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The Influence of Power on Middle Managers' Sensemaking Process and its Consequences

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Abstract

Middle managers' role in terms of change agents and mediators have increased in importance during organisational changes. Much research has concluded that middle managers' sensemaking process is important when studying organisational change since they have to interpret a new situation and at the same time mediate the new settings to their lower employees. More recent research has further concluded that sensemaking is influenced by power, however these studies are limited. This thesis extends previous research by studying how power influence the middle managers' sensemaking process when they are expected to implement a change process and at the same time have to reapply for their position due to a recruitment process. The findings in this thesis suggest that the management team's use of language and the information they shared in regards to the recruitment process influenced the middle managers' sensemaking process. However, the middle managers' sensemaking process is also influenced by their self-interests, which in turn affects their use of power and thus has consequences for the lower employees. These findings also highlight that the use of power has two sides, and that sensemaking and power are intercorrelated.

Keywords: organisational change, recruitment process, middle managers, power, sensemaking

Introduction

Organisational change can be seen as new ways of organising and working (Dawson, 2003) and some researchers argue that change is vital for an organisation's future success and existence (Todnem By, 2005). Thus, changes in organisations should be treated as the norm nowadays (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), which can be seen as a result of globalisation, technology advances, growth of trade, recessions as well as the digital economy (Dawson, 2003). However, a change process includes many challenges (Lewis, 1999) and many change initiatives tend to fail to meet the desired expectations (Elving, 2005; Vakola, Tsaousis, Nikolaou, 2004), where as much as 70 per cent of change initiatives fail (e.g. Tondem By, 2005; Beer & Nohria, 2000). One explanation for organisational failures could be that there is too much information and too many tools, which could in turn confuse the organisational members (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Another common belief for organisational failure held by top managers is the resistance to change among lower organisational members (Berube, 2014; Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008; Bovey & Hede, 2001). In line with this, Hardy (1996) argues that power is an important aspect to overcome resistance to change processes, which can further be linked to Kotter (1995) who states that a powerful

coalition needs to lead the change effort in order to succeed. Further, a change process has to be anchored throughout the organisation (Kotter, 1995). Even though a great deal of research is done within the field of organisational change, many change initiatives tend to fail as mentioned above, which suggest the importance to further study organisational change processes (Herold, Fedor & Caldwell, 2007).

In change processes, organisational members try to clarify what is going on around them and make sense of how to interpret their surroundings when they experience uncertainty (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Organisational change can therefore be viewed as the process of negotiating social constructions in order to understand the change and to influence others; this can further be understood as sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensemaking is widely used in research within organisational studies (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) and it is considered a useful concept when analysing a change process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). This as the change agents create an instability for the organisational members during a change process, which the members have to make sense of and make understandable for themselves (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Oftentimes, organisational members engage in gossiping, storytelling, spreading rumours and talking about past experiences, which in turn can impact the sensemaking process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). However, it can be argued that sensemaking is not a neutral act as power seems to be an important aspect, meaning that different organisational members have different powers and abilities to influence the sensemaking process (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014).

Change processes are generally top-down driven (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), and much research has been done from the perspective of top managers in regards to organisational change and sensemaking (Kezar, 2013). Change initiatives are often implemented at the top in an organisation and negotiated down the organisation, which is why middle managers become important actors in negotiating meanings (Lüsher & Lewis, 2008; Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Middle managers are seen as important mediators in change processes since they have the responsibility to influence upwards, laterally and downwards without no formal authority (Hope, 2010; Lüsher & Lewis, 2008). Additionally, middle managers' role as change agents have increased in importance since many organisations have become more geographically spread resulting in a lower interaction between the middle managers and top management (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Even though middle managers are important mediators, it can be argued that they may have a hard time to make sense of the change themselves and at the same time employees often seek out to the middle managers for helping them make sense of the change process (Lüsher & Lewis, 2008).

It can be understood that middle managers are important during a change process since they act as mediators, and thus it becomes important to understand the middle managers' sensemaking process. There is some previous research within this field (e.g. Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Rouleau, 2005); however, these studies of middle managers' sensemaking process have included the contextual factor of organisational change, but not the contextual factor of a recruitment process, where the middle managers have to reapply for their position at the same time as they are implementing a change process. Thus, previous studies regarding middle managers seem to have been conducted when they are in a position where they do not risk to lose their jobs and status. In addition, there seems to be little research on how power influences the sensemaking process during an organisational change (Hope, 2010). Consequently, there seems to be a gap in the research of sensemaking in combination with power

when the middle managers are going through an organisational change process and at the same time have to reapply for their position as a middle manager. When the middle managers are set in a recruitment process they are put in a situation where they on one hand have to think about their own interest, keeping their job, but on the other hand they need to mediate the interest of the management team and their employees. To investigate this setting, an organisation which is going through an extensive change process where the middle managers at the same time are in a recruitment process have been be studied. The chosen organisation wishes to be anonymous and the authors of this thesis will hereafter refer to the organisation as Rhody, which is a made up name. Rhody operates in the service sector and offers services to other organisations as well as private customers (Rhody's Annual Report, 2015). Their home market is within Northern Europe, where they employ about 30,000 individuals.

Drawing from the introduction, the purpose is to investigate how power and sensemaking are expressed in a situation where the middle managers are important mediators at the same time as they have to think about their own interests in order to keep their jobs while implementing a change process. The purpose is also to investigate how the middle managers' sensemaking process in turn affect the lower employees. Since the authors of this thesis view power as something that is exercised and since sensemaking is a relational process, it is fundamental to understand the relationship between the different organisational levels. To understand the middle managers' role and sensemaking process, interviews with three different organisational levels at Rhody were conducted: management team, middle managers and lower employees. Thus, this thesis is delimited to five offices in the area of Gothenburg and also to a limited period of the change process.

This thesis starts with a theoretical framework, where the concept of sensemaking and power are critically discussed and presented. The theoretical framework is followed by a section where Rhody and the setting are introduced. It continues with presenting how the field material has been collected and analysed. Thereafter, the results are presented with a description from the interviews and internal documents as well as quotes, which is directly analysed. The thesis continues with a discussion, where the empirical findings and the theoretical framework are discussed. Lastly, the conclusion, implications and limitations are presented.

Introducing sensemaking in organisational change
Sensemaking is both significant to understand and a challenge during organisational change processes (Lüsher & Lewis, 2008). As explained by Weick (1995), sensemaking is about converting diffuse happenings into something understandable for oneself by constructing, filtering, framing and creating facticity. Sensemaking can be seen as a social process, which takes place in a relational context where organisational members understand, interpret and make sense for themselves and others. In turn, the sensemaking process shapes the organisation and its understandings (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Further, sensemaking is about how individuals, in a social and individual activity, cope with interruptions as in an organisational change. Organisational changes further propose that the current way of thinking has to be altered since new meanings are to be constructed (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Thus, during a change process organisational members try to make sense of their surroundings and try to figure out how to respond to the change by interacting with others in the organisation (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Several researchers build on Weick's (1995) theory about sensemaking, and highlight that a

planned change effort affects how people make sense at all levels within an organisation (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Hence, sensemaking has a critical role in determining whether the actual change outcomes are in accordance with the planned change outcomes (Hope, 2010).

Weick (1995) puts together seven characteristics of sensemaking, which are repeatedly mentioned in the sensemaking literature: grounded in identity construction; retrospective; enactive of sensible environments; social; ongoing; focused on and by extracted cues; and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. One of them, *ongoing*, is of special interest for this thesis since Rhody is going through a change process, where interruptions in the daily work is assumed to strongly affect the sensemaking of the change process. Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking is an ongoing process as people are always in the middle of their work which could be seen as a they are in a flow. However, when these flows are interrupted by an unexpected event or occurrence, an emotional response is normal which in turn can affect the sensemaking process by organisational members. For instance, negative emotions can be expected when an individual interprets an interruption as harmful for oneself and the negative emotion can become more intense and last even longer when the interruption is not removed. In contrast, there can be a positive reaction to interruptions, when an interruption is suddenly removed or the interruption unexpectedly leads to an acceleration of a personal plan.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) discuss sensemaking in an organisational change from a top-down perspective. They argue that the CEO or top management team have the responsibility to set the direction of the change process, which is often done by creating a new vision along with symbols. This is done in order to show that the current way of doing things is no longer appropriate and to create a sense of urgency for the needed change. In this sense, the CEO or the top management team create an instability for the organisational members and thus force them to engage in making sense of the new situation in a different way. Simultaneously, the CEO or the top management team have a chance to influence the organisational members' sensemaking process.

Even though power have not been discussed to a great extent (Hope, 2010), drawing from above it seems like some individuals have more power to influence the sensemaking process than others (e.g. Lüsher & Lewis, 2008; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), which suggest the importance of studying sensemaking in relation to power in this thesis. From this section we would like to highlight that sensemaking help organisational members to interpret and make sense of changes and interruptions, by making the situation understandable for themselves. Further, interruptions can bring strong positive or negative emotions dependent on how each individual believes the change will affect them.

Sensemaking and power
There are different definitions for basically the same thing; conflict of interests, politics, power and power relations (Hope, 2010). Thus, all of these definitions have in this thesis been treated as the same phenomena and are referred as power. A common definition of power is "The ability to get others to do what you want them to do, if necessary against their will, or to get them to do something they otherwise would not do" (Hardy & Clegg, 1996, p. 623). In this sense, power can be argued to create the energy needed to implement a change process (Hardy, 1996). Power is embedded in acts and can influence what individuals determine to accept or reject (Pfeffer, 1981,

cited in Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). As already mentioned, power is in this thesis treated as something that is performed rather than something that individuals own. In this regard, power can differ between individuals and over time (Flyvbjerg, 2003). Further, power can be connected to the concept of sensemaking in a way that power defines what count as reality (Flyvbjerg, 2003). Additionally, self-interests and power can affect the sensemaking process, and thus lead to different understandings and interpretations (Balogun, 2003). Adding to the concept of power, Hardy (1996) identifies three different types of power that can be used in a strategic change process: the power of resources, power of processes and power of meaning.

The first concept, *power of resources*, is connected to the power of scarce resources. By handling the distribution of key resources, which individuals are dependent upon, power can be used to influence a decision in order to achieve a desired behaviour or to reach a set goal (Hardy, 1996). A key resource could for instance be information, expertise, rewards, punishment and the ability to hire and fire people (Hardy, 1996). In this thesis, the concept of power of resources will be used in order to see which resources that have an influence on the middle managers' sensemaking process and further how power of resources is used by the middle managers.

The second concept described by Hardy (1996), *power of processes*, is related to that individuals can influence the outcome by deciding who is part of the decision making process and who is not. The author further states that the most powerful decision makers can influence who takes part in the decision making process and affect the decision making process by indirect participation. However, in this thesis the concept will be expressed in terms of *activities* rather than processes, since it is of more importance to see what activities that is significant to gain power. Further, Balogun (2003) found that middle managers have an important role during change processes, and also that their time was limited during these periods. As a result of the time constraint, the middle managers had to decide which activities to focus on since there was not enough time to execute all the necessary activities as usual. What she also found was that the middle managers chose to focus on the more visible activities such as keeping the business going rather than the invisible activities such as negotiating the change process to their employees. To have the ability to choose what activities to prioritise can therefore be seen as *power of activities* since it can affect change outcomes.

The third concept, *the power of meaning*, is linked to that individuals can influence perceptions and preferences, which can be done by using symbols, rituals and language (Hardy, 1996). Thus, power can be used in order to construct meanings by creating legitimacy for certain ideas over other ideas (Hope, 2010). Individuals can in this sense legitimise their demands by using their power in order to influence how information is given and what kind of information is given to whom (Hardy, 1996). This concept will mainly be used in this thesis to investigate how the use of language has influenced the sensemaking process. In line with the third concept, Weick's (1995) characteristic *focused on and by extracted cues*, highlights the leadership as an important part in generating references to help understand the new direction of the organisation. Leadership can in this sense be understood as the process of influencing others (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004; Smircich & Morgan, 1982), since controlling which cues that are used for references is a significant basis for power (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014). Cues will in this thesis be understood as something new that is introduced in the organisation, which the organisational members have to interpret and make sense of.

Smircich and Morgan (1982) have highlighted the importance of power relations when studying leadership as a sensemaking process; managers try to impact the sensemaking of others in the organisation, although the other organisational members may interpret those meanings differently. Sensemaking can be said to be an act of power and should therefore not be viewed as a neutral act (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014). Some individuals have more power to influence the sensemaking process of others due to their position (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). However, the authors of this thesis are critical to whether the ability to influence others' sensemaking process mainly has to do with the actors' positions or whether other circumstances are important as well.

As can be drawn from above, it seems as power influence the sensemaking process and these concepts should therefore be studied in relation to one another. Thus, this thesis will investigate what influence power has on the middle managers' sensemaking by using the three powers of Hardy (1996): power of resources, power of activities and power of meaning. Moreover, this thesis will investigate whether the middle managers' sensemaking process has influenced their use of these three powers.

Introducing Rhody and the context: the change process and recruitment process
As stated in the introduction, Rhody is operating in the service sector and employ more than 30,000 employees where their home market is mainly within Northern Europe (Rhody's annual report). Rhody is listed on the Swedish stock exchange and has high dividends for their shareholders (Rhody's annual report). The industry Rhody is operating in is especially interesting to study as the organisation is pressured to change by external factors as well as changes in their customers' behaviour. Today, Rhody's customers require more solutions by mobile services and Internet, and Rhody has received complaints from their customers as it often takes time for them to hear back from their personal contact person, which causes a delay of their errands. To better meet the demands of their customers, Rhody has to become more agile and is thus initiating a change process in the area of Gothenburg. Rhody could be seen as an organisation with four different levels in the Swedish market, however this thesis is exclusively oriented to the area of Gothenburg and hence the focus will be on the three lower organisational levels. The highest level is the top management team responsible for the whole Swedish market and is not situated in the area of Gothenburg. The second level operates under the top management team and consists of the management team in the area of Gothenburg, who is responsible for the change process in Gothenburg. The third level consists of the different offices in the region of Gothenburg, where one middle manager has the responsibility for one office respectively. The fourth level is the lower employees, operating under the middle managers. In this sense, it can be argued that Rhody is a top-down driven organisation with a hierarchical structure.

The change process started in the summer of 2015 when the two existing regions in the area of Gothenburg were merged into one region. As a consequence, the two prior top managers had to reapply for the top manager position in the new region, resulting in that one of them became the new top manager of the whole region. The new top manager entered the position in the beginning of October 2015. Thereafter, the existing managers from the two regions had to reapply for the positions in the new management team. The process included that the new top manager selected a management team, which resulted in that only managers from the top manager's previous region were selected. After this process was finished and the new

management team was established, they continued the work with the change process in the new region of Gothenburg. In the end of November 2015, the management team presented the change process that Rhody would be going through. The management team first presented the change process to all the middle managers in the region of Gothenburg, and two days later the management team presented it to all the lower employees. During the two presentations, the top manager communicated the new vision and why they were going to do the change process. The new vision included how to become number one in the market. The change process could be seen to include two major parts: a new working approach and downsizing of offices, where the downsizing part includes that many of the existing offices shut down and merge together.

Regarding the new working approach, some of the offices in Gothenburg are part of a pilot study, and will therefore gain more attention and resources than the offices who are not part of the pilot study. However, the offices which are not part of the pilot study are still expected to initiate the new working approach, but to do a lighter version of it. As it is a pilot study, the working approach is characterised by trial and error, where some things are expected to work out while other things are not. In February 2016, all the middle managers were supposed to start implementing the new working approach at their specific office, indicating that they have a critical role in the change process. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the lower employees as well as the middle managers have had their own customers and had the throughout responsibility for their customers. The new working approach rather includes that the lower employees and middle managers will work in teams and collectively be responsible for their customers. This is believed to increase Rhody's availability towards their customers as the customers can get advised by more employees instead of waiting to get booked with their previous contact person. However, the customer will be able to choose if they want their usual contact person or someone else who may be available sooner. In the new working approach, the lower employees and middle managers will also become experts at what they do, since they will focus on one area rather than on the whole process. This is expected to increase the expertise Rhody can offer to their customers, and also diminish the stress for the employees as they do not have to do everything anymore. Rhody will also open an online office which extensively will offer online meetings and they will also increase the required number of online meetings to 50 per cent for the rest of the offices. They will focus on online meetings since they want to increase their availability and offer easier solutions to their customers and hence the customers do not have to be present at one of Rhody's offices which may be a struggle for some as well as time consuming.

Regarding the downsizing, some offices are merged together, i.e. some of the mergers will result in that two or three offices in the same area are merged together. Additionally, one of the mergers will result in that many offices are shut down in order to form a main office in the centre of Gothenburg. As a consequence of the mergers, there will be fewer and bigger offices and thus the positions for the middle managers will decrease from 29 to 23 positions. There will be six middle manager positions in the central office and one middle manager position at the residual offices respectively. The downsizing resulted in that the middle managers had to reapply for their positions, which implied that some of them would be left without a middle manager position. However, all of the middle managers were promised a position within Rhody, but some of them could get their position lowered. To make an informed decision regarding which middle managers would be reselected, all of the middle managers had to go through an extensive recruitment process during a period of two months. The recruitment process included interviews,

tests and assessment centres. In the beginning of March 2016, the management team presented the new middle manager positions for all of the employees. It was only three middle managers who did not get continued positions as a middle manager, while no external candidates were recruited. Most of the middle managers were given a new office in a different location. However, a few middle managers left Rhody voluntarily before the recruitment process was finished.

In short, the middle managers have a critical role when it comes to the implementation of the change process as they can be seen as mediators between the management team and the lower employees. At the same time as they are supposed to layout the change process, they are in a recruitment process during a period of two months. The timeline below summarises important events for Rhody.
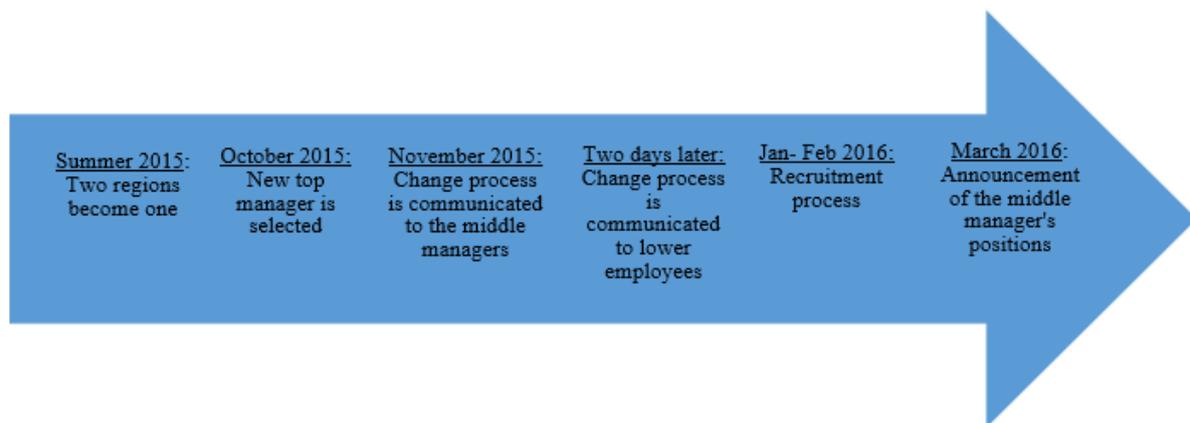

Figure 1. Timeline of important events

Methodology

Design of the study

In order to investigate the purpose of this thesis, a greater understanding on what is going on in the organisation was needed. Hence, this thesis has adopted a qualitative approach since a detailed examination of the phenomena was appropriate rather than standardised answers (Silverman, 2013). Flyvbjerg (2006) further means that a greater understanding is achieved by doing qualitative research, and Silverman (2013) states that case studies can contribute to the broader perspective as well. In order to gain a holistic understanding, three different organisational levels were studied: management team, middle managers and lower employees. The organisational change Rhody is currently going through in the area of Gothenburg will hereafter be referred to the change process.

The collection of data was done mainly through semi-structured interviews with employees within Rhody. Interviews were seen as most appropriate in order to answer the purpose of this thesis, this since how individuals speak and the kind of language they use show how the interviewees account for themselves and others (Tsoukas, 2005). The interviews were divided in two different phases. The first phase of interviews was collected early in the change process and followed an open structure in order to find interesting themes and aspects. Open questions were asked in order to get an overview of how the organisational members experienced the process. One of the middle managers was our contact person at Rhody and was interviewed first. The middle manager presented a detailed description of the change process and provided us with some internal documents regarding the change process, which better prepared us for

upcoming interviews. The middle manager thereafter booked the resisting interviews with the other middle managers, lower employees and some from the management team. Doing it like this was considered appropriate since the middle manager had access to everyone's schedules and also since our wishes were met in regards to what kind of interviews that were needed. However, the follow up interviews were booked in accordance with each employee. When 18 interviews in total were conducted, the field material was considered sufficient for investigating the aims of this thesis and hence no more interviews were carried out.

The second phase included follow up interviews and were conducted after the middle managers and lower employees found out which position they received. Dividing the interviews in two different phases were beneficial for the analysis as it allowed for a comparison of how the sensemaking process changed over time. The interviewees are anonymous throughout this thesis in order to make the interviewees more comfortable to express their feelings and speak more freely during the interview but also since the organisation has requested to be anonymous. To further keep the interviewees anonymous, all of them will be referred to their position within the organisation.

Collection of data
The data was collected at five different offices in the region of Gothenburg in order to get diversified field material. Even though the main focus is on the middle managers, sensemaking is a social and collective process, why it was important to interview the management team and the lower employees as well as the middle managers. The number of interviews at the different organisational levels reflect the structure of the organisation, i.e. there are more lower employees than there are middle managers. Also, interviewing several lower employees provided us with a broader understanding of the middle managers' sensemaking process. The first set of interviews were conducted by using open questions in a semi-structured way in order to create a dialogue, and to further allow the interviewee to answer the questions more freely (Trots, 2010; Kvale 2006). The focus during the interviews were to ask questions and listen to what they were saying in order to ask follow up questions. To reach a deeper understanding of the phenomena, the second set of interviews contained more focused questions on the themes that were found in the first set of interviews.

The interviews were held in Swedish and all of the interviews were recorded after approval by the interviewees, apart from the interview with the management team where notes were taken in detail during the interview. All the recorded interviews were transcribed in order to be able to make a more extensive analysis with quotations. Although, a risk with interviews is that the interviewee may not be completely truthfully, which could be as they want to portray their organisation in a good light or that they want to get it over with as soon as possible (Watson, 2011). This was noticeable in the interview with the management team, where two individuals were interviewed at the same time. In this interview, the two interviewees' answers were more focused on portraying Rhody in a good light rather than answering the questions. Hence, the interviewees talked more about Rhody as an organisation and as a consequence there was only room for a few of the prepared questions. The interview did however provide some useful information, although when their information was not sufficient, others' account of the management team has been used instead. This has not been considered as a limitation since sensemaking is about how individuals account for themselves and others.

As the middle managers have to translate the change process to their specific context, it is of high interest to see the directions they get from higher up. Therefore, internal documents were conducted as a complement to the interview made with the ones from the management team. We had access to several PowerPoint presentations that were used during the first presentation to the middle managers and the lower employees; however, emails were considered too sensitive to share. The documents were further used as a mean of triangulation in combination with the interviews, which could reduce the biases of using one single method (Bowen, 2009). Using triangulation, i.e. the use of more than one combined methods, further let the authors of this thesis to obtain more dimensions on the change process and the recruitment process than would have been achieved with only interviews.

Position	Number of interviewees	Number of interviews
Lower employees	7	11
Middle managers	4	6
Management team	2	1
Total	13	18

Table 1. Presents the number of interviewees and the number of interviews.

Data analysis
To analyse the field material, a grounded theory approach was used, referring to that the authors of this thesis started to collect data rather than starting with theories (Martin & Turner, 1986). In this sense, we had an open mind when we started to collect field material to be able to find interesting concepts and categories. A grounded theory approach was further considered appropriate since the interviews have been collected in two phases (Turner, 1981). The grounded theory approach is reflected in the whole analysis in the way that codes, themes and categories have been created from the field material.

The collected field material was analysed in two different phases. The first set of interviews were transcribed in detail in order to be able to analyse the field material. The next step in the field material analysis was to code all the interviews. The coding was firstly done in Nvivo 11, which is a software programme adjusted to analyse qualitative data. However, it was difficult to get a clear overview of the codes in Nvivo, why we redid the coding by using sticky notes. The sticky notes provided a clear overview of the field material, where the coding was done with sensemaking and power in mind. Thereafter, the codes were categorised in relevant and interesting categories, which resulted in three main categories: worries, lack of motivation and information gets stuck. Worries refer to increased worries among the middle manager to lose their jobs during the recruitment process. Lack of motivation refers to the fact that the middle managers lost their motivation during the recruitment process and as a result were more absent. Information gets stuck refers to that the middle managers can be seen as mediators of information but have a fear of raising critique to the management team since it may portray them in a negative light. The analysis and categories of the first set of interviews steered the questions of the second set of interviews. The second phase was similar to the first phase, where the second set of

interviews were transcribed, coded and categorised. The documents have been analysed alongside the interviews.

The empirical findings are presented in three main sections below, which are based on the three previous mentioned categories. The sections start with a description, and is then followed by a quote to better illustrate the interviewees' answers. The quote is thereafter explained and followed by an analysis. The quotes that are used in the empirical setting have been translated and moderated from Swedish to English, which should be kept in consideration. Thus, the spoken language has been adjusted to written language, and therefore excessive words have been removed.

High competition: Is it only room for the best middle managers?
The downsizing of offices involved that the number of middle manager positions were going to decrease, which led to that the middle managers had to go through a recruitment process and reapply for their position. Along with this, the management team clarified that they had opened up the applications for both internal and external candidates. This further created a belief among the middle managers that some of them were going to lose their status and get a position as a lower employee (Interview middle manager 1). At the same time, the management team introduced a new vision for Rhody, which included to be number one. This further signals that the management team has high ambitions for the future. As a response to the recruitment process, one middle manager explained:

> All of the middle managers will of course not get a spot as a middle manager, but I don't believe that the management team has 25 people hidden in a barn somewhere. However, this is what it [the communication] sounds like sometimes. [...] Sometimes I believe they [the management team] want it to look as it is higher competition than it actually is. (Interview middle manager 3).

The communication from the management team could be understood as they wanted the middle managers to believe that it was a high competition for the middle manager positions and that they might select 25 new candidates if they find others more appropriate for the positions. However, middle manager 3 believed this could be an attempt by the management team to create a higher feeling of competition than it actually was and thus believed the likelihood that all of them would get exchanged was slim. Some of the middle managers were however not that confident that the management team was actually exaggerating the high competition. The management team has by their tough approach managed to create a feeling of insecureness and fear among the middle managers concerning losing their position. Drawing from this, it seems like the management team wanted to signal that there is only room for the best performing middle managers in order to pressure the middle managers to perform and show their best sides. This further implies that the management team wanted to mediate that they have the power and control over the recruitment process and the middle managers' nearest future. The management team further used their power by showing that the recruitment process was going to happen whether the middle managers wanted it or not and that they were not able to influence the decision regarding the reapplication of their jobs.

In the beginning of March 2016, the middle managers found out about their new positions and it turned out that almost all of the middle managers, except three, received a new middle manager position, where no external candidates were recruited. However, almost every middle

manager had to relocate to a new office with new lower employees. When the recruitment process was over, one of the middle managers stated:

> This is what I mean with the signals I got [from the management team], that there would come many new middle managers. And that is what all of us have been worried about. And then not much happens, more than middle managers are changing offices. What I can see they [the management team] have placed middle managers close to where they live, which I think is a good idea. (Interview middle manager 3).

The management team did create an unjustified sense of high competition, this since not much happened in terms of that no one were replaced by external candidates and only a few lost their positions. This could signal that the management team wanted the reselected middle managers to feel that they were special and as a way to boost the middle managers' self-confidence. However, it could be assumed to be harder to achieve, since most of the middle managers were reselected. The consequences have rather been that the recruitment process and the management team's hard approach have taken much energy and time from the middle managers. Due to the loss of energy and time, the middle managers have not been able to fully support their lower employees. Further, another consequence has been that some of the middle managers have lost their trust for the management team since they believed the management team was bluffing.

The process has been cold
During the recruitment process, the communication has been quite harsh and the management team's approach has been perceived as colder than Antarctica (Interview middle manager 4). Further, it is believed that the management team has missed the humanity in the recruitment process and that the process has been too long. The management team has also expressed clumsy comments and not been dealing very well with worries among the middle managers. To exemplify, one middle manager explained:

> Regarding the communication to the middle managers, the management team communicated in the beginning that they will fix individual solutions for the ones who will not get a continued position as a middle manager. Later on when we had coaching and interviews and different meetings [with the management team] they rather asked 'What will you do if you do not get a middle manager position?'. Then I left with a feeling that I do not know what to do in case I do not get a continued middle manager position. (Interview middle manager 2).

In the start of the recruitment process, it seemed as the management team wanted the middle managers to feel that they would be backed up with an individual solution if they did not receive a new position as a middle manager. As the recruitment process progressed, the management team however changed approach and rather started to ask some of the middle managers what they would do if they were not reselected. This created a higher anxiety among some of the middle managers as well as a questioning attitude towards the management team's shift in approach. Hence, it can be understood as the management team believed it was not their mission to find a new position for the middle managers who were not reselected since they rather put the responsibility in the hands of the middle managers. Further, this signals that the management team did not value the soft aspects, such as the middle managers' feelings, that much in the recruitment process.

As a response to the recruitment process and the feeling of high competition that the management team created, some of the middle managers left Rhody before the recruitment process started. However, those who left Rhody may not have had the best results at their office and were thus aware that the chances of getting a continued position as a middle manager were

slim (Interview middle manager 1). Another consequence was that some of the other middle managers started to look for alternatives as they were worried of not receiving a new position within Rhody. The tough approach by the management team could indicate that it was an attempt to get rid of low performers in the organisation since the management team did not have to spend more resources and time on them. As these middle managers left voluntarily, the management team did neither have to go through the recruitment process with them nor did they have to find another solution for them. However, the tough approach by the management team could have been riskful since high performers could have left the organisation as well, as some middle managers started to look for external job openings due to the high pressure. This indicates that the management team's tough approach made some of the middle managers question themselves and their ability to deliver.

Reduced loyalty and trust
Even though not so many middle managers did not leave the organisation the tough approach from the management team led to other consequences. The middle managers thought the recruitment process was redundant since they believed that the management team already knew them and their capabilities as they have been working at Rhody for quite some time. Thus, it seems like the management team failed to motivate why the middle managers had to go through such an extensive recruitment process. Although, there is a belief that the management team put up the extensive recruitment process as a way to create a fair ground to base the decision on and to give the middle managers an equal chance to get reselected (Interview middle manager 1). Further, the middle managers perceived the recruitment process as awful and mentally tough, partly as the process was not motivated and as it included a long evolutionary process with an ambiguous outcome. Since the management team failed to motivate the recruitment process, this signals that the management team did not fully trust the middle managers as they wanted the middle managers to show their abilities and experiences during a long recruitment process. As one of the middle managers expressed:

> I have put up some form of walls in the loyalty and I feel a bit pushed away. It is like if they [the management team] do not like my work, then I do not really like them either. [...] No one in the management team told me that I could feel pretty confident to keep my job. Then I got a really fun job with a really big reliance and I was really happy about it. However, after a while I started wondering why I got the job, as I had been pretty sure I didn't have the management team's trust. Then you have to open up the loyalty again as I got a really big confidence from the management team. (Interview middle manager 4).

It seems like the extensive recruitment process has affected some of the middle managers' loyalty and trust for the management team and the organisation. This could be due to that the middle managers felt that they were getting overly tested rather than that the management team showed trust in them and comforted them during the recruitment process. Hence, this indicates that the middle managers did not feel appreciated for their contributions to the organisation. Rather than having to rebuild the trust and loyalty, it could have been favourable if the management team would have had faith in them from the beginning. This seems to further has affected the sensemaking process and the way the middle managers interpreted the management team. Some of the middle managers wished that the management team had chosen a different approach, where they could have shown an understanding for the middle managers' situation and supported

them instead. Further, it seems like the management team's approach did more harm than good as some of the middle managers indicated that their loyalty and trust will take time to rebuild again. It can further be understood that one response by some of the middle managers was that they treated the management team in the same way as they treated them, i.e. 'if they do not like my work, I do not really like them either'.

Loss of motivation: How am I to do my day-to-day activities?
The recruitment process was ongoing for two months and included several evolutionary steps, which in turn seems to have affected all of the middle managers' motivation in a negative manner. The main reasons for the loss of motivation seem to have been that the recruitment process took much energy and focus from the middle managers' daily work and as it was connected with an ambiguous outcome. Further, some of the middle managers knew they would not continue working at the same office with the same co-workers since their offices were closing down, and some of the middle managers were not even convinced they would still be a middle manager when the recruiting process was over. To state this more clearly, one of the middle managers stated:

> It has been an extremely big focus on the recruitment process, and it has included many steps. A lot of evaluation, so the recruitment process has taken too much time for me to find focus here at the office, as well as inspiration. When you're stressed, it is hard to be creative. [...] In my world, I have probably lost a quarter of results. It affects me. Frustration! (Interview middle manager 4).

The loss of energy and focus in turn seem to have influenced some of the middle managers' creativity and inspiration, which have led to frustration since they have had a hard time to deliver the expected results. Hence, the process could be seen as an interruption in the middle managers' work and due to the fact that the process was long it has taken much energy from the middle managers. This further indicates that the recruitment process has negatively affected the middle manager's work as a manager and the ability for the middle managers to execute their job in an appropriate way. Since the recruitment process has been mentally tough and time consuming, many middle managers have stated that a shorter recruitment process would have been more in place. Therefore, it seems like the management team has not considered possible consequences of the recruitment process such as lost focus and motivation at the offices and the risk of reduced results.

The middle managers have also struggled to set up goals at the office. This since they do not know whether they will continue as middle managers or not, and if they will, they do not know at which office. As a consequence, many of the middle managers feel that it is harder to get motivated when there is no clear goals to work towards. This can further be connected to that the employees and offices at Rhody are normally measured on everything they do, and normally work after a clear structure. Not having this clear structure has also affected the lower employees, who together with their middle manager are supposed to work out a new team based working approach. Thus, it has been an interruption in what they normally know as usual business.

Where is the leadership?
The recruitment process seems to have affected the middle managers' ability to be fully present both mentally and physically at their offices. This was noticeable during the recruitment process

as it took much time and energy from the middle managers but the absence seemed to continue even after the announcement of the new middle manager positions:

> On the one hand, I need to have focus on my co-workers here [at the old office], on the other hand I want to start the new project, so I need to focus on both. Therefore, I do not have time to be as present as I would have to be here. They [the middle manager's lower employees] are pretty independent so they are fine, but there is not much time for development and follow-ups and such. It is rather just about the operational and to do the daily business. (Interview middle manager 1).

Even after the recruitment process, it seemed hard for the middle managers to find motivation at their old office since there was a desire to start working with the new tasks at their new office as soon as possible. The middle managers' supportive roles have also been obstructed, in other words the lower employees' follow-up meetings and coaching have suffered. The announcement of the middle manager positions could further be seen as a new interruption for the middle managers since something new was ahead of them. However, this time the interruption included a feeling of relief since they received a new position as a middle manager. Further, the recruitment process seems to have had negative consequences not only during the process but also after the process was finished. Thus, it further seems like the middle managers put their own interest first as they put aside many of their responsibilities towards their lower employees, in other words there was a conflict of interests. In this sense, it appears like many of the middle managers focused more on the harder aspects, such as operational efficiency rather than the softer aspects, such as coaching and personal development.

The middle managers' absence has been noticeable for some of the lower employees as well. The lack of a present and motivated middle manager as well as the lack of coaching, goals on what to achieve and development have in turn affected the lower employees' motivation:

> Our middle manager disappeared when the recruitment process started. We have not had a leadership here since before Christmas and this has affected many small things at this office such as coaching, vacation planning and development for us, which in turn has created a lot of frustration. [...] If you say it like this, our results are worse than ever. (Interview lower employee 6).

The absence of the middle managers has for some of the lower employees created a feeling of frustration as coaching, development and vacation planning have been suffering. Moreover, the absence of the middle managers has affected the long-term goals at the offices. From a lower employee point of view this could get consequences as they found it hard to measure their results without knowing what goals they were aiming for. As quoted by two lower employees: "What you measure is what you get" (Interview lower employee 1 & lower employee 5). This indicates that they in some way value hard work since it will show, and may thus affect their work effort negatively when they are not measured. The absence of coaching, goals and direction seem to also have affected the results negatively. This indicates how important it is with a present and motivated manager who can coach employees and motivate them to perform and develop.

Filtering information: Is it smart for me to say what I think?
The management team believed that if all the employees had a chance to ventilate their concerns they would feel more certain about the change process and embrace it even more (Interview, management team). Although, it coincides as many of the middle managers felt that it was hard

for them to express their concerns due to the recruitment process. As one of the middle managers expressed:

> The management team wants to say that we have an open attitude, they want us to bring our concerns and tell them what we think. At the same time, they are implementing the change process and we don't even know if we have our jobs left tomorrow. In this case there are few people who actually say what they are thinking in terms of critique and negativity. Therefore, we have not had an open dialogue. It has been a one-way communication. (Interview middle manager 4).

The middle managers were aware of the open attitude and dialogue that the management team wanted to have, although the middle managers believed that it could be disadvantageous for them to express their concerns and critique regarding the change process to the management team. This since they were afraid that it would affect their chances negatively to receive a new position as a middle manager. Therefore, it seems to be an understanding that very few middle managers in this situation dared to question the management team and thus the communication has been more like a monologue from the management team. This further indicates how exposed the role as a middle manager is; the management team wanted the middle managers to tell them what they think but at the same time put them in a difficult position due to the fact that they were part of a recruitment process. It could be understood as the recruitment process influenced the middle managers' ability to implement the change process at their offices since it may be harder to execute parts of the change process, which they did not believe in. As the communication has been more like a monolog with a top-down communication, it further implicates that there is a hierarchical structure in Rhody.

From the lower employees' perspective
The issue regarding the middle managers' ability to express concerns and critique was also raised among the lower employees where some of them shared the belief that it might not be smart for their middle manager to bring these concerns upward to the management team. To exemplify, one lower employee stated:

> Here we have a problem with middle management, if my middle manager wants to keep the job my manager needs to deliver the management team's interest. My middle manager becomes a filter both upwards and downwards, especially downwards. If my manager's employees do not embrace the change process and argue against it, it clearly does not look good and my middle manager might not bring it further up or even worse my middle manager might mediate a negative picture of me to the management team. [...] You could therefore discuss if it is smart for my career to say what I think if I don't embrace this change process, and if I am not enthusiastic about it and applaud for the management team's efforts. No, probably not. (Interview lower employee 6).

The lower employees seem to understand the vulnerable position that their middle managers were in since the middle managers' choices could determine whether they would keep their jobs or not. Thus, there seems to be a common belief among the lower employees that their middle managers most likely have not dared to bring information forward which is not in line with the management team's view. The lower employee also expressed a fear of raising critique as the employee believed that the middle manager might transfer an unfavourable picture to the management team. Thus, this further indicates that there exists a fear of raising critique from a career point of

view. Moreover, this signals that the opinions of the lower employees most likely did not reach the management team, since the communication mainly goes through the middle managers. Further, it can be understood that the middle managers act as a filter since they control which information gets through to the management team. As the lower employees work close to the customers they believe that the management team could have received valuable information, which could have enhanced the change process. This in turn shows that there is a hierarchical structure in the organisation, since the lower employees do not feel comfortable to contact the management team by themselves.

Discussion

The discussion highlights three main sections, where the empirical findings are discussed in the light of the theoretical framework. The first section is related to how middle managers made sense of two contradicting cues. The second section discusses how the middle managers through their sensemaking started to act as a filter of information. The third section discusses how the middle managers' sensemaking changed when they received information regarding their new positions.

Making sense of contradicting cues

The findings in this thesis imply that the middle managers' roles as a mediator in the change process became hampered when they were set in a recruitment process with high ambiguity for their future. The influence of power has had an important role regarding how the middle managers made sense of their situation. What can also be seen is that there is conflict of interests, which is especially seen in the role of the middle managers who had to make sense of what is best for themselves in this specific situation. This became apparent when the middle managers were faced with two contradicting viewpoints, i.e. two new cues that were introduced which they had to make sense of.

The first cue, *the recruitment process cue*, was introduced in the end of November 2015, when the management team announced the recruitment process for the middle managers. The *recruitment process cue* could be seen as an instability for the middle managers as they were put in a situation with an ambiguous outcome. The communication from the management team regarding the recruitment process implied that there was a high competition for the positions and that only the best middle managers were going to be reselected. Further, the management team highlighted that they had opened up the applications for everyone and thus communicated that if they found better suited candidates they would be selected. At the same time, the management team implemented a new vision, which could further be understood as the management team only wanted the most ambitious middle managers on board. The second cue, *the open dialogue cue,* was introduced at the same time as the *recruitment process cue.* The *open dialogue cue* could be understood as the management team encouraged an open dialogue, where the organisational members were welcome to raise opinions, questions and critique regarding the change process. However, due to the fact that the *recruitment process cue* was introduced at the same time, the middle managers made sense of the *open dialogue cue* as it would not be beneficial for them to go against the management team. This since the middle managers were in a position where they were constantly judged and evaluated and where their performance and behaviour could affect if they would get reselected. Therefore, the middle managers feared to present a negative perception

of either the change process or themselves in front of the management team. These cues, *the recruitment process cue* and *the open dialogue cue*, can therefore be seen as contradicting. Hence, the cues will further be examined in regards to what influence power has had.

Hardy (1996) concludes that power of resources can be used to influence behaviours which could for example be through controlling information and the ability to hire and fire employees. In this thesis, it can be seen as the management team, when they introduced the *recruitment process cue*, had control over the power of resources in regards to the ability to hire and fire people and further what information that was given regarding the recruitment process. Hardy (1996) further concludes that power of meaning has to do with the way individuals influence others' perceptions and preferences by using for instance language and symbols. When the information was presented to the middle managers, the management team used a tough and hard language, which had an influence on how the middle managers perceived the *recruitment process cue*. In this sense, it can be seen as the management team had power of meaning regarding the used language, as they through their hard and tough language managed to influence the middle managers' sensemaking process. This as the middle managers made sense of management team's use of language as it was not beneficial for them to raise critique. In contrast, the *open dialogue cue* can be seen as an attempt by the management team to influence the sensemaking process for the middle managers. In this sense, the management team wanted the middle managers to understand the change process as it was an open approach where they could ventilate their concerns. Thus, the combination of the *recruitment process cue* and the *open dialogue cue* has proved to be contradictory. This has resulted in less critique regarding the change process but has also in one way legitimised the management team since they still advocated an open dialogue. Thus, it can be seen as the *open dialogue cue* minimised the management team's hard approach in the *recruitment process cue*. Therefore, it would be interesting to see what influence the middle managers' sensemaking process had considering which cues were given most attention.

The *recruitment process cue* seems to have influenced the middle managers' sensemaking process more than the *open dialogue cue* did. This since the middle managers made sense of the recruitment process as a possible threat to their position and thus the middle managers made sense of it as it was not beneficial for them to raise critique. What can also be seen is that there is a conflict of interest, where the middle managers chose to do what is best for them, i.e. keep their concerns and critique regarding the change process to themselves rather than sharing it with the management team which could have served to improve the change process. Weick (1995) found that interruptions that last long can in turn intensify emotions and thus the sensemaking process. This can be seen in this context as well, where the long-lasting recruitment process seems to have influenced the middle managers' emotions most and hence the *recruitment process cue* could be argued to be the biggest interruption for the middle managers. Many of the middle managers experienced negative emotions such as worrying, anxiety and stress since they were not convinced they would be reselected. However, one of the middle managers rather saw *the recruitment process cue* as a career opportunity and as a way to advance in a new position. Further, there seems to be a common understanding among the middle managers that 'resisters', those who question or express critique or concerns are automatically seen in a bad light. In this sense, it becomes clear that the *open dialogue cue* was not given much attention, and could further not be seen as an interruption in their daily work. The above discussion indicates that the

recruitment process cue had a higher influence on the middle managers' sensemaking process than what the *open dialogue cue* had. Some previous research (e.g. Brown, Colville & Pye, 2014; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005) present that certain individuals due to their positions have a higher ability to influence the sensemaking process of others. In this sense, it could be assumed that the management team due to their position in the hierarchy would also have a higher ability to influence the middle managers' sensemaking process. However, it could be drawn from the above discussion that the management team seems to have influenced the middle managers' sensemaking process by using their power, although the middle managers made sense of the situation in a different way than may have been intended from the management team. In the next section, it will be discussed how the middle managers used their power in order to influence their situation.

Filtering information
Even though the management team managed to influence the sensemaking process of the middle managers, the findings in this thesis support that the middle managers' self-interests affected their sensemaking process, which confirm the research of Balogun (2003) who found that self-interests can influence the sensemaking process. This as the middle managers made sense of the *recruitment process cue* as it was not beneficial for them to raise critique regarding the change process to the management team since they wanted to get reselected. As the middle managers also act as mediators of information between the lower employees and the management team, the middle managers had an advantage over the communication in the organisation regarding what information reach whom. Hence, the middle managers' sensemaking have affected their communication regarding their lower employees' concerns and critique, as they perceive it as negative for them to deliver it to the management team. Some of the lower employees have mentioned this as an issue and also expressed a concern that the middle managers might even mediate a negative picture of them to the management team if they are too critical towards the process. This in turn affects the lower employees' ability to get their voice heard.

From the above discussion it can be understood that there is a conflict of interest between the middle managers and the lower employees, where the middle managers put their own interests first rather than the interests of the lower employees. In this sense, it can be seen as the middle managers controlled the power of resources in terms of information and thus determined which information that was going through to the management team but also the other way around. Hardy (1996) presents that having control over power of resources, a desired goal can be met. In this thesis, the middle managers have made sense that their chances of getting reselected would increase if they controlled the information flows, in other words the middle managers' control over the power of resources in terms of information increase their chance to reach their specific goal, i.e. to get reselected. This can in turn be connected to the *power of meaning*, which Hardy (1996) describes as the ability to influence the perception of others which could be done by controlling the information and in this sense legitimise certain ideas over other ideas. Thus, it can be assumed that the middle managers chose not to mediate negative feedback to the management team as a way to legitimise themselves. In other words, the middle managers want the management team to perceive them as they are accepting and generally positive towards the change process. In turn, it can be assumed that the management team based on the information they receive believed that the change process is anchored among the employees. As

the management team does not receive complaints from the lower employees this could get negative consequences for the change process later on while it is implemented. Furthermore, some of the lower employees experienced frustration and felt disappointed since they have not had their voice heard. If some of the lower employees' concerns about the change process later turn out to be accurate, the feeling of frustration might be intensified and some might think "I was right the whole time but no one listened to me!".

The results of this thesis support the notion of Flyvbjerg (2003) that power differ between individuals and over time. The findings in this thesis show that power changes over time depending on the situation and also between different organisational levels. As can be seen in these findings, the middle managers' power to influence the change process is reduced when they are set in a recruitment process. This as the management team in a way took away their ability to influence the change process and thus minimised critique from them. This in turn seems to have led to a smoother process where it would appear to the management team that more of the middle managers accepted the change process. Previous research has also concluded that middle managers have an important role when it comes to change processes and also as mediators between the different organisational levels (e.g. Lüsher & Lewis, 2008, Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). The findings in this thesis extends these studies by showing that the middle managers' role as mediators can easily be hampered. This since our thesis found that the middle managers did not bring all the information to the management team since they determined doing so could be harmful for themselves. However, as the lower employees as well as the middle managers can be seen to have the most expertise regarding the customers, their questioning could have enhanced the change process due to the fact that the change process is grounded in the customers. Hardy (1996) states that expertise can be seen as power of resources, however in this situation the change process in regards to the customers were not based on the lower employees or the middle managers' expertise. In this sense, it can be argued that the management team's ability to form the change process due to their positions outweighed the employees' expertise in the area. Although, as already discussed, the middle managers executed power in different ways such as controlling the information flows.

Solving the puzzle retrospectively
When the management team announced the new positions for the middle managers, it turned out that not much happened. Most of the middle managers were comforted with a new position as a middle manager but at a different office in most cases. It can be seen as the management team solved the puzzle for most of the middle managers who had been worried. Therefore, the *announcement of the middle managers' new positions* could be seen as a new *cue* that was introduced for them, which they had to make sense of. Many of the middle managers were pleased with their new positions and some were given a role with more responsibility than they had before. Weick (1995) found that sensemaking often happens retrospective, in other words going back in time in order to understand the situation. This can be seen in this thesis as well. During the recruitment process, the middle managers made sense of it as high competition and thus believed that they may not get reselected as middle managers. After the recruitment process, the middle managers rather understood that the management team had been deluding them to think that it was a high competition since not much happened. In a way, it could be seen as the management team lied to the middle managers, which for some of the middle managers led to

reduced trust and loyalty. Further, the recruitment process created an unnecessary anxiety among the middle managers and many of them experienced the process as mentally tough. Given the new facts i.e. the announcement of the new positions, the middle managers understood that they would not have had to worry so much during the process and some of them also realised that they had been too absent for their lower employees. Thus, some of them started to question their own performance during the recruitment process. If the middle managers would have known from the start that almost everyone was going to get comforted with a new position they could have avoided much of their anxiety and further their performance at the offices could have been better. In addition, the management team could have avoided the reduced trust and loyalty among the middle managers if they had taken a softer approach. Although, it is hard to know if the management team knew from the start that they would not bring in any new candidates or if the middle managers simply happened to outperform external candidates.

Looking back at the recruitment process, it can be understood that there was not enough time for the middle managers to carry out their managerial roles, since they had to prioritise their time between the recruitment process and their managerial roles. Carrying out a change process takes both time and focus from the business as usual, and adding the recruitment process to the middle managers' responsibilities during the change process did not exactly smoothen the process for them. Balogun's (2003) research shows that time constraints due to a change process for the middle managers in her study led to that the middle managers prioritised the more visible parts, such as keeping the business going, at a cost of the more invisible parts such as negotiating the change process to their employees. This thesis expands her research and shows that the middle managers in this situation focused on what where best for them, i.e. in a self-interest manner. Thus, much of their focus and energy were on the recruitment process and also to do the most important operative business at their offices. Since the middle managers experienced a time constraint, they seemed to have ignored some of their supportive role for their lower employees. Even though many of the lower employees showed an understanding for this, they still seemed to value it high and would have liked more support in order to know how they were doing. Therefore, time could be a basis for power of resources for the middle managers since time during the recruitment process has proved to be scarce and as a result, the middle managers were made to prioritise between different activities. The control over the power of resources regarding time can be connected to that the middle managers also had control over the power of activities regarding what activities they chose to spend their time on, which in turn influenced the lower employees and Rhody's result in a negative manner.

Some of the literature regarding power (e.g. Hardy, 1996; Hardy & Clegg, 1996) highlight how organisational members can use power in order to influence others in a desired way. Our thesis on the other hand found that there seems to be two sides of power. On the one hand, using power can be effective in influencing certain behaviours, e.g. to reach a smoother change process without too much questioning due to the recruitment process. On the other hand, the use of power can lead to unexpected consequences, e.g. that the middle managers started to mistrust the management team and lost motivation during the recruitment process. These consequences were reinforced since they in turn spread downwards in the organisation to the lower employees.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how power and sensemaking are expressed in a situation whereas the middle managers are important mediators and at the same time have to think about their own interest in order to keep their jobs while implementing a change process. The purpose was also to investigate what consequences the middle managers' sensemaking process had for the lower employees.

At first sight, it seemed like the management team had the most power. The management team used a hard language approach in combination with the information they shared about the recruitment process. Thus, the management team had control over the power of resources and the power of meaning, which in turn influenced the middle managers' sensemaking as they interpreted the *recruitment process cue* as the biggest interruption. This since they feared to lose their positions, which further influenced how they made sense of the rest of the change process, i.e. they started to act in a self-interest manner. Thus, a conflict of interest appeared between the management team and the middle managers as the management team encouraged an open dialogue, but the middle managers chose to keep their concerns and critique from the management team. However, the middle managers have more power than what might have appeared at first. Even though they were in a recruitment process, where some of their ability to influence the change process were taken away, they still managed to gain power in other ways. Firstly, as the middle managers wanted to mediate a good picture of themselves in front of the management team they started to hold back information from the lower employees to the management team. Hence, the middle managers had control over the power of resources regarding the information flow between the management team and the lower employees. Secondly, as the recruitment process took much time and energy from the middle managers it can be seen as the middle managers had control over the power of resources regarding their scarce time and the power of activities regarding what activities they chose to put their time on. In this sense, the middle managers put their time on the activities that were best for them in the recruitment process rather than on their usual activities such as development, feedback and coaching for the lower employees. As a result, this had consequences for the lower employees as they experienced loss of motivation, lowered results and as they did not know how they were doing.

The findings in this thesis show the importance to consider what influence power can have on others sensemaking process, this since power seems to have two sides. It can as previous research provide be useful in order to influence behaviours, but it can also have other negative consequences as discussed above. Further, the findings in this thesis show that sensemaking and power seem to be intercorrelated, since the management team's use of power has influenced the middle managers' sensemaking, and that sensemaking in turn seems to have influenced the use of power among the middle managers. Although, the findings in this thesis suggest that self-interest is an important aspect when it comes to the influence of the sensemaking process.

There may also be other contextual factors that have influenced these findings, such as the hierarchical structure Rhody has. This since the hierarchical structure enhance the middle managers' role as mediators in regards to information, and in a less top-down driven organisation the lower employees may not be as dependent on the middle managers in regards to information flows. It can also be assumed that the results would look very differently if the contextual factors would not have been the same, e.g. if the middle managers were not going through a recruitment process at the same time as they were implementing a change process. In the studied setting, it

can be concluded that the middle managers' role as mediators have been constrained due to the recruitment process, which further may have influenced their roles as change agents. One limitation with this thesis is that the authors were not able to follow the complete change process due to time constraints. It would however be of high interest to see how the change continued to unfold and if the consequences of the recruitment process are persistent. Therefore, future research which investigate similar settings during a longer period of time would be in place in order to say more about the persistent consequences. Since middle managers are assumed to be important change agents (e.g. Hope, 2010; Lüsher & Lewis, 2008; Balogun & Johnson, 2005), it would further be interesting with research on what enables the middle managers' role as change agents. This since it can help organisation to create the best settings for the middle managers when implementing change processes, in order to get the best out of the middle managers as change agents. This thesis has showed that sensemaking and power seems to be intercorrelated and thus future research could investigate more on the relations between power and sensemaking.

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