Strategy Implementation and Non-linearity

The matter of professional context and sensemaking

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Strategy implementation and non-linearity – the matter of professional context and sensemaking

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Abstract

Within the field of organizational studies, strategy has for long been a subject of interest to academics as well as practitioners. An area of interest in this respect has been strategy implementation and how recipients perceive initiatives of change. In the light of this quest, a recent approach to study this phenomenon has been to more broadly look at the whole organization – from a practical perspective. Stressing the significance of intra-organizational individuals and saluting a holistic view, the strategy as practice (s-as-p) tradition provides good support in that it puts focus on what people actually do while exposed to strategic tasks. In this paper, attention is dedicated a particular change initiative in a large international corporation. Based on the information given to individuals within the organization at an early stage, this study illuminates varying perceptions of the change initiative. It contributes to the s-as-p tradition by showing how professional contexts influence sensemaking in respect to a strategic initiative, and by so provides support to the view that strategy implementation is far from a linear process.

Keywords

strategic change, strategy as practice, sensemaking, professional context

Introduction

Within the field of organizational studies, strategy has for long been a subject of interest to academics as well as practitioners. An area of interest in this respect has been how to successfully implement strategies. In the light of this quest, some scholars and researchers have focused upon the work of the top management level, conceptualizing the work of the decision-makers in the organization into frameworks and matrices. Success or failure of strategic initiatives has by this perspective been ascribed to either the quality of the 'master plan', faltering implementation, or other top-management related handling issues (Barley & Kunda, 1992; Whittington, 1996). Another more recent approach has been to more broadly look at the whole organization – from a practical perspective –, stressing the significance of intra-organizational individuals and saluting a holistic view to studying strategy (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007). Along the line of the latter, opposing the rationalist and objectivist approach to strategy as a top-down and linear activity, the strategy as practice (s-as-p) school provides good support in that it puts focus on what people actually do while exposed to strategic tasks (Whittington, 1996). The s-as-p tradition has further been proposed a promising means of furthering the study of social complexity and causal ambiguity to explain the practice that constitutes strategy process (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003).

In regards to strategy implementation and social complexity, acknowledging the latter within the former, several scholars have applied sensemaking-theory to dig further into this. Balogun and Johnson (2004, 2005) have shown how middle managers play an important role as interpreters and implementers of strategic change; Stensäker and Falkenberg (2007) argue that individual interpretative responses in extension lead to aggregated organizational-level responses; Rouleau (2005) suggests, based on her findings, the necessity of looking at middle managers' role as interpreters and sellers of strategic change at the micro level. Above all, those studies bring to the forefront how sensemaking processes are central in explaining whether or not accounts generated at lower organizational-level coincide with those of the change instigators. Also, they make a focal point in the necessity of recognizing a broader array of constituents to the activity of strategy work. That is, not only is senior management and their closest sub-ordinates important when trying to understand how strategy is done, but likewise is it crucial to include lower level employees. In line with taking a practical perspective on strategy, employees are those who both receive and deploy the plans designed at higher levels in the organization (Balogun & Johnson, 2005).

When acknowledging the agency of people outside top-management, focus is directed to how those individuals interpret and understand plans instigated by 'the top', and by so we can better understand how change takes form within organizations. Recognizing the notion of people as agents who construct their work environment has been called for (Barr, 1998; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), and further stresses the significance of understanding meaning creation within organizations, at levels below top-management. In this paper, focus has been dedicated a particular change initiative about to be implemented in an international manufacturing company. Attention was devoted to how individuals within two departments made sense of the change initiative; i.e. how they shaped an understanding of what the initiative represented and subsequently what it would imply to daily work within the organization (Maitlis, 2005). Hence, looking at

sensemaking and meaning establishments, in and between two divisions in an organization facing a change initiative, the aim of this study is to describe and analyze how the incidence of varying accounts in this respect may be understood.

In our findings, two themes (i.e. Magnitude of Change and Embracement of the Initiative) point to how participants through the mediation of their current ways of working, as well as prior work experience (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005), largely based an understanding of what the change represented. That is, the two themes developed in this paper demonstrate how a change initiative rendered different accounts of sensemaking. Showing how a top-down instated change initiative was given varying meaning among individuals, the findings reinforce the view that organizations constitute socially complex and unique environments, not easily lending itself to prescriptive models of change. In this paper, we start with reviewing the literature on Strategy as Practice and Sensemaking. We then describe the methods applied to the empirical work, subsequently followed by an analysis of how sensemaking within the divisions took form in regards to the initiative. Finally, we round up with a discussion, subsequently followed by conclusions as well as implications for practice and future research.

Strategy as Practice

Stemming out of dissatisfaction with how traditional management literature for the last three decades tended to deal with strategy as a rational and sequential process, designated to top management, concerns were raised arguing a 'humanization' (Whittington, 1996) of strategy research necessary (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). By so the rationale for opposition lay in a reluctance to accept prescriptive, generic, and normative, models to strategy work anchored within the natural sciences (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). To the strategy as practice (s-as-p) tradition, bringing in humans as determinants and affecters of strategy arose as an urgent and orderly element in achieving a more realistic view on strategic processes (Whittington, 1996). *Strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) as a research topic is concerned with the doing of strategy; who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use, and what implications this has for shaping strategy* (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 1). S-as-p theorists argue that a strategy is not something an organization has but it is something an organization does (Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004).

Centering a complexity and diversity attributed to social life that is claimed largely foreseen by predecessors (Johnson et al., 2003), the s-as-p tradition has developed its instruments in practitioners, practices and praxis (Whittington 2003, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). These tools epitomize the s-as-p tradition's dual approach to on the one hand what happens at the micro-organizational level, and on the other hand, what happens at the macro-organizational level, and above all, what happens in the intersection of these (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Micro-phenomena comprise the practitioners 'doing' of strategy, practices they make use of doing it, and how those different practices are sequentially put together into batteries constituting certain modes of praxis. What happens at the micro-level cannot however be understood without acknowledging its ties to wider social contexts (Whittington, 2006): the 'micro' happens partly explained by social institutions, industry-norms, etc. *Micro-phenomena need to be understood in their wider social context: actors are not acting in isolation but are*

drawing upon the regular, socially defined modes of acting that arise from the plural social institutions to which they belong (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 6). S-as-p theorists by so stress the significance of grasping social micro processes inside organizations, as well as understanding external influences, in the pursuit of trying to better perceive what strategy work really is and how it is played out within organizations (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006). Hence, the s-as-p tradition more than anything focuses on social human activity and how such may make strategic work anything but a linear, top-down, activity.

Jarzabkowski & Spee (2009) elaborate a typology to serve studies of organizations and strategy through a practice perspective [originally termed 'Activity Based View' (Johnson et al., 2003)] drawing on different ways of conceptualizing practitioners and the level of praxis. Practitioners may be an individual actor within organizations, an aggregate actor within organizations (i.e. groups) or an extra-organizational aggregate actor (e.g. consultants). Praxis – as Jarzakowski et al. define it *...comprises the interconnections between the actions of different, dispersed individuals and groups and those socially, politically, and economically embedded institutions within which individuals act and to which they contribute* (2007, p. 9) – may be found on respectively the micro-, meso- and macro organizational level. Viewed through this typology, several studies have looked at middle managers as practitioners (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Balogun, 2003; Rouleau, 2005; Lozeau, Langley & Denis, 2002). These studies have provided support to the assumption that strategy work is far from a straightforward operation, comprising the implementation of top-managements' clear cut strategic recipes. But rather, strategy relies on a multitude of actors with capacity to affect both content and operationalization of strategic initiatives. How individuals make do of strategic initiatives during implementation phase constitute an area of interest that focus on how local praxis at a micro- and meso level, spanning intra-organizational actors, may largely determine outcomes of such initiatives (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Stensäker & Falkenberg, 2007). In the following section we describe the theory utilized by several of the abovementioned papers in their search for understanding meaning establishment; sensemaking theory.

Sensemaking in Organizational Change

Sensemaking could be seen as a retrospective process in which people create sensible accounts to understand what people are doing (Weick et al., 2005), and has its origins in human psychology and crisis management (Weick, 1988). Sensemaking[1] is the interplay of action and interpretation, in a situation of uncertain and unpredictable events taking place, in quest for an answer to 'what is going on here?'. The concept was brought into organizational studies by Weick in the late 1980s and contribute to furthering the understanding of how meaning creation within organizations come about.

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[1] 'sensemaking', 'sensemaking-accounts', 'to make sense' ; refer to the social, collective and subjective process where organizational members form an understanding of something (in this paper, the Customer Company initiative). These concepts will hereinafter be applied interchangeably and should be treated synonymous.

Weick et al. (2005, p. 409) state that *[e]xplicit efforts at sensemaking tend to occur when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world, or when there is no obvious way to engage the world*. Sensemaking, as well as organizing, is thus a way to understand ambiguous initiatives and therein make the surrounding more orderly (Weick et al., 2005). It constitutes an inter-subjective process where individuals facing cognitive disorder (i.e. change) actively and less automatic (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) engage in social interactions to 'enact' (Weick, 1995) a common, and organized (Weick, et al., 2005), interpretation and understanding of the 'new'. Put differently, it is the construction and reconstruction of meaning by the actors involved, through which they create a framework for comprehending the character of the change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The notion of sensemaking refers to that people through social and cognitive processes construct a reality (Weick et al., 2005), and act in accordance with their constructed reality (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Stensäker & Falkenberg, 2007). Note, trigger to sensemaking-processes is always an element of 'novelty', the alteration of established ways for some unfamiliar form.

In regards to organizations, sensemaking takes place when a stream of new circumstances is put into words, where these written and spoken texts serve as …*the media through which the invisible hand of institutions shapes conduct* (Gioia, Thomas, Clark & Chittipeddi, 1994, p. 365). It is a process used by organizational members to deobfuscate the ambiguity connected to change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), and therein affect the outcomes of change initiatives based on their interpretations (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, Stensäker and Falkenberg (2007) acknowledge how practitioners during implementation modify a strategic change initiative according to own interests and interpretations. By so the article responds to calls from s-as-p theorists (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009) to link relations between individual- and organizational level responses to change. In their research on a large international oil company Stensäker and Falkenberg (2007) find that the strategic business units under study were unequally prone to incorporate change components, due to individuals' deviating interpretative responses. Hence, the authors illuminate how a change initiative was given varying interpretations at an individual level, leading to diverse aggregated responses at the business unit level.

Moreover, Balogun and Johnson (2005) point to how individual sensemaking in regards to strategic change initiatives may act determinant to planned change, especially if interpretations and meanings developed by individuals deviate from those of change instigators. Also, their findings point to the impact of narratives to sensemaking, i.e. knowledge and perceptions being exchanged during discussions. According to Maitlis (2005), sensemaking allows organizational members to generate accounts of what, why and how things will change, which enables action. As these individual responses develop, they will in aggregation likely change or modify the strategic initiative. Organizational members are thus seen as active agents that through their responses shape aggregated equivalents and in turn therein affect change initiatives (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Stensäker & Falkenberg, 2007).

Method

In this section we present the methodological aspects of the study, as following; the case company, research design and empirical collection, and empirical analysis.

The Case Company

The company being subject to this case study is an international actor within the manufacturing industry. Being part of a larger group of businesses, the company in focus is a function responsible of sales and marketing activities for certain geographical markets. This includes supporting national sales and marketing offices all around the world in the process of selling new products and services, as well as aftermarket related products and services. Therein, the company also has an indirect contact with local retailers and subsequently the end-customer. At this point in time, a recent re-organization has taken place, in which the new structure is seen as a starting point for a greater change initiative; becoming a more customer oriented company.

Research Design and Empirical Collection

Under given conditions for time period, available effort to deploy and the nature of the study object per se, a qualitative research approach seemed best suited for this study. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). Further, the paper employs a qualitative case study design (Bryman & Bell, 2011), meaning that we have carried out our research within a single organization. In regards to scientific contributions, this paper does not aim to carry any generic results, applicable outside the context of the study, but rather deploys an ideographic approach. Taking an ideographic approach means that the researcher is concerned with unveiling the unique properties and features of a single case (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

As main instrument for the collection of empirical material, semi-structured interviewees were employed. Some additional secondary materials were added in the form of internal PowerPoint presentations, consultant reports, and memos, on the change initiative. The interview-sampling method used could seemingly be denoted a 'convenience sample', which is useful when there is restriction(s) associated with the appointment of interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In our case, restrictions were seen in a limited number of potential respondents, limited access beyond the contact person's authorization, prospects' willingness to participate, as well as the time factor (i.e. approximately seven weeks were committed to the collection of empirical material). However, we do not see that this has affected the validity of the study to any significant degree. In regards to the secondary material, this has exclusively been used to present the case context, see section "Setting". Moreover, in order to better serve the purpose of looking at sensemaking-processes, it was chosen to include two levels in the organizational structure (i.e. managers and employees). This since it was desired to have the opportunity to include managers as potential sources affecting sensemaking-processes among employees at sub-ordinated level. In line with best customs for qualitative research we have worked towards providing what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as a thick account of the study object, in order to serve a high level of transparency (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In regards to the theoretical aspect of the paper, we have, by focusing on

academic articles, aimed at conducting extensive reviews on especially the fields of Strategy as Practice and Sensemaking theory.

The fieldwork took place at the headquarters of the studied organization and was carried out during a period of seven weeks in the spring of 2012. Altogether 20 interviews were conducted and recorded – ten within each of the company's two divisions. Apart from two interviews, both researchers attended the sessions in order to assure that we had the chance to cross-check interpretations and impressions afterwards. The interview samples included department managers as well as subordinates, with main body in the latter. The interviews were, apart from one, held in Swedish to allow interviewees the comfort of speaking their mother tongue. Each interview averaged about one hour, resulting in 20 hours of recorded empirical material. In addition, three meetings were held with the leader of the initiative, lasting for approximately 60 minutes each. The recordings were subsequently translated and transcribed. Since the purpose of this study was to increase our understanding of how varying interpretations of a change initiative may come about, an important aspect during the collection of empirical material was to allow respondents to speak rather freely. The interviews spanned how individuals described the context of the change, how they perceived the initiative, what it was that were to be changed and why, and what they expected in terms of subsequent actions.

Respondents' sensemaking-accounts on the change initiative revealed what they perceived to be the rationale behind the change, how widespread and profound the nature of it was, what it practically meant to their own work and their department, as well as the extent to which they were willing to give their endorsement to it. All along, our focus was on trying to uncover how individuals within the organization made sense of the change initiative. Note, since we boarded this change process at an early stage, we did not have the possibility to actually ask what it practically had meant to practice, but solely what members perceive that it would mean. Table 1 summarizes the primary sources of the empirical material.

Interviewee	No. of interviews
Top Management	
Leader of initiative	3 (meetings)
Division 1	
Manager	2
Employee	8
Division 2	
Manager	2
Employee	8
Total	**23**

Table 1. An overview of the empirical material.

Empirical analysis

To this qualitative study an inductive approach was deployed for the analysis of the empirical material, which implies that the researcher strives to avoid guidance from theory when dealing with the gathered material. More specifically, the methodology applied, generally referred to as thematic analysis, infers that the researcher search for identifiable patterns in the empirical material. Such patterns are commonly reported as themes and categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In terms of defining such, Braun and Clarke (2006) provide an explanation of what a theme represents: *A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set* (p. 82). Note, for the sake of clarification, categories are sub-ordinated to themes. Based on extensively reviewing our material, we have come up with two themes that each are made up of three categories, where the latter serves to treat different aspects of the former. These themes are valued essential to the understanding of how respondents' sensemaking processes resulted in various perceptions of the change initiative. In regards to coding of the empirical material, we have not employed any computer software but rather utilized a manual approach to this voluminous work. Illustration 1 shows the relationship between a theme and belonging-to categories. The following section briefly outlines the change initiative and serves as an introduction to our findings.
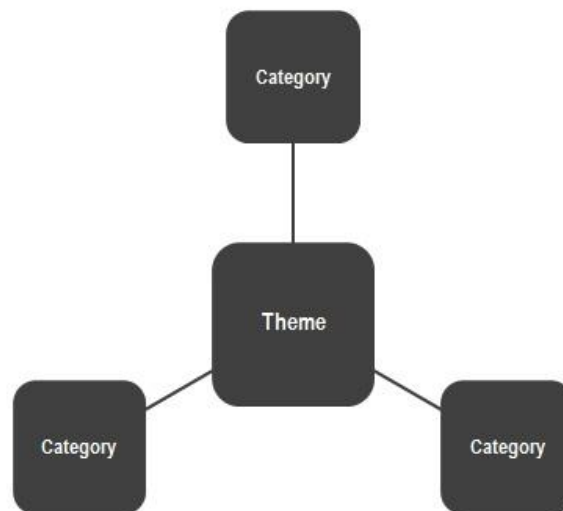

Illustration 1. Template showing relations between a theme and categories.

Setting

The studied company holds a formal organization comprising a top management team, supported by a staff unit, and two divisions responsible for sales and marketing activities (see Illustration 2). In Division 1 (D1), the main focus is on aftermarket sales; warranties, services, spare parts, etc., while Division 2 (D2) deals with sales of new products as well as used products. Hence, the two divisions to large extent deal with the same customers, but in different phases of the customer life cycle. Each division employs approximately 100 people, split into four business units.

Being benchmarked against counterparts in the industry, the company proves to be a leading star in respect to customer orientation. However, it is perceived by the top management team that further improvements are possible and may generate competitive advantages. The industry allows for little product differentiation, thus customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is deemed critical for market success. According to an independent survey, measuring customer satisfaction among actors in the industry, the gap between the company and its competitors has declined in recent years. It is also perceived that the company has a rather fragmented approach in how it currently manages its customer relationship, where the local retailer companies traditionally have handled customer communication and relationships.
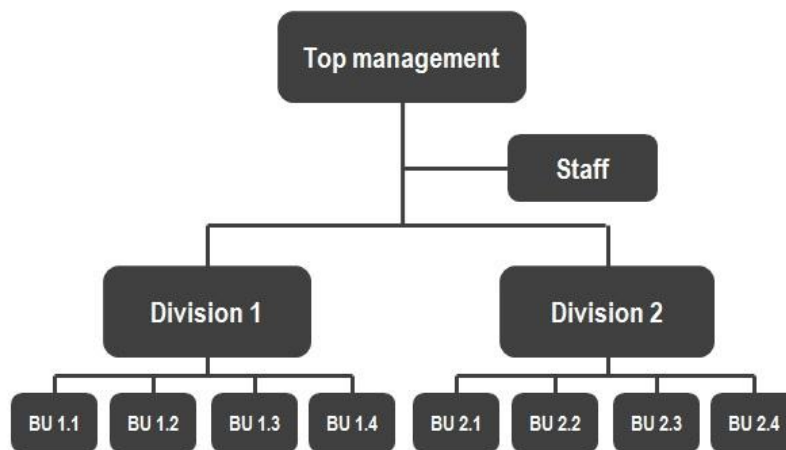

Illustration 2. Current organizational structure.

In the endeavor to further improve the company's customer orientation, the CEO has recently formulated a new vision. The idea is to take the company into a new level: advancing from 'best in class' to 'best in show'. With this strategic initiative the top management aims to consolidate the approach to include the whole organization. Customer Company, as the initiative is called internally, is thus thought of as the new strategic initiative meant to further permeate the corporate culture and the way business is done. It has been agreed by the top management team that this change is favorable but yet an extensive and complex matter to realize. Thus, in order to drive this organizational change journey and to communicate its importance, a new function has been established to work full-time with carrying out this strategic initiative. The leader reports directly to the top management team and in order to translate the vision into a concrete change initiative, several activities have been undertaken by the initiative leader.

As a starting point for concretizing the vision, a pre-study was conducted aimed at measuring the company's status quo in relation to the sought position. In doing this, an external strategy consulting company was hired to conduct a GAP analysis: putting the company's performance in relation to the aspired level. Also, the consulting firm was asked to present a best practice framework, specifying what to improve and how to close the gaps in order to become Customer Company. Concurrently to the GAP analysis, several workshop activities had been undertaken with various groups of people internally. The aim of these workshops had been to acknowledge the initiative and create awareness

around it, but also to integrate the views of employees not part of the top management team. During these workshops, the participants were given the opportunity to express ideas on areas of improvement. The initiative had also been presented on a few occasions where employees and managers from the two divisions were present. During these meetings, a PowerPoint presentation was given by the leader of the initiative, followed by a short Q&A session. The leader had also been asked by certain business units in the company to make a personal visit and present the initiative.

Looking to the two divisions covered by the change initiative, there were several aspects that made them appear rather similar. In addition to both being situated at the headquarters, several people had experience from working in both divisions. Furthermore, certain business units previously belonged to the other division, and a few managers had recently changed job from one division to the other. Also, people within D1 and D2 met regularly, both in projects as well as on cross-divisional meetings (called "town-hall" meetings). Thus, despite having separate responsibilities for the company's marketing and sales activities, there are several aspects that make the divisions appear relatively similar.

According to this study, there was also consensus that the traditional corporate focus; to produce and sell superior products, today is shifting and that customer satisfaction and loyalty to large extent stems from the products and services offered in the aftermarket. An employee within D1 expressed this issue in the following way: *The focus has traditionally been on the industry side and the production, which is now shifting towards the soft offers. The soft parts around [the product] are what the customer should experience as satisfying*. In a similar manner, an employee within D2 expressed that: *it [Customer Company] is about shifting from product to customer: going from being a production company to becoming a commercial company. We think we know the customer but we don't.* Thus, the perception is concurrent within both divisions that Customer Company will help to further strengthen the focus on customers over products. For this reason, admiration and support was also expressed towards start working in line with the initiative. It was regarded by many as a favorable path for the company to follow; for example, it was mentioned that *we have to change from an inside-out approach to an outside-in approach. In that respect I believe "Customer Company" is the way to go*. Another respondent expressed that: *my interpretation [of the initiative] is that we are to put the customer in focus and work towards going from product to customer, which I have been missing. I am really happy to see that we can start to work like this.* The study thus shows that both divisions were well aware of the initiative and had an idea of what it aimed to accomplish. Moreover, this aim was in line with their ideas of what path the company should follow and thus they gave praise and support towards it.

Although this study covers an early phase of the Customer Company initiative, and despite the relative closeness between the divisions, discrepancies in regards to interpretations were found. In the following section, these differences will be addressed and discussed more thoroughly.

Findings - Understanding Deviations in Sensemaking

From this study some central categories have arisen that helps to exemplify how and why members' sensemaking-accounts on the change initiative have taken certain form. Along that note, we present two themes built up by these categories, facilitating the understanding of deviating sensemaking-accounts encountered within the organization. Based on reviewing and analyzing our empirical material, we have come up with what we regard the most influential and significant themes in this respect. Themes being as follow: first, diverse accounts in regards to the perceived *Magnitude of Change* are discussed, secondly, diverse accounts on *Embracement of the Initiative* are considered. Thus, in line with the purpose of this study, the aim of this section is to show how and why individuals' perceptions of the initiative differed in certain aspects.

Concerning influential and significant categories, the following sections help demonstrate how individuals' different sensemaking-accounts may be understood. These categories have been grouped, based on their inter-relatedness, into the two themes. The themes are relevant to the purpose of this study in that they relate to the perceived level of effort needed from members in order to realize the initiative, as well as how prone and motivated they are to deploy that effort. They constitute what we see as key to understanding the overall conditions for implementing the change initiative within the studied organization. This section is structured along the abovementioned themes, and belonging-to categories, where under each category both divisions are presented interwoven. First, we will provide more explanations on our two themes, starting with Magnitude of Change. Within the organization people hold various descriptions of the magnitude of change associated with Customer Company. The initiative may be perceived to imply different forms of changes to the organization. In this study, three categories surfaced central in this regard (see Illustration 3). These concerned perceptions towards the scope of the change, the nature of it, and the sense of urgency ascribed to it. Together these categories constitute the theme called Magnitude of Change.
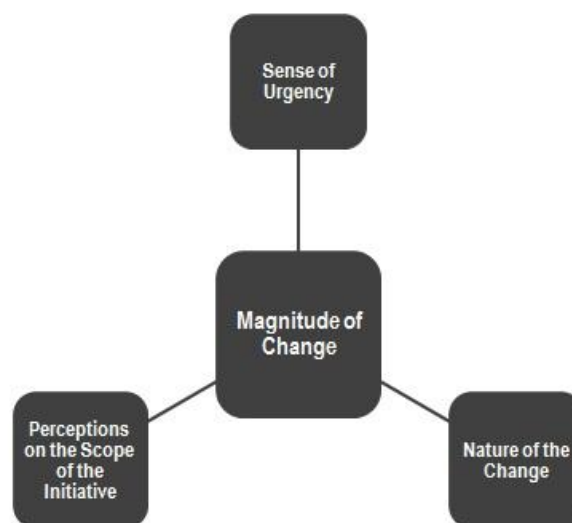

Illustration 3. Three categories make up the theme Magnitude of Change.

Thus, the three categories serve to explore different aspects of respondents' sensemaking-accounts in respect to the magnitude of change. Before treating this theme and aforementioned categories, we will present a similar structure for the second theme that we have identified, concerning members' level of embracement towards the initiative.

Our second theme; Embracement of the Initiative, comprises considerations on how respondents showed varying endorsement towards the change initiative. In respect to this, three categories turned out prominent in showing how respondents expressed embracement towards the initiative (see Illustration 4). These categories concern; the approval shown, the tendency of giving rich accounts, and the incidence of expressing implicational reflections, towards the initiative. Through these categories, we put focus on understanding how and why different accounts towards the initiative were expressed in regards to embracement of it.
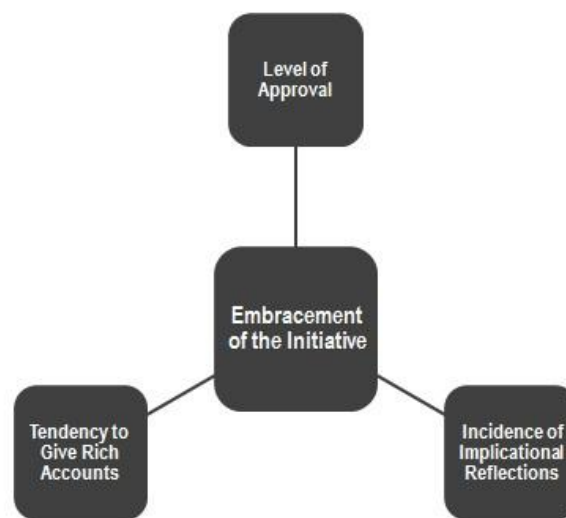

Illustration 4. Three categories make up the theme Embracement of the Initiative.

In the following section we deepen our discussion on the theme Magnitude of Change, subsequently followed by an equivalent treatment of the theme Embracement of the Initiative.

Magnitude of Change

In this section we present, through three categories, the sensemaking-accounts described by respondents within D1 and D2 respectively on the magnitude of the change initiative. First, we address elements related to whether respondents valued the change as rather incremental or radical to the organization. Secondly, we present elements related to whether respondents value the change as residing on a practical or normative level. Lastly, we address elements in regards to what sense of urgency interviewees ascribed to the initiative.

Perceptions on the Scope of the Initiative

A distinguishing feature in our empirical material concerned Perceptions on the Scope of the Initiative. This refers to respondents' perceptions on the amplitude of the change, i.e. how extensive the realization of the initiative was seen. This category relates to

sensemaking in that it exemplifies how deviating accounts can take form in regards to the scope of the initiative, and how these deviations can be understood.

Within D1 there was a distinctive level of homogeneity in terms of appreciating the initiative to imply rather radical changes to the organization. Without exception – but with varying emphasis – respondents within the division acknowledged the initiative to infer a major change to the company, considering the size of the organization, its traditions, and present ways of working. Because the initiative per se also was seen as mainly concerning mindset and attitude, this further underlined the view that this was a vast operation to realize. As one employee within D1 expressed: *It is about getting a new way of thinking here. It is a big issue since people that have been working in a special way for many years have gotten used to that. There is a network established around this way of working [the old and accustomed]. It is like trying to get everybody to walk backwards instead of forwards.* In close connection to this standpoint, some voices expressed skepticism as of the company was ready to realize this quest. Questions were raised pertaining whether sufficient resources had been committed to the project, if adequate pre-studies and analyses had been carried out, or simply if not the firm had underestimated the amplitude of what they were trying to achieve. As one employee at D1 noted, in respect to perceived effort needed to reach success with the initiative; *it's going to take a massive effort to come about with this change. It takes a major change in mindset among many individuals at different levels.* Or as another employee at D1 remarked, in regards to skepticism: *I shouldn't say it will take 30 years, but it certainly takes five-ten years to turn a ship like this company around from what it is today into becoming a true customer company. Every individual in here must totally swap image in there head.* Hence, expressions of doubts and rigorousness, which was commonly ascribed to the initiative within D1, seemingly related to appreciations of the initiative as a rather radical operation to the organization.

Also in line with viewing the initiative as something that deeply permeate all aspects of the firm, taking the customer perspective into account on a more regular basis was another, at present troublesome, aspect mentioned by respondents in D1. At the time it was said that time constraints often prohibit people from including customers' perspectives in the planning as well as execution phase of projects. It was perceived that other factors; such as sales numbers, profitability, and production lead time, traditionally had been considered more important. As one employee at D1 remarked: *There is an ingrained focus here on different types of results. If you wake management in the middle of the night the first thing they'll say is, how much did we sell? Conversely, the first thing management asks isn't, how did the customer experience us?* By looking to their work situation, some respondents in D1 perceived the distance between the headquarters, the retailers, and the end customer, as a major challenge. One employee at D1 expressed that: *You have to get to know your customer better than we do at the headquarters today. In general, every retailer knows their customer well. If we at the headquarters are to justify our salary and support them [the retailers] out there in their work, we must have knowledge on a more overbridging level. We then have to attain that knowledge in some way and you won't get it toddling around this corridor.* That is, respondents within D1 tended to refer to their own work roles and contexts in perceiving the scope of becoming Customer Company.

Yet another related concern in this respect expressed at D1 was that the organization to some extent was characterized being somewhat ignorant when it came to knowledge about customers. As one employee at D1 expressed: *One is perhaps a bit narrow-minded here at HQ – believing that we know what our customers want, but it isn't really true. We need to abandon the procedure that we think we know, but instead genuinely ask customers, in order to make sure what they really want.* This signifies the need expressed among many at D1 to overthrow what was regarded old legacy to the benefit of incorporating fundamentally new ways to deal with customer relations. It was thereby an issue that was perceived running rather deeply into the organizational backbone. Hence, respondents within D1 perceived the initiative to be of thorough character that demanded serious attention, resources, and commitment, in order to be realized. And what especially stood out about those points of view was that they seemed to be rooted in individuals' professional context[2], i.e. they were based in how respondents experienced their daily work-situation. In the next paragraph we will enter upon presenting how respondents within D2 perceived the scope of the initiative.

Within D2, some respondents mentioned the initiative as implying major changes on how business was conducted. It was often motivated by saying the initiative had to do with transforming the organization from engineering and product driven to customer driven, an operation acknowledged rather heavy. This shows that respondents had made sense of the initiative as being of normative character. Others saw the organization today as doing fairly well in regards to being Customer Company, and that it takes no more than fine tuning to incorporate the standards of the initiative. Those descriptions were of more practical nature, i.e. ascribing to certain matters within current practices that were regarded necessary to attend to. Respondents who mainly attributed adjustments as consequences of the initiative for instance mentioned support systems, improved communication with regional branches, and a sharpened focus, as necessary tweaks in becoming Customer Company. A phrasing from a D2 respondent signified this view: *At the same time then, what is it really that we have to do – what is it we should do on-top of what we otherwise would have done? Well, viewed from that perspective, it's probably about making some fine-adjustments to a lot of things here.* Another respondent at D2 suggestively denoted in regards to the scope: *it's not a revolution in any sense.* Thus, mixed takes on the scope of the initiative stood out at D2. However, lion part of the interviewees expressed standpoints skewed towards perceiving the initiative as more of adjustments than something subversive.

In addition, some respondents within D2 regarded the Customer Company initiative to be closely related to a prior strategy; to acquire and own the retail network internationally. Seeing the prior strategy as a starting point for improving the customer relation, the new initiative was seen as a further shift in this direction. *The way I see it Customer Company has been a long term strategy since the company started with this retail-thinking – when one started to invest in repair shop,* as one employee at D2 noted. This standpoint indicated sensemaking-accounts in that the initiative was perceived as 'more of the same' rather than something overthrowing. Furthermore, the fact that the company had shifted

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[2] 'professional context', 'work situation', 'work role' ; are terms used synonymous throughout this paper. They refer to individuals' work environment; practice and praxis they draw upon in their professional role.

focus from solely supplying products to also offering services added up to the view that Customer Company is a natural next step, implying no more than minor changes to the organization. *We have for many years now gone from selling just products to more and more selling solutions. This is just another step in that direction,* as remarked by an employee at D2. These kinds of expressions were fairly common at D2 and seemed to infer the general point of view that the organization had come a rather long way in becoming Customer Company. Hence, varying perceptions towards the scope of the initiative was evident within D2, and seemed related to how respondents appreciated their personal work situation to be affected by the initiative. These respondents regarded the initiative as an extension of previous ways of working, and had difficulties identifying what radically would change, as a consequence of Customer Company. In this respect, D2 held a relatively light take on whether the initiative implies rather radical or incremental changes compared to D1. Also, within D2 there was relatively more heterogeneity in how members perceived the scope of the change, meaning that the perceptions differed more within D2 than within D1.

Nature of the Change

Another feature discernible in our empirical material was that respondents expected different measures to be taken in order to incorporate Customer Company. This category refers to consequences and results that respondents expected of the initiative. It ties to sensemaking in that it shows how individuals looked to their daily work in order to perceive these measures.

It was consensus within D1 that the mindset and attitude must change in order to become Customer Company. It was also clear that the initiative comprised the whole company and that neither the headquarters nor the retailers could carry out this change solely. As mentioned by one employee within D1: *a substantial number of people within the company have to change their attitude. /…/ it should come naturally to the front of your mind how the decision will affect the customer.* By this, the employee was clearly referring to normative implications of the initiative, expecting a change to take place in the norms of conducting day-to-day work. On the same note, another employee expressed concerns that little had happened so far, and that normative changes demanded more vigorous efforts: *I haven't actually seen a great deal of evidence that people are changing their mindset, and I say it really has to change people's mindset. To me you really have to change their heart and mind, and you are not going to do that by PowerPoint presentations.* Thus, perceptions that normative implications were necessary, and not yet had taken place, seemed rooted in the respondents' respective work situation where they had seen little evidence of a changing mindset.

Moreover, several respondents within D1 referred to the initiative almost as a form of cultural change. One employee said that: *What I am lacking, or have not seen, is specific actions to change the culture.* In this regard, many employees mentioned hopes and expectations in that the company would change their way of thinking: *We now have to change from an inside-out approach to an outside-in. In that respect I believe "Customer Company" is the way to go. We have to see to the end-customer in everything we do, ask the question "is the customer willing to pay for this?"* Some employees argued that empowerment would become a key component in achieving a more customer oriented

mindset, again making the link between the initiative and attitudes within the organization. In this respect, one employee said: *I think it [Customer Company] will affect the roles in so much as they will be encouraged to take their own initiative and make decisions, without necessarily referring back to their management all the time. /.../ I think it all has to do with empowerment. To empower people and to give them the confidence to use that empowerment without obviously going crazy is what it is about.* Also, an acknowledged concern was that the company in general must attain a more customer friendly approach – and that such an approach needs to be ingrained into the very organizational backbone. Thus, within D1 there seem to be a relative emphasis towards viewing the initiative as of normative nature rather than one simply implying some practical modifications. Put in other terms, a new attitude and mindset would be implications of Customer Company, but in order to reach there, more efforts were deemed needed.

A majority of the respondents within D2 perceived the change to be of normative character as opposed to containing solely practical measures. Furthermore, many expressed that the whole organization must participate in the initiative: *it's not enough having it [Customer Company] out there or in here in the organization. It has to be there in all stages. Everybody have to think this way.* Similar to D1, several of the respondents acknowledged that this change, more than anything, concerns a change of mindset. However, as compared to D1, this majority was noticeably smaller. Tendencies towards seeing the change as one of tweaking and fine tuning was also mentioned; oftentimes pointed to details within prior ways of working that needed to be practically adjusted. By looking at the professional context, and how that relates to the initiative, a manager within D2 expressed the following: *I perceive that the administration and reporting has increased. It would be beneficial to cut down on this, so that we have time to focus on being Customer Company.* In addition to these measures, the manager also mentioned that: *A very powerful email-policy, not guidelines but rules [are necessary]. Clearly prohibit the amount of emails, instead using the telephone and talk to each other much more.*

In addition, respondents within D2 also showed a greater heterogeneity regarding where changes were to be made in the organization. One manager within D2 said that: *It is to some extent a matter of attitude, or a new way of thinking. As a salesman you can call your customer and ask if he or she is happy with the product. It doesn't require that much.* By this, the manager was indicating that he regarded changes in attitude to happen on retail level, where the customer interaction is. Contrary to this, one employee expressed that: *We have during all these years I've been here tried to be a customer oriented company, that in itself then is nothing new – what it's about is getting the retail-perspective in here [the headquarters].* This indicated a perception that changes were to be made mainly at the headquarters level. However, what these two perceptions have in common is that they both refer to a sales mindset; measures closely related to their daily work. Hence, the aforementioned citations clearly point to that professional context does play an important role in individuals' sensemaking process, made evident in respondents' appreciation of how the initiative would affect the organization, as well as where changes were to be made.

Sense of Urgency

The third category identified in our empirical material on the magnitude of change concerns how respondents ascribed a sense of urgency to the initiative, i.e. how they appreciated the necessity of becoming Customer Company today. The category refers to sensemaking in that it points to how individuals, by looking to their work situation, made sense of whether incorporating the initiative was deemed crucial to the organization.

Within D1, a majority of the respondents expressed concerns towards the urgency of becoming a more customer oriented company. Mostly, it was regarded a necessity in sustaining a strong market position, – increased customer orientation was perceived a general trend within contemporary society, pertaining also to this industry. Ultimately, disregarding calls for attaining a more customer oriented approach was seen potentially deteriorating to the company's future well-being. *Absolutely, and it is simply because it is the only way to survive*, one employee at D1 remarked in respect to this matter. The respondent also mentioned investments in education to be key component in realizing the initiative, saying: *If you were to allocate significantly more time to create training materials and educate people, that is an investment - but I do not feel that the company is yet to accept it as an investment at the level that it should be.* The respondent continued this reasoning by adding: *We really have to get people at headquarters to understand what it is that we need to do and why, what are the pro's and con's, and how shall we do it – that is the big investment.* This remark points to the urgency ascribed to incorporating the initiative, but it also shows how the respondent referred to the professional context (having previously worked with educating personnel) and therein perceived that measures must be taken instantly. Thus, by looking at their work situation, respondents make an account of what the initiative represents, and what shortages and gaps that are to be met. Concerns on the urgency associated with the initiative ties into respondents' professional context, which constitutes a lens for making sense of how important the initiative is to the organization and what it requires.

Respondents within D2 sometimes referred to the initiative in rather abstract terms, having difficulties with making sense of the initiative in a concrete manner. This consequently meant that respondents struggled with perceiving what Customer Company would mean in practice, to their work situation. As an example, one employee said: *It's a guess, but many probably wander around considering how it affects them. I can't say that it has been any small talk about it; it has been too abstract to be discussed.* In addition, this view seemed associated with the perception that the company was fairly close to incorporating the standards of the initiative. It was hard to identify shortcomings and gaps necessary to close, in order to become Customer Company. Instead, it was perceived that the organization in many instances was doing rather well in terms of delivering value as Customer Company, and thus little urgency towards specific improvements were expressed. On this note, a manager said: *It is wrong to say that there is something that doesn't work today… that would be wrong. We have a lot that works really well in the company, a lot is in place. I think it is a lot about small, small adjustments to reach all the way there.* Not only does this citation point to the view that adjustments and tweaks were sufficient but it also connotes a lower urgency towards incorporating changes. One employee further expressed the following: *I believe many think that it doesn't really concern them. I don't perceive that anybody is pessimistic or critical, everybody probably*

think the concept is the right thing. Thus, viewing the initiative on an abstract level; with difficulties in seeing the personal work role, as well as gaps and shortcomings, was associated with a lower sense of urgency. Conversely, some respondents, especially within D1, made sense of the initiative by looking to their personal work role, consequently saw changes that could be made, and therein perceived a greater sense of urgency.

Embracement of the Initiative

In the following section we will discuss three categories serving to describe the theme Embracement of the Initiative. It concerns how willingness towards incorporating the change initiative was expressed by respondents within D1 and D2. The section comprises the following categories: first, we address elements related to what extent respondents showed approval towards the initiative; second, we present elements related to whether respondents provided vivid and rich accounts of the initiative; third, we address elements related to respondents' tendency of having reflected over implications of the initiative.

Level of Approval

One category, related to Embracement of the Initiative, discernible in our empirical material concerned what Level of Approval respondents showed towards Customer Company. This category refers to how the initiative received varying cherishment from the two divisions, and how this related to respondents' construction of sensemaking accounts around their specific work situation.

The change initiative seemed to be taken with ease and enthusiasm among many employees as well as managers within D1: *I think it's really good. I think this is the way we have to walk,* as one employee remarked. Another note in this respect, expressed by an employee describing initial reactions when first hearing about the initiative: *Oh well, finally!* Running consistently through the division, a cherishment towards the initiative was evident. Some respondents even expressed relief in that the organization now, finally, had decided to incorporate what was regarded as ways of working that for long had been routine at D1. On this matter, one employee explicitly stated: *I would say that we [D1] are a guiding star in respect to leading this behavior in our organization. And we have been doing this for a long time now.* This showed how employees at D1 made sense of the initiative by looking to how it fitted into their current ways of working. As example of this, a part of D1 had for several years worked with a project called 'customer promises', aimed at improving the customer interface in retail services. A few respondents even regarded the fact that 'customer promises' now had been integrated with the initiative a prerequisite to their endorsement of it. One manager said that: *If the 'customer promises' had not been included – which it initially wasn't, there were questions here [within D1] – is this a new program? But since it is now being integrated, it is a completely different thing. When Customer Company now is presented, and the 'customer promises' is part of it, it makes sense.* Logically therein, in cases where the initiative was perceived as closely aligned to respondent's present ways of working, endorsement of it was apparent. Getting involved and to practically start working with the initiative was something many thereby expressed with joy and excitement.

In general, respondents within D2 replied positively to the change initiative. However, what complicated the sensemaking process was the respondents' difficulty in perceiving how their work practices related to the initiative. On this note, one employee said: *and then I have thought of what I can do [for Customer Company]. It has sounded so attractive, and interesting, so at least I have thought about it...* This citation indicated that the respondent gave endorsement to the initiative but that it also was hard to describe – beyond thinking about it – what it would bring to daily work practice. Another employee said: *Exactly in detail what [the leader of the initiative] is aiming for and what new strings she's trying to pull, I can't really tell.* Further, becoming more customer-oriented was in many respects viewed an undertaking that been in progress for many years – the Customer Company initiative was regarded the next big effort at making the puzzle take form. One employee mentioned: *The name itself [Customer Company] says some - an attempt in trying to approach customers, to become more customer oriented. And then of course that in itself is nothing new, we have been working with that as long as I've been here.* Hence, a general approval towards the initiative was seen within D2. However, the cherishment was in general lower than in D1, seemingly related to a difficulty in perceiving how the individual work role connects to Customer Company.

Tendency to Give Rich Accounts

A second category related to embracement, which was found distinguishing in the empirical material, was respondents' tendency to give vivid accounts of the initiative. This category refers to the incidence of giving a thorough description of the Customer Company initiative; exemplifying what the initiative aims to accomplish. The category shows how rich explanations of the initiative seemed related to the incidence of looking to the professional context in the sensemaking process.

Respondents within D1 were in general able to give comprehensive and vivid accounts of what Customer Company represented. Such accounts involved abilities to acutely anticipate implications of the initiative and a capacity to give examples of procedures that were regarded in line with a Customer Company approach. Further, this seemed to be connected to discussions held within D1 in regards to what could be done on a collective as well as individual level, in order to incorporate the initiative. One manager said: *Last autumn we, within D1, identified what we can do [for Customer Company], some explicit measures that we could take, and we put that in our business plan.* As a consequence, it was decided that each and every employee within D1 was to visit at least two retailers, or customers, annually. Interestingly, descriptions of the initiative seemed to be rooted in the discussion held, respondent's previous work-life experience, as well as their current work situation. Another employee, working with aftermarket services, gave the following example: *This is about making it easy for the customer to understand what this product will cost him, and how much time that he will have to invest to keep it running. Also, you can make more out of the soft products; make it more comfortable for the customer. For example, we are currently doing this through our Emergency Services; the customer can just press a button when there is a breakdown and we will come to assistance.* Hence, rich descriptions of what procedures that were in line with a Customer Company approach seemed connected to the meeting held within D1, where the initiative was formally addressed. Also, in giving vivid accounts of Customer Company, people within D1 tended to refer to their own professional context in the sensemaking process.

Within D2 it was rather uncommon that respondents tended to deliver extensive accounts of what Customer Company represented. Although several respondents could describe the initiative on a visionary level, it was not commonly as rich and descriptive as those provided by respondents within D1. Also, the division showed more heterogeneity in this respect – that is, members differed more in their descriptions. In terms of rich accounts, some interviewees were able to provide reviews on a concrete level, but a majority showed proneness to talk about it in abstract terms. One employee said: *It's not crystal clear, I cannot say – what one wants to do. The communication [of it] is so far a bit fuzzy. We know what we want to do on an overbridging level, in large. But how it's broken down into details… that is not as clearly communicated, but it's perhaps something we have to work out [on divisional level].* In addition, another employee said: *I cannot say that it directly has been any chatting about it around the coffee breaks, it has been too abstract to be discussed around. The concept is right, that's probably something that all agree upon, but it's hard to know what it means.* By referring to the initiative as - *too abstract to discuss* - the respondent implied that it was hard to make sense of what the initiative meant in practice. Ostensibly, the most striking difference between the two divisions was how members within D2 tended to give less examples of how Customer Company would take form in practice. Also, it seemed that respondents within D2 had not to the same extent discussed Customer Company. Neither did they to the same degree look to their professional context in perceiving of what it represented, and thus had difficulties in providing vivid accounts of how Customer Company would take form in practice.

Incidence of Implicational Reflections

A third category, on the theme Embracement of the Initiative, was seen in the incidence of members having reflected upon implications of the initiative. The category refers to the tendency of having reflected upon what consequences Customer Company brings to the organization; how the collective as well as the individual would be affected by the initiative. This category ties to sensemaking in that it exemplifies how respondents referred to their professional context and therein tended to give various accounts of reflections in this respect.

Within D1, concerns were expressed by several respondents on what Customer Company meant to the division, indicating that they had reflected upon probable implications. In many instances, respondents gave similar accounts on how Customer Company would affect the division on a collective level. As an example, one manager said: *We have to speak with the retailers and the workshops, further out in the organization, since they have a solid competence and experience. /…/ We should give them the prerequisites to understand their [customer] interface; knowing the products better, knowing the customers better.* In similar terms, another respondent said that: *Our role is to help them [the retailers], to give them the tools and clean up backwards so that they have the right conditions that facilitate their job. They shall have properly trained mechanics so that the customers leave the workshop satisfied.* Discernible in these expressions, respondents within D1 seemed to have reflected upon implications on a divisional level. Furthermore, those expressions were alike in that they oftentimes concerned the relation between the headquarters and the retailer-network. In addition, some respondents in D1 were able to

also see implications on an individual level, giving descriptive accounts of how the personal role would change. One respondent said: *Just my own way of thinking and how I evaluate things; how I reflect upon what I can do in my job, what I should focus on. Pose the question: does this give any added value to the customer? If not, I prioritize other things. Right or wrong, that is how I deal with it.* Hence, there was a tendency within D1 to having reflected upon implications on a collective level, and commonalities in those accounts were somewhat evident. Also, some respondents expressed how they had reflected upon implications on a more individual level, oftentimes related to their professional context. Many also referred to a decision taken in the division to conduct two customer visits per annum.

Considering tendencies within D2 of having reflected over changes that the initiative might bring to their daily work, the general perception was that it was rather unclear. As mentioned by one employee: *It has actually been a lot of questions in regards to what it really is. It has been hard for people to grasp what they [the management] mean. People understand the purpose in so much as that we should become more customer friendly and so forth, but what does that mean on a less abstract level – compared to our daily aspirations at present?* As the note indicates, most members felt they had an overall good understanding for what the initiative aimed at on a visionary level. However, the broad standpoint within D2 was that it was hard to translate the initiative's vision statement into daily practice. Compared to D1, interviewees expressed relative little descriptions of having reflected in this respect. It was also mentioned by many that neither formal nor informal discussions within D2 had taken place, in regards to Customer Company. *The Customer Company initiative hasn't been discussed at any of our meetings. Above all, I believe this is due to that our manager not knowing exactly what it is about* (employee, D2). Initiating a dialogue around Customer Company was something several members expressed critical in order to get moving towards incorporating the initiative. If not, the initiative was deemed to probably fade out as an unsuccessful change initiative. Thus, respondents within D2 had difficulties in reflecting over implications of the initiative, on the collective as well as individual level.

Discussion - The Matter of Sensemaking and Professional Context

In regards to studying strategy from a micro perspective (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009), this study shows how respondents within two divisions make different sense of a change initiative. These differences seem connected to the respondents' tendency to look to their professional context in the sensemaking process. As acknowledged by Maitlis (2005), through sensemaking recipients shape accounts of why things are to change. In this regard, it is concurrent within both divisions that Customer Company will help to further strengthen the focus on customers over products, and therein the company can achieve a more favorable market position. Hence, both divisions were aware of the initiative and had an idea of what it aimed to accomplish. However, in line with previous research on sensemaking within organizations (Stensäker & Falkenberg, 2007; Balogun & Johnson, 2005), discrepancies in regards to making sense of the initiative appeared evident. In this respect, two themes arose that indicate how and why such differences may exist: Magnitude of Change and Embracement of the Initiative. Each theme is made up by three categories, where each category serves to exemplify an aspect of the belonging-to theme.

In line with the purpose of this study, the two themes serve to show how and why individuals made different sense of the initiative.

Considering the theme Magnitude of Change, a distinguishing feature in our empirical material concerned Perceptions on the Scope of the Initiative. This category exemplifies how respondents tended to refer to their own work roles in order to make sense of the size of the initiative. By looking to the professional context, respondents within D1 identified several deficiencies and areas of improvement in order to become Customer Company. Thus, they appreciated the initiative as a rather radical operation to the organization. Similar sensemaking processes seemed to have taken place within D2, but generated in appreciations of less extensive measures needed in order to incorporate Customer Company. Respondents within D2 perceived the initiative as an extension of previous ways of working and had difficulties identifying what radically would change as a consequence of Customer Company. As highlighted by Weick et al., (2005) sensemaking occurs when present ways of working are perceived to be different from the expected (i.e. future) ways. Differences in regards to perceptions on the scope of the initiative can thereby be understood in that respondents, by looking to the professional context, perceived varying degrees of cognitive disorder associated with the change. That is, members of D1 perceived the initiative as a rather immense operation (i.e. radically different from their current ways of working) associated with uncertainty, leading to more active sensemaking engagements. On the contrary, members within D2 perceived it as a less extensive change operation, consequently not associating similar uncertainty, which rendered in relatively passive sensemaking engagements.

Another feature discernible in respect to the theme Magnitude of Change concerns how respondents expected different forms of measures to incorporate Customer Company, referred to as Nature of the Change. This category shows how respondents looked to their daily work and therein made different sense of the character of change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), i.e. what to change (Maitlis, 2005). Within D1, respondents perceived attitudes and mindset to not be in line with their perception of what Customer Company represents, often referring to observations from their work situation. Thus, what they perceived had to change in order to incorporate the initiative was of normative character. Similar to this, respondents within D2, by looking to their daily work, perceived normative changes to be necessary measures to become Customer Company. However, heterogeneity was found within D2; some respondents perceived that tweaks and adjustments were sufficient. This seemed rooted in the perception that improving customer orientation was something that the organization for long had been working with. In other terms, they perceived the organization's present state of working fairly in line with expected standards of the initiative (Weick et al., 2005). What were perceived as missing pieces in incorporating Customer Company were measures of practical character, related to respondents' daily work.

The third category identified in our empirical material on the Magnitude of Change, termed Sense of Urgency, relates to how respondents appreciated the necessity of becoming Customer Company today. It exemplifies how respondents referred to their work situation when making sense of whether incorporating the initiative was deemed crucial to the organization. By looking to the professional context, respondents made

different sense of how to change (Maitlis, 2005) and subsequently ascribed various sense of urgency connected to this. A general perception within D1 was that putting the customer in focus would be a necessity in sustaining a strong market position, and that Customer Company would help to reach there. Also in regards to the urgency ascribed to incorporating the initiative, some respondents tended to look to the professional context; suggesting that substantial efforts should be deployed immediately. However, within D2 the initiative was perceived at a more abstract level, oftentimes pointing to small adjustments in different parts of the organization without specifying were these measures would take place. Hence, members within D2 had difficulties in relating the personal work role to the initiative, thus could not see how to change (Maitlis, 2005), and subsequently could not perceive that any changes would be of urgent matter.

The second theme, Embracement of the Initiative, concerns how respondents expressed willingness towards incorporating the change initiative. In this regard, a distinguishing category concerned the level of approval expressed towards Customer Company, i.e. cherishment expressed within the two divisions. In D1, respondents generally expressed endorsement towards the initiative, where some perceived it to be closely aligned to their present ways of working. At some instances, endorsement of Customer Company related to a project, run by D1, now integrated with the initiative. Similarly within D2, a general approval towards the initiative was expressed. However, cherishment was in general lower, seemingly connected to difficulties in perceiving how the individual work role related to Customer Company. Put in sensemaking terminology, members within D1 to higher extent utilized their professional context as input to the sensemaking process, therein with more ease could identify their roles, ultimately resulting in their relatively high endorsement.

Another category, related to Embracement of the Initiative, is Tendency to Give Rich Accounts. Our study shows that vivid descriptions of Customer Company were seemingly connected to a tendency of looking to the professional context in the sensemaking process. It was also evident how narrative events (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) impacted upon this process. Within D1, some discussions about Customer Company had taken place regarding what the initiative represents. Further, there were tendencies to give rich and concrete descriptions of the initiative, which on the one hand seemed connected to the discussions that had taken place, but also related to their individual work roles. Although vivid accounts were also expressed within D2, the respondents tended to give less concrete descriptions of how Customer Company would take form in practice. Discussions regarding the initiative had not taken place within D2, seemingly connected to a tendency of giving less vivid accounts. Hence, in line with previous research (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) narrative events seemed to affect the sensemaking process, made evident through the tendency to give rich accounts. Also, the incidence of looking to the professional context seemed to play a significant role in this respect.

A third category that appeared distinguishing in our empirical material refers to respondents' tendency to having reflected upon what consequences Customer Company would bring to the organization. The category is termed Incidence of Implicational Reflections and connects to sensemaking in that it shows how respondents, by referring to their professional context, showed differences in having reflected upon implications of

the initiative. Again, narrative events (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) seemed to have impacted upon this incidence. Respondents within D1 showed a tendency to perceive implications on a collective level, frequently referring to how the relation between the headquarters and the retailer-network would change. Furthermore, discussions held at D1 had resulted in some concrete actions (e.g. meeting with two customers annually), oftentimes mentioned as implications when respondents described how their work role would change. By so, this corresponds to the idea of organizational members as active agents with capacity to impact upon change initiatives (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Stensäker & Falkenberg, 2007). In contrast, respondents within D2 seemed to lesser extent having reflected over implications of the initiative, both on the collective as well as individual level. It was mentioned by many that discussions regarding the initiative had been parsimonious and that it was difficult to tell what was going to happen next. Hence, the occurrence of having reflected upon implications seemed connected to the incidence of narrative events, wherein implications on individual and collective level could be addressed.

This study acknowledges the importance of professional context in the sensemaking process, pointing to how this can have a significant impact upon the perception of what, why, and how, things will change (Maitlis, 2005). Seeing the professional context as a lens that mediate the individual in times of change, different lenses consequently generate different accounts of the initiative. As put forward in this paper, sensemaking accounts can partly be understood through looking to commonalities in respect to recipients' professional context. Considering how sensemaking processes within D1 generated relatively more homogenous perceptions on the initiative, this could on the one hand be explained by commonalities in their professional context. On the other hand, working with the aftermarket services, it seems that being customer oriented is valued an utterly vital aspect to their line of business. Hence, this study points to that reasons for deviations in respect to sensemaking can be explained by differences in recipients' work situation. Considering deviations in sensemaking, two themes surfaced central in our study and encompassed aspects (i.e. categories) where organizational members' accounts varied. By the extent to which respondents looked to the professional context in the sensemaking process, this generated various perceptions in regards to the Magnitude of Change and Embracement of the Initiative.

Looking to the professional context in making sense of the initiative rendered in more concrete appreciations of what, why, and how, things would change. Regarding what to change, respondents that to high degree connected their professional context to sensemaking perceived the initiative as a rather comprehensive operation to realize, associated with normative repercussions. This generated a propensity of appreciating deficiencies in current ways of working within the organization at large, acting affirmative as to why it had to change. Also, this seemed related to a tendency of ascribing a high sense of urgency towards incorporating the initiative. Thus, recognizing the change as an immense operation that bears normative repercussions, and that current ways of working were insufficient in delivering this, resulted in a more active sensemaking process. Acknowledging the collective feature of sensemaking processes, narrative events constitute a remedy in reconciling cognitive disorder (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). This was apparent in our study in that narrative events facilitated the

perception of how the collective as well as the individual relates to the incorporation of the initiative. Hence, it helped organizational members in the sensemaking process in connecting their professional context to Customer Company. Put in other terms, narrative events alleviated the cognitive disorder associated with the initiative. This was not least remarkable in regards to understanding how and why perceptions towards embracement of Customer Company varied among participants.

The tendency to perceive what Customer Company represents through the mediation of individual work roles seemed associated with cherishment of the initiative. Ostensibly, this could be explained in the organizational members' perceptions of their current ways of working attuned to what Customer Company inferred. In turn, this might imply that little efforts would be deployed by individuals in order to change their way of working. That is, if respondents appreciated their own way of working to be in line with Customer Company, it is probable that they would continue working in that direction. Further, narrative events (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) seemed to facilitate connecting the professional context to the initiative, this also led to a tendency among respondents to give rich descriptions of Customer Company. These narratives also impacted upon the extent to which respondents had reflected upon implications of the initiative, i.e. how things would change. Organizational members that connected the professional context to the sensemaking process had to a higher extent reflected upon how their individual work role would have to change, often accompanied with concrete examples. Interestingly – giving vivid accounts of the initiative as well as having reflected upon individual implications – could serve as counterargument to the notion that these respondents were satisfied with their current way of working, and thus would deploy little effort to incorporate the initiative.

Hence, the extent to which respondents looked to their professional context in the sensemaking process clearly impacted upon how organizational members had different perceptions of the initiative. Further, these deviations are manifested through the categories that make up the two themes outlined in this paper. In the following section concluding remarks regarding our findings, along with managerial implications and future areas of research, are provided.

Conclusion

This paper concerns a change initiative in the early implementation phase at an international manufacturing company, aimed at making the whole company more customer oriented. By looking at two similar divisions, and how the members of these form an understanding of what the change initiative represents, we found that deviating sensemaking-accounts in this respect tended to be highly influenced by respondents' professional context. Even though contextually defined, through the identified themes presented, the paper shows how the incidence of these deviations can be understood. By so, these themes contribute to furthering the understanding of how people, being subject to change, approach makeovers unfamiliar to them (Barr, 1998; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). In this respect it is displayed how individuals, through the mediation of their current work situation, perceive of what, how, and why, things are to change (Maitlis, 2005). These findings relate to prior studies that point to how recipients tend to perceive

new information by relating it to their existing knowledge (Weick et al., 2005), which in turn may lead to intended as well as unintended meanings (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Furthermore, professional context therein could be seen as a micro praxis that organizational members to large extent draw upon in their sensemaking process (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

The idea that implementation of strategic initiatives is anything but a linear process, flowing from top-management and sequentially distributed down the organizational hierarchy, have been contested in previous research (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2007; Whittington, 2003). Along that note, this paper contributes by pointing to how individual sensemaking constitute processes that are ambiguous and elusive, and by so lends support to the perception that top-down directed change is a complex, if at all feasible, operation. Instead, we know from previous research (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Barr, 1998; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) that interpretations of change initiatives, mediated by recipients' existing context of action, can have significant impact upon change initiatives. Hence, there is no one-way control over the change initiative since its incorporation is dependent on involvement and negotiation between different members (Coombs, Knights & Willmott, 1992; Brown, 1998). By capturing how deviating sensemaking-accounts take form in the organization, this study contributes to the s-as-p tradition by indicating that organizational change implementation is by no means linear and simple (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006). In addition to Stensäker and Falkenberg's (2007) findings; that individual level responses to change shape organizational level responses, this study uncovers how and why individual responses to a change initiative take form, seemingly affected by each recipient's professional context. Hence, recipients should be regarded as active agents in that perceptions of the initiative are being made which subsequently impact upon its incorporation. This contributes to the view that strategy and change are complex and non-linear matters to organizations (Balogun & Johnson, 2005).

Moreover, the study points to the importance of narrative events, serving as forums in which sensemaking takes place. In line with Balogun and Johnson's (2005) assumptions on managers' intervention in the sensemaking process during narrative events, this study shows how meetings held by managers, where the initiative was discussed, served as facilitators for members' sensemaking. Hence, discussions held within one division on the initiative seemed to affect members' sensemaking. Therein, this study also supports findings by Stensäker and Falkenberg (2007) pointing to the importance of middle-managers in their impact upon employees' sensemaking process. In this paper, we show how middle-managers functioned as a linkage between the leader of the initiative and the employees, facilitating discussions and also by making decisions on how to work in line with Customer Company, consequently impacting upon employees' sensemaking process. Additionally, the incidence of not looking to the professional context when making sense of the initiative seemed connected to appreciations of the organization as doing well in terms of incorporating Customer Company. This occurrence could possibly indicate tendencies of recursiveness in that respondents were satisfied with the current routines and practices and thus less prone to change (Jarzabkowski, 2004).

In regards to managerial implications, our findings relate to previous studies, indicating difficulties in controlling and managing lateral sensemaking processes that take place in the organization (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Stensäker & Falkenberg, 2007). Although change leaders seem to impact upon sensemaking through formal or informal presentations and discussions, recipients also make sense of the initiative in their absence. Hence, from a managerial perspective, it seems important to have managerial presence when recipients' sensemaking processes take place, in order to facilitate and achieve an interpretation aligned with the intentions. In this regard, Balogun and Johnson (2005) argue that leaders and managers should develop rules and set limits to recipients' ability to make sense of change initiatives. This involves communicating an explicit purpose, intended outcomes, and boundaries, instead of managing the details (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Thus, leading and managing change should be more seen in terms of facilitating sensemaking processes as opposed to controlling them. Furthermore, our study point to the necessity of recognizing recipients as inclined to perceive change through the mediation of their current ways of working. Leading to multiple sensemaking-accounts in respect to change initiatives, this stresses the need for resilience and flexibility on behalf of people assigned as change leaders. Hence, various sensemaking-accounts of a change initiative evolve automatically (Weick et al., 2005), and leaders therefore have to recognize the hardship in directing strategies top-down (Whittington, 1996). By referring to Stensäker and Falkenberg (2007), we argue that change leaders should assist recipients in their sensemaking-process; translating abstract visions and ideas into the practice at hand, as well as allowing time and resources for this to take place. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge middle-managers' role in facilitating sensemaking, again leading to a questioning of the practicability of controlling change top-down in the organization. Since recipients create deviating accounts of change initiatives through sensemaking processes, taking place in several narratives, leaders' control over change initiatives is constrained (Brown & Humphreys, 2003).

With reference to our findings, the significance of professional context in change ought to vary with the extent to which different professional contexts are included at the time for change. Taking into account that our study captures an early phase of a change initiative, a longitude study that follows how professional context and sensemaking impact upon (or modifies) change initiatives would be of relevance. Therein it would be possible to also see how professional context and sensemaking subsequently affect the initiative during the realization phase. Hence, a seemingly fruitful avenue for future research would be to investigate whether initiatives are to higher extent exposed to modification when a multitude of professions are subject to the same change? Conversely, under conditions of unified professions, are change initiatives sensemade in a more aligned manner, resulting in less modification? Also, does professional context impact upon the way in which change recipients carry out change, from a practical perspective? If so, how does this impact take form?

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