

TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
School of Business and Governance
Department of International Business Administration

Arina Tikka

**THE ROLE OF FIRST-LINE MANAGER IN THE SUCCESS OF
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
A CASE STUDY OF AS LINDE GAS**

Master's thesis

Programme International Business Administration

Supervisor: Merle Ojasoo, Associate Professor

Tallinn 2020

I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading. The document length is 16676 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

Arina Tikka, 08.05.2020

Student code: 183805TVTM

Student e-mail address: arina.tikka@gmail.com

Supervisor: Merle Ojasoo, Associate Professor

The paper conforms to requirements in force

.....
(signature, date)

Chairman of the Defence Committee:

Permitted to the defence

.....
(name, signature, date)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	5
INTRODUCTION	6
1.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE MANAGER’S ROLE IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT.....	9
1.1. Definition of change management.....	9
1.2. Management and leadership in the context of change management	10
1.3. First-line manager as a change recipient	13
1.4. The role of first-line manager prior to change implementation	14
1.5. The role of first-line manager during the change implementation	18
1.6. The role of first-line manager after the change implementation	20
1.7. Organizational obstacles that prohibit change.....	22
1.8 Short summary of the theoretical framework	25
2. RESEARCH	28
2.1. Background of the research in AS Linde Gas	28
2.2. Research design and methodology	28
2.3. Sampling and data analysis	30
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	32
3.1. First-line managers’ awareness of the change management practices, their involvement and motivation to support change	32
3.2. First-line managers’ role and perceptions of the change management	33
3.3. Organizational obstacles that prohibit the change.....	36
3.4 Expectations and recommendations for the change management strategy	40
3.5 Concluding discussion.....	43
CONCLUSION	47
LIST OF REFERENCES	49
APPENDICES	55
Appendix 1. Steps in change process	55
Appendix 2. First-line managers change management roles.....	56
Appendix 3. Main challenges faced by first-line managers	57
Appendix 4. Key elements of the successful organizational change.....	58
Appendix 5. Interview questions for the semi-structured interview	59

Appendix 6. Interview transcriptions	61
Appendix 7. Non-exclusive licence	62

ABSTRACT

Business change has become a new constant process that exists in any organization. Despite the recognition of change management as a critical competency, some organizations still face a challenge to embrace and adopt the change. The role of first-line manager in the success of organizational change is essential and to improve change processes it becomes more obvious that organizations need to acknowledge the importance of manager's and leader's role. The aim of this research is finding out the role of first-line manager in the context of change management and gaining first-line managers' perceptions of their role in the success of organizational change. Furthermore, it attempts to determine possible shortages of change management processes within given company and propose improvements for the change management strategy.

The master thesis is focused on the role of first-line manager in AS Linde Gas business service center established in Tallinn, Estonia. The current research is a single case-study conducted with a qualitative method applying an inductive approach. Qualitative data is collected through semi-structured interviews with seven team leaders of the customer service teams (who in the context of given research are first-line managers) and two managers mainly responsible for processes, development and project execution in the customer service function.

The main finding suggests that the role of first-line manager in the change management initiatives in the case company is not yet unified nor clearly defined and there is a need to clarify team leader's identity in the context of change. The first-line managers face various challenges while dealing with a management of change that need to be addressed as change becomes an inherent part of the organization's culture and operations.

Keywords: change management; first-line manager; organizational change; role.

INTRODUCTION

Many leaders emphasize the challenges of managing change in today's rapid, comprehensive and competitive environment (Raffaelli 2017). In some organizations the management of organizational change tends to be reactive, discontinuous and rather ad hoc activity that is often reported as a failure at around 70 percent of all change programs initiated (Balogun, Hope-Hailey 2004). Even though this descriptive observation might be misrepresented and lack reliable empirical evidence (Ten Have *et al.* 2017, 70), it still becomes clear that a change is a sustained element that affects all organizations and the pace of change has never been greater than in the current demanding circumstances and continuously developing business environment. Therefore the successful management of change is considered to be a highly required skill (By 2005). Many change initiatives are led by senior management, nevertheless they may also be led by individuals operating at different levels of organization, including mid-level managers, team leaders and frontline employees (Raffaelli 2017). Organization leaders and managers are considered as an important influence factor to support an organizational change (Appelbaum *et al* 2015; Warner Burke 2017, 298; Kotter 1996) and their behavior might influence follower's rating of successful change implementation (Moutosi 2018). In this regard if there is a need to improve change processes within an organization, it is vital and beneficial to understand what successes and challenges first-line managers face in their role in terms of change management (Ronningstad 2018).

Several studies show that not all leaders are aware of their impact on the success of organizational change and sometimes demonstrate destructive leadership. Even though the number of studies with focus on the positive traits and behaviors of leaders is growing, there is still little knowledge about the impact and relationship of destructive leadership behaviors and contextual influences, particularly in the context of organizational change (Neves 2018). Whereas the resistance towards a change may be a result of the change agent's e.g. leader's own problematic behavior (Moutosi 2018). Hence, it becomes more obvious that organizations need to acknowledge the importance of manager's and leader's roles as it can affect the result of organizational change.

An effective implementation of change requires individuals on the different organizational levels to play distinct roles during the change. Thus, it is essential for any organization to ensure that change management is effective on any level within the organization (Kumah 2016). So far, previous studies emphasize the importance of change agent's role in the context of organizational change, even so these studies are mainly focused on the executive managers and research or development departments (Raffaelli, 2017). In the review made by Radaelli and Sitton-Kent (2016) it has been outlined that the role of other change agents (e.g. middle-managers, first-line managers) who may have notable influence on the effective change implementation has received little attention in terms of systematic analysis of their role.

The master thesis will focus on the role of first-line manager in AS Linde Gas business service center (BSC) established in Tallinn, Estonia. In the context of this paper the first-line managers are team leaders of the customer service teams and managers mainly responsible for processes, development and project execution in the customer service functions to whom non-managerial employees report. During the past three years the case company has executed several organizational changes by centralizing more of its functions to Estonia with the aim to develop Linde's gas business in Northern Europe. After the latest organizational change, it was decided to form a working group to evaluate and assess the executed change management process and a way forward. Within the framework of the project it was conducted 60 interviews with employees and their team leaders. The justification of this case study arises from the collected feedback and observation during the project indicating several challenges related to the change management process and the role of the team leader during the organizational change. Based on the above, **the research problem** for the master thesis is that the role of the first-line manager in the context of change management in the given company is not yet identified. The head of BSC recognized a need to conduct deeper research to address the problem and identify improvement areas for the change management process in the BSC. As frequency of organizational changes and its severity become the norm, improving the understanding of success factors and their underlying relationships becomes increasingly important (Vakola, Petrou 2018).

Based on the above, **the aim of this research** is finding out the role of first-line manager in the context of change management and gaining first-line managers' perceptions of their role in the success of organizational change. Furthermore, it attempts to determine possible shortages of change management processes within given company and propose improvements for the change management process.

This thesis has four research questions which will be answered in the thesis:

- What is the view in the literature of the first-line manager's role in the change management process?
- What are the main challenges faced by first-line managers as they are involved in change implementation?
- How do the perceptions of practicing first-line managers compare with the literature and the change management theory?
- What are suitable change strategies for this company that might be used for the next change management process?

To review the thesis structure, the first chapter will consider the theoretical framework relevant to the topic. Theoretical part is followed by empirical research. The role of first-line managers from a change management viewpoint is studied using a qualitative method. A qualitative study is performed in a form of one-to-one interviews with nine first-line managers of the case company. The nature of the interview is aimed to be consistent with research questions to be able to define the role of first-line manager, identify challenges and perceptions of the change management. The second chapter also explains research methodology and analysis. The final chapter reveals the findings and results of interview analysis. Based on the outcome of the research, the master thesis will give an overview of recommendations and propose a consolidated approach to a planned organizational change for given case study company.

1.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE MANAGER’S ROLE IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

In this chapter the author gives a theoretical literature review on the change management and the role of first-line managers in it according to the latest studies and change management literature. Theoretical framework will also cover challenges faced during the change implementation.

1.1. Definition of change management

Change management has been defined as “the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers” (Moran, Brightman 2001). It is a process by which the future state of organization, teams and individuals is reached by embedding new ways of operating to meet business and end-user requirements (O’Donovan 2018, 50). It can start with creating a vision for change and empowering individuals to act as change agents to achieve that vision (Lorenzi, Riley 2000). Successful change management is dependent on the social exchange between decision-makers and employees being well- received, that requires extensive communication, open dialog and discussion. It is a framework and practices followed by senior leaders, managers and change agents with the aim to motivate, inform and support employees through the process of change implementation (Jimmieson, Tucker 2018).

Where change in the organization goes beyond the project scope and context, it can be referred to as organizational development which stands for a field of applied behavioural science. Organizational development plays a critical role in enabling organization readiness for change by establishing capability for learning and innovation (O’Donovan 2018, 50). Change management became a subject area by merge and codification of a set of practices to address numerous aspects of business change. Recent change management theories seek to consolidate and unite the people-centric and structural elements into a holistic approach to business change with the aim to encourage more objective, thoughtful and consistent application of it (Jones, Recardo 2013, 3).

The evolution of organizational change models is an implication of a wide range of characteristics focusing on different components. Some approaches have concentrated on differentiating change by its type in the context of phases (continuous or stepped change), other methods view the change in the context of its impetus (planned or emergent), while another approach sees a change in terms of its organizational origin (top-down or bottom-up). One more differentiation is to see a change in terms of its size and impact, where transformational and incremental components must be identified. These characteristics are not mutually exclusive and overlap at intersection along the change process (Rosenbaum *et al.* 2018). Organizational change can be also identified as an incremental change, transitional change and transformational change. Incremental change is not seen as a linear process, rather an emergent, developmental, continuous process of aligning an organization with its changing environment. Transitional change aims to implement a known new state and the management of its temporary stage over a controlled period. Transformational change on the other hand is known as “radical” change and entails a new way of doing things instead of improving the known way of operating (O’Donovan 2018, 64). At the same time, the gradualist paradigm assumes that organizations are able to adapt and transform through a process of continuous adjustment. Meanwhile on the contrary, the punctuated equilibrium paradigm posits that organization progresses through the alternation of periods of equilibrium, when limited incremental change might happen, and periods of evolution, when structures are fundamentally transformed (Hayes 2010, 17-18).

1.2. Management and leadership in the context of change management

The study conducted by Rafferty, Jimmieson and Restubob (2009) dedicated to the influence of the top management and supervisory leaders on change appraisals, attitudes and adjustment to change, concluded that leaders at the lowest hierarchical level, who interact with their employees on a day-to-day basis, are more likely to be most outstanding to employees when forming beliefs about the likelihood of the change to be successful and when determining who is to blame for change failures. The results of the study suggest that both the top management team and supervisory leaders have an important role to play in the organizational change (Oreg *et al.* 2014). Even though it appears to be an overall understanding of what characteristics define leadership and management, the essence of their interrelation and degree of functional overlap can be debated. Nevertheless, recent study provides the evidence that both change leadership and change management can contribute to positive outcomes and experiences of organizational change (Holten

et al. 2019). In an integrated review Choi (2011) concluded that effective leadership can be considered as an antecedent to change and trust in leaders as an antecedent to employee openness to change and cynicism. In addition, the author enhanced the importance of situational variables that many researchers emphasize, for instance employee involvement in the decision-making process and change projects, information sharing, a successful history of change, effective leadership practices (*Ibid.*). There have been conducted several studies with the aim to identify if various leadership styles are different and in which circumstances the difference is important. The examination and meta-analysis of several studies show that for some outcomes various leadership styles are relatively more important than transformational leadership, however less important for others (Lee *et al.* 2019). There is an illusion that successful organizational change depends on the individual change agents often being in the position of manager. Tendency in leadership and organizational theories have been enervating focusing on who is important in the success of change intervention, not what. Indeed, in order to progress, the focus should shift from “change agents” to “agency” as a verb, meaning that the doing is not limited within one specific organizational role (By 2020). As leadership styles are not always mutually exclusive, and a manager or team leader practices multiple styles (Bligh *et al.* 2018), then given master thesis does not focus on any specific leadership style, rather on the role of first-line manager or team leader in the change management, and specific behaviors they must demonstrate to succeed with the change implementation.

The change management literature indicates the relationship between organizational change success and the role of leadership. Leadership is widely considered as the key enabler of the change process but there appears to be substantial about what constitutes a good leadership. While management and leadership involve distinct activities, they are still complementary and both required to succeed in a changing business environment (Hayes 2010, 159-161). Bolden (2004) argues that distinction between leadership and management may be misleading. He points out that most commonly people are recruited into a management, rather than leadership position, where it is expected to carry out a great scope of tasks ranging from day-to-day operations to long-term thinking, and none of mentioned above are done in isolation. Whether leadership is provided by a single individual or is distributed and achieved through a collective effort, some of the leadership tasks are identified and reflected in Kotter’s eight-stage model which can serve as a framework for those who are leading and managing a change (Hayes 2010, 169; Holten *et al.* 2019). Though, the focus in the given research will focus not only on the Kotter’s model. Based on the existing evidence it can be claimed that indeed Kurt Lewin’s three-step model should be placed at the center of the so far evolved models of planned organizational change. Hence, Lewin’ model is a strong

framework where mechanism for stimulating a change is based on the broad contextual and situational trait appearing in each organization (Rosenbaum *et al.* 2018). Based on the abovementioned, the author of this master thesis proposes that several commonalities that become apparent across Kotter's eight-stage model and Lewin's three-step approach can be consolidated to define the role of first-line manager during the change process for the given research. Kurt Lewin's model is used as a broad framework, while the more specific steps are set up by the Kotter's model. Both models are presented in the chapters below.

Managing a change is a complex process and approach to address it should be dynamic and evolving. Those responsible for change initiative shall recognize that there is no unique strategy that can be applied to all situations. Approach to manage a change needs to be contextualized (Hayes 2010, 54-55). A framework to address the objective of the given research is based on the approach suggested by Rosenbaum *et al.* (2018) as fundamental components of Lewin's three-step model provide "the basis for a more integrated and relational view of change". As illustrated in figure 1, the framework also covers Kotter's eight-steps model. Furthermore, it is combined with the generic model adopted from Hayes (2010, 47, 169) where Kotter's eight steps can be easily integrated to present a conceptual framework for thinking about change management. The model can be applied both in the context of organizational change and small-scale changes at the level of the individual or the group (*Ibid.*).

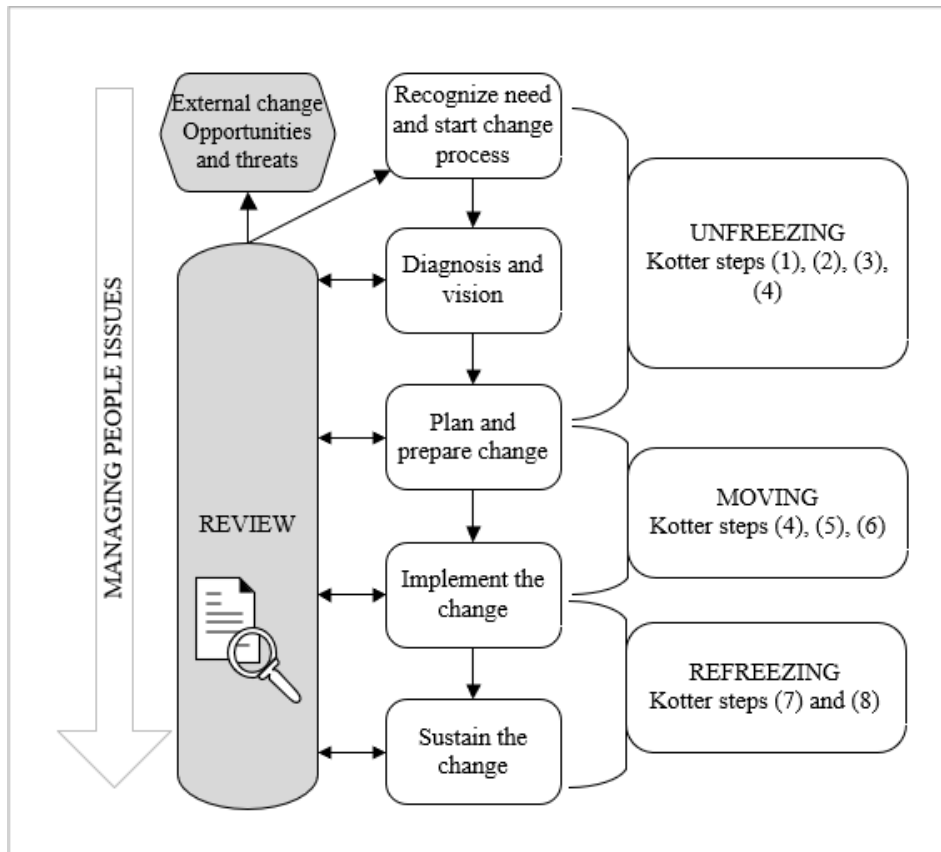


Figure 1. Steps in the change process

Source: Author's framework based on the operationalization of Lewin's and Kotter's change models by Rosenbaum et al. (2018) and generic process model of change by Hayes 2010 (55)

For a better understanding and for illustrative purposes, change process models and respective steps are categorized into prior-, during-, and post-implementation. The role of first-line manager prior to change (unfreezing), during the change (moving) and after the change implementation (refreezing) will be investigated to determine challenges and whether the role of first-line manager is different in every phase.

1.3. First-line manager as a change recipient

During any given change, people can hold a wide range of roles that will strongly impact their perceptions of the change and their reactions to it. These can be a champion, end user, developer/builder, watchful observer, obstructionist, and such. At some point, people may now and then play more than one role. In other cases, the roles are unique. If not clearly identify both the players and their roles in a change situation, there is a risk in making decisions and taking actions based on generalizations that are not true for some of the key players (Lorenzi, Riley 2000). A

leader's effectiveness is dependent upon a specific need of a given task, process or policy; hence it is situational. It also applies for organizational change as some of changes might be small or incremental, however these changes cannot be compared to a large-scale change. Large-scale changes involve a major organizational restructuring of leadership roles and are associated with mergers and acquisitions. The complexity and scale of the change initiative will determine the approach to be used for the change (Page, Schoder 2019).

Studies have shown that managers' experiences can influence change outcomes and their action. If a manager has experienced organizational change as a change recipient, there is a higher probability to acquire the ability and confidence to carry out a change. The extent to which the change is implemented can be influenced by previous early experiences of change by managers as change recipients (Ozawa 2019).

1.4. The role of first-line manager prior to change implementation

Kurt Lewin's three-step plan for structured change originated more than 60 years ago but is still relevant for many organizations today due to its simplicity and applicability. Lewin's three-step approach is divided into following phases: unfreezing, change and refreezing. The first step "unfreezing" is the preparation phase where all levels of organization need to be educated about a reason and a need behind the change. At that step motivation and engagement play an important role. The second step "change/moving" is described as a process of making a change begin. "Refreezing" – the third step in Lewin's model intends to prevent an organization from reverting back to the prior step (Page, Schoder 2019). The findings in the Rosenbaum et al. (2018) paper suggest that Lewin's three-step model symbolizes a framework for planned change, nevertheless these steps cannot be examined in isolation of other correlated processes. Even though Lewin's model might be criticized as simplistic or linear, it is still "a robust approach to understanding the complexity of human behavior and how it can be changed" (Burnes 2020).

Another one of the most well-known approaches for change management and organizational transformation is a Kotter's eight stage model for creating a major change (Pollack, Pollack 2015). Kotter's model includes a sequence of stages to address a change and transform an organization – establishing a sense of urgency; creating the guiding coalition; developing a vision and a strategy; communicating the change vision; empowering broad-based action; generating short-term wins;

consolidating gains and producing more change; anchoring new approaches in the culture (Kotter 2012, 23). This master thesis will present a short review of each component of the Kotter's and Lewin's models in the attempt to highlight the value of each from the perspective of the first-line manager's role.

According to the Kotter's model, change starts with creating a sense of urgency as people are less likely to change if they do not see the need to do so. After a strong sense of urgency is created leaders must communicate this "broadly and dramatically" (Appelbaum *et al.* 2012). Urgency is a combination of thinking, feeling and demonstrated behavior ingrained in a positive corporate renewal (Das 2019). Kotter claims that it is essential that the need for change will be understood, otherwise change agents might not have enough power and credibility to initiate required change (Appelbaum *et al.* 2012) and stakeholders might strengthen the status quo resulting in a resistance towards the change initiative (Self 2007). Reasoning behind the change must provide laudable, reliable data reflecting needed change and must go beyond rational arguments (Thornton *et al.* 2019).

Change readiness and motivation to change are not less important. Motivating others to accept the need for change and support it, is a great challenge. According to the Kotter's model, in addition to creating a sense of urgency, change effort can be supported by creating a guiding coalition – the second stage in his model. A guiding coalition formed by a change agent might involve employees who are more confident and motivated to engage in the change process. That sort of involvement can serve as early examples of successes and by that can inspire others to get involved (Hayes 2010, 75). According to Kotter, leading and managing the change effort requires a coalition, "a group with enough power to lead the change" (Kotter 2012, 23), a cross-functional network of leaders who can drive the change (Page, Schoder 2019). Members of the guiding coalition can be characterized by their authority and position, expertise, credibility and leadership (Kotter 1996, 53). Each of these characteristics, and relationship between these, have been supported in different change management literature. In addition, there have been various case studies illustrating the importance of guiding coalition in the change process where progress would not have been made without a guiding coalition. In contrast, some scholars doubt the importance of Kotter's guiding coalition and conclude that Kotter does not acknowledge the need for creating multiple guiding coalitions on different occasions to deal with various change processes (Appelbaum *et al.* 2012). Still, change initiatives continuously supported by leaders are more likely to succeed and get support from employees (Self *et al.* 2007; Appelbaum *et al.* 2012).

Above mentioned steps from Kotter's model are also reflected in Lewin's model first step - unfreezing stage (Das 2019). According to Lewin's model, all levels of the organization need to be prepared and educated about the reasons behind upcoming change (Page, Schoder 2019). Lewin claims that before new behavior and approach can be successfully adopted, the old behavior and process should be neglected (By 2005). Lewin highlights the importance and also relevance of the stated objective to be clear. He underlines that situational context within which the change objective is being framed is similarly important (Rosenbaum *et al.* 2018). It is essential to understand the underlying reasoning and urgency of change especially for those responsible for strategy execution and also those affected by the resulting changes. This comprehension is necessary to ensure that a desire and readiness for change will be supported by employees and stakeholders. It requires not only inspirational communication from the leaders but also a culture conducive to change. Leadership team should continuously motivate people to embrace a change to make it happen and by that change people's behaviors from resistant to supportive instead (Franken *et al.* 2009). Being a first-line manager, it is essential to ensure that the change vision meets essential psychological needs of their employees, provides clarity around the change effort and creates confidence in them, inspires, motivates and triggers intellectual stimulation (ten Have *et al.* 2017,78).

There is a wide acknowledgement that a strong, well-defined vision is a great contributor to the success of change initiative. According to Kotter's model, developing a vision and strategy is the third step. To formulate a "clear and sensible vision" is the first task for the guiding coalition (Kotter 1996, 70). At the supervisory leader level vision and inspiration entail translating organizational-level issues into a team level change vision that will reflect and address day-to-day problems and issues when implementing and managing change efforts (Oreg *et al.* 2014, 166). A vision must be clearly defined and easy for employees to understand and act on. An inappropriate vision can create confusion. At the same time there is research literature that questions the importance of vision itself arguing that the implementation of vision has greater impact on the success of change initiative (Appelbaum *et al.* 2012). Still, not only employees directly influenced by the change should understand the change initiative. In their research Washington and Hacker (2005) conclude that managers who understand the change effort are less likely to be resistant toward the change and just the opposite are more likely to be excited about that. That is due to the relationship between the perception of the upcoming organizational change and the response to it along cognitive, emotional and intentional dimensions (Szabla 2007). Hence, leaders and

managers, including first-line managers, must act as communicators, must lead by example and communicate the urgency of change, reasoning behind the change and its vision to convince others to follow, and contribute to creating a conducive to change culture. Being an initiator of the change effort, the first line manager should consider the above-mentioned steps in order to get support of the employees. Being change recipient or agent, the first line manager should get inspired and engaged toward the upcoming change in order to be able to translate change vision into a team level vision that will appeal to the interest of employees.

Findings of existing change management literature, theories and research emphasize the importance of communication during the organizational change. They also indicate the relationship between success of organizational effort and communication. Change experts describe communication as a crucial part of planning, implementation and management of change (Pundziene *et al.* 2007) as a systematic and reliable communication not only generates a sense of control and increases employee job satisfaction but can also reduce uncertainty (Bordia *et al.* 2004). In their study, Nelissen, van Selm (2007) provided empirical evidence of the value of management communication on those influenced by organizational change process. The role of management communication is strongly correlated to employee responses and satisfaction with the change initiative (*Ibid*). That is also supported in the fourth phase of the change effort in Kotter's theory. He claims that it is needed to constantly communicate the new vision and strategy in every possible mean, while the guiding coalition should serve as a role model of the new behavior expected of employees (Kotter 2012, 23). Company employees and other stakeholders observe those responsible for change effort and watch for the indications of their involvement, that is why it is important to communicate the vision by example (Hayes 2010, 170). Change agents should persistently and effectively communicate the change vision to raise the awareness and create a buy-in of the vision (Das 2019). Quality of communication at the lower managers level is crucial as it serves to deliver satisfied customers and empowered employees. Communicating at this level, lower level leaders must carry out day to day duties, give instructions and work for the best interest of their subordinates. One of the key factors to sustain the lasting change at this level is a trust, established between lower level leaders and employees, and quality communication plays an important role in launching and maintaining this trust (Pundziene *et al.* 2007). Trust can be supported through established weekly team meetings, where there is a possibility to discuss the changes and potential implications with the manager. Thus, this style of management contributes to the employees being open and facilitates trust (Frahm, Brown 2007). It is important that those who are leading a change effort ensure that expectation of managers and employees align with

understanding of the change objective, and styles of communications are accompanying the change goal (*Ibid.*). That is crucial as responses to organizational change to some extent are influenced by management communication regarding objectives and consequences of the change effort (Nelissen, van Selm 2007). Thus, communication should provide necessary information and knowledge to reduce the uncertainty related to change. However, it should be acknowledged that in some cases communication can be a reason for additional stress or can amplify the unfavourable effect of organizational change.

1.5. The role of first-line manager during the change implementation

As concluded above, simply the successful communication of the vision might not be enough by itself. The fifth step of Kotter's model (2012, 23) involves empowering broad-based action. Empowering employees to the change vision include addressing four major obstacles: structures, skills, systems and supervisors (Kotter 1996, 102). The study of privatized enterprises in Jordan showed that there is a significant impact of employee empowerment factors including talent management, leadership style, employee training and rewards on the success of organizational change (Al-Asoufi, Akhorshaideh 2017). Another study of Klidas *et al.* (2007) found that supervisor attitudes, empowering management style and training play a role in employee empowerment and are significantly correlated with empowered behavior. Balogun and Jinkins (2003) propose that change management can be conceived as a process of knowledge generation, where organization needs to advance new tacit knowledge and interactions internally and externally. New tacit knowledge and new ways of operating can be created via interactive dialogues in the environment of enabling context which encourages employees to take initiative and learn within new change vision. The concept of enabling context can be an alternative perspective on the role and responsibilities of those leading change initiatives (*Ibid.*). Tacit knowledge relates to the process of sharing the experience and expertise, it refers to the knowledge sharing that is hard to express symbolically or in writing (Wang *et al.* 2016). Knowledge sharing and tacit knowledge are also reflected in Lewin's three step model. In the Lewin's three step model, knowledge sharing is codified and personalized and finds a place in the second phase of the change. He claims that the codification of knowledge is explicated knowledge that can be easily transferred and used by relevant users, while personalization is tacit knowledge which is not easily transferable (Hussain *et al.* 2018). Organizational culture and a supportive environment play a great role in deploying tacit knowledge through continual social interactions like teaching, training,

brainstorming and face-to-face communication. Such efforts facilitate knowledge sharing and transfer within the organization (Memon *et al.* 2020). Organizational culture is one of the most challenging dimensions of change management and has been defined as “the pattern of basic assumptions that a group has invented, or discovered in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein 1992 referenced in Belias, Koustelios 2014). It involves three level: basic assumptions, values and beliefs, cultural artifacts (Schein 1992 referenced in Austin, Ciaassen 2008). As it has been advanced by researchers, organizational culture plays a great role in how employees react and respond to the change on an emotional level and it can be concluded that change and emotions are socially established whereas organizational change has the power to alter the culture and influence people’s emotions. Those responsible for change should acknowledge the role that organizational culture plays in facilitating organizational and the emotions that need to be handled sensitively (Smollan, Sayers 2009), and should realize the role they play and its impact on the organizational culture. That is important as change in the organization can change the organizational culture making it more supportive of organizational outcomes (Austin, Ciaassen 2008) or controversially strengthening the resistance. Is it essential for the managers to understand what is the current culture of the organization and the connection between employees’ cognition related to readiness for change, the different scenarios of how employees might react and essence of current organizational practices (*Ibid.*).

At the second phase of Lewin’s model the organization is ready to proceed with the change. Though this step is not a single event, rather a reinvigoration that occurs over a period. At this stage, transformation includes many aspects of human behavior like knowledge, beliefs, emotions and connections. The change/moving step offers the most challenges because people need to adapt to the new way of operating as the old and comfortable way has ended. At this step it is critical to ensure that leaders serve as a role model, provide supportive and consistent two-way communication, make suggestions and offer recommendations (Page, Schoder 2019). The role of the leaders during the change process is to demonstrate following behavior patterns: education, communication, participation, involvement, task and emotional support, promotion, manipulation, cooperation and coercion to the change (Hussain *et al.* 2018). People need a sense and point of direction. Hence, the role of first-line manager during the implementation phase goes beyond being an effective communicator. Those leading the change and managers serving as change agents need

to make sure that their messages are understood and implemented in the minds of their employees. They need to stimulate development of new tacit knowledge by creating enabling context.

To proceed further, once seeing the change happening, but not specifying important and visible short-term wins, employees may give up and turn their attitude into being resistant. Some change initiatives require a multi-year effort and keeping change leader motivated might be challenging, so employees involved in change initiative should be recognized and small victories celebrated (Mento *et al.* 2002). From the Kotter's point of view, step six is necessary to generate short-term wins, plan visible improvements, reward and recognize people who have been working to achieve and make wins possible (Kotter 2012, 23). Short-term wins create self-confidence, the hope that significant achievements are possible, builds up a psychological momentum towards the long-scale objectives (Pietersen 2002). Step six helps to test change vision against real conditions and make necessary adjustments (Kotter 1996, 122-124). Hence, during the transformation phase, being a change leader, the first-line manager should get enough support to stay motivated, and at the same time also acknowledge early wins of subordinates. During the change process there is a danger to lose the initial sense of urgency as possibly the attention drifts to processing operational matters. One way of minimizing that risk is to search for short-term wins that can be celebrated along the way (Hayes 2010, 170). Throughout the change phase, those leading the change should set performance expectations and reward behaviors demonstrated to fulfil the change vision. Nevertheless, it is critical that the leaders serve as models of the behaviors needed to legitimize the change and set the standard for the rest of the organization (Eisenbach *et al.* 1999 referenced in Appelbaum *et al.* 2012).

Therefore, in case if the first-line manager is leading and executing the change effort, it is recommended to serve as a role model of the new behavior; create opportunities to acknowledge early change adopters and victories; seek for and eventually provide the feedback to remove the obstacles or make necessary changes, and ensure that those not following the change will be actively involved.

1.6. The role of first-line manager after the change implementation

Categorization of communalities across Kotter's and Lewin's model aids in focusing attributes of these two models with the aim to assist change agents in fitting and modification with the aim of

dealing with situational factors apparent within organizations. Kotter's seventh and eight steps support Lewin's third imperative "refreezing" as suggested that the reaching of a different level is not a sufficient objective of planned change. The objective should include reaching the permanency of the new level (Rosenbaum *et al.* 2018) and preventing the company from reverting back to the previous stage (Page, Schoder 2019). Consolidating gains and producing more change is the seventh stage in Kotter's model. The main focus on this stage of the transformation should be on the promotion and development of employees who can implement the change vision; transform and change old systems, structures and policies that do not fit the new change vision; relaunch the change process with new projects and change agents (Kotter 2012, 23). Even though Kotter advocates celebrating early wins, he warns of a threat to kill momentum if the victory is declared too early (Hayes 2010, 170). By accelerating the change initiative leaders not only counter possible resistance towards a change and drive to consolidating gains, but also produce even more change and transcendence (Seijts, Gandz 2017). As the change effort can regress, it is critical for leaders for to use short-term improvements to tackle other issues, such as systems or structures that are not aligned with the newly implemented changes (Appelbaum *et al.* 2017) and use credibility afforded by early wins to proceed with the change (Hayes 2010, 442). It is recommended to expend effort on a retrospective look at every step of the change process to reflect on what works and what does not work. Such efforts contribute to the continuous refinement of the developing process (Mento *et al.* 2002). As it might be more difficult than anticipated to implement a change, the role of the manager is to respond by reviewing the situation and identifying factors that have constrained the roll out in the first place. Those leading a change should be alert to the possibility that even being implemented as intended, change effort might not be generating the effect that was anticipated (Hayes 2010, 428).

Unless new behaviors are anchored in social norms and shared values, they will be a subject to degradation once the stress associated with a change initiative is gone. To anchor newly implemented changes, there is a need to show people "how specific behaviors and attitudes have helped to improve performance" and ensure that "the next generation of management really does personify the new approach" (Kotter 2012, 15). That is the final step of the Kotter' model where he argues that leaders should use every opportunity to demonstrate benefits granted by the change intervention, help others to see how the changes have created new approaches, behaviors and attitudes leading to improved performance (Hayes 2010, 170). For the organization to be successful and remain competitive, it must not only be capable to execute intended change and strategy, but also continuously reassess and learn how to enhance that capability by reviewing

organization's current effectiveness as well as developing and implementing necessary improvements (Franken *et al.* 2009). First-line manager should support an organizational culture that provides a base for new ways of operating.

1.7. Organizational obstacles that prohibit change

A clear and full understanding of the change management concept does not guarantee achieving more coherent and effective organizational change. Being a primal element of human nature, change might evoke negative feelings like loss, uncertainty and unpredictability, fear of unknown, loss of stability and security, identity and relationship (Jones, Recardo 2013, 46-49). In their paper Rosenbaum *et al.* (2018) have identified 13 commonly organizational change models since Lewin's three-step model and highlighted linkages to them. They identified a range of matters that characterizes the causes of change failures, like structure and content of change management, the role of senior managers, tension between organizational focus vs people focus, ignorance of the role of culture, change readiness amongst change agents, little focus on the employee engagement in the planning and execution phases and poor planning process (*Ibid.*).

High quality of communication has a great impact and helps to shape people's reactions to change. However, communicating a change is one of the challenges. Understanding of what stands behind the change and what type of change that organization is undergoing is essential for planning communication as different types of change require different approaches to communication (Harrison 2020, 117). Larkin and Larkin (2006) claim that traditional communication channels via e-mails, intranet, town hall meetings create maximum employee resistance and contribute to the failure of change implementation. Informal, face-to-face communication on the other hand will deliver more employee support. Late communication missing possible outcomes of the change are also considered to be reasons for ineffective communication. Delay in communication when managers are waiting for a certain plan for the change before they can begin communicating, can lead to rumours and resentment in the company (*Ibid.*). While some change management literature offers uncomplicated perception of communication, McClellan (2011) proposes to challenge the traditional understanding of communication as a tool to promote and implement change, and offers a constitutive approach to communication as local and political process and practice that creates and maintains pre-established understanding of organizational reality. He claims that challenges around communication of change come when articulation of different meanings fails and when it

suppresses the conflicts necessary to provide opportunity for new meanings of organizational reality to evolve. He argues that to overcome challenges related to communication around organizational change, those promoting a change, instead of simply managing and controlling information, should rather encourage conversations about uncertainty and conflict of meaning. Change requires a conversation that can challenge assumed understandings and enable productive conflicts to remodel organizational life (*Ibid.*). Challenges around communication are related not only to the lack of communication skills of the manager him/herself, but also to communication methods used in the company, the clarity and meaning around change vision, understanding and predictability in terms of outcomes.

Employee resistance to change can be expected and strengthens the need for leaders to have a clear vision, apply effective communication methods and create a supportive and safe environment. (Page, Schoder 2019). If the sponsor of change is not clarifying change direction and does not support in removing organizational obstacles, the trust and confidence will quickly erode. There is a risk in case of poor understanding of the change road map, roles and dependencies, that change might end up being ineffective. Those implementing the change, who are in the context of a given master thesis are first-line managers, may be diligently and efficiently performing their tasks but still not advancing the change collectively. When being asked about the big picture of the change effort, change agents operating in that type of paradigm might not be able to explain it and will refer to doing their jobs and satisfying the needs of the management above (Jones, Recardo 2013, 46-49). Thus, if the first-line manager does not see a big picture and trust the change sponsor, the challenge of advancing and embracing the change on the team level might arise resulting in ineffective change effort and additional time spent clarifying reasoning behind the failure. In this case first-line manager might experience challenges not only being in the role of change agent but also as change recipient.

To proceed, organizations might be limited in time and resources that they can allocate to execute change effort. However, it is still important to consider the timing, sequencing and pacing of events, as if a change is delayed it may not deliver benefits and change which is happening in a rush may not allow time to adapt (Buchanan *et al.* 2005). Change is also affected by internal factors and such dimensions as receptiveness to change based on previous experiences, past events and also anticipated future (*Ibid*), where the change manager might rely on past successes which promote a sense of self-belief and arrogance (Hayes 2010, 160). This might result in the leader moving ahead with a change initiative without giving adequate attention to the needs and matters

raised by others. First-line manager might be limited in time to allocate needed resources for the effective change preparation and implementation and might be limited in time to reflect on the current situation to adjust, if needed.

The role of employees in the change process needs to be addressed and should not be overlooked. Typically, whilst employees appreciate support and help from their supervisors, the company being not careful, can create a victim mentality among its employees while helping them through the change. To wit, there is a danger that employees may perceive themselves as passive victims of the change who need to be cared for by the change agents or their supervisors (Rothermel, LaMarsh 2012). That might result in employees being constantly dissatisfied with any change effort, and expectations that organization will take care of difficult changes by themselves. Indeed, in practice change agents and supervisors might find them drained of resources addressing a multitude of other operational issues. This challenge can be addressed by recognizing that everyone is concerned by a change, and defining a clear role employee should play in the change process (*Ibid.*) Employees directly affected by the change initiative should be considered and treated as partners in the change management process. Excessive support to the employees might result in first line-manager being a support function for every small-scale change. Thus, the amount of input and influence the employee has around the change can impact employees' response to change.

Another challenge for the first-line manager is knowledge sharing practices as part of an organizational culture they are operating in. Such impediments like workplace politics, criticism of new ideas, destructive internal competition and risk avoidance may limit employee interaction and sharing process (Amabile *et al.* 1996 referenced in Memon *et al.* 2020). Such an organizational climate raises doubts and concerns in employees' minds, stopping them from actively participating in knowledge creation, exchange of ideas and feelings. Consequently, they are less likely to take on decision-making responsibilities and share information that could be important for the change initiative (*Ibid.*). In this context, organizational climate is defined as meanings that employees attach to the interrelated experiences at work. The level of trust and how open employees can relate to the manager, organizational relationships and culture can also turn into challenges for a manager if not dealt with properly.

One more challenge first-line managers face is coping with the change fatigue caused by continuous change processes that can be exhausting for employees and managers. Some studies suggest that frequent changes may have negative consequences, resulting in long-term sick leaves,

that is why it is recommended to consider and assess possible negative consequences for their employees before initiating another change initiative (Bernstrøm, Kjekshus 2015). In addition to the challenge of change-fatigue present for a group of employees, the study shows that first-line manager can face individual resistance from a subordinate who does not adapt to a routine. In some cases, despite all the efforts to effectively deal with change resistance, some managers still face change recipient not willing and able to change because they are so locked into their own point of view (Ronningstad 2018). In contrast, some findings show that negative attitudes towards a change can be more attributed to the situation than to the negative people. Even though personality does affect personal attitude toward a change, its impact may become irrelevant in the specific context (Devos *et al.* 2008, Wanous *et al.* 2000 referenced in Choi 2011) and attitudes are not personality based, rather “shaped by experiences in the work context” (Johnson , O’Leary-Kelly 2003, referenced in Choi 2011). In this regard, manager might face another challenge – degree and the context of change experienced previously.

The role of first-line manager may assume various obligations and responsibilities, including coping with challenges in managing the change. It is expected that they will effectively communicate about the change vision and meaning to frontline employees; demonstrate support and embrace the change; allocate time and resource; participate in the training of employees; collaborate with stakeholders to implement the change; contribute to the organizational development and building positive working culture; and identify and manage resistance in the scope of their responsibility. Each of these dimensions may become a great challenge for the first-line manager when dealing with organizational change.

1.8 Short summary of the theoretical framework

In this chapter the author gave a theoretical literature review on the change management and the role of first-line managers in it according to the latest studies and change management literature. Managing a change is a complex process and approach to address it should be dynamic and evolving. Those responsible for change initiative shall recognize that there is no unique strategy that can be applied to all situations. Approach to manage a change needs to be contextualized (Hayes 2010, 54-55). The author of the given master thesis addresses the objective of the research based on the approach suggested by Rosenbaum *et al.* (2018). It is combined with the generic model adopted from Hayes (2010, 47, 169) where Kotter’s eight steps and Lewin’s three-step

model can be easily integrated to present a conceptual framework for thinking about change management.

The role of first-line manager prior to the change implementation involves unfreezing step from Lewin's model and three first steps of Kotter's model with the main aspects as follows:

- first-line managers, must act as communicators, must lead by example and communicate urgency of change, reasoning behind the change and its vision to convince others to follow, and contribute to creating a conducive to change culture and environment
- communication should align with employees' values and provide necessary information and knowledge to reduce the uncertainty related to change.

The role of first-line manager during the change involves moving step from Lewin's model and fourth-sixth steps of Kotter's model with the main aspects as follows:

- first-line managers need to make sure that their messages are understood and implemented in the minds of their employees
- they need to stimulate development of new tacit knowledge by creating enabling context
- serve as a role model of the new behavior
- create opportunities to acknowledge early change adopters and victories
- seek for and eventually provide the feedback to remove the obstacles or make necessary changes
- ensure that those not following the change will be actively involved.

The role of first-line manager after the change involves refreezing step from Lewin's model and seventh-eighth steps of Kotter's model with main aspects as follows:

- promote benefits granted by the change implementation
- demonstrate and acknowledge how new approaches, behaviors and attitudes contribute to improved performance
- continuously reassess current organizational capability and effectiveness to develop and implement necessary improvements
- support organizational culture that provides base for the new ways of operating.

Theoretical framework also covered possible challenges that might arise during the change implementation and needs to be simultaneously reviewed and addressed:

- lack of communication skills and insufficient communication methods used in the company
- lack of clarity and meaning around change vision deteriorating the understanding and predictability of possible change outcomes
- narrow view and lack of trust, the challenge of advancing and embracing the change on the team level might arise resulting in ineffective change effort and additional time spent clarifying reasoning behind the failure
- change agent and change recipient role conflict
- limited in time to allocate needed resources for the effective change preparation and implementation
- limited in time to reflect on the current situation to adjust, if needed
- continuous change processes that is exhausting for employees and managers
- resistance on the individual and team level and negative attitudes towards a change.

Theoretical framework presented in this research presents the change as a continuous learning process rather than an end state and involves elements as recognizing the need for change and starting the change process by translating a need for change into a desire; reviewing the current state and creating a new vision that offers sufficient incentive; preparing and planning for change implementation; implementing and reviewing the change; sustaining the change; managing the people issues (Hayes 2010, 54-55). However, not a single change management approach is suitable for all companies and every organization evaluates a situation based on its own judgmental criteria and own perspectives.

2. RESEARCH

2.1. Background of the research in AS Linde Gas

The master thesis will focus on the role of first-line manager in AS Linde Gas business service center (BSC) established in Tallinn, Estonia. During the past three years the case company has executed several organizational changes by centralizing more of its functions to Estonia with the aim to develop Linde's gas business in Northern Europe. Today, the regional BSC incorporates approximately 200 tasks for different front and back office functions including customer service, order-to-cash processes, IS and Procurement service desk, material data handling, reporting, eCommerce etc. After the latest organizational change, it was decided to form a working group (with both internal and external consultants) to run organizational diagnosis with in-depth analysis of customer service function within the company. Within the framework of the project it was conducted 60 interviews with employees and their team leaders. The justification of this case study arises from the collected feedback and observation during the diagnosis phase indicating several challenges related to the change management process and the role of the team leader during the organizational change. The head of BSC recognized a need to conduct deeper research to address the problem and identify improvement areas for the change management process in the company. As frequency of organizational changes and its severity become the norm, improving the understanding of success factors and their underlying relationships becomes increasingly important (Vakola, Petrou 2018).

2.2. Research design and methodology

The current research is single case-study applying qualitative method and conducted with an inductive approach with the aim to explore the role of first-line manager and main challenges faced from a change management viewpoint and reported through representative data sample. The qualitative case study is a research approach that allows to explore a phenomenon within a context based on different data, ensuring that the issue is not explored through one lens (Baxter, Jack 2010). Qualitative research contributes to find the sequences of meanings and examine the wider context

in which the phenomenon arises (Silverman 2014, 18) and is based on the data and meanings which is expressed through words (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 482). The case-study seems to be an appropriate strategy to address the main questions of the master thesis as it “involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (*Ibid.*, 145-149). In addition, a single case study is suitable in case if a researcher has an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon in the organization where one works (*Ibid.*, 146), what is also relevant for the author of the given master thesis. Inductive approach should stimulate the linkage between the social context and perceptions of research participants and the theory that emerges (*Ibid.*, 503). Inductive approach used in this research aimed to build up connections between master thesis objectives and research findings. Research process was cyclical moving between research questions, data gathering and analysis with the focus on the themes and interpretation of rich data (Liu 2016).

In the given master thesis qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews as it is seen as the best method to address specific topics related to the research objective and is used to gather data for the qualitative research. The semi-structured interview leaves a space for the researcher to offer new meaning to the research focus and understand the phenomenon through a real-life experience giving the opportunity to challenge responses with clarification, meaning making and critical reflection (Galletta 2013, 24). Semi-structured interview allows the researcher to have a list of themes and questions to be covered, but at the same time allows to omit and vary these from interview to interview depending on the flow of the conversation. Semi-structured interview is necessary to understand the reasoning behind the meaning and opinions of interview participants and give an opportunity to explore the answers where additional explanation is needed (Saunders *et al.* 2009, 321-323).

Qualitative research was made by interviewing seven team leaders of the customer service teams and two managers mainly responsible for process, development and project execution in the customer service functions. Such approach contributed to the data collection not only from the customer service team leaders' point of view, but also from the ones who are often acting as change owners. Prior to the interview team leaders received an e-mail with a general explanation of the research topic, purpose, method, benefits and degree of their involvement and preparation. Interview invitations also included general information around interview purpose. The interviews were conducted during one-to-one sessions with the length from 35 minutes to 1 hour. Three interviews were conducted in person in the office facilities of the company. Due to the declared state of emergency six other interviews were conducted online via Skype application. To comply

with the research ethics, interviews started with an explanation of the purpose of the research and then proceeded with gathering an evidence that the participation is voluntary, and interview may be recorded and transcribed ensuring anonymity.

The nature and the structure of semi-structured interviews were developed aiming to be consistent with research questions and objectives. Interview questions were divided into four main categories, with the list of themes and alternative questions to be covered (Appendix 5). Transcribed interviews are accessible through a link (Appendix 6). The main categories were divided as follows:

- evidence regarding managers awareness of what the change management is, their involvement and motivation to support change
- the role first-line manager plays in change management and their perception of it
- main challenges, reasoning behind and strategies to cope with these, in the context of change management
- expectation and recommendation for the next change management initiatives

During the interviews, main questions as well as follow up questions were asked to allow the participants to talk about their experience and understanding. The order of questions varied depending on the flow of the conversation. Questions used during the interviews were mostly open-ended, to understand the ‘what’, the ‘how’, the “why” and to infer causal relationships between dimensions (Saunders, 2015). Participants were welcomed to talk about all aspects related to the change management and their experiences. After the interview team leaders were welcomed to provide feedback regarding the interview structure and clarity to give the author a possibility to refine questions or structure of the interview if needed. After preliminary analysis of the data collected during two first interviews, the author has changed some questions. Time frame for the data collection was three weeks – first interview conducted on the 11th of March and the last interview on the 27th of March.

2.3. Sampling and data analysis

Qualitative research does not include random sampling in the sense that it is used for statistical research. Sample method should reflect the research question (Galletta 2013, 33) so the motivation behind the sample size and criteria for the selection of the participants were aiming to achieve

research aim. Based on the research topic the target group of the study were first-line managers, therefore participants have been selected based on their position in the company, experience and previous involvement in the change management initiatives. To ensure that research would cover different perspectives and experiences, seven team leaders of the customer service and two managers responsible for process, development and project execution in the customer service functions (both change agents and owners) were invited to participate in the research. Their managerial experience had a wide diversity from four months to eight years. The size of their respective teams varied from 4 employees to 18. All team leads have been in the company at least two years. To ensure an anonymity and to comply with ethical principles more detailed overview and characteristics of participants will not be presented and departments and projects names are coded.

As the preparation for the qualitative data analysis recorded interviews were manually transcribed using data sampling approach, transcribing those sections of the audio-material that are relevant to the study, having listened to that material several times beforehand (Saunders et al. 2009, 590). Further, the primary data analysis was performed in the form of reading the transcription, finding primary relationships between elements and reflecting to create a primary holistic understanding and recognize the author's own possible assumptions. As the time frame of the interview was three weeks, then the author had a possibility to undertake initial analysis, explore additional literature and previous study before carrying out further interviews. The next phase followed was structuring of data based on the inductive analysis consisted of following steps: preliminary reading of transcriptions; detecting specific data segments related to the research objectives; labelling these segments to generate categories based on the key themes, patterns and relationships between these; reducing overlapping categories; and creating a model including most relevant categories (Liu 2016). Summary of key categories developed from the data is presented in the form of tables (Appendix 2-4) and discussed in chapters below. Qualitative analysis was chosen as it enables the author to explore emerging themes and investigate how they last under different conditions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. First-line managers' awareness of the change management practices, their involvement and motivation to support change

When being asked about the change management and its meaning, several team leaders showed their awareness, however some team leaders could not provide any explanation of the change management term. Nevertheless, all first-line managers demonstrated their awareness of the importance of their attitude toward a change initiative and wanted to be perceived as team leaders with a positive attitude. Those more deeply familiar with the change management principles showed a greater understanding of various dimensions and perspectives of change management.

Employees involvement as a situational variable has a positive impact on the success of organizational change, can serve as early examples of successes and by that can inspire others to get involved (Choi 2011; Hayes 2010, 75). To gather the evidence of team leader's involvement at early stages of the change initiatives and if it correlates with their perceptions of change, they were asked to describe the extent to which they are typically involved in the change and reflect on the reasoning behind the change. When it comes to the involvement of the first-line manager into the change initiative planning, then it can be concluded that there is a practice to involve them already at the latest stage of the planning phase or at implementation phase. Some of the examples: *"it's just a matter of fact when the manager is involved and then the ground or basic work has already been done and it's a little too late"* (P1) or *"I see several changes upcoming where they have already finished planning, now we need to take in these changes as they are"* (P9). Three team leaders shared their positive experience of being involved into the change initiative on the early stage which had from their opinion a positive impact on their motivation to support change and contributed to their understanding of the change: *"my reaction was from the beginning very positive because I felt that I was included in the discussion. [...] I was treated like a stakeholder [...] I was involved in the planning mode, which I really appreciated because then you can anticipate all the kind of steps that can go wrong and you can make your suggestions and you can prepare the people also and talk about business incentives"* (P4). The interviews showed that team leaders would prefer to be involved in at a much earlier stage with the aim to support the change effort, make valuable insights to contribute to the success of the change. Moreover, it can support the organizational development as team leaders are more likely to share the best practices than failures. However, such practice is rather an exclusion.

To understand the team leader's motivation to support the change they were asked to share the most important dimensions required to effectively manage a change. The findings show that clear vision, guidelines, details and reasoning behind a change are highly valued by the team leaders. Some of them emphasize the challenge to embrace a change if some information is missing: *"it's awful to explain it to someone if you don't know yourself"* (P9) or *"we need to communicate some things that we ourselves still don't know much about"*(P2). Being caught between "two worlds", they are in a role of advocate of change in front of their employees. One of the team leaders used an expression *"I'm between two fires"* (P2) which indicates a tough position and challenge that comes along with a first-line manager position. The urgency and reasoning for change must be understood on all levels of organization. Hence, in case of top-down change, team leader's role would be to champion the change, as it is claimed by Kotter, otherwise change agents (in this context first-line managers) might not have enough of power and credibility to initiate required change (Appelbaum *et al.* 2012) and stakeholders (subordinates) might strengthen the status quo resulting in a resistance towards change initiative (Self 2007).

3.2. First-line managers' role and perceptions of the change management

Key finding based on the interviews of the team leaders and managers is that the role of first-line manager in the change management initiatives in the case company is not unified, not clearly and commonly defined and varies. However, their change management roles with the main tasks and responsibilities are presented under the discussion chapter in the table below (Table1). In some cases, the team leader is taking actions based on the experiences from the previous initiatives applying gut feeling and own perceptions of their responsibilities. First-line managers have described their role in following way: *"a little bit all over, very much initiator, a driver, [...] communicator [...] ((thinking)) a change agent"* (P1) or *"very strong support role"* (P3) , *"mitigator"* (P4). However, it seems to be a misalignment or lack of ownership when it comes to the responsibilities. In some cases, it was stated that the scope of team leaders' role and responsibilities is not clear enough. As it was emphasized in one of the interviews: *"Key persons need to [...] get some more training or responsibility to deliver the change, because project leaders cannot get the change related information to every individual"* (P7) or in another interview: *"we get more into some sort of information-manager role, controlling that everyone follows it, rather than to be change agents"* (P1). In contrast, team leaders also acknowledge that it is their

responsibility to implement and follow up on a change: *“Whenever there is something to be implemented, then I understand that I have a responsibility to see that it is implemented and followed up”* (P4) or *“I’m following up, if it’s a change then I want to make sure that everybody has taken it seriously and acting accordingly”* (P2). These findings suggest that it will be beneficial to clarify team leader’s identity in the context of change management integrating sense-making.

Table 1. First-line managers change management roles

Role	Tasks/Responsibilities
Communicator	Communicate change to subordinates Provide necessary information about change (timeframe, reasoning, expected comes, responsibilities) Translate and mitigate higher-level decision to specific action points Prepare answers for potential concerns or questions
Liaison	First contact point for change owners and project teams Make room for concerns Provide feedback and escalate potential issues
Advocate and role model	Demonstrate support behavior and positive attitude toward a change Champion reasoning behind the change Promote benefits granted by the change implementation
Trainer and coach	Train and coach employees throughout the change process Stimulate development of new tacit knowledge
Supporter and motivator	Motivate employees providing emotional, mental, practical and technical support Ensure that those not following the change will be actively involved. Support organizational culture that provides a base for the new ways of operating.

Source: Author’s compilation

The most common pattern is the role of communicator. All team leaders have emphasized the importance of clear communication, the way it is structured and how it is passed on: *“I think to have the structured communication plan regarding a change is also a key to manage a change, but of course the manager has a huge role in it”* (P1), *“if we have some changes then I need to explain to team”* (P9) or making a change meaningful for their employees and facilitating the reasoning behind the change: *“translating higher decisions [...] to very specific action points or learnings”* (P4). Interpretation and narration are important aspects of their role being also essential for change management practices.

Another pattern is support and motivator role. Many team leaders have concluded that they provide a lot of support to their employees during a change. As they believe that is a part of their responsibilities and is expected by their subordinates, for example: “*As the title suggests – team leader is there for the team [...] they need someone they can turn to*” (P3) or “*very important for you as a team leader to be as much as supportive as possible*” (P2). Team leaders also motivate their employees: “*I tried to serve it as an extra opportunity to do something interesting or to learn something new*” (P8) or “*...to inspire and motivate people because I feel that this is my responsibility to go, to keep people motivated*” (P2) and mitigate a change with personal approach. These findings suggest that team leaders support and guide their employees through the change by that supporting the change effort indirectly.

Advocate of change and role model is another role that team leaders have identified for themselves. They emphasize that they need to demonstrate their support in an observable way, sharing a positive attitude, whilst firstly team leaders themselves need to get on board with the change initiative: “*if you don't really understand why you have to do something, then it's really hard to be motivated to do it.*” (P8) or “*...you need to be very clear about set output for everyone - what will come out of this (change) and how we will come to this point? Quite clearly you need to understand yourself before you go out.*” (P7). Through explaining what is the rationale behind the change and how it will affect employees, team leaders gain employees’ support and commitment: “*if everybody understands it correctly [...] then I think there will be no resistance at all [...]it will go very smoothly and then we can take these changes on.*” One of the prerequisites of gaining support is also authority and trust: “*if a person is not an authority figure then it doesn't really matter what is her or his approach.*” (P4). It highlights the importance of maintaining relationships with the team to gain their support and commitment. Also, it shows that the ability to facilitate the change depends on the communication and organizational culture.

As a change typically requires individuals to obtain new skills, competences or change in behavior, the first-line manager needs to ensure that subordinates will get proper training and coaching making these trainings more personalised. By these means first-line managers support organizational learning and reduce the degree of resistance as being prepared employees feel more comfortable to cope with upcoming change. As it was said by one of the participants: “*if trainings are meant for large groups or generic population in the company, then the result is - nobody does anything because they didn't really understand what is their role in it. [...] some information or bits of information are not applicable as it is without clarification*” (P4). Most of the team leaders

support their employees with training, either providing these themselves or by organizing more detailed training upon a need adopting these to the employees' level of knowledge.

Continuous process improvement is considered to be an important driver for organizational success and development and is one of the targets to the team leaders. Seeking for small-scale changes with the aim to optimize operational processes team leaders perceive themselves as initiators and drivers of change pointing the way forward. Being a part of large-scale changes, their contribution is in providing feedback to change owners or project team to ensure best practice solution. As pointed out by participants: *“collecting from the team that feedback and then escalating to the person who really needs to make changes [...] I think this is part of our work. They need to bring up things and make it work. So, one way or the other.”* (P5) or *“it's my job to make sure I think about the change from the point of view of my team”* (P8). Being in a role of liaison, team leaders act on behalf of their employees to make necessary change in the process to make the implementation smoother, less stressful for the team and beneficial for the company and its customers.

3.3. Organizational obstacles that prohibit the change

Based on the central concepts from the field of organisational change, it can be concluded that communication is one of the key elements of a successful organizational change. Based on the interviews it can be stated that communication is one of the key challenges that prohibit the successful change implementation in the given case company. Being a change recipient, team leaders shared the challenge to get clear guidelines when it comes to time frames of communication about the change to the rest of the organization, and also the structure of change communication. Referring to large-scale changes, it might be unclarity: *“I think we are now communicating and performing the change in so many ways that we don't have a receiver of the information”* (P1) or *“...you might get a message that is not yet time to communicate it (change), but others have already communicated it”*(P7). It might create confusion among employees, lead to incorrect interpretation of information, and cause faulty assumptions and rumors. If such a situation is to be repeated often, team leaders might face a challenge of selling the change idea to their subordinates every time when a change effort is presented. Nevertheless, hearing some other information from outside, employees might lose trust towards their leaders and even consider the information not being transparent. Another important aspect of communication is its clarity, transparency, and

structure. Team leaders have shared such a challenge as role ambiguity being caught between two worlds, especially when they are missing clear guidelines and outcome or expectations regarding the change are not clear, e.g. *“you don't really understand it yourself, and you feel lost, then implementing this change is really a nightmare”* (P4) or *“transparency question is always in the air”* (P2) or *“it is just like I'm between two fires”* (P2). Employees want to hear how upcoming change will affect their work, however that information is not always present: *“...would be also good to have some pre information - what can be the consequences when we implement? This is missing.”* (P5).

Another challenge brought up is the unstructured way of implementing or executing a change. Due to the organizational metric, intervention can be initiated by external stakeholders who are coming in with a change having their own agenda and way of approaching the change. Whilst at that moment there might happen another or even several projects where project owners are not aligned with each other. Due to lack of common approach and not clearly established prioritizations of the change initiatives, there is a risk to miss deadlines or, in contrast, overburden change recipients with information. As it was pointed out by several participants: *“performing one change one week and another change in the same area another week”* (P1) or *“sometimes miss support to team leaders to set correct prioritizations as we have many change initiatives going on”* (P7) or *“on the bottom of the pyramid you don't have the mandate to say what to prioritize or not”* (P1). For the change initiatives to succeed there is a need for reasonable vision and support from senior management that will be also expressed in setting adequate prioritizations. In case of large-scale changes initiated from top-down, team leaders do not have authority to postpone these changes and at the same time small-scale changes are also important for the organizational development. Change initiatives continuously supported by leaders are more likely to succeed and get support from employees (Self *et al.* 2007; Appelbaum *et al.* 2012).

There have been various studies on the change resistance topic and that is why possible reasons for potential resistance have been questioned during the interviews. Resistance is also something that first-line managers experience, both being a change recipient and also change implementer. Being a change recipient, they feel a challenge and a conflict to embrace a change when they do not see the reasoning behind a change being fair enough, transparent, relevant or perceived possible to implement. As mentioned by one of the participants when being asked about the issues that has the most negative impact on the success of the change: *“When the decision itself is maybe not really reflecting the reality, in the sense that may be nearly impossible to implement the way it*

is, or at least it is perceived that way, and this perception has not been anyhow dealt with” (P4). That sort of resistance can emerge due to the lack of team leader’s participation in the decision-making process, which has also been mentioned by team leaders. This suggests that team leaders are not necessarily against the change per se, but rather resist the imposition of initiatives they perceive to be impractical or not likely to result in positive outcomes (Buick et al. 2018). It is worthwhile to note that participants’ judgement might also depend on their perspectives of common sense. The misalignment between those perspectives and planned change create a conflict between stakeholder’s beliefs resulting in scepticism and problematic buy-in (Moon 2009). Participants argued that thoroughly planned change with open intentions, clear guidelines and possibility to make adjustments in the change initiative are integral to their ability to adequately prepare for the change and ensure the buy-in amongst their employees: “if you don't know what you are supposed to do and why, how can you sell this then?” (P4) or “team leaders understand the necessity better when they really have had a good discussion about it” (P8).

The findings suggest that team leaders themselves lack support from the organization indicated by a lack of time dedicated to planning and implementation: “it’ usually such a rush when we do things” (P1), “the time resource issue is always an issue, to have that time”(P3), “I do feel more time is constantly needed . Sometimes it also feels like, okay, the change has actually already been implemented and we are late on the train” (P8); insufficient information and lack of transparency from the change owners: “you actually feel that there is something more, but nobody is telling you” (P2) or “They sent out letters and so on, but we didn't really get any guidelines.” (P8); lack the confidence to interpret the change: “it's awful to explain it to someone if you don't know yourself” (P9); poor follow up on the executed change: “for the most projects or changes I've seen, they come up, we do something and then they kind of die down” (P8). Lack of support from the organization reduces the ability of team leaders to facilitate employee understanding of the change, motivate employees and mitigate resistance, especially when the communication is not efficient enough. Main challenges have been clustered and presented in a table form for a better overview (Table 2).

Table 2. Main challenges faced by first-line managers

Challenge	P(1)	P(2)	P(3)	P(4)	P(5)	P(6)	P(7)	P(8)	P(9)
Communication	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Delay in communication		x					x	x	
Unclear explanations				x		x	x	x	
No communication strategy	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Too much information	x		x				x		
Lack of time for proper communication, execution, time pressure	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Dealing with emotions (resistance, negative experience, missing personal touch, mindset)		x	x	x		x	x	x	
Fall back into old habits	x		x			x			
Missing support from organization			x	x	x	x	x		
Unclear guidelines	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Unclear roles and responsibilities	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Unclear outcomes and impact	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Lack of empowerment		x		x	x		x		
Unclear prioritization	x		x			x			
Team leader involved too late	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Missing alignment with other stakeholders	x	x			x		x	x	
Lack of transparency		x					x	x	

Source: Author's compilation

As shown in the table 2 participants have indicated that they face challenges with communication being sometimes unclear, sometimes excessive, and sometimes even delayed. Unclear communication strategy leads to unalignment in the organization that has also been brought up as a challenge. Missing support from the organization in a form of unclear guidelines, roles, outcomes in expectations might lead to lack of empowerment and motivation to support the change. It might have an impact on the team leader's ability to facilitate the change and deal with employees' emotions.

3.4 Expectations and recommendations for the change management strategy

Managing a change is a complex process and approach to address it can be very different. To understand what the most important key elements of the successful organizational change are and why, participants were asked to share their best experiences and expectations of the future change management initiatives. Key elements have been clustered and are presented in table (Table 3). Main elements will be analysed in more details below.

Table 3. Key elements of the successful organizational change

Key elements	P(1)	P(2)	P(3)	P(4)	P(5)	P(6)	P(7)	P(8)	P(9)
Adaptability			x		x			x	x
Adopt the information to the receiver making it easier to understand				x			x	x	
Buy-in of team leader	x	x	x	x					x
Demonstrate positive attitude	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Early involvement and respect	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Fairness and transparency		x		x			x		
Find change supporter			x			x	x		
Opportunity to provide feedback and make changes on the way		x	x	x	x				
Repeat the message	x	x	x				x	x	x
Structured change and communication plan	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Support to team leaders during and after change implementation			x			x	x	x	
Sustain and follow up the change	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Time to reflect	x	x		x				x	
Two-way open communication	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
Understand a reasoning, clear detailed plan, explained expected outcome of the change, its impact and benefits	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: Author's compilation

A clear detailed plan regarding the upcoming change which would cover a reasoning behind the change, a thorough explanation, expected outcome, possible impact and benefits has been identified as the most important factor and prerequisite of change. It is not yet established as a common practice but has been highlighted by all research participants. Not having that creates a confusion and unalignment on different levels of organization. There is a need for a structured way of approaching a change: *“I think that that should be more structured here. Like when we perform a change that we do it the same way over and over again, so people know (what to expect).”* (P1). Team leaders expect to have as much details as possible: *“you need to have all the answers for the employees before you ask them something to do or not to do anymore.”* (P5). It is important for the first-line manager to be able to provide relevant, transparent information regarding the change, otherwise it might create a distrust towards management.

As mentioned in previous chapters, employee involvement has a correlation with success of organizational change. Emphasized by several team leaders, they need to be involved in the change before the execution plan is ready as it contributes to the better outcome of the change initiative, elicited change readiness and contributes to their understanding of reasoning behind the change. Interestingly highlighted, this is not to argue about management decisions, but rather to contribute to the success and share insights that may be valuable, as front line employees may see potential shortcomings and challenges better as they operate with the customers and processes daily. For instance, *“If the change comes from the senior management, I think that it is important to gather some kind of input from the lower level employees as well. This is before the change and maybe after the change.”* (P2) or *“The opportunity to have a dialogue. Not just gathering people and announcing something, but this opportunity to be included also, to maybe make a contribution, plan this change”* (P4). Moreover, they see their role in representing employees, for example: *“if I'm included in the planning phase, it's my job to make sure I think about the change from the point of view of my team.”* (P8). Early involvement of the employees into the change process can contribute positively and has been discussed in the previous chapters.

Another important element is clear communication that has already been discussed in this research. However, it is important to point out that communication should be present not only prior to change, but throughout the whole process as a continuous process enabling organizational learning, knowledge sharing and contributing to an alignment between different stakeholders and teams. As one of the participants stressed out: *“I think more collaboration and communication*

between the team leads to improve the support to the customers and daily stress or task - if it can be more effective, maybe have workshops or meetings together to support each other.” (P5).

Furthermore, team leaders outline the importance of a positive attitude. Being positive themselves, team leaders believe they affect employees’ attitude towards the change: *“If you are positive, [...] you are in a very good mood and can explain changes, why do we change, then I think they take this change much easier”*(P9) or as said by another participant: *“I think as a team lead, you should really be careful how you communicate things to the team. Also, sometimes you need to communicate matters in a positive way.”* (P3). However, a positive attitude towards a change itself should not be seen in an isolation of other critical elements. Worth to mention, that team leaders should also observe the employee responses to change and pay attention to how they change overtime, as pointed out by one of the participants: *“I would say this emotional intelligence is a crucial part of change because you need to, first of all you need to kind of control and direct your own emotions, you need to anticipate the emotions of your team and also maybe guide them to positive emotions”* (P4). This can help team leaders to determine whether team members support the change on both cognitive and emotional level.

It is apparent that a first-line manager plays a great role in the success of organizational change and along with the other employees needs support from the organization to effectively manage a change. There are various obstacles that prohibit a change, but also various methods to tackle them that have been analyzed and discussed in this research. Based on the above mentioned, recommendations for the change management process are following:

- to involve the first-line managers at the early stages to gather different perspectives and prevent possible shortages in the upcoming change
- to provide a clear detailed plan prior to the every upcoming change, which would cover a reasoning behind the change, a thorough explanation, expected outcome, possible impact and benefits to enable first-line managers to communicate all necessary information to the employees and plan their activities in an efficient way
- to present an overall strategy that is reflecting segments for which employees can be held accountable or responsible for ensuring that impacted by the change employees receive needed awareness, leadership, coaching, and training

- to establish and ensure a follow up of the executed change initiatives with a feedback session/questionnaire with the aim to assess continuous improvement and encounter previous mistakes
- to provide a training to the first-line managers to educate them about the change management, their role in the change process, essential success factors to improve organizational learning and share best practices
- to establish a clear role and responsibilities for the first-line managers during the change management process to avoid misalignment, lack of ownership and ineffective change implementation.

3.5 Concluding discussion

The analysis has been performed based on the qualitative research and the results from the interviews have been presented in the previous sub-sections. The recommendations for the change management process have been presented. The following section discusses the results of this research referring back to the theoretical framework. Five first-line managers' change management roles emerged from the analysis: communicator, liaison, advocate and role model, trainer/coach and supporter/motivator. In the case company organizational changes and initiatives are mainly introduced by senior and therefore change sponsorship did not get a lot of attention and was not identified as one of the main first-line managers' roles. Abovementioned roles and the main challenges throughout the change process will be concluded and compared to the change management theory below.

Referring back to the theoretical framework (appendix 1), the change process starts with an awareness of the need for change where the analysis and diagnosis of the current state needs to take place. At this stage one of the leader's role is to communicate the urgency of change broadly and dramatically and set possible courses of action. As discussed in previous chapters, communication is one of the key enablers for successful organizational change, and also a great challenge for the team leaders of the case company. All participants of the research have indicated challenges with getting right communication regarding a change initiative. In some cases, communication is delayed, in some cases it is efficient enough to provide all necessary information to the employees, however a clear communication strategy seems to be missing. Creating and

communicating the urgency of change might be a great challenge in case if change effort has already been started but team leaders are not yet informed about that.

To prepare an organization for a change a proper preparation needs to take place. According to the second step of the framework, a vision which derives from a diagnosis of a situation prior to a change should be created and communicated. To succeed in that a guiding coalition needs to be established. A guiding coalition formed by a change agent might involve employees who are more confident and motivated to engage in the change process. That sort of involvement can serve as early examples of successes and by that can inspire others to get involved (Hayes 2010, 75). Three participants of the research have also mentioned this point as one of the enablers of a success. According to Kotter, leading and managing the change effort requires a coalition, “a group with enough power to lead the change” (Kotter 2012, 23), a cross-functional network of leaders who can drive the change (Page, Schoder 2019). The qualitative data shows that first-line managers are willing to participate in the change management and see a great benefit in being involved at the early phases of the planning the change. They have brought up that such an early involvement contributes to a better understanding of reasoning behind a change, supports readiness for change and helps to prevent shortages in a process. However, that is not a common practice in the organization and late involvement has been outlined as a reason for issues at the later stages of the implementation. So far, first-line managers’ perceptions and natural willingness to be involved in the planning phase do not contradict to the change management literature.

Being involved at the early stages first-line managers can also contribute to a strong and well-defined vision. It is important that the team leader not only communicates the change effort to the employees, but also translates and mitigates a higher-level decision to specific action points. At the supervisory leader level vision and inspiration entail translating organizational-level issues into a team level change vision that will reflect and address day-to-day problems and issues when implementing and managing change efforts (Oreg *et al.* 2014, 166). As it is pointed out by most research participants, if they understand the change, then it is easy to act on it and the resistance is less likely to arise. That is due to the relationship between the perception of the upcoming organizational change and the response to it along cognitive, emotional and intentional dimensions (Szabla 2007). Several participants have indicated fairness and transparency of decision making as important elements of the change management. At this point a first-line manager is acting in the role of communicator, liaison and advocate of change.

At the phase of transformation, when an organization is ready to proceed with a change, the first-line manager should keep in mind many aspects of human behavior like knowledge, beliefs, emotions and connections. At this step it is critical to ensure that leaders serve as a role model, provide supportive and consistent two-way communication, make suggestions and offer recommendations (Page, Schoder 2019). At this phase, the role of team leaders also includes being a trainer and coach for the employees demonstrating following behavior patterns: education, communication, participation, involvement, task and emotional support, promotion, manipulation, cooperation and coercion to the change (Hussain *et al.* 2018). First-line managers believe that it is important to repeat the change message to their employees. In addition, team leaders need to make sure that their messages are understood and implemented in the minds of their employees. They need to stimulate development of new tacit knowledge by creating enabling context. According to the framework, it will be beneficial to reward behaviors demonstrated to fulfil the change vision. However, none of the research participants have mentioned such element in their change management practice. Moreover, change management can be conceived as a process of knowledge generation, where organization needs to advance new tacit knowledge and interactions internally and externally (Balogun, Jinkins (2003). Worth to mention that organizational culture and a supportive environment play a great role in deploying tacit knowledge (Memon *et al.* 2020), therefore it is essential that team leaders promote such social interactions like teaching, training, brainstorming and face-to-face communication. Such efforts facilitate knowledge sharing and transfer within the organization (*Ibid.*). Interestingly, only one team leader emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing with other teams, while others rather pointed out misalignment on the organizational level. Those responsible for change should acknowledge the role that organizational culture plays in facilitating organizational change and the emotions that need to be handled sensitively (Smollan, Sayers 2009), and should realize the role they play and its impact on the organizational culture. That is important as change management in the organization can change the organizational culture making it more supportive of organizational outcomes (Austin, Ciaassen 2008). At the same time first-line manager should be given an opportunity to plan possible improvements as the six step of Kotter's model suggest testing change vision against real conditions and make necessary adjustments (Kotter 1996, 122-124). That has likewise been suggested by team leaders of given company. Being in the role of trainer and coach, team leaders must ensure that provided training is sufficient providing with necessary explicit knowledge. Interestingly, research participants have emphasized that providing support throughout a change process is their main task and requires markable time and resources. Theoretical framework suggests though that while providing a support, it is important to set a clear role that employee is

expected to play in a change process. Excessive support to the employees might in contrast result in the team leader being a support function for every small-scale change. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate underlying reasoning and address this issue.

After the change has been implemented the change management suggests that it is essential to sustain the change to prevent organization and employees falling back to the old habits. Consolidating gains and producing more change is the seventh stage in Kotter's model (Kotter 2012, 23). As the stress associated with the change effort goes away, it is important to still provide support to those who are influenced by the change. The study shows that team leaders require support from the organization to sustain the change as in some cases they are left alone to deal with a change after the official project is over. Feedback and follow up on the change initiative is not a common practice in the case company and therefore is recommended to be included in the change management process.

Lastly, it should be acknowledged that the empirical data presented in this research is from an analysis and transcripts of interviews and includes judgements and perceptions that are prone to error. The sampling is based only on first-line managers and therefore challenges and shortages in the change management process of given company have been analysed based on the perceptions and judgments of the first-line managers only. Similar research should be replicated to include first-line employees directly influenced by change initiatives to enable comparison.

CONCLUSION

Business change has become a new constant process that exists in the organization. Despite the recognition of change management as a critical competency, some organizations still face the challenge to embrace and adopt the change. One actor essential for the success of organizational change is the first-line manager and the ability to implement appropriate and effective change is of critical importance to a company's success. However, the role of first-line manager in the context of change management has received little attention so far.

The present research focused on the role of first-line manager in AS Linde Gas business service center established in Tallinn, Estonia. The aim of this research was finding out the role of first-line manager in the context of change management and gaining first-line managers' perceptions of their role in the success of organizational change. Furthermore, it determined challenges in the change management process within the given company and proposed improvements for the change management process. The current research was a single case-study applying qualitative method and conducted with an inductive approach. To address the objective of the master thesis a theoretical conceptual framework was adopted from Hayes', Kotter's eight steps and Lewin's three-step models. The role of first-line manager prior to change, during the change and after the change implementation was investigated to determine challenges and whether the role of first-line manager was different in every phase. Qualitative research was made by interviewing seven team leaders of the customer service teams (who in the context of given research are first-line managers) and two managers mainly responsible for process, development and project execution in the customer service functions.

The research indicated that the role of first-line manager in the change management initiatives in the case company was not unified, not clearly and commonly defined and varies. These findings suggest that it will be beneficial to clarify team leader's identity in the context of change management integrating sense-making to ensure alignment and increase ownership. Five first-line managers' change management roles emerged from the analysis: communicator, liaison, advocate and role model, trainer/coach and supporter/motivator. Referring back to the framework presented in the theoretical research, each of the above-mentioned roles finds its place throughout the change process and offers challenges that have also been presented and discussed.

Managing a change is a complex process and approach to address it can be very different. The most important key elements of the successful organizational change from the first-line managers' perspective are: a clear detailed plan regarding the upcoming change, structured change and communication plan, early involvement and demonstrated positive attitude. The research participants have also shared their challenges when dealing with change management. The most common challenge based on the qualitative data is communication. It creates confusion among employees, leads to incorrect interpretation of information, and causes faulty assumptions. The findings suggest that team leaders themselves lack support from the organization indicated by a lack of time dedicated to planning and implementation; insufficient information and lack of transparency from the change owners; lack the confidence to interpret the change; poor follow up on the executed change. These challenges might have an impact on a team leader's ability to facilitate the change and deal with employees' emotions. The challenges shared by the research participants indicate shortages in the change management process of given company and can be addressed by applying presented in the research framework which covers the role of the first-line managers during different stages of organizational change. Based on the research results general recommendations have been given to address challenges and shortages in the change process. The aim of the research was achieved, and research questions were answered.

By recognising team leaders' experiences, perceptions and challenges while dealing with organizational changes, this research has presented an opportunity for improvement in the change management execution to mitigate its effect on the organization and its employees. Based on the presented framework and analysis of qualitative data it can be concluded that an approach to the change management should recognize that the key to the success lies in understanding that the change is implemented by people who need clearly established roles, structured way of dealing with change, a working environment and culture that are conducive to change, and supportive organization that encourages innovation, acknowledges challenges and removes obstacles, and finally, recognizes success in achieving the change.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Al-Asoufi, B.B., Akhorshaideh, A.H.O. (2017). The Impact of Employee Empowerment on the Success of Organizational Change: A Study in Privatized Enterprises in Jordan. – *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, Vol. 7, No. 1.
- Anderson, M. (2013). *The Leadership book*. 2nd ed. US: Financial times publishing.
- Appelbaum, S.H., Habashy, S., Malo, J.L., Shafiq, H (2012). Back to the future: revisiting Kotter's 1996 change model. – *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 31, No. 8. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711211253231> , 20 March 2020
- Appelbaum, S., Cameron, A., Ensink, F., Hazarika, J., Attir, R., Ezzedine, R., Shekhar, V. (2017). Factors that impact the success of an organizational change: a case study analysis. – *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 49 No. 5, 213-230. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-02-2017-0006> , 09 April 2020.
- Austin, M.J., Ciaassen, J. (2008). Impact of Organizational Change on Organizational Culture. – *Journal of Evidence - Based Social Work*, Vol.5, No. 1-2, 321-359. Accessible: https://doi.org/10.1300/J394v05n01_12 , 01 Mai 2020.
- Balogun, J., Hope-Hailey, V. (2004). *Exploring Strategic Change*. 2nd ed. London: Prentice Hall.
- Balogun, J., Jenkins, M. (2003). Re-conceiving change management: A knowledge-bases perspective. – *European Management Journal* Vol. 21, No. 2, 247–257. Accessible: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0263237303000197> , 04 April 2020.
- Baxter, P.E., Jack, S.M. (2010). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. – *Qualitative Report*. Vol. 13, No. 4.
- Belias, D., Koustelios, A. (2014). The impact of leadership and change management strategy on organizational culture. – *European Scientific Journal*, Vol.10, No.7.
- Bernstrøm, V. H., Kjekshus, L. E. (2015). Effect of organisational change type and frequency on long-term sickness absence in hospitals. – *Journal of Nursing Management* Vol, 23, 813–822. Accessible: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jonm.12218> , 12 April 2020.
- Bligh, M., Kohles, J. C., Yan, Q. (2018). Leading and Learning to Change: The Role of Leadership Style and Mindset in Error Learning and Organizational Change. – *Journal of Change Management*. Vol. 18, No. 2, 116-141. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2018.1446693> , 04 April 2020.
- Bolden, R. (2004). What is Leadership? Research report. Leadership South West: University of Exeter. Accessible: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/29810622> , 06 April 2020.

- Bordia, P., Hunt, E., Paulsen, N., Tourish, D., DiFonzo N. (2004). Uncertainty during organizational change: Is it all about control? – *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 345-365.
- Buchanan, D., Fitzgerald, L., Ketley, D., Gollop, R., Jones, J.L., Saint Lamont, S. (2005). No going back: a review of the literature on sustaining organizational change. – *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 189-205.
- Buick, F., Blackman, D., Johnson, S. (2018). Enabling Middle Managers as Change Agents: Why Organisational Support Needs to Change. – *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 77, No. 2, 222–235. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12293> , 19 April 2020.
- Burnes, B. (2020). The origins of Lewin’s Three-step model of change. – *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. Vol. 56, 32-39. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886319892685> , 09 April 2020.
- By, R.T. (2005). Organizational Change Management: A critical Review. – *Journal of Change Management* Vol. 5, No. 4, 369-380.
- By, R.T. (2020). Organizational Change and Leadership: Out of the Quagmire. – *Journal of Change Management* Vol. 20, No. 1. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2020.1716459> , 10 April 2020.
- Cambridge dictionary (2020). Cambridge University Press. Accessible: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/first-line-manager> , 22 March 2020.
- Choi, M. (2011). Employees’ attitudes toward organizational change: A literature review. – *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 479-500.
- Das, V. (2019). Comparative study of Kotter’s and Hiatt’s (ADKAR) Change Models. – *Journal of Leadership and Management*, Vol. 15, 263-271.
- Devos, G. Buelens, M., Bouckenooghe, D. (2008). Contribution of Content, Context, and Process to Understanding Openness to Organizational Change: Two Experimental Simulation Studies. – *The Journal of social psychology*. Vol. 147.
- Frahm, J., Brown, K. (2007). First steps: linking change communication to change receptivity. – *Journal of Organizational Change*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 370-87.
- Franken, A., Edwards, C., Lambert, R. (2009). Executing Strategic Change: Understanding the Critical Management Elements that Lead to Success. – *California Management Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 49-73.
- Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the Semi-structured interview and beyond*. New York: New York University press.
- Hales, C. (2005). Rooted in supervision, branching into management: Continuity and change in the role of first-line manager. – *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 42, 471–506.

- Harrison, P. (2020). *Communication change*. (Eds.) Ruck. K. Routledge: New York
- Hayes, J. (2010). *The Theory and Practice of Change Management*. 3rd ed. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holten, A., Hancock, G., Bøllingtoft, A. (2019). Studying the importance of change leadership and change management in layoffs, mergers, and closures. – *Management Decision*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 393-409. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-03-2017-0278> , 11 April 2020.
- Hussain, S. T., Lei, S., Akram, T., Haider, M.J., Hussain, S.H. (2018). Kurt Lewin's change model: A critical review of the role of leadership and employee involvement in organizational change. – *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 123-127. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2016.07.002> , 29 March 2020.
- Jimmieson, N.L., Tucker, M.K. (2018). Change consultation during organizational restructuring. Buffering and exacerbating effects in the context of role stress. – *Organizational Change: Psychological effects and strategies for coping*. (Eds.) Vakola, M., Petrou, P., 27-46.
- Jones, D.J., Recardo, R.J. (2013). *Leading and implementing business change management. Making change stick in the contemporary organization*. London: Routledge
- Klidas, A., van den Beg, P.T., Wilderom, C.P.M. (2007). Managing employee empowerment in luxury hotels in Europe. – *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 70-88.
- Kotter, J.P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kotter, J.P. (2012). *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Kumah, E., Ankomah, S., Antwi, F. (2016). The Role of First-Line Managers in Healthcare Change Management: A Ghanaian Context. – *International Journal of Bio Sciences, Healthcare Technology and Management*. Vol 6, 20-33.
- Larkin, T.J., Larkin, S. (2006). *Communicating Big Change*. 3rd ed. Larkin Communication Consulting. Accessible: http://www.larkin.biz/data/Communicating_Big_Change-English.pdf , 12 April 2020.
- Lee, A., Legood, A., Hughes, D., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., Knight, C. (2019). Leadership, creativity and innovation: a meta-analytic review. – *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. Vol. 29, 1–35. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2019.1661837> , 04 April 2020.
- Liu, L. (2016). Using Generic Inductive Approach in Qualitative Educational Research: A Case Study Analysis. – *Journal of Education and Learning*. Vol. 5, No. 2.
- Lorenzi M.N., Riley R.T. (2000). Managing change: an overview. – *J Am Med Inform Assoc.*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 116-124.

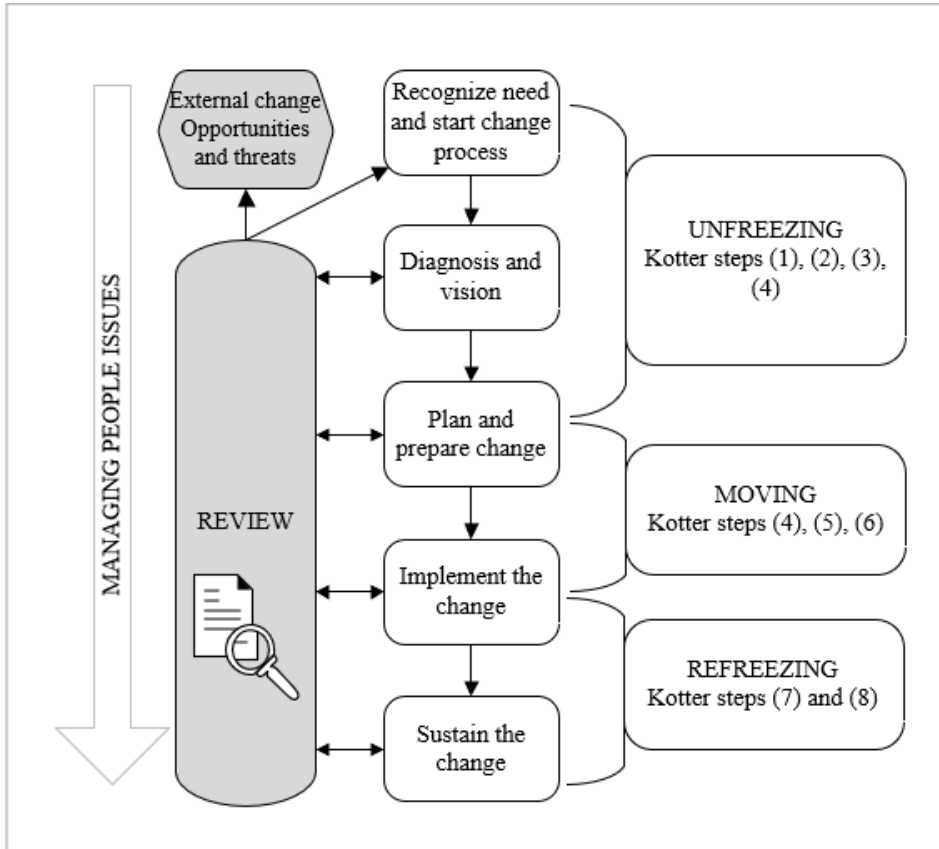
- McClellan, J. G. (2011). Reconsidering Communication and the Discursive Politics of Organizational Change. – *Journal of change management*. Vol. 11, No. 4, 465-480. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2011.630508> , 12 April 2020.
- Memon, S. B., Qureshi, J. A., Jokhio, I. A. (2020). The role of organizational culture in knowledge sharing and transfer in Pakistani banks: A qualitative study. – *Global Business & Organizational Excellence*. Vol. 39, No. 3, 45-54.
- Mento, A., Jones, R., Dirndorfer, W. (2002). A change management process: Grounded in both theory and practice. – *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 45-59.
- Moon, M.Y. (2009). Making sense of common sense for change management buy-in. – *Management Decision*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 518-532.
- Moran, J. W., Brightman, B. K. (2001). Leading organizational change. – *Career Development International*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 111–118.
- Moutosi, O. (2018). How Change-related Unethical Leadership Triggers Follower Resistance to Change: A Theoretical Account and Conceptual Model. – *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 141-161.
- Nelissen, P., van Selm, M. (2008). Surviving organizational change: how management communication helps balance mixed feelings. – *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 306-318.
Accessible: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/13563280810893670/full/pdf?title=surviving-organizational-change-how-management-communication-helps-balance-mixed-feelings> , 25 March 2020.
- Neves, P. (2018). With the Bad Comes What Change? The Interplay Between Destructive Leadership and Organizational Change. – *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 91-95.
- O'Donovan, G. (2018). *Making Organizational Change Stick. How to Create a Culture of Partnership between Project and Change Management*. London: Routledge.
- Oreg, S., Michel, A., By, T.R. (2014). *The Psychology of Organizational Change: Viewing Change from the Employee's Perspective*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Ozawa, K. (2019). Managers' experiences as recipients: impact on organizational change, – *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 143-156. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-05-2018-0137> , 11 April 2020.
- Page, L., Schoder, J. (2019). Making change last: leadership is the key. – *Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 32-41. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-01-2018-0003> 19 April 2020
- Pietersen, W. (2002). The Mark Twain dilemma: the theory and practice of change leadership, – *The Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 23, No. 5, 32-7.

- Pollack, J., Pollack, R. (2015). Using Kotter's Eight Stage Process to Manage an Organisational Change Program: Presentation and Practice. – *Systemic Practice & Action Research*, Vol. 28, No.1, 51-66. Accessible: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11213-014-9317-0> , 19 April 2020.
- Pundziene, A., Alonderienė, R., Buožiūtė, S. (2007). Managers' Change Communication Competence Links with the Success of the Organisational Change. – *Engineering Economics*. Vol 54, No. 4.
- Radaelli, G., Sitton-Kent, L. (2016). Middle Managers and the Translation of New Ideas in Organizations: A Review of Micro-practices and Contingencies. – *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 18, 311-332.
- Raffaelli, R.L. (2017). *Organizational Behavior Reading: Leading organizational change*. Boston: Harvard Business school.
- Rafferty, A. E., Jimmieson, N.L., Restubog, S.L. (2009). When leadership meets organizational change: The influence of the top management team and supervisory leaders on change appraisals, change attitudes, and adjustment to change. (Eds.) S., Oreg, A., Michel, R., By. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 145-172.
- Ronningstad, C. (2018). Us and Them – First-line Management and Change Resistance. – *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v8i2.106152> , 07.05.2020
- Rosenbaum, D., More, E., Steane, P. (2018). Planned organisational change management: Forward to the past? An exploratory literature review. – *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 286-303. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-06-2015-0089> , 09 April 2020.
- Rothermel, R., LaMarsh, J. (2012). Managing change through employee empowerment. – *Global Business & Organizational Excellence*, Vol. 31. No. 2, 17-23. Accessible: 10.1002/joe.21411, 29 March 2020.
- Saunders, M., Thornhill, A., Lewis, P. (2009). *Research Methods for Business Students*.5th ed. Edinburgh: Pearson.
- Saunders, M. N., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2015). *Research methods for business students*. 7th ed. Harlow: Pearson.
- Seijts, G.H., Gandz, J. (2017). Transformational change and leader character. – *Business Horizons*, Vol. 61, No. 2. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.11.005> , 06 April 2020.
- Self, D. (2007). Organizational change – overcoming resistance by creating readiness, – *Development and learning in organizations: An international journal*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 11-13. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1108/14777280710779427>, 26 March 2020.
- Self, D.R., Armenakis, A.A., Schraeder, M. (2007). Organizational change content, process, and context: a simultaneous analysis of employee reactions. – *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 211-29.

- Silverman, D. (2014). *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage publ.
- Smollan, R.K., Sayers, J.G. (2009). Organizational Culture, Change and Emotions: A Qualitative Study. – *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 435-457.
- Szabla, D. (2007). A multidimensional view of resistance to organizational change: exploring cognitive, emotional, and intentional responses to planned change across perceived change leadership strategies, – *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 525-58.
- Ten Have, S., ten Have, W., Huijsmans, A.B., Otto, M. (2017). *Reconsidering Change Management. Applying Evidence-Based Insights in Change Management Practice*. London: Routledge
- Thornton, B., Usinger, J., Sanchez, J. (2019). Leading effective building level change. – *Education*, Vol. 139, No. 3.
- Vakola, M., Petrou, P. (2018). *Organizational Change: Psychological effects and strategies for coping*. London: Routledge.
- Wang, Z., Sharma, P.N., Cao, J. (2016). From knowledge sharing to firm performance: a predictive model comparison. – *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 69, No. 10, 4650-4658. Accessible: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.03.055> , 01 Mai 2020.
- Washington, M. and Hacker, M. (2005). Why change fails: knowledge counts. – *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 5, 400-11.
- Warner Burke, W. (2017). *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Steps in change process



Source: author's framework based on the operationalization of Lewin's and Kotter's change models by Rosenbaum *et al.* (2018) and generic process model of change by Hayes 2010 (55)

Appendix 2. First-line managers change management roles

Role	Tasks/Responsibilities
Communicator	<p>Communicate change to subordinates</p> <p>Provide necessary information about change (timeframe, reasoning, expected comes, responsibilities)</p> <p>Translate and mitigate higher-level decision to specific action points</p> <p>Prepare answers for potential concerns or questions</p>
Liaison	<p>First contact point for change owners and project teams</p> <p>Make room for concerns</p> <p>Provide feedback and escalate potential issues</p>
Advocate and role model	<p>Demonstrate support behavior and positive attitude toward a change</p> <p>Champion reasoning behind the change</p> <p>Promote benefits granted by the change implementation</p>
Trainer and coach	<p>Train and coach employees throughout the change process</p> <p>Stimulate development of new tacit knowledge</p>
Supporter and motivator	<p>Motivate employees providing emotional, mental, practical and technical support</p> <p>Ensure that those not following the change will be actively involved.</p> <p>Support organizational culture that provides a base for the new ways of operating.</p>

Source: Author's compilation

Appendix 3. Main challenges faced by first-line managers

Challenge	P(1)	P(2)	P(3)	P(4)	P(5)	P(6)	P(7)	P(8)	P(9)
Communication	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Delay in communication		x					x	x	
Unclear explanations				x		x	x	x	
No communication strategy	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Too much information	x		x				x		
Lack of time for proper communication, execution, time pressure	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Dealing with emotions (resistance, negative experience, missing personal touch, mindset)		x	x	x		x	x	x	
Fall back into old habits	x		x			x			
Missing support from organization			x	x	x	x	x		
Unclear guidelines	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Unclear roles and responsibilities	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Unclear outcomes and impact	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Lack of empowerment		x		x	x		x		
Unclear prioritization	x		x			x			
Team leader involved too late	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Missing alignment with other stakeholders	x	x			x		x	x	
Lack of transparency		x					x	x	

Source: Author's compilation

Appendix 4. Key elements of the successful organizational change

Key elements	P(1)	P(2)	P(3)	P(4)	P(5)	P(6)	P(7)	P(8)	P(9)
Adaptability			X		X			X	X
Adopt the information to the receiver making it easier to understand				X			X	X	
Buy-in of team leader	X	X	X	X					X
Demonstrate positive attitude	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Early involvement and respect	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Fairness and transparency		X		X			X		
Find change supporter			X			X	X		
Opportunity to provide feedback and make changes on the way		X	X	X	X				
Repeat the message	X	X	X				X	X	X
Structured change and communication plan	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Support to team leaders during and after change implementation			X			X	X	X	
Sustain and follow up the change	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Time to reflect	X	X		X				X	
Two-way open communication	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Understand a reasoning, clear detailed plan, explained expected outcome of the change, its impact and benefits	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Author's compilation

Appendix 5. Interview questions for the semi-structured interview

Interview plan

The same introduction followed every interview to ensure that participant and interviewer are aligned on the aim of the research:

“Thank you for joining the interview and giving consent for the interview to be recorded and transcribed. The aim of this research is finding out the role of a first-line manager in the context of change management and gaining your perceptions of the role you play in the success of organizational change. Furthermore, I will attempt to propose improvements for the change management process based on the gathered inputs, literature and other research around that topic. All that is to see what else we can do to make change more effective and smoother.

I have several topics to be covered during the interview. First, we would talk about change management in general, how it is done in our company, what are the methods, communication, your involvement and what are your thoughts around the change management process here. Secondly, we would talk more deeply about your role and how do you perceive it. Furthermore, we would move to challenges you face in that role. Finally, we would cover the topic of your expectations. I have a set of questions to be answered, but I am expecting us to have an open dialog.

Do you have any questions/concerns so far?”

To gather general information: *What is your current position in the company and how many direct reports do you have? * this information will not be disclosed in the transcription to ensure anonymity*

To gather evidence regarding managers **awareness** of what the change management is, their **involvement** and **motivation** to support a change:

1. How would you describe the “change management” process or term?
2. To what extent are you usually involved in the change management initiatives? (planning/executing/following up)
3. How did this involvement assist you in your understanding of why the change is important?
4. Do you know what was expected from you during the change?

To explore **perception** of team leaders’ **role** in change management:

5. How would you describe your role in the change management? (*change recipient vs change agent, e.g. communicators, supporters, trainers, managers of resistance, observer*)
6. Does a team lead influence an employee’s attitude toward a change? Why & how?
7. How do you think, what contributes to a success of the change management process?
8. What are the specific actions/behaviours/skills a team leader needs to demonstrate to get people on board and effectively manage the change? What knowledge or skills does a first-line manager need to effectively manage a change?
9. What are the mechanisms/tactics/approaches *you* use?
10. There is a saying – “Managing a change is about managing people.” - please elaborate on that, do you agree/not, why?

To explore **challenges** faced managing a change:

11. Overcoming resistance to change is an important aspect of the change agent’s role - have you ever experienced resistance towards a change?

- A. If not, then> What is the reason behind that?
- B. If yes, then> Why did it appear? How was the resistance expressed?

- 12. How would you describe your role in coping with resistance towards a change?
- 13. Did you experience any *other* barriers or facilitators to the change process?
- 14. What issues do you believe have a negative impact on the ultimate success of a change process?

To gather evidence regarding **communication**:

- 15. In what form the vision and reasoning behind the change is usually/in regard to the latest change you were involved in communicated?
- 16. Was that effective? Why?
- 17. How do you usually communicate the change to your team?

Expectations for change management process:

- 18. What should be considered for the next change management projects? What should be kept as-is practice and what should be improved?

Appendix 6. Interview transcriptions

Transcribed interviews are available at the following link from 03.05.2020 – 05.06.2020.
Furthermore, upon request.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11wAJsvmh2oGowt9tB5ax9u3YDuG6SJwG?usp=sharing>

Appendix 7. Non-exclusive licence

A non-exclusive licence for reproduction and for granting public access to the graduation thesis¹

I Arina Tikka,

1. Give Tallinn University of Technology a permission (non-exclusive licence) to use free of charge my creation

THE ROLE OF FIRST-LINE MANAGER IN THE SUCCESS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE. A CASE STUDY OF AS LINDE GAS

supervised by Merle Ojasoo,

1.1. to reproduce with the purpose of keeping and publishing electronically, including for the purpose of supplementing the digital collection of TalTech library until the copyright expires;

1.2. to make available to the public through the web environment of Tallinn University of Technology, including through the digital collection of TalTech library until the copyright expires.

2. I am aware that the author will also retain the rights provided in Section 1.

3. I confirm that by granting the non-exclusive licence no infringement is committed to the third persons' intellectual property rights or to the rights arising from the personal data protection act and other legislation.

¹ *The non-exclusive licence is not valid during the access restriction period with the exception of the right of the university to reproduce the graduation thesis only for the purposes of preservation.*