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MAKING SENSE OF CONTINUOUS CHANGE: EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract			
<p>Change is talked about a lot in the context of business management. It is seen to be a constant that employees have to manage. This thesis examined how employees make sense of continuous change and an emphasis was given to how this sensemaking can be enabled. Sensemaking is the process in which employees try to understand and find meaning of change. This research was done as an assignment from the Department of Educational and Cultural Services of the City of Oulu. The client wanted to examine how their employees feel about change and their organizational status.</p> <p>This research utilized two distinctive research methods: Review of previous literature, and a case study. Theoretical framework was formed through the use of previous research done on sensemaking and organizational change. The case study included qualitative semi-structured interviews of 13 participants from two organizations that operate under the Department of Educational and Cultural Services. Two of the participants were principals that were asked to participate by their superiors. The 11 other interviewees took part in the interview voluntarily and they were mostly teachers.</p> <p>The key findings of this research are based on the empirical analysis and the theoretical framework. They aim to offer useful information on how to develop employee's sensemaking abilities. This information is based on the contributors and barriers of sensemaking that were found in this research. Work community that fosters a positive and supportive atmosphere where employees feel like they can openly express their opinions is integral. It is important to include and involve employees in decision making and to make sure that their views are considered. Negative feelings about change should be identified and employees should be supported through these feelings. Sufficient time should be given so that employees can successfully implement change. Management has an integral role in helping and guiding their employees during change.</p> <p>This research and its findings support the previous literature done on sensemaking. However, the findings offer knowledge that is focused on the employee perspective and on how the sensemaking of employees can be enabled. This research is beneficial for the client since it offers tools that can help with the implementation of change. Even though this research was done as an assignment, the findings can be generalized to at least similar organizations.</p>			
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study was done to examine how employees of schools make sense of continuous change. This master's thesis is done as an assignment from the City of Oulu and its department of Educational and Cultural services. The department of Educational and Cultural Services is a department run by the city of Oulu. According to the city of Oulu website (2023) "The Department of Educational and Cultural Services is in charge of early education, basic education and upper secondary education as well as services related to youth, culture, sports and leisure activities." (City of Oulu, 2023.) The tentative task was related to the department's desire to examine methods to develop organizational culture inside the department of Educational and Cultural Services. The task included to research the current situation of the department's organizational culture, what are important for the members of the organizations, and how do they see the status of their organization. The focus of the thesis is on the employees of the department of Educational and Cultural services and their views and opinions.

Theoretical framework of this master's thesis is based on organizational change and sensemaking. Classic research of organizational change by Weick and Quinn (1999) shows that change occurs in organizations in two ways. Change can be seen as a response to a situation where something is needed to be done to fix an issue, or it can be seen as continuous development of the ways that an organization operates (Weick & Quinn, 1999). According to Moran and Brightman (2000) successful change management occurs by guiding and managing employees through change rather than fixating on the idea of managing the change itself. Beycioglu and Kondakci (2021) showed that employees can feel disenfranchised by change, how important it is to engage employees in change, and to increase their understanding of change.

Sensemaking is seen to be a useful tool in explaining how the employees handled the continuous change inside of their organizations. Sensemaking is defined as the process that a person goes through when they are experiencing unexcepted or distressing situations and how they try to explain what is happening and how they should act.

People react to unexpected situations by trying to find out what is plausible and rational, and this is the process of sensemaking. (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005.) Sensemaking is often used in research when talking about change which is why it is related to the assignment of this master's thesis (e.g., Balogun, Bartunek & Do, 2015; Ericson, 2001; Kieran, MacMahon & MacCurtain, 2022).

The empirical data of this master's thesis are anecdotal and the focus when collecting data was to gather stories and experiences of individuals. This kind of emphasis on stories and narration goes with the concept of narrative sensemaking. Narrative sensemaking is explained as a type of storytelling which enables individuals to make sense even retrospectively (van Hulst & Tsoukas, 2021).

This thesis focused on the employee perspective and the everyday organizational life. Many of the previous research done on sensemaking focuses on extraordinary events such as crises (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2015). Therefore, this thesis offers valuable knowledge of sensemaking of employees during mundane, everyday work life.

The organizations that are examined in this master's thesis are two upper secondary schools that operate in the city of Oulu. In the context of organizational change schools have a different perspective than other organizations such as private businesses. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture Finnish schools must obey various laws and regulations set by the Finnish parliament (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2023). Also, The Finnish National Agency for Education sets the National Core Curriculum that must be followed by all schools operating in Finland (Opetushallitus, 2023). Therefore, schools must adapt to the changes in educational laws and objectives since they are all held to the same standards by the related ministries and the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Empirical analysis and data collection was a large part of this thesis since the assignment was to examine the current organizational culture and status of the department of Educational and Cultural services. The client of this thesis chose two organizations inside of the department of Educational and Cultural services that were to be studied. The organizations had performed well in the Kunta10 report which was

done to examine the work and well-being of municipal workers (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, 2023). Well-performed organizations were chosen to further study why and how they were out-performing other organizations inside the department. This research could help map out best practices that could be valuable for the whole department to implement.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The objectives of this thesis were to examine how the employees of organizations inside of the department of Educational and Cultural services view the status of their organization and how they handle the change that has occurred or occurs in their organization. Important part of the assignment was to find methods that can be used to develop the organizational culture inside the department and the focus was on the perspective of employees. The theory of sensemaking is used to better understand how the employees manage the ongoing change that their organizations go through (Weick et al., 2005). The aspect of organizational culture and its effects on how employees handle change is also examined since it was an integral part of the assignment. The role of management in employee sensemaking and change management were also studied since this thesis was done for the Department of Marketing, Management and International Business.

Formulated to fulfil the objectives, the research question of this study is:

How do employees make sense of continuous change?

The research question encompasses the focus of the assignment given by the client and it includes the theoretical perspective of the thesis. Sensemaking was chosen as the theoretical lens of the research which is why it is included and emphasized in the research question. The concept of “continuous change” is used because change in organizations is seen as continuous since organizations must respond to the continuous change of the environment and the society, they operate in (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Humans actively react to their environment and adjust their behaviour accordingly which calls for organizations to adapt to these changes (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Thus,

continuous change in this context then relates to change that organically occurs inside organizations but also the planned and implemented change projects of the organizations.

A sub-question to further focus on the aspect of finding best practices is:

What enables employee sensemaking?

An integral part of the assignment was to find best practices and success stories that could be then used as benchmarks for the other organizations inside of the department. The sub-question is used to look more deeply into the processes and practices that have positively contributed to the employees' abilities to make sense of continuous change that occurs in their organizations.

1.3 Methodology

Research was done extensively into the theoretical concepts of sensemaking and organizational change. These concepts are the primary theoretical framework of this thesis. Searching and studying is done on these concepts through looking at previous literature written about these concepts. This was done to gain understanding and knowledge of sensemaking and organizational change that then could be implemented into the empirical analysis part of the thesis. Keywords utilized when searching literature included, but were not limited to, were ones such as "sensemaking", "narrative sensemaking", "organizational change", "change management", and "making sense of change". These keywords were used to gain knowledge of the overarching theories of sensemaking and organizational change but also to further examine how these theories are seen to relate to each other.

The empirical part of this thesis was a qualitative structured, open-ended individual interview that was done on the employees of two organizations that operate under the department of Educational and Cultural services. The organizations that participated in the empirical part of this thesis were chosen by the client. The organizations were two schools that will be referred to as Group A and Group B from now on. Altogether

13 interviews were held with employees from both organizations. The employees were mostly all teachers with varying number of years they had worked in their organizations.

These research methods provided a possibility to gain an understanding of how employees make sense of continuous change from a theoretical and practical point-of-view. The preview of previous literature done on sensemaking, and organizational change allowed to create a theoretical framework which was then utilized in the analysis of the empirical data.

1.4 Structure of thesis

After this introduction the next part of the thesis is focused on creating and explaining the theoretical framework of this research. The key theoretical concepts organizational change and sensemaking are defined and explained using scientific literature. The focus of this thesis is on organizational change and how employees view and handle it which is why it is important to gather knowledge of it. Organizational change is a broad subject which is why the thesis aims to define it well for the reader. There is an emphasis on organizational culture and change management since they are integral for successful implementation of organizational change.

Sensemaking is the primary theory which is applied to the empirical analysis therefore it is explained thoroughly. Sensemaking in general is a large concept so a focus is given to the aspect of narrative sensemaking and making sense of change. There is an emphasis on the individuals and the organization as a whole when talking about sensemaking since it aligns with the assignment.

The next part of the thesis focuses on the research design and methodology used in the thesis. The qualitative research method, data collection and analysis are explained thoroughly, and their scientific basis is stated. The interview process to collect empirical data and how the data are analysed are accounted for.

The empirical analysis section of this thesis includes the analysis of the empirical data collected for this thesis. The data are analysed to answer the research questions through the use of the established theoretical framework. Different contributors of sensemaking that are found from the data are brought forth. The role of management in employee sensemaking is also examined further.

The last part of this thesis is focused on the findings and conclusions of this research. Theoretical and managerial conclusions are established based on this research. The limitations of this research are stated. This thesis ends with a look into possibilities of future research.

2 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

The concept of organizational change is the overarching theory of this thesis. The aspects of organizational change such as organizational culture and change management are examined to gain more knowledge and to emphasise the role of management.

Tsoukas and Chia (2002) argue that organizational change should not be viewed from the perspective of stability and how change disrupts it. On the contrary change should be seen as continuous and ongoing since it happens constantly in both micro-level and macro-level operations of an organization. An integral perspective of Tsoukas and Chia is that organizational change should not be studied and seen as an event that has happened to an organization. Change should be seen as the actions done by the employees of an organization, and the decisions behind these actions. Organizational change cannot only be defined as the implementation of change projects but as the continuous development of operations and actions of an organization. (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002.) This view of change as continuous is important since it shows that change is not something that has a beginning and an end. It highlights how integral it is to foster innovation and development.

Classic research on organizational change by Weick and Quinn (1999) support the idea of Tsoukas and Chia (2002) regarding the nature of change. Weick and Quinn (1999) argue that there are two distinct types of organizational change: Episodic change and continuous change. The difference between these types of changes is that episodic change occurs to address issues that have risen in an organization. Episodic change is reactionary, and they can be defined more as singular change events that occur during a specific time period. Continuous change on the other hand is the way that an organization constantly reacts and tries to adjust to the changing nature of the world. It is important to distinguish between the different types of changes since they should be implemented in different ways. This research also showed how the calls for change can come from outside or inside of an organization. (Weick & Quinn, 1999.)

Beycioglu and Kondakci (2021) studied organizational change that occurs in schools. They show that schools are heavily susceptible to external and internal pressures to implement change. The researchers argue that most change in schools is done through a top-down manner, meaning that the need for change comes from the management. This is supported by the fact that schools must operate according to laws and legislations which is why the operations of a school are decided by the government. The research done by Beycioglu and Kondakci showed that change projects in schools often fail due to the top-down manner of implementation of change. Employees feel ostracized by the change process, and they lack understanding of why and how new changes need to be done. (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021.) This lack of understanding calls for processes such as sensemaking which is shown to increase employee's understanding of the need for change (Bartunek et al., 2006). Employees should feel as they are active participants of change rather than passive tools of change. This active participation can therefore combat the top-down nature of change in schools.

2.1 Role of organizational culture

There is no specific definition for organizational culture. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) describe organizational culture as the shared values, norms, and meanings of individuals in an organization. Organizational culture fosters the creation of organizational identity, which relates to how individuals view themselves in their organizations. Since people are social they aim to see themselves as a part of a group which can be enabled by organizational identity. (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015.)

A positive view of their organization and feeling of commitment which are enabled by a strong and positive organizational culture have an important role in how employees perceive change. Organizational culture is also integral in creating a good work community. For the perception and implementation of change it is shown to be integral that people feel comfortable in their work communities. (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005.)

Organizational culture that is felt by individuals to be supportive and positive can be important in how employees are able to do their work. In the context of organizational change, organizational culture can enable how employees are able to handle and

implement change. The kind of organizational culture that fosters a positive atmosphere, where employees can share their opinions and where they feel like they are facing change together, is integral. (Parent & Lovelace, 2018.)

2.2 Change Management

Important factor of change management according to Moran and Brightman (2000) is to focus on managing the impacts of change rather than process of change itself (Moran & Brightman, 2000). This can be explained by how change is viewed. It is often viewed as something that happens to an organization rather than something that is actively implemented by the employees of an organization. As Maitlis and Christianson (2014) showed, employees question themselves and their behaviours during unexcepted and surprising situations, such as change (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Employees can often be mostly worried about their own work and how change affects them. Therefore, it is important for managers to support and help their employees during change by showing them how it is going to affect them and why it is happening.

According to Errida and Lotfi (2021) the management of organizational change can be what determines how successful is the change implementation process. They emphasize the importance of a shared vision of change. This shared vision is distributed to the employees by discourse and communication. (Errida & Lotfi, 2021.) This concept of shared vision is also highlighted as an important factor of sensegiving. During change employees often look for the management for help with their own sensemaking processes. (Ericson, 2001.) Another important task of managers during change is to motivate their employees by using positive reinforcements (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Change processes can often be stressful and tough on the employees which is why it is integral for them to be motivated and committed. Therefore, managers should have an important role in keeping their employees informed and motivated during challenging change projects.

Moran and Brightman (2000) showed characteristics that are common in effective leaders of change. The concept of vision is brought up by talking about framing. It is

important for managers to frame change in a way that is understandable for the employees. This frame of change is formed by giving reason and information of change. Change management thrives in a supportive and positive atmosphere where managers are seen as role models of change. (Moran & Brightman, 2000.) Even though the responsibility of creating a good work community is on everyone, managers have the largest responsibility. It is the duty of managers to foster a positive work atmosphere.

When investigating organizational change and its management the concepts of understanding and meaning are brought up (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021). There is an emphasis on the importance of shared vision and the acceptance of it (Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Moran & Brightman, 2000). When investigating successful change management communication and discourse are shown to be integral parts (Moran & Brightman, 2000; Parent & Lovelace, 2018). All these factors lead to the questions “how do employees understand change” or “how can employees find meaning in change”. One answer to these questions is the theory of sensemaking. This is explained in the next section.

3 SENSEMAKING

This section explains and defines the theory of sensemaking. First, the section begins with a look into sensemaking as a whole. Then, narrative sensemaking is explored. The third part of this section focuses on sensemaking of change, which connects the two main theories of this research, which are organizational change and sensemaking. This section ends with the exploration of the limitations of sensemaking research.

The theoretical concept of sensemaking has multitude of definitions since it is a broadly studied concept. The overarching definition of sensemaking is the process during which people try to understand situations they are in by creating meaning. This process of creating meaning leads people to be more informed of the situation they are in and how they should act. Sensemaking stems from situations that are unexpected which causes people to not be able to understand and behave in ways that they are used to. (Weick et al., 2005.)

The process of sensemaking is seen to arise from ambiguous and unexpected situations that force the individual to reassess their previously held understanding. These kinds of situations can include ones such as an emergency that individuals did not know would happen, but also planned occurrences such as organizational change. At the root of sensemaking are uncertainty and confusion which can arise from both unexpected and expected events. Sensemaking derives from situations where questions “what is happening” and “how should I act” emerge. Individuals look for answers to these questions from their surroundings such as their environment or the people they are around, or from the inside of themselves such as past experiences. (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014.) The idea that sensemaking stems from both unexpected and expected situations is interesting. It shifts the way that change is viewed from something that is disruptive and urgent to something that is continuous and expected.

Sensemaking is the process in which people try to find the most plausible or believable explanation to the situation that then can guide them to conduct their behaviour. When individuals try to make sense of the situation they are in, they are challenged to discard their previously held understanding and to adapt to a new way of thinking and

behaving. (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014.) It is understandable that it can be difficult to change the way you think or act. People often create routines to help their everyday lives. During change these routines can be disrupted. This calls for the understanding of why these routines are disrupted and how they should be modified.

Weick has dedicated decades into research of sensemaking which is why most literature centres around his work. Weick et al. (2005) examined the social aspect of sensemaking; organized sensemaking. They argue that organizations are made up of the different meanings that its members hold. People tend to organize their thoughts of the world through discourse with others, especially of situations that they experience together. The study by Weick et al. (2005) studied nurses that worked in a hospital and how they made sense of their everyday work. Communication and discourse were used to gain knowledge that helped the individual nurses to make sense of disruptive situations by making them seem more plausible and rational. The concepts of plausibility and rationality are at the centre of sensemaking since the process of sensemaking is about finding out the most believable explanations of situations. (Weick et al., 2005.) Even though this study examined nurses who worked in a hospital the findings can be transferred to other organizations. Organized sensemaking occurs in work communities where opinions and meanings are shared.

Cornelissen, Mantere and Vaara (2014) studied the sensemaking processes that individuals associated with the Stockwell shooting experienced. The Stockwell shooting was an incident during which London police officers killed a man who they thought to be a fugitive. The man was not the fugitive they were looking for but an innocent person. (Cornelissen et al., 2014.) Their study showed how different factors such as emotions, commitment, and framing affected how people make sense of situations. Emotions that are felt by a person themselves or expressed by other people were seen to cause people to adjust their sensemaking process. In their study Cornelissen et al. (2014) said "...her sensemaking was strongly guided by the emotional arousal that came across in the chain of communication,..." (p.21). The findings of the study showed that negative feelings such as fear caused people to make rash decisions that they would not make in normal situations. (Cornelissen et al., 2014.) Fear can precede other functions of sensemaking since it is a visceral reaction.

Focus is given to the feeling of fear rather than to other processes of sensemaking such as finding out what is plausible or believable. This study is an unordinary example of sensemaking since it examined a situation where people feared for their lives or others'. It can be questioned how the findings of a study done on such an extreme event can be transferred.

According to Cornelissen et al. (2014) the concept of framing was very prevalent in the sensemaking processes. Framing can be said to be a mental framework that people see things from and it guides them to form reactions during the sensemaking process. Frames can be made up of things such as previous experiences, or like the study showed they can be given. Cornelissen et al. showed that sensegiving was used by the framing of the situation. The situation was framed to be dangerous, and it called for fast reactions. The other people adopted this framing of the situation which leads to the concept of commitment. (Cornelissen et al., 2014.) Employees can look for their managers for help and guidance when they experience feelings of uncertainty. Managers have an important role in making frames which can help their employees to better understand situations. However, framing should not be used to force employees to perceive things in a way that is preferred by the managers. This means that managers should allow their employees make their own meanings and let them understand things in their own ways.

Matlis and Sonenshein (2010) argue that commitment is often useful for sensemaking, but it can also be harmful. Commitment enables the formation of meaning and purpose since people care enough to find meaning and purpose in situations. (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010.) The findings of the study by Cornelissen et al. (2014) showed that commitment could be harmful and even dangerous. The findings of their study showed that people were committed to the framing of the situation. The situation was framed to be urgent and dangerous, and people did not question it since they had committed to it even in situations where there were contradicting information. (Cornelissen et al., 2014.) People should question matters and take into consideration all the available information rather than blindly follow the prevalent framing. But in general commitment can be seen as a positive attribute. Commitment can foster productivity and motivation which in turn can enable sensemaking.

The research done on sensemaking is broad and it has been done on various organizations and contexts (e.g., Cornelissen et al., 2014; Weick et al. 2005). Sensemaking occurs in individuals, but it can also occur as a collective process; organized sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking is influenced by a multitude of factors such as the process of sensegiving (Cornelissen et al., 2014). As Weick et al. (2005) showed discourse is important in the creation of shared meanings. This occurs also in narrative sensemaking which is explained in the next section.

3.1 Narrative sensemaking

Narrative sensemaking is concept of the sensemaking process that explains the individual's actions during and after a situation that has triggered their sensemaking process, and how those actions affect their identity. Narrative sensemaking can be referred to as storytelling during which individuals form stories of their experiences that in turn can help them to better make sense of them. (van Hulst & Tsoukas, 2021.)

van Hulst and Tsoukas (2021) studied how police officers make sense of their work through narrative sensemaking. They show that narrative sensemaking consists of three phases: narrative enactment, narrative understanding, and narrative identity work. Narrative enactment is the phase that occurs during the situation when individuals must in real time try to make sense of the situation. Individuals form hypothesis they see to be the most plausible and act according to it. Narrative understanding happens after the situation when individuals try to retrospectively make sense of what has happened. During this phase individuals construct a story of the event that is affected by their past experiences and who the story is told to. The third phase is narrative identity work which relates to the social aspect of storytelling. How people tell stories and therefore make sense of events is affected by how they view their story would affect the way they themselves or other people view them. (van Hulst & Tsoukas, 2021.) Narrative sensemaking is an important concept of sensemaking since it shows that sensemaking is done not only during the situation when sensemaking is initially triggered. It is interesting that sensemaking occurs even after the initial situation in the form of storytelling. Narrative sensemaking highlights the

social aspect of sensemaking. People's sensemaking can be affected by how they want to be viewed.

When looking at organizations from the perspective of narrative sensemaking it is important to look at organizational narrative as a tool of sensemaking. Thurlow and Helms Mills (2015) studied how employees of a Canadian college made sense of a change project that their organization faced. The researchers focused on the organizational narrative that was formed about the change project and how it impacted the individuals' sensemaking process. In their findings they saw that organizational narrative was used to legitimize the change project which in turn contributed into the sensemaking of the employees. Legitimization leads to plausibility which has been shown to increase the abilities to make sense. (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2015.) The want for the narrative to feel legitimate is understandable since it can lead to employees feeling that their work is meaningful, and it is done to better their organization.

Organizational narrative on change is accepted by employees if it is seen as believable or plausible. The authors showed that employees can form their own narrative of change that can differ from the "official" narrative of change told from the perspective of the management. The difference of narrative can impair sensemaking since it does not go along with the narrative that is based on the plans of the change project. This hinderance of sensemaking therefore can negatively impact the way change is implemented inside an organization. (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2015.) It can be difficult to balance between allowing employees to create their own meanings and narratives, and creating a unified narrative that everyone follows.

According to Vaara, Sonenshein and Boje (2016) "First, organizational narratives are temporal, discursive constructions that provide a means for individual, social and organizational sensemaking and sensegiving." (p.6). They elaborate that narratives are an important tool for an organization to give a name for phenomena that occurs. Especially during change where things are new and confusing it is necessary for narration to be used to explain and "put into words" what is happening. (Vaara et al., 2016.) Rantakari and Vaara (2016) also argue that narratives show how people interpretate situations and processes that happen inside an organization. This concept

of different interpretations is shown by Vaara et al. (2016) as well. They show that narratives are affected by the interests and opinions of individuals. In an organization narrative can shape how the people interpret events even when the narrations can go against their own thoughts and views. (Vaara et al., 2016.) Organizational narration can be a valuable aspect in seeing how members of an organization are feeling. Narration is interesting as it shows not only what is talked about but how it is talked about.

Narrative sensemaking could be an important tool in understanding how and why people make sense. Individuals can have their own narratives that can differ from the organizational narrative. People may use narrative sensemaking by creating and telling stories of situations they have experienced.

3.2 Sensemaking of change

As it has been shown in the previous paragraphs, sensemaking is seen to be triggered from unexpected or disruptive situations that lead individuals to question their way of understanding and behaviours (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). This is why there is abundant research done on the relationship between sensemaking and change (e.g., Ericson 2001; Guette & Vandembemt 2017; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). This chapter thus focuses on sensemaking of change and more specifically sensemaking of organizational change.

In 2001 Ericson conducted a study to examine a change project that was occurring in a Swedish university hospital. The aim of the study was to see how the employees made sense of the change project and how the sensemaking processes of individual employees impacted the implementation of said project. In the beginning of the change project a vision of the change was given to the employees by the management. For a successful implementation of change it is integral that a shared meaning is accomplished. Individuals create their own meanings according to their own past experiences and their views. A shared meaning on the other hand is created by dialogue and sharing of meanings between individuals. An important finding of Ericson was that the vision of change is accepted if it makes sense to the employees.

Communication and dialogue were used to explain the vision which helped individuals to make sense of it thus helping them to adopt the vision. (Ericson, 2001.) The concepts of plausibility and rationality were once again at the centre of the sensemaking process. It should be important that the vision of change is clear, and it is seen to be meaningful.

When studying organizational change, it is important to distinguish change recipients from change agents. Change recipients are the employees that implement change that is initiated by the change agents. Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph and Depalma (2006) studied the ways that change recipients make sense of change initiatives. They found that it is important for change recipients to understand the reasoning behind a change initiative. This can in turn lead to change to be perceived as something that is good and helpful, which leads to a better implementation of change. Continuous discourse was highlighted as an integral part since it can be used to address inconsistencies. These inconsistencies between what is told to change recipients and how they themselves perceive them is harmful for sensemaking. Another important factor is to understand how emotions are seen to actively be shared by groups, also known as emotional contagion. Emotional contagion can be understood in how individuals express their emotions and how these emotions affect the ways others view things. (Bartunek et al., 2006.) As humans are social, they tend to look for others for cues on how to behave or react to things. Therefore, when, for example, change is talked about in a negative manner that feeling of negativity is often shared by the group.

Change is often seen by management as a strategic move that is necessary. On the other hand, for employees change is often seen as something that disrupts their work that they have signed up for. This discrepancy of meanings is where the process of sensegiving should be utilized. Sensegiving is the action taken by management in which they try to influence the sensemaking process of their employees. As it has been stated before a shared meaning is an integral part of successful implementation of change. Sensegiving is a way for management to create this shared meaning of the change that is occurring. (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010.) Organizational change even when planned and expected can disrupt patterns and routines that employees are used to. This disruption may force employees to adapt and alter their behaviour which in turn can cause confusion and uncertainty. These feelings of confusion and uncertainty

can lead to fear and anxiety which impair the abilities of employees to do their work and how they can make sense of the change that is happening.

Guiette and Vandenbempt (2017) examined sensemaking during change implementation and their findings showed what had inhibited employees' sensemaking abilities. When employees felt that they could not actively partake in change, but it was rather happening to them they felt like it was harder to make sense of it. Sensemaking was also impaired when the employees felt like the change project overshadowed their everyday lives. Another harmful factor was the feeling of detachment. If employees thought that change was happening somewhere else, or it felt like it was existing separately of their normal work tasks it was harder for them to make sense of it. This detachment also led to employees to follow the prevalent story or vision of change rather than creating their own interpretations and meanings. It can be harmful for managers to utilize sensegiving processes such as information and vision sharing since it can suppress the individuals' ability to make sense. (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2017.)

On the other hand, Kieran, MacMahon and MacCurtain (2022) conducted a study that showed how sensegiving and management could develop and increase sensemaking capabilities of employees. Research was done on two multinational companies where leaders and middle management were studied. The findings showed that to increase employee understanding of change conversations and discourse were shown to be important. Debating and questioning were encouraged which enabled the employees to actively partake in the formation of the shared meaning and vision of the change. Focus was given to achieving mutual understanding and the acceptance of the majority opinion rather than forcing people to adopt the decided and preferred vision. (Kieran et al., 2022.)

It can be difficult task for managers to navigate between the importance of sensegiving and the harmfulness of stifling individual opinions and meanings. Sensemaking is often based on the individual's own experiences and thoughts. Therefore, it can be dangerous to try to influence individuals in to adopting a preferred meaning or story.

However, organizations, where open discussion of meaning and vision is encouraged, may succeed better in the implementation of change.

Balogun, Bartunek and Do (2015) examined how senior managers were able to make sense of organizational change. The study showed how the senior managers had constructed a unified vision of change. They shared meaning and opinions which lead to collective sensemaking. During the change project the way senior managers made sense drastically changed. In the beginning of the project change was accepted since it was seen to be reasonable. As the project continued the senior managers started to experience negative feelings towards the project which led to a decrease in their sensemaking abilities. The narration of the change shifted from an understandable and reasonable decision to a transactional and bad decision. (Balogun et al., 2015.) The concept of detachment as explained by Guette & Vandembemt (2017) was present in the findings of Balogun et al. (2015) as well. Senior managers felt like they were disconnected from the project. All of this ended in the resignation of many of the senior managers. (Balogun et al., 2015.) It should be important to acknowledge that managers who are often in charge of implementation of change are not just required to give sense to their employees. For managers to be able to give sense they should have constructed their own meaning. This own meaning can then be in turn used in sensegiving.

When talking about organizational change it is always important to acknowledge change resistance and its role. Thomas and Hardy (2011) argue "...an understanding of organizational change in which power and resistance lie at the heart of the negotiation of meanings that shape particular instances of change." (p.328). This can be seen as how individuals have their own meanings of change and how these meanings can constitute as the classic explanation of resistance. (Thomas & Hardy, 2011.) When an individual's meaning goes against the preferred vision or meaning of change it can be seen as resistance of change. This is why it is integral in successful implementation of change to negotiate meanings and aim to form a shared meaning of change.

Another view of Thomas and Hardy (2011) is that this continuous negotiation of meanings is a driving force of change. It is this negotiation that makes change to be

something that occurs constantly and naturally in organizations. These negotiations can be the act of sensegiving, but it is important to note that individuals play an active role in creating their own meanings of even set and decided meanings they are given. (Thomas & Hardy, 2011.) This idea of continuous negotiation of meanings goes together with the idea of change as a continuous process. These negotiations of meanings can be successful in organizations where individuals are encouraged to discuss their own views and meanings. Managers should play an important role in facilitating these discussions and negotiations. However, it should be acknowledged that employees have their own responsibility to partake actively.

In conclusion a successful implementation of change calls for a shared and accepted vision and meaning (Balogun et al., 2015; Ericson, 2001; Kieran et al., 2022; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The vision of change should be clear, and it should be formed together. Forcing people to adopt a vision or a meaning of change can be detrimental to the implementation of change. This formation of a collective and mutual vision of change is possible when individuals are encouraged to question and share their views and opinions (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). When people feel detached from the change project, they can feel like they are not active participants. This can in turn lead to a decrease in their sensemaking abilities. This is why it is important for managers to utilize sensegiving and other actions where they can include the employees in the process (Guette & Vandenbempt, 2017; Kieran et al., 2022; Thomas & Hardy, 2011). This possibility to actively partake can also lessen change resistance.

3.3 Limitations of sensemaking

Holt and Cornelissen (2014) examined how the study of sensemaking could be used to understand sensemaking in the mundane times of an organization. They argue that since sensemaking studies often begin after unexpected events not enough focus is given to the everyday life of an organization. They also question how the sensemaking and frames of researchers can affect the way they do sensemaking research. (Holt & Cornelissen, 2014.) It is an interesting thought how the sensemaking of researchers affects how they conduct their investigations on sensemaking.

Sensemaking research is a growing field, and it is emerging as an integral part of organizational research. The concept of sensemaking has developed over time to include aspects such as emotion and morality but it is also seen to lack insight into deeper aspects that can affect sensemaking. There is also the issue of defining when sensemaking happens since the current research focuses on the retrospective view of sensemaking. More research should be done to examine how sensemaking could be utilized to gain understanding of the future. Another limitation of sensemaking research is its focus on crisis or change situations such as Cornelissen et al. (2014), which is an integral part of sensemaking, but more mundane and everyday situations should be considered as well. (Brown et al., 2015.)

What can be confusing about sensemaking is how broad is the concept of sensemaking. It can be difficult to understand what constitutes as sensemaking since it appears in the behaviour and thoughts of individuals. It can be challenging to point out what is sensemaking or is everything sensemaking.

4 CASE ASSIGNMENT

This master's thesis was done as an assignment for the City of Oulu. The client was more specifically the department of Educational and Cultural Services. The department is one of the largest departments of the City of Oulu. The department operates on many fields ranging from education to sports and well-being. (City of Oulu, 2023.)

The assignment given originates from the desire of the department of Educational and Cultural services to develop their working culture. The department has a strong plan and a strategy for this development. The original idea of the assignment was to see how this development could be monitored and measured. In the original task the focus was on how individual units and the whole department could be targeted by the development plan. The aim of the assignment shifted from the original idea due to the client. Now the assignment was to examine the current status of the organizational culture inside the department. The assignment called to study the opinions and views of employees on how they see their organizations. The context of change was still very integral in the revised assignment. Since the department is going through the process of developing their culture and operations the client wanted to see how employees view these changes.

The assignment included a task to interview employees of the department. The client chose two organizations that operate inside the department. The decision to choose the organizations was based on the Kunta10 report. These organizations had performed well in the investigation. According to the client these well-performing organizations were chosen to offer a chance to find an answer to why these organizations performed better than others. Therefore, a part of this assignment was to find best practices and success stories. These could be then used as benchmarks for the other organizations inside the department.

The assignment that this master's thesis aims to fulfil is multifaceted. The focal part was to gain knowledge of the views and opinions of the individuals that work inside the department. Important themes of the assignment were organizational change and

development and working and organizational culture. An integral part of the assignment were the interviews. The interviews were utilized to gather answers for the assignment and for the secondary aim of finding best practices and success stories. The importance of the assignment is how the department's desire and plan to develop their operations are viewed and felt by the employees.

The City of Oulu had 211 848 inhabitants on the 31st of December of 2022. The middle-age of inhabitants of Oulu is 39,4 years. (Oulun kaupunki, 2023.) This is very relevant since it shows that the people that live in Oulu are quite young. This is related to the fact that there are two large universities in Oulu: University of Oulu and the Oulu University of Applied Sciences. These universities have over 20 000 students altogether (Oulun yliopisto, 2023). The City of Oulu does active cooperation with various stakeholders, such as the University of Oulu (City of Oulu, 2019). This thesis is an example of this cooperation. In 2019 80,2% of employed inhabitants of Oulu work in the service industry. The second largest industry in 2019 was manufacturing with 10,4 %. (Oulun kaupunki, 2021.)

The Department of Educational and Cultural Services and The Department of Urban Environmental Services comprise the services of the City of Oulu. The operations of the Department of Educational and Cultural Services focus on educational and cultural and leisure activity services. The Department of Urban Environmental Services organizes urban planning and environmental services. (City of Oulu, 2023.)

The City of Oulu has an operational strategy called Oulu2030. In this strategy the City of Oulu lists aims that the city wants to fulfil by the year 2030. The focus is on development and especially on the importance of educational and cultural services. (Oulun kaupunki, 2023.) This emphasis on these factors increases the importance of the department and its employees that organize these services.

The City of Oulu was chosen to be the European Capital of Culture for the year 2026. According to the organizers of Oulu2026 "...we want to bring more culture and well-being, create new jobs and develop our region in a sustainable way." (Oulu2026, 2023). This chance to be chosen as the European Capital of Culture is an honour. The

City of Oulu show their dedication for development of their operations. This master's thesis is a part of this as it aims to examine how this development can be done in a successful way. It also works towards the aims of the Capital of Culture.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research methods

5.1.1 Literature review and theoretical framework

As it has been stated in the second part of this thesis a theoretical framework was constructed based on previous literature done on sensemaking and organizational change. The decision to base the theoretical framework on the concept of sensemaking was done after the interviews were conducted. Theoretical framework of sensemaking of change was seen to best reflect the assignment by the client, and it went well with the type of empirical data that were collected. The interviews were examined to see whether any theoretical concepts emerged from them. Since the interviewees were asked questions regarding organizational change and the emphasis was on their feelings and opinions sensemaking was chosen as the research to base the theoretical framework on. As it was stated by Ericson (2001) the concepts of employee's own meanings and understanding are integral in sensemaking research. The interviews showed that the interviewees often stated they felt confused or distraught by the different change projects their organizations were going through. These feelings of confusion and distraught are shown to be integral triggers of sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

Extensive research was done on literature done on sensemaking. It was important to first gain an understanding about the generic research done on sensemaking to set a baseline for the theoretical framework. Once an understanding of sensemaking was gained research was done on the research that combined sensemaking and change. It was seen that sensemaking was often used in research regarding change which is why there were a multitude of interesting and useful literature. The concept of narrative sensemaking regarding sensemaking of change emerged during research. From the beginning of the master's thesis process there was the idea that the empirical data would be anecdotal. A story from the employees would be told through this thesis. The story would be about how employees perceive their organizations and how they view

the different change projects that they experience. This emphasis on the employees' stories is seen in the concept of narrative sensemaking (van Hulst & Tsoukas, 2021).

Knowledge of organizational change was gathered to further understand how previous research on organizational change is conducted. Literature on organizational change is extremely broad which is why focus was given to organizational change that occurred in municipal and school settings. It was also important to establish an understanding for the reader of the different types of change that the employees had experienced in the empirical part of the thesis. This master's thesis is done for the international business management programme which is why it was important to look at the theory behind change management. Maitlis & Sonenshein (2010) show in their article the importance of management in employee sensemaking which ties in with change management. Two management-level employees were interviewed for the empirical part of this thesis; therefore, it was integral to establish theoretical background of change management. Having theoretical background of change management aids the forming of managerial conclusions of this research.

5.1.2 Case study

The other research method used in this master's thesis was to interview two organizations inside the department of Educational and Cultural services of city of Oulu. This decision to interview employees of the department was integral to the assignment.

Case studies are done to examine or develop theories in a practical setting. There are different types of case studies which are used to accomplish different aims. The case study type used in this master's thesis were "no theory first" and "gaps and holes". (Ridder, 2017.) The questions of the interviews were chosen to gain knowledge of how employees viewed their organizations and the change processes they went through. Before the interviews no theory was chosen to examine through the case study. There was the idea to research "how and why" (Ridder, 2017) employees felt about their experiences in their organizations. The theoretical framework emerged from the data collected through the interviews which means that this was an abductive analysis.

Abductive analysis thus defines an analysis where previous literature and research is found to support the empirical findings (Tuomi & Sarajarvi, 2002).

Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) define two types of case study research which are “intensive case study research” and “extensive case study research”. The case study research type that was used in this master’s thesis was the intensive case study research since it focused on only two specific organizations rather than a broad spectrum of organizations. In the assignment the focus was set on two organizations of the department that were successful compared to the other organizations of the department.

The type of research done in the empirical part of this master’s thesis is qualitative. In qualitative research the focus is more on the humanistic side rather than the scientific side. Qualitative research looks for phenomena and the lived experiences of people. (Walle, 2015.) The assignment of this master’s thesis was to gather experiences and opinions of people therefore qualitative research was seen to be the most appropriate method of research.

The research method chosen to study the organizations was a qualitative interview. The decision to use interviewing was made since it goes with the idea of storytelling and anecdotes that was at the centre of the assignment. Interviews are often used in situations where the research is done on people and their individual opinions and perspectives. The interview was a semi-structured interview which means that a specific set of questions was asked all participants and they were able to answer the questions in their own ways. It is also very communicative way of interviewing which can lead to the participants to feel comfortable thus giving them confidence to share their opinions. This goes with the overall theme of the thesis which was focused on storytelling and anecdotes.

Sensemaking research often utilize interviews since the focus of the research is on the experiences and opinions of people. The study done by Kieran et al. (2022) that was used in the theory section is an example of how interviews are used to examine sensemaking. The semi-structured interview used by Kieran et al. is like the one used

in this master's thesis. The organizations studied by Kieran et al. were going through the process of implementing change objectives such as the organizations studied in this thesis. The theme of the interviews was strategic change and sensemaking praxis. Even though the participants did not specifically talk about sensemaking the answers could be used to study the theory of sensemaking. (Kieran et al., 2022.) The interviews done in this thesis did not specifically ask questions about sensemaking. However, the answers can also be used for the study of sensemaking.

5.2 Data collection

The assignment given by the client was to study organizations inside of the department of Educational and Cultural services of city of Oulu. The organizations to examine were chosen by the client. Two organizations were chosen since they had performed well in the Kunta-10 report. Kunta-10 was used to choose well-performing organizations to gather best practices and success stories. An integral part of the assignment was to examine how and why these organizations performed better than others, and how the knowledge gained from this research could be implemented to other organizations inside the department.

The organizations were two upper secondary schools which will be referred to as Group A and Group B to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees. This was important to ascertain that the research was done ethically. The interviewees were employees of the schools, and they were mainly teachers. The interview was voluntary therefore the participants took part in this research on their own accord. The principals of the schools brought forth the invitation for the interview to their employees. The invitation for the interview stated that it is a part of a master's thesis research that is done as an assignment for the department of Educational and Cultural services of the city of Oulu. Principals of the schools were also interviewed to gain a managerial perspective. Altogether 13 people were interviewed for this master's thesis, and the distribution of participants between the two groups were quite even.

The overarching theme of the interview was change and organizational culture. The emphasis when constructing the questions was on assuring that the questions allowed

the participants to share their own views and opinions. The questions were set in ways such as “*In your own opinion...*” or “*Do you feel like...*”. All participants were asked the same questions except for one question and one assisting question differed between the principals and the other participants. The principals were asked questions related to their own managerial experiences and practices. This was done to gain understanding of the role of management. The other participants were asked about their views on the role of management in their everyday lives. All participants were asked questions about the current status of their organizations, change projects that had occurred or occurred inside their organizations, and how they viewed the discourse around change inside their organization. The interviewees did not see the questions beforehand. The original and translated interview questions are in the Appendices. In Appendix 1 the questions for the principals can be found, and in Appendix 2 the questions for the employees can be found.

The interviews were held both face-to-face and virtually through Microsoft Teams. The aim was to organize the interviews face-to-face since it was seen to be the best way for this kind of interview. Having an interview face-to-face was thought to make the interview more natural and casual which could lead the interviewee to feel more comfortable. Unfortunately, due to illness and scheduling issues many of the interviews had to be done through Microsoft Teams. Doing the interviews virtually did allow for a more flexible schedule which led to the opportunity to interview as many participants as possible. The interviews were recorded, and notes were written during the interviews. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes to an hour.

5.3 Data analysis

After all the interviews were held, they were transcribed using the transcription tool of Microsoft Word. Transcribed interviews were then abbreviated to gather the main points said by the interviewees. The interviews were semi-structured, and the aim was to gather data that were anecdotal. This caused the interviewees to share a lot of details and stories, therefore it was necessary to abbreviate the interviews. The answers given by the participants were analysed and they were abbreviated to only contain information that was relevant to the question asked or the overall theme of the

interview. After the data were transcribed and abbreviated the data were translated from Finnish to English.

Full citation	Abbreviated citation
<p>”It has been dispersed and now we have maybe gotten to be kind of like more unified. That we are a bit closer, and it is good. And if maybe all our operations were in one place so I would see it to be actually important”</p>	<p>Operations and employees have been dispersed, now they are operating closer together and it feels more unified. This is seen as a good thing.</p>

Table 1 Example of an abbreviated citation

The data were divided into two groups: managerial and employee data. This was done to gain the ability to compare the answers of the principals and employees. Another division was done to separate the answers from each group. This was done to see whether the two groups had differences and similarities in their answers.

After the data were transcribed, abbreviated, and translated the data were distributed into different categories. During this part of the research process there was no theoretical framework which would be used to form the categories. This type of analysis is called abductive analysis. Abductive analysis is defined as the process of analysing empirical data and basing the theoretical framework on the gathered data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). The data were examined to see whether repeating themes or answers emerged. Repeated answers or themes were then highlighted, and categories were made based on the recurring themes. The aim of the interview was to gain answers about change, organizational culture, role of management, and the status of the participants organization. So, even though there were no theoretical framework set during this part of the research there was a clear understanding of what the assignment of this thesis called for.

Once recurring themes were found from answers given by the participants categories were formed to represent the recurring themes. Categories were divided into two sub-categories: Overall and managerial. The overall categories represented themes that were present in the answers of the participants when they answered questions regarding change, status of the organization, and organizational culture. Managerial category included answers from the participants regarding the role of management. This category was divided into two sub-categories: Answers from the management and answers from the employees.

Overall category	Managerial category
Work community	Accessibility
Openness	Sharing of responsibilities
Continuous change	Approachable

Table 2 Example of categories

5.3.1 Formation of the theoretical framework

As it was stated before, the type of data analysis used in this thesis was abductive analysis. The empirical research was not done to test a specific theory, but it was done to find recurring themes and answers. Based on these repeating themes a theoretical framework for this research was formed. When investigating the data, it showed that the concepts of confusion and a lack of understanding of change emerged from the answers of many of the participants. Another recurring theme that the data showed was

the importance of work community and open communication and discourse. Many of the participants also exhibited a need for clarity and information from the management about the change projects that their organization was facing.

After these recurring themes were established, time was taken into investigating previous literature done on different theories regarding organizational change. The themes of uncertainty and lack of clarity lead to the theory of sensemaking. As it has been stated before sensemaking occurs when people must try to understand unexpected situations, and they must decide how to react to these situations (Weick, 1995). Previous literature has also been done on the relationship between sensemaking and organizational change. Therefore, the data that were collected were seen to be connected to the theory of sensemaking which is why the theoretical framework was based on sensemaking.

Once the decision was made to use sensemaking as the theoretical framework of this research the data were analysed again. Research was done on sensemaking to help on establishing a way to analyse the data through the lens of sensemaking. The data were then again divided into two categories: Contributors of sensemaking and barriers of sensemaking. This division was done based on previous literature on sensemaking. Contributors of sensemaking were data that showed what had helped the participants to make sense of the change their organizations experienced. Barriers of sensemaking were data that showed what had made it harder for participants to make sense of said change. These categories were the main findings of this research since they directly answer to the research questions: *How do employees make sense of continuous change?* and *What enables employee sensemaking?*

6 FINDINGS

This part of the research aims to answer the research questions of this master's thesis. The empirical analysis and the theoretical framework are connected to establish the findings of this research. The research questions of this thesis are: *How do employees make sense of continuous change?* and *What enables employee sensemaking?*

This section begins with a composition of the interviews. This part includes a deeper look into the central themes that arose from the interviews. This is done to explain how the data collected from the interviews was utilized in the formation of the findings. Then the findings of this research are explored. The findings are divided into three parts that distinctively highlight the most important findings of this research. The first part shows what has been integral in the ability of employees to make sense of change. The second shows what has negatively impacted the ability of employees to make sense of change. The empirical analysis part also examined the role of management which is why the third part of this section is focused on the role of management in the sensemaking abilities of the employees.

6.1 The central themes of the empirical data

The central themes of the empirical data were found from the answers of the interviewees. The themes were based on the answers given in the interviews rather than on the questions. Recurring answers related to the same topic were identified and themes were formed according to them. Next the 6 themes will be gone through and questions that generated answers that are related to the themes are cited. The excerpts of the answers are utilized to show the importance of the themes.

Theme 1 was **work community**. The role of work community was emphasized, and it was brought up in many answers. Many of the participants said that they feel that they have a good work community. Attributes of a good work community that were shown in the answers were ones such as positive atmosphere and close and comfortable relationships between colleagues. Answers relating to the role of work community appeared especially for the following questions:

Question for principals: 5. How are current changes talked about in your organization? What kind of discourse is it? Assisting question: As a leader do you try to create or lead discourse?

Question for employees: 5. How are current changes talked about in your organization? What kind of discourse is it? Assisting question: Do you feel like you are heard, and you have influence?

Excerpts of answers to this question:

“We (principals working in Oulu) know each other quite well. And we can communicate well.” – Interviewee 1 (principal)

“Wisdom is shared.” – Interviewee 2 (principal)

“We sense how everyone is feeling so we could have a positive atmosphere.” – Interviewee 8 (employee)

“We can discuss in good spirits, and everyone can bring their opinions forth.” – Interviewee 5 (employee)

Theme 2 was **continuous change**. Change was seen to be happening constantly. The educational system is dynamic, and it is continuously being advanced. Many participants stated that they felt like something was happening all the time. Specific change projects were being implemented alongside smaller, continuous projects. Answers relating to continuous change appeared especially for the following questions:

3. How do you view the changes that have happened or are happening in upper secondary schools both nationally and here in only Oulu such as LOPS21, digital materials, and the abandonment of the matriculation examination that is talked about in the news?

4. What kind of changes or change projects are going on currently? Or have any change projects just ended or coming? Can you describe them?

Excerpts of answers to this question:

“It can be straining for employees that it always feels like we have to come up with something new to do.” – Interviewee 2 answer to question 3

“It is important to know that change is continuous and most likely it can take quite a long time.” – Interviewee 7 answer to question 3

“Change project that is still ongoing even though it has not started just now. There are things that constantly change and develop.”
– Interviewee 10 answer to question 4

Theme 3 was **openness**. Conversational culture was told to be open and mutual communication was seen to be successful. Participants exhibited feelings of openness when they explained how conversations occur in their organizations. Interviewees said that they feel like they have access to important information. Many of them also expressed how easy it is for them to share their opinions. Answers relating to openness appeared especially for the following question:

5. How are current changes talked about in your organization? What kind of discourse is it?

Excerpts of answers to this question:

“Natural and familiar conversations about current topics.”
– Interviewee 2

“Everyone who wants to share their opinions can definitely do that.”
– Interviewee 3

Theme 4 was **tension**. Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety were seen to be caused by upcoming change projects. What caused tension in many of the participants was the unpredictability of their work and organizations. Upcoming big change project for the Group A was seen to cause tension in the participants. They said that they were nervous about how the change would go and what would be the impacts. Answers relating to tension appeared especially for the following question:

7. In your opinion how are things going on in you organization? A) Are there problems? B) What works well? In your opinion what have you done successfully. Please provide an example. C) What about the future? Where is your organization going? What should be considered in your opinion?

Excerpts of answers to this question:

“Everyone is nervous about the upcoming change project this Autumn.”

– Interviewee 13

“There is no consistency.” – Interviewee 7

“The experiences and feelings of uncertainty of the employees should be considered and they should be supported.” – Interviewee 12

Theme 5 were **feelings of stress and strain**. Work life was seen to be hectic, and focus was felt to be on change rather than on the everyday work. Implementation of change was seen to be bothersome since it has to be done on top of regular work. Lack of time to carry out change was apparent. Answers relating to feelings of stress and strain appeared especially for the following question:

3. How do you view the changes that have happened or are happening in upper secondary schools both nationally and here in only Oulu such as LOPS21, digital materials, and the abandonment of the matriculation examination that is talked about in the news?

Excerpts of answers to this question:

“I felt like I do not want to learn a new thing. But of course, I had to learn it.” – Interviewee 4

“It takes time to get used to new things.” – Interviewee 11

Theme 6 was **the role of management**. The role of management was seen to be central. Most of the participant said that they have good relationship with their immediate managers. Many of the participants also believed that communication to the upper management goes through the immediate manager successfully. Both of the principals said that they like to give responsibilities to their employees. They both emphasised that their employees are professionals of their own fields. Thus, a manager has important responsibilities, opportunities, and challenges. There was a question in the interview that was related to this theme.

Question for the principals: 6. What is your own type of leadership?
What impacts your leadership?

Question for the employees: 6. How do you view the role of management in your daily work life? Immediate management, the management of the city, HR management

Excerpts of answers to these questions:

“I will not come and stand behind your back and supervise what you are doing. But you have to use your own skills and judgement.”
– Interviewee 1 (principal)

“Be a human alongside other human.” – Interviewee 2 (principal)

“Immediate management is approachable enough. You can dare to go to them if you have something to say.” – Interviewee 6

6.2 Contributors of sensemaking

The data gathered from the interviews showed that the employees exhibited attributes that can be seen to positively impact their sensemaking abilities. These attributes are explained, and previous literature is used to support the understanding.

Many of the interviewees talked about the influence of their work community. A positive and supportive atmosphere was said to be important and apparent in their work communities. Participants experience that they can have open communications with their colleagues and management.

“We can discuss in good spirits and information is brought forth. And own opinions can be shared freely.” – Interviewee 5

“Every day it feels nice to come to work.” – Interviewee 7

“We have a positive atmosphere and people are nice.” – Interviewee 9

They felt that they shared collective opinions and meanings. These collective meanings were created by the employees talking to each other on how change initiatives and projects would impact them collectively, or their shared subjects. Another important factor was that the participants felt that they themselves and their colleagues are passionate and motivated about their work. The commitment they had for their work could be seen in that many of the participants had worked at their job for over 10 years.

“Employees are professionals in their own fields.” – Interviewee 1

” I have worked in the organization A for about 25 years.”
– Interviewee 8

“Many of our employees are passionate about their work and they want to develop and do better. They have a high standard for their own work.”
– Interviewee 10

The importance of emotional contagion was shown by Bartunek et al. (2006) A positive atmosphere is created by the individuals, and it is adopted by the group. A positive work atmosphere can also in turn help individuals to perceive change as something that is good rather than negative. This positive and supportive atmosphere form an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their opinions and even dissenting views. (Bartunek et al., 2006.) Ericson (2001) showed that a shared meaning of change was integral in the successful implementation of change. They highlighted the importance of dialogue between colleagues where they were encouraged to share their opinions and views. (Ericson, 2001.) The idea of collective meaning was studied by Balogun et al. (2015). They showed that people who worked together had created a unified meaning of change. It was impacted by their shared views and opinions. (Balogun et al. 2015.) This could be seen especially with the participants who were facing a big change project together, or how teachers of the same subject experienced changes to their shared subjects. Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) argue that commitment can enable sensemaking since people committed to their work are more likely to care enough to find meaning and work through difficult situations.

Another important factor that enabled the sensemaking abilities of the participants was the perceived openness of their organization. They felt that they were encouraged to communicate their opinions and feelings. Communication was held in official settings such as in meetings and in informal settings such as in the breakroom.

“Coffee table conversations happen obviously.” – Interviewee 3

” Our work community is straightforward.” – Interviewee 8

The participants felt like information about the different change projects was shared and there was access to it. Many of the participants also shared that it was easier for them to understand and orientate with upcoming changes when they were talked about well in advance.

“Shorter information sharing events are organized.” – Interviewee 5

“We have discussions in advance which can make it simpler to prepare for change.” – Interviewee 6

Ericson (2001) showed that communication was an important factor in helping employees understand change. The study also showed that employees should accept the vision of change and this acceptance can be gained by explaining it through dialogue. (Ericson, 2001.) This sharing of information goes with the answers given by the participants. They felt like they were more able to understand change when they had received knowledge of it in advance. Bartunek et al. (2016) also highlighted the importance of continuous discourse. This discourse can be used to explain the need for change to the employees which in turn can influence the way they perceive the change. Inclusion of employees in the conversations of change were shown to be a factor of successful implementation of change (Kieran et al., 2022). Thomas and Hardy (2011) showed how continuous negotiation of meanings can be done through encouraging employees to take part in discourse.

Some of the participants told in the interview how they want to take initiative and be a part of decision making. This is called shared leadership. Shared leadership is highlighted as a necessary factor in successful pedagogic leadership. Shared leadership contributes to employee inclusion and positive work atmosphere. (Opetushallitus, 2023.) Many of these participants said that they belong to development committees because they want to have an active role.

“I am in a group that thinks about how to develop evening teaching.”
– Interviewee 3

“I participate in additional things.” – Interviewee 7

Some of the participants recalled an incident where a change to longer class durations was made by the city. The employees resisted this change, and they actively demanded for the duration to be changed back to the original. After a year with the new longer class duration the city decided to change it back to the original duration. The decision to go back to the original duration was made mostly due to the employee feedback.

“Very well in advance it was strongly shown that no let’s not make this change. Teachers were strongly against it. It still passed.” – Interviewee 12

“It was a trial year and it showed that we were listened to because we went back to the old way.” – Interviewee 12

Many of the employees also highlighted the importance of them having a possibility to give statements and opinions about things such as the curriculum.

“We had a statement round where we could give statements about the Core Curriculum.” – Interviewee 4

Guette and Vandembemt (2017) argued that employees’ sensemaking abilities were inhibited when they felt like they were not active participants in the change project. They also argued that when employees felt detached from change, thus not being able to affect it or implement it, employees had issues of making sense of that change. (Guette & Vandembemt, 2017.) These ideas go along with how important it is for employees to be able to actively partake in change projects. This active participation can enable the employees to find meaning in the change. Employees should feel like they have a voice, and it is heard when change is implemented. Kieran et al. (2022) also highlighted the importance of encouraging employees to question the decisions that were made. This questioning can then in turn lead to a mutual understanding that is accepted by the employees and the management. (Kieran et al., 2022.)

Another important factor that contributed to the participants ability to make sense of changes that were happening inside their organization was their readiness for change. Most of the participants had a positive attitude towards their organization, and they thought that the status of their organization was good. This positive view that they held of their organization thus enabled them to have a more positive view of the changes and adversity that they were facing.

One participant said that they saw change as a positive thing. They elaborated:

“...it could be an opportunity for everyone to examine themselves and their roles.” – Interviewee 12

This participant also continued and said:

“This change project would be a fresh new start and I am hopeful about it.” – Interviewee 12

Many of the participants also acknowledged that change is inevitable and continuous which made it easier for them to understand change.

“It is important to know that change is continuous and most likely it can take quite a long time.” – Interviewee 7

One of the participants said that if the interview would have happened last year, their answers would have been different. Now they felt like the organization was doing very well and no major change projects were happening. This goes along with the idea of temporal narration, which means that narration, opinions, and views are temporal, therefore they can change and evolve (Vaara et al., 2016). The views of the participant had changed from the previous year. Now they felt more content with the change projects they had gone through, and they had a more positive outlook of their organization.

These positive feelings that the employees exhibited about their organizations and different change project goes with the views brought up in the study done by Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010). They argued that when employees view change as something negative as in something disruptive it can negatively affect their sensemaking of the change. Therefore, when change is seen in a positive way it makes it more understandable for the employees. (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010.) Bartunek et al. (2006) also talked about the importance of employees to perceive change as something positive. This positive perception that employees have of change can lead to the change project to be implemented in a better way. The concept of emotional contagion that Bartunek et al. examined relates to the positive outlook that the participants had of

their organizations. This positive outlook can lead to the work community to follow the colleagues that view change as a positive thing and adopt their view. (Bartunek et al., 2006.) Ericson (2001) talked about how important it is for employees to accept the vision of change. This acceptance of vision can occur when employees understand it and view it as necessary or helpful. (Ericson, 2001.)

6.3 Barriers of sensemaking

The data gathered from the interviews showed that the employees exhibited attributes that can be seen to negatively impact their sensemaking abilities. These attributes are explained, and previous literature is used to support the understanding.

As it was shown in the previous section, a close and positive work atmosphere can enable sensemaking of employees. The empirical data also showed that troubles in the work community such as lack of communication between colleagues, and social dynamics could negatively impact sensemaking of employees.

The other group of participants operate daily on different campuses, and it is common for them to not interact daily with their colleagues. Many of the participants felt like these factors negatively affected their work community. The other group is facing an upcoming large change to their work community. This change was seen to cause anxiety and stress in many of the participants.

“Our community will break up which is sad.” – Interviewee 13

One participant also stated that they felt like since their organization is small that can come with some issues. The participant felt that since everyone works so closely to each other and are very close in general it made it harder for them to bring up dissenting opinions.

“Close relationships can obstruct the sharing of differing opinions. That can be challenging.” – Interviewee 12

Ericson (2001) showed how important it is for sensemaking that a shared meaning is created. This shared meaning can be achieved by communication and when individuals share their own meaning with each other. (Ericson, 2001.) It could be argued that since the other group examined in this thesis had a very divided work community they could struggle with creating a shared meaning. Many of the participants said that they do not interact with their colleagues daily. Thomas and Hardy (2011) also argue that the concept of continuous negotiation is important since it can be used to create a mutual meaning. This goes with the idea that change and meanings should not be discussed only during formal settings when change is planned and implemented. Communication should be done every day also in informal settings so that the employees can bring forth their own views and meanings.

Negative feelings such as uncertainty and anxiety arose from many of the answers of the participants.

“Can I keep up with change?”. – Interviewee 4

“When a big change is coming people are very stressed about even mundane things when compared to other times. People are nervous and anticipating which can cause everyday challenges to feel even bigger.”

– Interviewee 12

Many of the participants also felt that since they know that change is continuous they are not sure of what is to come. The other group also stated that there are plans for a new campus that would unite their organization. But they said that there is no specific plan set for the campus which was felt to be confusing.

“A new campus will be built, and it is possible that our school will move there. There are no clear plans set whether we move. Or what is the schedule.” – Interviewee 4

The participants were asked about the most recent National Core Curriculum of 2021. Many of the participants felt like they did not understand the reason for the new

curriculum. The previous curriculum was set only few years before the new one which made it hard for some participants to make sense of why a new one was set again. Many of the participants also said that they felt like the new curriculum was not necessary.

“The new National Core Curriculum is unclear.” – Interviewee 5

“In everyday work it is not clear what was the benefit.” – Interviewee 7

As Weick (1995) showed sensemaking is triggered by unexpected situations which cause people to feel uncertain. Ericson (2001) studied how employees made sense of change and the findings showed that it is important for individuals to accept the established vision of change. This acceptance of the vision of change stems from employees feeling like it made sense to them. It is important for employees to view change as plausible and believable. (Ericson, 2001.) The participants of this thesis exhibited feelings that showed how they had not accepted the vision and meaning of the change to the curriculum. The participants felt like they did not understand the reasoning behind the change. Balogun et al. (2015) also showed how important it was for employees to perceive the change as something that is helpful and good. If this perception was accomplished it also led to the employees to accept the change, thus leading to a better implementation of change.

Another factor that impacted negatively how the participants made sense of change was how fast and frequently big change projects occurred. An example of this was the National Core Curriculum of 2021. Many of the participants felt like the new curriculum was changed too quickly after the previous one. They also said that they did not have enough time to get used to and adjust to the previous curriculum.

“In my opinion reforms came too quickly. We didn’t have time to make the changes from the previous Core Curriculum into practice.”

– Interviewee 8

They were not able to put the changes that occurred in that the previous one into practice and make them into routines. So, they had to quickly make changes in a situation where they did not even feel comfortable to begin with. Another example of a change project that participants felt to have been implemented too fast was the move for matriculation exams to be held electronically. Many of the participants felt like they had to learn and operate new systems very quickly which was very difficult for them. Many experienced that too much was demanded from them due to the fast nature of the changes.

” A lot of problems that have to be solved spontaneously.”

– Interviewee 10

“Reforms were given half-ready and tools to implement them weren’t enough.” – Interviewee 13

“When I have learned one system I would like to use that one.”

– Interviewee 4

Maitlis and Christianson (2014) showed how sensemaking arises from situations where they should adapt a new way of thinking. This calls for individuals to dismiss their previous routines and understandings. (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014.) Individuals often strive when they have their routines so it can be challenging for them to discard them and change them. Especially when these routines are disrupted quickly it can be even more difficult for individuals to react to the changes. Individuals also need time to adapt their views which is impaired when they feel like the implementation process is rushed.

Change resistance was evident in the answers of many of the participants. Many of them exhibited negative preconceptions of change projects.

“I hope that a new curriculum would not be set before I go into retirement.” – Interviewee 4

One thing that was brought up in many of the interviews was the feeling that they did not have a lot of influence. When decisions came from high up such as from the Ministry participants felt like they did not have impact on them. This was seen by many to be frustrating since they felt forced to implement and adapt to them.

“On some things like national things we have no influence.”

– Interviewee 6

“It depends on the thing whether we have influence. Often it feels like things that we have to follow come from somewhere else.”

– Interviewee 8

In the context of sensemaking Thomas and Hardy (2011) argue that change resistance can be seen when individuals have negative meanings of change. These meanings that employees hold can cause them to perceive change as a bad thing. This kind of change resistance can be addressed by negotiating meanings to achieve a meaning of change that is accepted by individuals. (Thomas & Hardy, 2011.) Balogun et al. (2015) also showed how negative perception of change can cause the sensemaking abilities of individuals to decrease. It was also present in their findings that these negative feelings and resistance to change could lead to even committed senior managers to resign. (Balogun et al., 2015.) The feeling of detachment that many of the participants exhibited was explained by Guiette and Vandembemt (2017). When employees felt like they could not have an impact or that decisions of change happened somewhere else, it made it harder for them to make sense of the change. It could also lead to employees to just follow their orders rather than trying to create their own meaning of what is happening and why. (Guiette & Vandembemt, 2017.)

Many of the participants felt strained by their work and the constant change projects. Teachers often work in both upper secondary school and in basic education therefore the nature of their job is already very demanding. Most participants said that they felt strained because they had to often learn new systems and ways of operating in short timespans. They also said that since they are so busy with their daily work tasks they do not have energy to do extra work.

“Who would want to go and voluntarily lead the implementation of the new curriculum.” – Interviewee 7

Many of the participants also said that they feel strained by having to do normal daily work in turbulent time during change. They said that having to work almost constantly on change projects while doing their normal work was exhausting.

“I wish teachers could get back to their normal work and get to focus on it.” – Interviewee 13

Guiette and Vandembemt (2017) showed that it is harmful for sensemaking when employees feel like change projects obscures their daily work. This can also lead to employees feeling like they lack control of their work which can lead to detachment. This lack of control can negatively impact how employees perceive their work. It can be argued that employees want to focus on their work since it is something that they have chosen to pursue. So, when something is seen to overshadow their job it can negatively affect how they perceive their work and organization.

6.4 Role of management

The role of management in employee sensemaking was examined through the use of empirical data and the theoretical framework. The answers of both the principals and the employees were examined to gain an understanding of how both types of participants exhibited sensemaking processes.

Many of the employee participants said that they look to the management for information about change projects. Some of the participants pointed out that information is successfully transferred from the city through the principals to the employees.

“I think we have a good connection to the higher level.” – Interviewee 8

“If you want information you can get it.” – Interviewee 4

However, one employee participant felt like more discourse should be created by immediate management.

“Should put things forth and foster conversation.” – Interviewee 12

They also felt that their immediate management should be more decisive or determined. This is important since the employees need their managers to offer them information and reassurance about uncertain and confusing situations.

The importance of the immediate management was apparent in most of the employee interviews. Many stated that they did not feel like they needed to contact the higher management, such as the managers of the Department of Educational and Cultural Services. Higher management was seen by many as invisible. Many of the participants said that they felt like their immediate management was reachable and approachable. And this was the reason for them not feeling the need to be in contact with the higher management. However, some said that if they wanted to contact the higher management they could and they knew how.

“You can contact immediate management easily, but I have not had the need to contact the higher levels. It goes through the principal.”

– Interviewee 3

“I have wanted to keep contact with upper management, and I know how.” – Interviewee 8

The principals were asked a question regarding their personal style of management. Both said that they like to give their employees responsibilities and they trust that their employees are professionals in their fields. Both also highlighted the importance of allowing their employees to express their opinions and feelings. Their own opinions are also shared but they allow room for discussion.

“You can tell your opinions straight for example that you do not agree.”

– Interviewee 1

“We are democratic. We aren’t authoritative where one person decides everything and who holds the wisdom. Wisdom is shared.”

– Interviewee 2

One of the principals also emphasized how integral it is for their organization to work together and create a good atmosphere.

“Doing things together can be seen in other things besides work.”

– Interviewee 2

Good atmosphere is created out of the workplace as well with extracurricular activities. Managers have an important role in creating a good work atmosphere, and it is one of their most integral duties. Especially during change, it is necessary that employees feel like they are supported and listened to. (Kuntaliitto, 2023.)

The concept of sensegiving was apparent in the interviews of all participants. According to Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) sensegiving happens when management try to influence their employees’ sensemaking. Sensegiving is done through communication when a shared meaning is created. (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010.) Kieran et al. (2022) also showed how important successful sensegiving is to increase how employees can make sense of change. Sensegiving should be utilized by giving employees information that helps them to understand change. Continuous communication and the encouragement to question are important factors of sensegiving. (Kieran et al., 2022.) Managers should also allow their employees to feel like they have an active role in the change projects. This can be done through empowering them to create their own meanings of change and by giving them duties that can help them feel meaningful. (Giette & Vandenbempt, 2017.)

7 CONCLUSIONS

In this section the key results of this research are brought forth. The key results are based on the empirical analysis, and they aim to offer useful information on how to develop employee's sensemaking abilities. This part is based on the contributors and barriers of sensemaking that were exhibited in the empirical data, and the theoretical framework. These key results aim to answer the research questions: *How do employees make sense of continuous change?* and *What enables employee sensemaking?*

These findings that aim to answer the research questions are based on the empirical data. In the next section 7.1 Key results, these findings will be supported by previous research done on sensemaking. Employee sensemaking occurs in a work community which fosters a positive and supportive atmosphere. Work community can create commitment and other positive attributes which enable employees' to feel comfortable with each other. Employees that feel comfortable with each and feel like they can share their opinions openly can make sense of change better. Communication regarding change should be open to everyone to partake in and relevant information should be available and sufficient. Managers have an important role in facilitating and creating discourse which in turn can lead to the betterment of employee sensemaking. Managers should also empower and encourage employees to partake in decision making, and employees should feel like active participation is meaningful. Individuals experience and perceive change in their own ways. These individual reactions should be identified and addressed. All of these factors explain how employees make sense of continuous change, and what enables employee sensemaking.

Then the theoretical and managerial conclusions are drawn based on the empirical data and the theoretical framework. After that the limitations of this research are explained. Proposals of possible future research about this topic are brought forth. The thesis ends with information for the client that goes beyond this research but are seen to be useful and important.

7.1 Key results

These are the key results of this master's thesis. They answer the research questions: *How do employees make sense of continuous change?* and *What enables employee sensemaking?* This part shows what should be done during change so that employees can make sense of it.

Work community that harbours a positive and supportive atmosphere is integral in sensemaking (Bartunek et al., 2006). People should feel like they belong to a community where they are supported and valued. A good work community can lead to people to enjoy their work even more. This positive outlook of their work can also lead to people to be more committed to their jobs. Committed employees often have better work performance and they are more resilient during disruptive situations such as change (Karmakar, 2020). A good workplace should be a considerate environment where everyone has a right to their opinions and are encouraged to share them. This kind of environment enables employee sensemaking, since they can share their meanings and create a shared meaning (Ericson, 2001). However, with small work communities there is the risk that individuals might be afraid to share their opinions. Since everyone knows each other so well people can fear that their opinions are personified. Individuals who voice dissenting views can be ostracized by the majority. It is the duty of both the manager and the employees to make sure that this kind of polarization does not happen.

It is important for employees to feel that they are in an encouraging and open environment. This kind of environment fosters the sharing of opinions and views, which in turn enables sensemaking (Thomas and Hardy (2011). Employees should feel like that they can openly discuss with each other. When employees feel like this it can help them to achieve a mutual understanding about what is happening and how it impacts them. This is called a shared meaning, which is integral in sensemaking (Weick et al. 2005). Conversations regarding change should occur not only in formal settings such as in meetings but also in informal settings. It is important that employees feel comfortable enough with each other so they can talk about issues that bother them or what is unclear to them. Managers have an important role in facilitating and creating

discourse, since it can be difficult for employees to initiate discussion about distressing or complicated issues (Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010). It is also integral that employees have access to relevant information well in advance. This sharing of knowledge and information is an important task of the managers, and it goes with the concept of sensegiving (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). Sensegiving can be used to enable employee sensemaking (Kieran et al., 2022).

Inclusion and involvement of employees in decision making processes is very important in employee sensemaking (Guetta & Vandembemt, 2017). Having meetings where employees can voice their opinions is integral. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2023) employees should be encouraged and empowered to actively partake in the planning and implementation of organizational change. This active participation can lead the employees to feel like they are valued members of their organization and that their opinions are heard and taken into consideration. (Opetushallitus, 2023.) When employees share their views they should be considered. If it is not possible to act according to the views of the employees, it is important to explain to them why. This can help the employees to better understand the decision and accept that their way was not the approved one. The involvement of employees can make them feel like what is happening to them and to their organization is done on their terms. This can reduce the feeling of that they are forced to do things that they do not want to do or what they signed up for. Which in turn enables employee sensemaking. (Guetta & Vandembemt, 2017.)

Feelings of uncertainty, confusion and anxiety that often appear during change projects can lead to change resistance, since the reason for change is not understood (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). It is important that these feelings are acknowledged and there is a plan to address them. If employees feel comfortable and happy with their job and they feel like their work community is positive aspect of their lives they can have a better outlook on change as well. Employees should be supported when they are feeling negative about change. Uncertainty and confusion often arise from employees not knowing what is happening to themselves or their organization (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Therefore, it is integral to give employees the information they need so they can better understand and make sense of the change. What is often the

most important thing for employees is their own work and how change will affect that (Moran & Brightman, 2000). This is why the focus of change should not be only on the big picture but on the individuals that go through said change (Errida & Lotfi, 2021).

On the other side of the coin of change resistance is change readiness. As some individuals have negative preconceptions of change some on the other hand welcome change. This is why it is important to consider the different views and reactions of individuals. Individuals that have positive outlooks of change should be empowered and championed to share their views since they can influence other's views on change (Bartunek et al., 2006).

Employees can feel very strained by change especially ones that happen quickly. It is important to offer employees support with their work during change. Implementation of change can disrupt employee's daily routines and their mundane work tasks which can cause them anxiety and stress (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This is why it is integral that employees do not feel like they are overrun by the change project (Balogun et al. 2015; Thomas & Hardy, 2011). Sufficient time should be given to employees to implement new changes. Change needs time to be properly implemented and that employees can make new routines. Even though change is continuous, and it happens constantly (Weick & Quinn, 1999), it is important that employees are given enough time to get used to the new changes.

The opportunity to partake in the interviews was offered to all employees of the two organizations that were chosen for this research. The interview was introduced to the employees as a part of a master's thesis research done on organizational change in collaboration with the Department of Educational and Cultural Services. Only 11 people from these organizations volunteered to take part in the interview. The principals of both schools took part in the interviews as well since they were asked to participate by their superior. This raises the question whether the other employees do not care about change or are they too tired to talk about change. Maybe this shows that the majority of the employees did not find meaning in talking about their views and opinions of change. It is quite alarming that only a handful of employees wanted to

partake in the interview which was organized to make the voices of the employees heard.

7.2 Theoretical and managerial conclusions

This master's thesis and its findings go along and support the previous research done on the theory of sensemaking. The participants of this thesis had gone through and were going through various change projects. The empirical data showed that the participants exhibited sensemaking processes related to the change projects. The findings of this research showed what had positively and negatively impacted the sensemaking abilities of the participants. Guette and Vandenbempt (2017) showed inhibitors of employee sensemaking. These inhibitors included factors such as detachment and not being able to partake in change. (Guette & Vandenbempt, 2017.) These inhibitors of employee sensemaking were apparent in this research as well. Contributors to employee sensemaking such as communication (Ericson, 2001), work community (Bartunek et al., 2006) and the feeling that the employees have an impact (Kieran et al., 2022) were apparent in this research as well.

This master's thesis can thus offer not only the client but to the research of sensemaking valuable information on how employees make sense of change. Prior research is seen to focus on crises and unexpected situations such as Cornelissen et al., (2014). This is seen to be a limitation of sensemaking research (Brown et al., 2015). This research specified change as continuous, and it examined sensemaking from the point-of-view of everyday organizational life rather than from the perspective of an unexpected crisis. This research therefore offers valuable theoretical contribution. This thesis also focused on how employee sensemaking can be enabled which is beneficial information for a theoretical point-of-view as well as for a practical perspective.

The managerial conclusions of this master's thesis focus on the role of management in employee sensemaking. Previous research shows that management has an integral part in successful implementation of change (e.g., Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Moran & Brightman, 2000). This thesis supports this idea. According to the empirical analysis and the theoretical framework of this research sensegiving and the facilitation of

discourse are important tasks of the management (Kieran et al., 2022). A clear hierarchy was shown to exist in the organizations that were studied in this thesis. This highlighted the importance of the immediate management which were in this research the principals. Employees felt that their principals were integral and visible parts of their everyday work lives. The upper management such as the management of the Department of Educational and Cultural Services were seen as distant. Many felt that they did not need to contact them since they believed that information was gained successfully through the immediate management.

The findings of this research showed that managers have an important role in sharing information of change projects to their employees. Managers should also create and facilitate conversations where employees can share their views and opinions. This research thus showed that managers and their actions have an important role in how employees make sense of change.

7.3 Limitations of this research

This part explains the limitations of the research done for this master's thesis. The sampling size of the case study done for this thesis was small. Of the 13 participants who were interviewed 2 were management-level employees (principals), and 11 were lower-level employees (teachers and secretary). Because of the small sampling size, it can be difficult to generalize the findings of this research. The organizations that were studied were also quite small which is why it can be questioned how the findings can be transferred to larger organization with more employees.

Another limitation of this research is that the organizations that were examined were upper secondary schools. Schools are a very specific type of organization. As it was shown schools are influenced a lot by external forces and pressure. Schools must obey strict laws and regulations, and their operations are based on national guidelines such as the National Core Curriculum. These reasons can make it difficult to transfer the findings of this research to other organizations such as private businesses.

The analysis of this research was abductive. This means that the interview was not specifically designed to study the theory of sensemaking. The theoretical framework was formed after the empirical data were collected. Conclusions were drawn based on the data that were collected in a non-specific way and a theoretical framework that was seen to support the data. This can undermine the validity of this research as one done on sensemaking.

7.4 Proposals for future research

An important part of the assignment given by the client was to find best practices and success stories from the organizations that were examined. This is why it would be an interesting and important future research idea to see what can be transferred from this thesis to the other organizations of the department. This research highlighted integral factors that can enable employee sensemaking of change. Since the department wants to develop their whole organization it could be interesting to see what could be transferred into practice from this thesis. It would be especially intriguing to see how the findings of this research could be transferred to organizations that are not schools. The Department of Educational and Cultural Services operates on many other fields other than education.

Another interesting idea for future research would be to examine the same participants of this research. The other group that was interviewed is going through a large change project that will conclude this Autumn. Therefore, interviewing the same people could offer important information on their opinions and views after their change project had ended. The interview should be done after two to three years since change takes a lot of time. This time could allow employees to implement change and make these changes into routines. Since many participants exhibited anxiety and stress over their change project it would be valuable to learn whether their feelings had changed.

Since this research examined upper secondary schools it could be interesting to see how this study could be duplicated in other cities or municipalities. In Finland all schools must follow the national laws and regulation therefore it could be that they all face the same struggles as the ones in this thesis. Investigating different schools in

Finland could offer a chance to see whether these changes are implemented better in some places.

7.5 Useful information for the client

This part goes beyond the research done in this master's thesis. Useful information was gathered from the interviews that could be beneficial for the client to know.

The two organizations that were studied have gone through multiple change projects over a short period of time and new ones are happening. This thesis could be useful in the successful implementation of the new upcoming change projects. Interviewees exhibited frustration and confusion due to the continuous and constant change. Many of them stated that they felt very strained since they had to work in a turbulent environment. Many said that they wanted to focus on their everyday work rather than continuously having to learn new systems or routines. Also, it could be seen that appropriate time to implement new changes were seen to be lacking. Since change was seen to happen constantly it was hard for employees to get comfortable with the previous changes before a new one was happening.

The immediate management has an important role in the everyday work lives of employees. Managers are looked towards for information and reassurance. This is why it is important to make sure that management is taken care of and supported.

What is important to realize about change is that individuals have different reactions and readiness for change. Some employees welcome change and they view it as a positive thing full of opportunities. On the other hand, some feel very strained by change, and they wish that no new changes would come. Own experiences and perspectives affect how the need for change is understood and how they participate in the implementation of change. It is important to treat people as individuals and support them in the ways that they require.

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Appendix 1**Semi-structured interview questions for principals: Original**

Alkuun selitän, että haastattelu nauhoitetaan. Haastattelu on osa gradututkimusta, joka tehdään yhteistyössä Oulun kaupungin Sivistys- ja kulttuuripalveluiden kanssa. Haastattelu on luottamuksellinen.

1. Kerro itsestäsi. Kuka olet ja miten olet päätenyt tähän työhön?
2. Mikä on nyt ajankohtaista teidän työssänne? Niin henkilökohtaiselta kannalta kuin mielestäsi teidän organisaation kannalta.
 - a. Apukysymys: Mitä korostetaan tällä hetkellä?
3. Millaisina koet lukiomaailmassa niin valtakunnallisesti kuin täällä Oulussa tapahtuneet tai tapahtuvat muutokset, kuten esimerkiksi LOPS21, digimateriaaliuudistus tai uutisissa taas puhuttanut ylioppilaskirjoituksista luopuminen?
4. Mitä /millaisia muutoksia/muutosprojekteja on tällä hetkellä meneillään, onko mitään muutosprojekteja juuri päättenyt tai tulossa. Voitko kuvailla niitä?
5. Miten teidän organisaatiossanne keskustellaan ajankohtaisista muutoksista? Millaista keskustelua on?
 - a. Apukysymys: Pyritkö johtajana luomaan tai ohjaamaan keskustelua?
6. Millainen on oma johtamistyyli? Mitkä asiat vaikuttavat tapaaasi johtaa?
7. Miten sinun mielestäsi teidän organisaatiolla nyt menee?
 - a. Onko haasteita?
 - b. Mikä toimii hyvin? Missä olet omasta mielestäsi itse onnistunut? Kerro esimerkki.
 - c. Entä tulevaisuus? Mihin olette menossa? Mitä sinun mielestäsi pitäisi ottaa huomioon?
8. Avoin kysymys: Tuliko jotain vielä mieleen? Haluatko kertoa vielä jotain mitä en huomannut kysyä?

Haastattelun lopetus.

Semi-structured interview questions for principals: Translated

In the beginning I explain that the interview will be recorded. The interview is a part of a master's thesis research that is done as an assignment for the department of Educational and Cultural Services of city of Oulu. The interview is confidential.

1. Tell me about yourself. Who are you and how did you end up with this job?
2. What is current in your job now? In your personal view and in your organization's view.
 - a. Assisting question: What is emphasized currently?
3. How do you view the changes that have happened or are happening in upper secondary schools both nationally and here in only Oulu such as LOPS21, digital materials, and the abandonment of the matriculation examination that is talked about in the news?
4. What kind of changes or change projects are going on currently? Or have any change projects just ended or coming? Can you describe them?
5. How are current changes talked about in your organization? What kind of discourse is it?
 - a. Assisting question: As a leader do you try to create or lead discourse?
6. What is your own type of leadership? What impacts your leadership?
7. In your opinion how are things going on in your organization
 - a. Are there problems?
 - b. What works well? In your opinion what have you done successfully. Please provide an example.
 - c. What about the future? Where is your organization going? What should be considered in your opinion?
8. Open question: Did something else come to your mind? Do you want to tell me something else that I did not realize to ask about?

The end of the interview.

Appendix 2**Semi-structured interview questions for employees: Original**

Alkuun selitän, että haastattelu nauhoitetaan. Haastattelu on osa gradututkimusta, joka tehdään yhteistyössä Oulun kaupungin Sivistys- ja kulttuuripalveluiden kanssa. Haastattelu on luottamuksellinen.

1. Kerro itsestäsi. Kuka olet ja miten olet päätnyt tähän työhön?
2. Mikä on nyt ajankohtaista teidän työssänne? Niin henkilökohtaiselta kannalta kuin mielestäsi teidän organisaation kannalta.
 - a. Apukysymys: Mitä korostetaan tällä hetkellä?
3. Millaisina koet lukiomaailmassa niin valtakunnallisesti kuin täällä Oulussa tapahtuneet tai tapahtuvat muutokset, kuten esimerkiksi LOPS21, digimateriaaliuudistus tai uutisissa taas puhuttanut ylioppilaskirjoituksista luopuminen?
4. Mitä /millaisia muutoksia/muutosprojekteja on tällä hetkellä meneillään, onko mitään muutosprojekteja juuri päättnyt tai tulossa. Voitko kuvailla niitä?
5. Miten teidän organisaatiossanne keskustellaan ajankohtaisista muutoksista? Millaista keskustelu on?
 - a. Koetko, että teitä kuullaan ja teillä on vaikutusta?
6. Millaisena koet johdon roolin teidän päivittäisessä työssänne? Teidän koulun johdon, kaupungin, hr-johdon.
7. Miten sinun mielestäsi teidän organisaatiolla nyt menee?
 - a. Onko haasteita?
 - b. Mikä toimii hyvin? Missä olet omasta mielestäsi itse onnistunut? Kerro esimerkki.
 - c. Entä tulevaisuus? Mihin olette menossa? Mitä sinun mielestäsi pitäisi ottaa huomioon?
8. Avoin kysymys: Tuliko jotain vielä mieleen? Haluatko kertoa vielä jotain mitä en huomannut kysyä?

Haastattelun lopetus.

Semi-structured interview questions for employees: Translated

In the beginning I explain that the interview will be recorded. The interview is a part of a master's thesis research that is done as an assignment for the department of Educational and Cultural Services of city of Oulu. The interview is confidential.

1. Tell me about yourself. Who are you and how did you end up with this job?
2. What is current in your job now? In your personal view and in your organization's view.
 - a. Assisting question: What is emphasized currently?
3. How do you view the changes that have happened or are happening in upper secondary schools both nationally and here in only Oulu such as LOPS21, digital materials, and the abandonment of the matriculation examination that is talked about in the news?
4. What kind of changes or change projects are going on currently? Or have any change projects just ended or coming? Can you describe them?
5. How are current changes talked about in your organization? What kind of discourse is it?
 - a. Assisting question: Do you feel like you are heard, and you have influence?
6. How do you view the role of management in your daily work life? Immediate management, the management of the city, HR management
7. In your opinion how are things going on in you organization
 - a. Are there problems?
 - b. What works well? In your opinion what have you done successfully. Please provide an example.
 - c. What about the future? Where is your organization going? What should be considered in your opinion?
8. Open question: Did something else come to your mind? Do you want to tell me something else that I did not realize to ask about?

The end of the interview.