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An Ethnographic Study of Organizational Change in a Bank

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COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL
SOLBJERG PLADS 3
DK-2000 FREDERIKSBERG
DANMARK

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THE INFINITE STORM: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN A BANK

PhD Series 04.2020

Signe Bruskin

THE INFINITE STORM

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL
CHANGE IN A BANK**

Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies

PhD Series 04.2020

CBS  COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

The infinite storm

*An ethnographic study of organizational
change in a bank*

Signe Bruskin

Department of Organisation

Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies

Copenhagen Business School

Supervisors:

Professor, Morten Thanning Vendelø, Copenhagen Business School

Professor, Jesper Strandgaard, Copenhagen Business School

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Table of content

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
ABSTRACT	7
DANSK RESUMÉ	10
PREFACE	13
1. INTRODUCTION: A WORLD OF CHANGE.....	15
CHANGE & STABILITY.....	17
RESEARCH CONTEXT.....	19
THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION	20
2. LITERATURE: THE NEW STORY OF CHANGING.....	24
THE DICHOTOMY OF PLANNED – EMERGENT CHANGE	25
THE DICHOTOMY OF MAJOR – MINOR CHANGES	27
COMBINING THE TWO DICHOTOMIES	30
THE EXCEPTIONS.....	32
DISCUSSION	34
<i>Studies of minor organizational changes.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Studies of the uncategorizable changes</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>38</i>
3. METHODOLOGY: IN PURSUIT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE	39
ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT	41
PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE	44
METHODOLOGY	46
DATA COLLECTION	51
<i>Ethnographic fieldwork</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Interviews</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Corporate material.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Moral and ethical considerations.....</i>	<i>73</i>
ANALYTICAL STRATEGIES.....	74
CLOSING REMARKS	78
4. INSIDER OR OUTSIDER?	80
THE INSIDER–OUTSIDER DEBATE	82
FLUID IDENTITIES	84
METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS	86
BECOMING AN INSIDER	88
BECOMING AN OUTSIDER	91
SHIFTING ROLES.....	93
DISCUSSION: CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ETHNOGRAPHER	96
CONCLUSION	98
5. A DRIFTING PHENOMENON.....	100

A BECOMING VIEW	102
METHODS.....	105
<i>Ethnographic data collection</i>	107
<i>Data analysis</i>	111
ANALYSIS: ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES DRIFTING AWAY IN SPACE AND TIME	112
DISCUSSION	123
<i>Studying an ever-changing phenomenon</i>	124
<i>The fate of organizational change failure</i>	125
CONCLUDING REMARKS	127
6. WINDOWS TO ‘WHAT REALLY MATTERS’	129
SENSEMAKING OF CHANGE.....	132
<i>Exceptional effect</i>	134
<i>Specific circumstances</i>	135
<i>Certain people</i>	136
METHODS.....	138
<i>Ethnographic data collection</i>	139
<i>Data analysis</i>	142
UNPACKING THE SENSEMAKING PROCESSES OF MUNDANE CHANGES	144
<i>Nonexceptional changes</i>	145
<i>Non-episodic changes</i>	147
<i>Non-static change agents</i>	150
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION.....	152
7. ANTICIPATING DOOMSDAY	155
FUTURE-ORIENTED SENSEMAKING: AN EMERGING FIELD.....	156
METHODOLOGY	159
<i>Data analysis: Metaphors as an analytical strategy</i>	160
FINDINGS	162
<i>Trivializing past changes as everyday humdrums</i>	162
<i>Anticipating future change as Doomsday</i>	165
DISCUSSION	168
<i>Emotions in sensemaking</i>	169
<i>Anticipation in future-oriented sensemaking</i>	171
CONCLUSION.....	172
8. DISCUSSION.....	173
BEYOND DICHOTOMIES	176
AN EMPIRICAL INQUIRY	179
CONCLUSION.....	181
REFERENCES	183
APPENDICES.....	202
APPENDIX A: CO-AUTHOR DECLARATION	202
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDES	204
APPENDIX C: OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS.....	207

List of figures and tables

- **Figure 1:** The combination of the dichotomies planned – emergent and major – minor changes (p. 30).
- **Figure 2:** Data analysis (p. 144).

- **Table 1:** RQs and central dichotomies explored in chapters 4-7 (p. 23).
- **Table 2:** RQs, central dichotomies and methodological strategies applied in chapter 4-7 (p. 48).
- **Table 3:** Overview of data collection (p. 52).
- **Table 4:** Summary of empirical data (p. 107).
- **Table 5:** Empirical examples of organizational changes studied through in space (p. 113).
- **Table 6:** Empirical examples of organizational changes studied through in time (p. 118).
- **Table 7:** Assumptions of change (p. 134).
- **Table 8:** Summary of empirical data (p. 140).
- **Table 9:** RQs, central dichotomies and findings from chapters 4-7 (p. 176).

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Signe Bruskin

Frederiksberg, November 2019

Abstract

This dissertation is based on a longitudinal ethnographic study of organizational changes in a Nordic bank. Taking as a point of departure, an empirical observation of lower-level organizational members consistently identifying other organizational changes as radical than those indicated by top management, this study pursues how organizational members construct organizational changes through an *emic* approach.

The field of organizational change has historically been characterized by a number of dominant dichotomies, such as ‘planned – emergent change’, however, this study explores and challenges the existing dichotomies. With an aim of going beyond the existing dichotomies of the field, the study draws on process philosophy. Grounded in the assumption that phenomena are always in a state of *becoming*, this dissertation contributes to the field with a study of organizational changes which are not *a priori* determined organizational changes such as mergers, acquisitions, or reorganizations. Instead, organizational changes are viewed as fluid phenomena that are part of everyday work activities, constructed by the organizational members themselves.

Reflected in how I was myself employed as a researcher in the organization under study, the data collected is at once a mix of ethnographic fieldwork, including shadowing and observations, interviews, as well as corporate materials. A chapter is dedicated to the discussion of methodological strategies, data collection and considerations of studying organizational change as an ever-changing phenomenon grounded in a process ontology and another purely dedicated to the methodological reflections on being an insider – or outsider.

One of the dichotomies explored in this dissertation is organizational change failure – success. A chapter explores organizational changes as they are followed both through the organization and in time and is inspired by the anthropological strategy of ‘studying through’. Thus, this study reveals how organizational change failure has suffered the same fate as organizational changes more broadly, due to its drifting nature.

Another dichotomy under discussion is that of radical – mundane changes, grounded in the theoretical differences between classic Weickian and post-Weickian sensemaking. Mundane changes are an under-researched area of sensemaking, however, this study unpacks potential links between radical and mundane changes while exploring three anchor points grounded in the theoretical differences.

Historically, sensemaking is argued to be retrospective, but in this dissertation, the dichotomy of retrospective – prospective sensemaking is explored by unfolding organizational members’ sensemaking of organizational changes in both the past and future. By unpacking change metaphors used by the organizational members themselves, a potential link between retrospective and future-oriented sensemaking is found in organizational members’ emotions. Further, the metaphors reveal that the anticipated future might be *undesired*.

The dissertation proceeds with a discussion of its two main contributions. The first contribution builds on the main argument is that in order to study organizational changes and capture them in their complete vividness, it is essential to move between the poles of a dichotomy rather than relying on only one. The discussion of dichotomies concludes by calling for more empirical studies exploring, challenging and creatively applying dichotomies from the field of organizational change.

The second contribution takes its point of departure in a call for more empirical studies grounded in process philosophy, as to-date, the field is too overpopulated with conceptual views based on philosophical ideas. Thus, this dissertation is the culmination of a longitudinal ethnographic study, where organizational changes were studied from within, grounded in the researcher's own role as a corporate ethnographer. It therefore contributes with an empirical study, illustrating the strengths and challenges of taking an *emic* approach while studying organizational changes *in situ*, across an organization, and over a two-year period.

The dissertation concludes with a summary of the key findings, as well as a pointed answer to the main research question posed at the beginning of the dissertation. It is argued that, in order to study organizational members' own construction of organizational changes, attention must be paid to the organizational members' everyday work activities and organizational routines. By so doing, it then becomes possible to study how organizational changes are constructed in a particular organizational context, by a particular organizational member, at a particular point in time.

Dansk resumé

Denne ph.d.-afhandling er baseret på et longitudinelt etnografisk studie af organisationsforandringer i en nordisk bank. Studiet udspringer af en empirisk observation, hvor organisationsmedlemmer på lavere organisatoriske niveauer konstant identificerede andre organisationsforandringer som radikale, end dem topledelsen pegede på. Derfor søger dette studie at undersøge, hvordan organisationsmedlemmer konstruerer organisationsforandringer gennem en *emisk* tilgang.

Historisk set har feltet for organisationsforandringer været karakteriseret af en række dominerende dikotomier som 'planlagt – emergerende forandringer', men dette studie udforsker og udfordrer de eksisterende dikotomier. Med et mål om at gå skridtet videre end de eksisterende dikotomier indenfor feltet, trækker studiet på procesfilosofi. Baseret på antagelsen om at fænomener altid er i en tilstand af *tilblivelse* har denne afhandling et bidrag til feltet ved at studere organisationsforandringer, der ikke er *a priori* organisationsforandringer som fusioner, opkøb og reorganiseringer. I stedet er organisationsforandringer konstrueret af organisationsmedlemmerne som flydende fænomener, der er en del af en det daglige arbejde.

Som erhvervsforsker, ansat i den organisation hvor forskningen finder sted, er data indsamlet som et mix af etnografisk feltarbejde, inklusiv skygning og observationer, interviews og virksomhedsmateriale. Et kapitel er dedikeret til en diskussion om metodiske strategier, dataindsamling og -overvejelser relateret til at studere et foranderligt fænomen baseret på en proces-ontologi og et andet er dedikeret til de metodiske refleksioner relateret til at være insider – eller outsider.

Et af de udforskede dikotomier i afhandlingen er organisationsforandringer som fiasko – succes. Et kapitel undersøger organisationsforandringer, mens de er fulgt

gennem organisationen og i tid, inspireret af den antropologiske strategi 'studying through'. Hermed viser studiet, hvordan organisationsforandringer som fiaskoer har lidt den samme skæbne som organisationsforandringer mere generelt på grund af deres flygtige karakter.

Et andet dikotomi, der ligeledes bliver diskuteret, er radikale – hverdagsagtige forandringer baseret på teoretiske forskelle mellem klassisk Weick og post-Weick menings-skabelse. Hverdagsagtige forandringer er et underanalyseret område indenfor menings-skabelseslitteraturen, men dette studie peger på et potentiel link mellem radikale og hverdagsagtige forandringer ved at udforske tre nøgleområder baseret på de teoretiske forskelle.

Historisk set har menings-skabelse været anført som en retrospektiv proces, men i denne afhandling er dikotomiet retrospektiv – prospektiv menings-skabelse udforsket gennem et studie af organisationsmedlemmernes menings-skabelse af organisationsforandringer i fortiden og fremtiden. Ved at analysere de forandringsmetaforer, som organisationsmedlemmerne trækker på, peger studiet på, at en mulig sammenhæng skal findes i organisationsmedlemmerne følelser. Herudover viser metaforerne, at den forudsete fremtid kan være *uønsket*.

Afhandlingen fortsætter med en diskussion af de to hovedbidrag. Første bidrag bygger på det hovedargument at for at studere organisationsforandringer og indfange dem i deres komplette livagtighed er det essentielt at glide mellem polerne i dikotomiet fremfor at bero på kun en af dem. Diskussionen om dikotomier konkluderer med en opfordring til flere empiriske studier, der udforsker, udfordrer og kreativt trækker på dikotomier fra feltet for organisationsforandringer.

Det andet bidrag tager udgangspunkt i en opfordring til flere empiriske procesfilosofiske studier, da feltet i dag er overskygget af konceptuelle syn baseret

på filosofiske ideer. Således er denne afhandling en kulmination af et longitudinelt etnografisk studie, hvor organisationsforandringer er blevet studeret indefra med afsæt i forskerens egen rolle som erhvervsforsker. Derfor bidrager det med et empiriske studie, der illustrerer styrkerne og udfordringerne ved at tage en *emisk* tilgang til at studere organisationsforandringer *in situ*, på tværs af en organisation og over en toårig periode.

Ph.d.-afhandlingen konkluderer med en opsummering af hovedpointer fra analyserne og svarer derudover på hovedforskningsspørgsmålet fra indledningen. Argumentet er at for at studere organisationsmedlemmernes egne konstruktioner af organisationsforandringer, må opmærksomheden ledes hen mod organisationsmedlemmernes dagligdagsaktiviteter og organisatoriske rutiner. Derved bliver det muligt at studere, hvordan organisationsforandringer er konstrueret i den pågældende organisatoriske kontekst, af det pågældende organisationsmedlem, på det pågældende tidspunkt.

Preface

This dissertation is structured as a paper-based thesis and contains five peer-reviewed papers submitted to or published by different academic journals. All five papers are included in this dissertation with permission from the respective publishers. Some of the papers have been previously presented in their earlier versions, in different forums. Details of each paper are listed below. *Preface* is the only section of the dissertation, where these five are termed papers, in the rest of the dissertation they will be called chapters.

The paper ‘**The new story of changing: Exploring dichotomies in the field of organizational change**’ (chapter 2), is a theoretical paper that has been published in *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture, and Change Management: Annual Review* (2020, vol.19, no.1: pp.7-16). The paper is single-authored. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the International Conference on Knowledge, Culture and Change in Organizations in 2019, where I received the Emerging Scholar Award.

The paper ‘**Insider or outsider? Exploring the fluidity of the roles through social identity theory**’ (Chapter 4) has been published in the *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* (2019, vol.8, no.2: pp.159-170). The paper is single-authored. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 12th Annual International Ethnography Symposium in 2017, where it received an honorable mention in the ‘Best paper’ category.

The paper ‘**A drifting phenomenon: Organizational change failure in a becoming view**’ (Chapter 5) has been published in the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (2019, vol.32, no.6: pp. 605-620). The paper is single-authored.

The paper **‘Windows to ‘what really matters’: Unpacking organizational sensemaking of mundane changes‘** (chapter 6) has been submitted to the Journal of Change Management and awaits critical review. The paper is single-authored.

The paper **‘Anticipating Doomsday: Exploring future-oriented sensemaking through change metaphors’** (chapter 7) has been submitted to the Journal of Organizational Change Management and awaits critical review. The paper is co-authored by Associate Professor Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen, Department of Organization at Copenhagen Business School.

1. Introduction: A world of change

Change has become an everyday term. Everybody talks about change: changes in one's private life and changes in the workplace. In the corporate world, the constant changes across industries, in consumer behavior, and in technologies have been articulated as 'the new normal' (e.g. Anthony, 2009; Bruce, 2018), underlying the general tendency to talk about change as now more widespread than ever. Thus, change has become a buzzword: we talk about change as if we all agree on what it is. But do we?

This dissertation takes as its point of departure, an empirical observation. While top management at the organization under study articulated that many organizational changes had taken place over the last couple of years – referring to them collectively as 'the transformation' -, in contrast the lower level organizational members responded with '*what transformation?*' This inconsistency, or even paradox, between what, on the one hand the top management viewed as organizational changes and on the other hand what lower level organizational members experienced as organizational changes forms the basis of this study. Thus, this study aims at conceptualizing organizational changes by, in particular, searching for an *emic* definition through pursuing the following research question:

How do organizational members construct organizational changes?

Historically, the field of organizational change has been dominated by dichotomies, such as planned – emergent change (e.g. Beer & Nohria, 2000), radical – incremental change (e.g. Tushman & Romanelli, 1985), and episodic – continuous change (e.g. Weick & Quinn, 1999). However, this dissertation tries to explore and go beyond existing dichotomies in order to get a richer and more in-depth view of organizational changes that to a greater extent reflect the *emic* definition of organizational changes emphasized in this study. This is in line with the calls made by Chia (1999, 2014) to better understand the nature of change ‘on its own terms’ taking into account ‘the inherent dynamic complexities and intrinsic indeterminacy of organization transformational processes’ (Chia, 1999, p. 210). To reach beyond the more traditional dichotomies, this study draws on process philosophy because of its emphasis on how ‘to think processually, therefore, is to think opposing tendencies because the subject-object of thought, the world, is itself always already becoming’ (Nayak & Chia, 2011; 293). Thus, one significant aim of this study is to think beyond how organizational change historically has been defined and point towards new lines of thinking about organizational change (Nayak & Chia, 2011; 304).

This study differentiates itself from other process philosophical studies of organizational change by one aspect in particular: it does not concentrate on *a priori* defined organizational changes, such as strategic changes (e.g. MacKay & Chia, 2013) or change programs (e.g. Hernes, Hendrup, & Schäffner, 2015). To explore and reach beyond dichotomies of, for example, strategic – everyday changes, strategic ones are also included in the study, if and when organizational members themselves point out these more traditional types of organizational changes. However, this leaves the researcher with the question of whether everything is relevant to include or not, and leads to a discussion of what is and

isn't considered to be change.

Change & stability

The most oft-referenced dichotomy within the field of organizational change is: change – stability. Dewey (1925) argued that this dichotomy was in fact the most essential dichotomy within the history of philosophy, because philosophies show a tendency towards relying on either one or the other extreme. He claimed that the more classic, orthodox philosophies, give greater primacy to the stable, fixed and sure in contrast to philosophies of flux (process philosophies), which regard change as being 'universal, regular, sure' (Dewey, 1958; 50). Hence, Dewey argued that within philosophies of flux, change and flux become glorified instead of simply a matter of empirical question.

However, this is exactly the intention of this study: to empirically examine how organizational change is constructed. In line with arguments made by March (1980), Feldman (2000), and Orlikowski (1996), this current study found, grounded in an *emic* approach to the field, that organizational members consistently pointed at organizational changes as being part of everyday work activities. Hence, radical organizational changes were either immanent in routines or reflected in everyday work activities, rather than major organizational changes visible to everyone. As a consequence, this study has mainly been informed by process philosophy, where attention must be paid to 'microscopic change' (as termed by Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 580), which is change that occurs 'naturally, incrementally, and inexorably' (Chia, 1999, p. 222). This study thereby proceeds through an iterative process between stability and change, seeing them as closely interlinked; what at one point might be talked about as a stable organizational routine by an organizational member might, at another point, be reframed or

reinterpreted as an organizational change. Thus, this dissertation seeks to explore the dichotomy of stability and change as has been attempted by others, for example by analyzing narratives (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Sonenshein, 2010; Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016), organizational culture (Mats Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015; Hatch, 2004), organizational identity (D. Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Schultz, 2016), or routines (Dittrich, Guérard, & Seidl, 2016; Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

In contrast to these many studies, but in line with the other dichotomies included in this dissertation, the aim has not been to focus solely on one pole of the existing dichotomies (e.g. a planned change). This is also true concerning the dichotomy of change – stability, because ‘If change is viewed in juxtaposition to stability, we tend to lose sight of the subtle micro-changes that sustain and, at the same time, potentially corrode stability’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 568). Instead, change – and stability – are studied with an attentiveness to how organizational members construct the phenomena. Thus, this study differentiates itself from the majority of studies, which view stability and change as polar opposites, by seeing the two as being closely interlinked.

Grounded in a process philosophical approach of organizational change, where ‘change is essentially multiple and heterogeneous’ (Chia, 1999, p. 226), this dissertation takes its point of departure in the search for an *emic* definition of organizational change, by not predefining organizational changes. Instead, the study aims at letting the organizational members themselves point out what they define as organizational change.

Research context

This dissertation draws on a longitudinal ethnographic study of organizational members in a Nordic bank. The study was conducted in the IT department of ‘the Bank’¹. For three years, from 2016-2019, I was employed in the IT department of this particular Nordic bank as an industrial Ph.D., which gave me adequate access to study the organizational changes ‘from within – not as an “abstract concept”’ (James, 1909, p. 235). In other words, I acted as a ‘corporate ethnographer’ (as applied by Cefkin, 2009; Fayard & Van Maanen, 2015; Jordan, 2013; Sedgwick, 2017), meaning that I was employed in the organization itself under study. This role afforded me the opportunity to go beyond dichotomies, such as top management - employee level, and IT headquarters – local IT sites, by observing, shadowing and conducting interviews across the organization (chapters 3 and 4 unfold and elaborate on this role further).

The Bank was composed of approximately 20 000 organizational members, with 2700 of these employed in the IT department, in the year 2016. Three years later, in 2019, the number had grown to 3600. The growth in number of organizational members was mainly due to the establishment of a new site in Eastern Europe, and the insourcing of a subsidiary in India. However, these were not the only visible organizational changes the IT department experienced during that period. Other noticeable changes involved the more than 75% replacement of the IT senior management team, and a number of structural reorganizations which succeeded in changing the organizational diagram dramatically. The IT department was no exception, and reflected changes in the rest of the Bank generally. During the

¹ ‘The Bank’ is a pseudonym for the organization studied. The reason for applying a pseudonym is not at the request of the Bank – as might have been the most obvious reason – quite the reverse; they had indicated that they wanted the real name to be included. Instead, firstly, this is an ethnographic study of change in an organization, specifically an IT department of a bank. The people studied have the greatest number of similarities with tech people in general, making the fact that it is a bank secondary. Because of that and in order to invite fewer prejudices from the reader, I have decided not to include the real name of the Bank. As might be clear at this point, the name of the Bank does not require the skills of a private investigator, but hopefully the pseudonym will help the reader to not overthink about the organization itself. Secondly, no real names are used in this dissertation in order to keep the anonymity of the people studied who have been generous with their time and honesty. Applying a pseudonym of the organization studied supports that aim.

same period, the Bank experienced the introduction of a new CEO, a more than 80% replacement at the top management level, and again, so many structural reorganizations that the organization could not be recognized on paper from the outside. Globally, the Bank's dramatic shifts were comparatively not so uncommon, even though Nordic banks in particular are routinely characterized as being stable workplaces with high seniority. The last ten years since the financial crisis, the financial sector and banks in particular, have undergone remarkable changes, due to e.g., increased regulations, changes in customer demand, and digitalization. Thus, viewed from the outside, the IT department of the Bank seemed to be the ideal setting for studying organizational changes.

The structure of the dissertation

In order to answer the overall research question of the dissertation: *How do organizational members construct organizational changes?*, most chapters are guided by a sub-question. Common to all chapters is the aim of studying organizational changes in their vividness by exploring and challenging existing dichotomies in field of organizational change. Table 1 sums up research questions and dichotomies explored in chapters 4-7.

Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature in the field of organizational change while pursuing the research question: *How can dichotomies in the field of organizational change be reconsidered in order to capture the vividness of change in organizations?* The chapter explores two central, theoretical dichotomies within the field of organizational change, namely: planned – emergent change, and major – minor change. After combining the two dichotomies, the chapter contributes with a discussion of central gaps in the field.

Chapter 3 delves into the methodological aspects of studying organizational change, when it is viewed as a fluid phenomenon grounded in process philosophy. The chapter contributes with reflections concerning the philosophy of science, methodological strategies, and data collection, by unfolding these in greater detail than found in the method sections in chapters 4-7.

Chapter 4 can be seen as a continuation of chapter 3, where I explore a central methodological dichotomy, i.e. insider – outsider, with an examination grounded in my role as researcher in the organization studied. This is achieved by pursuing the research question: *How is the role as insider shaped by the context and through interactions with organizational members in situ? And how does that enable or constrain the ethnographer in that particular situation?* This chapter contributes with a discussion on how my role as corporate ethnographer can be neither *a priori* categorized as insider nor outsider, but instead is fluid and shaped *in situ*.

The three following chapters 5, 6 and 7, constitute the analysis section. Chapter 5 addresses several central dichotomies in the field of organizational change (see table 1) in order to answer the research question posed: *Why is organizational change failure under-researched within the field of the becoming view?* Inspired by the anthropological strategy of ‘studying through’ the chapter illustrates how organizational change can be studied by following the phenomenon both in time and through the organization. The chapter further contributes with a discussion of how organizational change failure has suffered the same fate as organizational change more generally by the tendency to drift away in time or space, grounded in an *emic* definition of organizational change.

Chapter 6 pursues the research question: *How do organizational members make sense of mundane change?* A number of dichotomies are explored grounded in theoretical differences between classic Weickian sensemaking and post-Weickian

sensemaking (see table 1). The chapter contributes with a discussion on how mundane changes in the eyes of organizational members can in fact be interpreted as reflections of radical changes in the organization as a whole. Thus, it is illustrated how a central dichotomy within the field of organizational change, radical – mundane, can be unpacked by exploring the empirical data.

Intrigued by an emerging pattern in the empirical data, we pursue the research question: *What does the organizational members' metaphor-driven future-oriented sensemaking reveal about their experience of past organizational change?* in chapter 7. While exploring the dichotomy of sensemaking of past – future changes, the chapter contributes with a discussion on how emotions in organizational members' sensemaking accounts can offer the missing link between retrospective and prospective sensemaking.

In chapter 8, I return to the overall research question posed in the introduction. With an aim of answering this question, I summarize the findings from each chapter, revisit the dichotomy of stability – change, as well as discuss dichotomies in the field of organizational change more generally. Further, I include reflections on what might be the theoretical as well as practical consequences of this study. Lastly, I make concluding remarks.

Table 1: RQs and central dichotomies explored in chapters 4-7.

Chapter	Research questions	Central dichotomies
<p>4. Insider or outsider? Exploring the fluidity of the roles through social identity theory</p>	<p>How is the role as insider shaped by the context and through interactions with organizational members <i>in situ</i>? And how does that enable or constrain the ethnographer in that particular situation?</p>	<p>Insider – outsider</p>
<p>5. A drifting phenomenon: Organizational change failure in a becoming view</p>	<p>Why is organizational change failure under-researched within the field of the becoming view?</p>	<p>Past – present Top management – employee level Strategic – everyday routines Failure – success</p>
<p>6. Windows to ‘what really matters’: Organizational sensemaking of mundane change</p>	<p>How do organizational members make sense of mundane change?</p>	<p>Radical – mundane change Exceptional – nonexceptional Episodic – nonepisodic Certain change agents – everyone</p>
<p>7. Anticipating Doomsday: Exploring future-oriented sensemaking through change metaphors</p>	<p>What does the organizational members’ metaphor-driven future-oriented sensemaking reveal about their experience of past organizational change?</p>	<p>Past – future Retrospective – prospective sensemaking Emotional – emotionless</p>

2. Literature: The new story of changing

Exploring dichotomies in the field of organizational change²

The field of organizational change is widespread and has a long history. Scholars have for decades written about the topic and the way organizational change is defined and viewed varies within the field, which scholars have tried to map out (e.g. Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Burke, 2002; Smith & Graetz, 2011; Todnem, 2005; van de Ven & Poole, 1995, 2005; Weick & Quinn, 1999). The aim of this chapter is not to present an exhaustive review of the literature on organizational change, but to explore some of the most central dichotomies within the field.

Traditionally, the field has been characterized by dichotomies such as planned – emergent change (e.g. Beer & Nohria, 2000), and episodic – continuous change (e.g. Weick & Quinn, 1999) in order to capture the different views of organizational change. Dichotomies symbolize a division into two mutually exclusive or contradictory groups or entities, why studies of change in the field of organizational change is characterized by extremes.

Even though the field of organizational change has developed over the last decades, it is surprising that practitioners still tend to draw on more traditional theories of organizational change such as Kotter's (1996) 8-step change model, which only reflects one end of a dichotomy, namely the planned change. This chapter revisits some of the most central dichotomies to explore whether these contains unexplored possibilities. Hence, the intention is to unpack the potential of rewriting the story of organizational change, so it better captures the vividness of

² This chapter is almost similar to the version published in *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture, and Change Management* (2020, vol.19, no.1, pp. 7-16).

organizational changes. Grounded in this intention, the chapter pursues the research question: *How can dichotomies in the field of organizational change be reconsidered in order to capture the vividness of change in organizations?*

After exploring two central dichotomies in the field of organizational change, the chapter proceeds by combining them and revisits existing studies to unfold these combinations. Two gaps emerge which are discussed in the final section of the chapter. One being empirical studies that can not be placed within one single category but instead moves along a dichotomy. The other being empirical studies of minor organizational changes, in particular within the field of process studies.

The dichotomy of planned – emergent change

The most significant dichotomy within the field of organizational change is between scholars viewing organizational changes as either planned or emergent (e.g. Beer & Nohria, 2000). Hence, the dichotomy is about to what extent organizational change is deliberate. Another quite similar distinction made in the theoretical field of organizational change is planned – unplanned change (e.g. Poole & Van de Ven, 2004), however, with some differences.

The former, a planned view, originates from a rational assumption that organizational change can be planned and managed through stage-models. This is the most traditional view on organizational changes and most often this conceptualization is attributed to the works of Kurt Lewin (1947) and his 3-stage model of change: Unfreezing, Moving and Freezing (Cummings, Bridgman, & Brown, 2016). These stage-models represent rather simple, linear and practical ways to understand organizational changes, which characterizes the main view of the planned perspective. Some of the main contributors to the planned view are Kanter et al. (1992), Kotter (1995), Luecke (2003), and Nadler and Nadler (1998).

All of them have developed multistep models with a desired end state. Because of its normative and controllable nature, this approach to change is the most distinct in practice. Within the planned view, organizational changes are initiated from the top, as a top-down process, led by managers through a linear process. Thus, changes are seen as episodic and 'off the-shelf standardized solutions' (Weick, 2000, p. 232) and the aim becomes to get back to stability. Successful organizational changes are often ascribed to the manager in charge of the change. Opposite, because of the belief that organizational changes can be managed and controlled, an unwanted outcome of the change will often be due to errors in executing the planned steps: 'Skipping steps creates only the illusion of speed and never produces a satisfying result' (Kotter, 1999, p. 76). In other words, the planned view builds on a leader-centric approach to organizational changes, where the manager bears a big responsibility of the outcome of an organizational change and the planned steps in the process are seen as sequential.

In contrast to the planned view, the emergent view defines change as continuous and ongoing. Weick (2000, p. 223) makes the argument that 'emergent, continuous change forms the infrastructure that determines whether planned, episodic change will succeed or fail'. This sentence emphasizes how the two perspectives are fundamentally different and that emergent change occurs without *a priori* intentions as is the case with planned change. A study of continuous change is the one by Brown and Eisenhardt (1997), where they based on an inductive study of change in the IT industry argue for the important changes happening in organizations to be continuous and incremental in opposition to episodic. However, their view on continuous and incremental change lean against planned change, when they state that 'many firms compete by changing continuously' (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997, p. 1). Thus, making it somehow different from emergent change, grounded in the assumption of emergent change

as the opposite of planned change on the dichotomy. What is also worth noticing in the quote by Weick (2000, p. 223) is that emergent and planned change in his view are not only two opposite ends of a dichotomy but can also be considered together. Similarly, Poole and Van de Ven (2004) argue that a strategic planned change might occur in an organization already changing because of factors out of the control of the management, the unplanned or emergent changes. The intersection of these emergent and planned changes together shapes the organization.

Drawing on the work done by Lewin (1947), a slightly moderated sequence in an emergent view would be: Freeze, rebalance, unfreeze (Weick & Quinn, 1999). This is grounded in the assumption that the starting point must be to freeze continuous change by making a disrupted sequence visible. To rebalance is to reinterpret or resequencing steps so they unfold with fewer blockages. Lastly, to unfreeze is to resume emergent change in ways that are not attentive to local changes (Weick, 2000). By that, emergent change moves the focus of attention in the direction of smaller changes, adaptations, and adjustments in routines, moving beyond what can be managed, choreographed, scripted, or controlled, and is instead a force in its own right (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004).

The dichotomy of major – minor changes

Another central dichotomy within the field of organizational change is major – minor changes. This dichotomy is about the scale of an organizational change and has not often been explicitly unfolded or discussed in the literature. However, most studies can either be classified as focusing on minor or major organizational changes. Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) have a somewhat similar classification of

sensemaking studies of organizational changes, when they argue that sensemaking is triggered by minor or major events.

In this chapter, major organizational changes are the ones that are major to the organization as major and minor are relative terms. Thus, on paper – at least – major changes are radical to the organization. These are for example mergers, acquisitions, strategic restructurings, organizational crisis etc. What characterizes this type of organizational change is the extent of influence on the organization, where the change in itself influence a major part of the organization. Historically, the field of organizational change has been occupied with major organizational changes. One reason for that might be grounded in for example how Cambridge Dictionary define organizational change as: ‘a process in which a large company or organization changes its working methods or aims, for example in order to develop and deal with new situations or markets’³. Grounded in that definition, organizational change becomes not only planned and intentional but also something which is remarkable or visible both internally and externally. Thus, the prevalent definition of organizational change is that it is a major change to the organization. Hence, the many empirical studies of major organizational change, have taken point of departure in the prevalent understanding of what organizational change is.

Similar to how Lewin’s (1947) 3-stage model of change has been a fundamental outset for the development of step models within the field of organizational change, so has his argumentation of what change is. One interpretation of Lewin’s definition of organizational change can be found in Oreg and Berson (2019, p. 273): ‘Organizational change refers to the transition of the organization from one state to another (Lewin, 1951)’. By that, organizational change becomes something which moves the organization from one state to another, hence, making

³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/organizational-change>

it a major change to the organization. Examples of empirical studies of major organizational changes are e.g. Lüscher and Lewis (2008) studying organizational restructurings and e.g. Monin, Noorderhaven, Vaara, and Kroon (2013) and Reynolds (2015) studying mergers and acquisitions.

At the other end of the dichotomy are studies focusing on minor organizational changes. When organizational changes are part of everyday work practices or organizational routines, they can be categorized as minor organizational changes. A group of scholars, grounded in process philosophy, builds on the belief that '[m]icroscopic change reflects the actual becoming of things' (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 580). The argument here being that to investigate changes, attention must be paid to microprocesses, because this is where change originate from. In line with that, March (1981) and Brown et al. (2015) have emphasized that attention must be paid to mundane experiences and events, because they are contingent to the overall process of change. Thus, they emphasize how studies of organizational change must be focused on the minor organizational changes, which are part of the mundane and everyday work activities of the organization, to unpack processes of change.

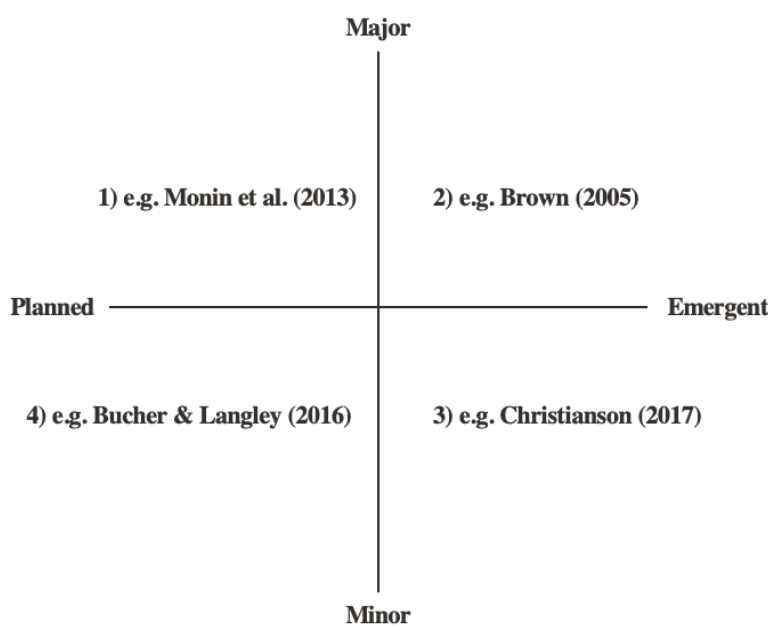
This argument is further unfolded within process philosophy with the central assumption that everyday work activities cannot be separated from routines, as a lot of work done in organizations is performed through routines. As March (1981, p. 564) states: 'in its fundamental structure a theory of organizational change should not be remarkably different from a theory of ordinary action'. Hereby, emphasizing how studying minor organizational changes is a matter of studying everyday work activities and organizational routines. This might explain why the field of organizational change has mainly been focusing on major organizational change, because studies of minor organizational changes are as much a study of everyday work activities or organizational routines. Empirical examples of studies

of minor organizational changes are Dittrich, Guérard, and Seidl (2016), when they examine the role of reflective talk in routine changes, and Patriotta and Gruber (2015) in their study of how newsmakers at a U.S. television station make sense of and adjust to planned and unexpected events on a daily basis.

Combining the two dichotomies

To unfold the two dichotomies in more detail, and to unpack how existing empirical studies fit into these dichotomies, this chapter proceeds by exploring how the two dichotomies can be combined. Figure 1 is a simple illustration of the combination of the two dichotomies of planned – emergent and major – minor organizational changes, which will be further unfolded below. The empirical examples included are all within the field of process studies, thus theoretically closely related, to illustrate the nuances between the four categorizes.

Figure 1: The combination of the dichotomies planned – emergent and major – minor changes.



The first group of studies concerns organizational changes which are major and planned and represents the most studies in the field of organizational change. Major and planned organizational changes are often strategic ones such as mergers and acquisitions (e.g. Monin et al., 2013). In particular, a number of empirical studies have been concerned with the organizational members' reactions to organizational changes, most often by looking at major planned changes (e.g. Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006; Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, & Do, 2018; Oreg, Michel, & Todnem, 2013; Söderberg, 2003).

When organizational changes are major and emergent, they often have similarities with organizational crisis, where the changes interrupt organizational activities. This is due to major emergent changes are often characterized by ambiguity, confusion, and feelings of disorientation for the involved organizational members as organizational crisis are (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). An example is Brown (2005), studying the collapse of Baring bank as the result of fraud, thus, happening as an emergent major organizational change.

Organizational changes as part of everyday work practices can be categorized as minor organizational changes, either planned or emergent. An example of an empirical study of minor emergent changes is such as Orlikowski (1996) who focused on the situated micro level changes that actors enact over time as they make sense of and act in the world. In this particular study, the example of minor emergent changes are new technology changing everyday organizational routines when organizational members appropriate the new technology into their work practices or when organizational members respond to unanticipated breakdowns. Another example of an empirical study of minor emergent changes is Christianson (2017) unpacking 'updating' as the process of revising provisional sensemaking to incorporate new cues in the case of unexpected events, namely broken equipment.

Minor planned changes can also be identified as changes in everyday organizational activities and routines. Feldman (2000) and Tsoukas and Chia (2002) have argued that routines are not as stable and unchanging as is so often presented in organization studies. Instead, scholars have pointed out how the internal dynamic of a routine is a source of change in and of itself (e.g. Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Howard-Grenville, Rerup, Langly, & Tsoukas, 2016). Examples of a minor planned change can be a new hiring process, changing the routines as part of the recruitment process as was one of the examples in Feldman (2000), or a planned initiative to change patient processes in hospitals which it is in the study by Bucher and Langley (2016).

Looking broadly at process studies of organizational change, the majority has been on major rather than minor changes. Thus, only few have studied minor organizational changes as smaller disturbances in ongoing routine activities (Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2015; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Instead, most research has been centred around major organizational changes such as a mergers or acquisitions.

The exceptions

In this chapter, I have explored two dichotomies in the field of organizational change, namely planned – emergent change and major – minor change. In addition, I have explored a combination of the two dichotomies grounded in a discussion of existing studies. However, some studies do not fit into these categorizations.

The first empirical study to explore is Orlikowski and Hofman (1997). In their study of technology-based change, they build an improvisational model of change management to recognize the importance of different types of change, namely,

anticipated, emergent and opportunity-based. By that, they include both the anticipated changes, which are planned changes, and the emergent ones. Thus, they incorporate both end of the dichotomy planned – emergent in the same model, breaking with the classic idea of relying on only one end of the dichotomy.

Building further on to their line of thoughts and the above-mentioned argument made by Weick (2000, p. 223) about how planned and emergent changes are interlinked, I will argue that we will need to consider the two extremes together instead of only one of them. If doing so, organizational changes can be unfolded in more nuances. Think of this example: A reorganization (planned change) is called off because of the managing director is being dismissed by the company without notice (emergent change). In the planned view the reorganization would be the organizational change, which would have ended the day it was called off. Whereas the emergent view would only view the managing director leaving the company as a change in the organization, because the reorganization never created any changes in the organization due to it never took place. However, if we draw on both end of the dichotomy, we get to see the two organizational changes as interlinked. By bringing the two perspectives together, we see more nuances in how organizational changes unfold and by that it enriches our understanding of change in organizations. If only drawing on one of the extremes we end up not seeing the organizational changes in their vividness.

Another example, which does not fit into only one of the four combinations in figure 1, is the study by Bartunek, Huang, and Walsh (2008) which started out as a minor emergent change when an individual decided to leave the organization. However, in all three cases included in the study the individual leaving led to collective turnover revealing how a minor emergent change can lead to a major emergent change. That particular study shows the value in not only studying the

minor emergent change nor the major emergent change, but instead how they are interlinked.

Other empirical studies also show how the studies move along dichotomies rather than staying within one extreme. Examples of studies linking major planned changes and minor planned changes are Kellogg (2009, 2018), which unfold how institutional changes influence everyday work practices in two U.S. hospitals. These empirical examples show the value of not categorizing studies into one end of a dichotomy, but instead moving along dichotomies to explore how the changes are interlinked. Hence, being occupied with the categorization of the studies of organizational changes into planned or emergent, major or minor hinder us in studying organizational changes in their vividness.

Discussion

So far this chapter has explored and challenged existing dichotomies in the field of organizational change. I found that while most studies of organizational change focus on one of the four categories, a few empirical studies move between them. I also found that most process studies of organizational change examine major planned changes. The fact that most studies can be categorized into one of the four categories indicates that the potential associated with studies with a change perspective which moves between categories is not sufficiently exploited. Also, few studies focus on minor organizational changes. In sum, existing studies in the field have created a too simplistic view of organizational changes which does not capture the vividness of organizational changes.

Therefore, this chapter proceeds by discussing the two gaps identified above. First discussion centers around the lack of empirical studies of minor organizational changes, in particular in the field of process studies. The second discussion

explores the potential of studying organizational changes that moves between the categories.

Studies of minor organizational changes

As the findings of this chapter show, the field of process studies lack empirical studies of minor organizational changes. In particular, this is supported by scholars pointing at the lack of sensemaking studies focusing on the more mundane forms of organizational change (e.g. Brown et al., 2015; Gioia & Mehra, 1996; Powell & Rerup, 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

One of the differences between sensemaking of minor and major changes, which might also be one of the reasons why the field is lacking studies of minor changes, is the triggers of the sensemaking. Triggering episodes such as mergers are easier to identify and thereby, easier to design a study around. Further, salient cues such as public announcements of mergers are easier to capture than when sensemaking is immanent, thus, not triggered by episodes and happening without the organizational members being aware (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, 2019). In particular, when the cues are not salient they are even harder to collect later in the process, because they might have disappeared or been forgotten by organizational members. Thus, when sensemaking is immanent or at least not triggered by major episodes, it becomes harder for the researcher to study.

One way to overcome this challenge, is to approach change from within (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Thus, it becomes essential to study the minor organizational changes while they are unfolding in order to experience organizational members experiencing the changes. This call for empirical studies studying organizational changes through an *emic* approach (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2019). When studying organizational change through an *emic* approach, the researcher study from inside

the primary world. Thus, making it possible to study how organizational members' sensemaking of organizational changes is accomplished. This is in contrast to an *etic* approach, where the researcher study from the outside world. Here, the researcher study how organizational members make deliberate sense of organizational changes, prompted by the researcher's queries.

Further, there is a potential in capturing minor organizational changes by studying organizational members and changes *in situ*. Returning to the quote by March (1981, p. 564) included above, 'a theory of organizational change should not be remarkably different from a theory of ordinary action', why it calls for empirical studies of everyday work activities to capture the minor organizational changes. By studying organizational members in their everyday work situation creates a possibility of capturing the less salient cues. However, both the *emic* approach and to study *in situ* implies a more complex study than if organizational changes where studied through an *etic* approach, because the researcher must be there when the minor organizational changes are taken place.

Studies of the uncategorizable changes

This section aims at unpacking and discussing the studies of organizational changes that are impossible to categorize in figure 1, hence, the studies moving along a dichotomy rather than staying within one of the extremes. I found that a number of empirical studies have been studying organizational changes that move from one category to another, however, the field is lacking this kind of studies. This is in particular of interest, because these studies have an unexplored potential in unfolding organizational changes in more of their vividness.

To capture organizational changes that move from one category to another, calls for studies of changes that are not *a priori* determined. When organizational

changes are *a priori* determined, the research is designed around already identified organizational changes. This type of studies are often grounded in what I above define as an *etic* approach (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2019). The argumentation for that can be found in this quote by Sandberg and Tsoukas (2019), elaborating on the *etic* approach: ‘In such an approach, sensemaking is likely to be viewed as a relatively well-bounded phenomenon (hence, inclined to be seen as episodic rather than ongoing), whose cognition-related and/or language-use-related properties may be abstracted and their associations studied in a systematic manner’ (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2019, p. 42). This quote explains well how an *etic* approach limits the view of organizational changes to a well-bounded phenomenon which can be studied in a systematic manner, rather than being open to organizational changes moving along a change dichotomy.

However, to study organizational changes that are not *a priori* determined, it is again essential to enter the field through an open approach, being open to an *emic* definition of organizational change. This definition is not predefined but is continuously being constructed by the organizational members in the field. That implies that to capture organizational change which is never a well-bounded phenomenon, it is essential to have an open approach throughout the research process. First of all, this is crucial in the process of collecting the data, e.g. asking open questions which are not limited to the significant changes, and neither only paying attention to salient cues or talk about significant changes when being in the field observing. Second, it is crucial in the process of analyzing the data, where a more inductive approach, rather than deductive, will support the researcher in staying open to the data and the possibility of new *emic* definitions of organizational change can emerge.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored two central dichotomies in the field of organizational change, namely planned – emergent and major – minor. When combining the two, I found that a number of studies are moving between the categories, however, these were only few which created an unexplored potential of studying organizational changes that move along dichotomies. Moreover, I found that the field of process studies lacks empirical studies of minor organizational changes. Proceeding from the findings, the chapter paves the way for how to rewrite the story of changing by suggesting that future empirical studies are focusing on studying organizational changes *in situ* through an *emic* approach in order to close the gaps identified in the field. Thus, creating the possibility of capturing organizational changes in their vividness.

3. Methodology: In pursuit of organizational change

Hunting an ever-changing phenomenon

Grounded in the assumption of organizational change as a phenomenon constructed by organizational members, this dissertation aims to explore and move beyond existing dichotomies of organizational change. The process philosophical approach to organizational change, this dissertation is inspired by, carries with it the challenge of studying change when it is not necessarily linked to one extreme in a dichotomy but instead as a tension between the two poles, always in a state of *becoming*. In this way, this chapter invites a broader discussion, grounded in process ontology of how to study phenomena which are ever-changing.

The challenges of capturing and analyzing processual data are well-known among process scholars, one simple explanation for this being ‘Process data are messy’ (Langley 1999, p. 691). Further, gathering processual data is difficult because it is hard to capture and pin down a phenomenon, which is always in a perceptual state of becoming (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). Nayak and Chia (2011, p. 291) argue ‘By and large, we are not good at thinking process, movement, flux or transformation on their own terms. Our conceptual skills favour the static, the separate and the self-contained, which might explain why the field of process philosophy has been overpopulated with conceptual ideas’ (e.g. Chia, 1999, 2014; Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014b; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). However, empirical examples grounded in a process ontology can be found in studies by Hernes, Hendrup, and Schäffner (2015) and MacKay and Chia (2013). Here, the focus is on unpacking processes. This is also the pursuit of the current study: to unpack the construction of organizational changes. Thus, this chapter

(and dissertation more broadly) aims to contribute to the field of process philosophy by illustrating how organizational change as an ever-changing phenomenon can be studied.

Langley et al. (2013), argue that the field of process studies is especially lacking studies focused on the individual level, which is what this dissertation intends to tackle, by analyzing the organizational members' own construction of organizational changes. This is supported by Orlikowski (1996) who argues that paying attention to the micro-level of change is essential, because here changes 'emerge frequently, even imperceptibly, in the slippages and improvisations of everyday activity' (p. 36). This point further underpins the challenge of studying phenomena grounded in a process philosophical approach, because these phenomena are not linked to stable entities but instead are part of everyday work activities. This has implications which Nayak and Chia (2011, p. 284) state by quoting James (1925): 'A process philosophical approach to the analysis of social life entails lying "flat on its belly in the middle of experience, in the very thick of its sand and gravel... never getting a peep at anything from above"', (James, 1925, p. 277) in order to savour the continuity and temporality of such experience'. This current study aims at 'lying flat on its belly in the middle of experience' or studying change from within (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), by being a corporate ethnographer in the organization studied and gathering longitudinal data over a two-year period. Thus, it becomes possible to study organizational changes as part of everyday life of an organization.

Chapter 3 is structured into six separate sections. The first section concerns the organizational context of the research setting, namely, the Bank. This section is followed by a deeper look into the philosophy of science and how this dissertation has been informed by a process philosophical approach to questions of ontology and epistemology. The third section concerns methodology and is followed by a

section with a focus on data collection. The aim of the data collection section is to unfold, to a greater extent than covered by the other chapters, what types of data serve as the fundament of this dissertation, and how these data have been collected around a phenomenon that is ever-changing. The chapter ends with a section on analytical strategies and finally some closing remarks.

One difference worthy of attention, between chapter 3 and the others, is that this chapter is strongly inspired by a more confessional and impressionistic style (van Maanen, 1988). The argument for choosing this style is found in the intention of the chapter itself, which is to show how the particular work came into being and how the fieldwork was accomplished. Thus, this chapter must be seen as a supplement to the the rest of the chapters with the aim of elaborating extensively ‘on the formal snippets of method descriptions that decorate realist tales’ (van Maanen, 1988, p. 75). Hence, this chapter draws on autoethnography (Ellis, 2003) by including autoethnographic vignettes, inspired by fieldnotes written while I was present in the organization as a corporate ethnographer. The aim is to invite the reader into the subjectivities of the fieldwork, giving a sense of how I came to understand the studied scene.

Organizational context

Finally, there. I close the car door behind me and walk across the big parking lot towards the grey flat building. It looks like a plant. Dull and uninspiring. But nice with the water sculpture in front of the main entrance. Even though, I almost don't notice it anymore. Already, 14 months in this building. I walk through the security port and smile at the receptionist. She smiles back at me and says: 'Good morning'. When I turn my head, I spot a poster at the glass door. Under the

picture of a grey-haired man in a knitted sweater, it says: 40th anniversary! Reception for Peter Nilsson Monday October 3 at 3pm in meeting room DS037. Come by to celebrate!

While conducting ethnographic fieldwork, I was physically placed in the IT headquarters of the Bank. The Bank was not new to me. Prior to this position, I had been employed in the corporate HR department of the Bank for a total of five years, so I was already familiar with ‘the culture’ of the Bank. However, the IT department differed in many aspects from the rest of the organization, which is why it sometimes gave the distinct feeling of being employed in an entirely different company. In 2019, the IT department was structured into two main areas: IT development with app. 2600 employees and IT infrastructure with app. 1000 employees. Both areas were spread across five main locations, with three offices located in a Nordic country, another in Eastern Europe and the last in India. Data was collected at three of these five locations: at two of the Nordic offices, including the IT headquarters, as well as the office in Eastern Europe.

As the study takes place in a bank, it would be natural to expect the people studied to behave like stereotypical bankers, e.g. young, proactive guys in dark suits. If the current study had been conducted at the headquarters of the Bank, the people under study might have indeed been described in these terms. But this was not that study. Instead, it is a study of the IT department: a place both physically and culturally quite far from the headquarters of the Bank. Thus, the IT department and the more than 3000 organizational members therein have more similarities with an actual IT company than that of a bank. With that said, there were characteristics that can be linked to the fact the people studied did work in a bank. Some examples of this can be seen in e.g. the beliefs that precision is more important than efficiency, or the appreciation of security over advancement, as

well as comfortable routines over challenge or change as Weeks (2004) described of the bankers in BritArm.

However, Kunda's (1992) description of the organizational members of 'Tech' prove especially applicable to the organizational members of the IT department, especially if zooming in on the Nordic office, where the majority of my ethnographic fieldwork took place. Firstly, the group can be described as fairly homogeneous, with one important exception: the staff function. The average organizational member of the Nordic office is white, male, and in his fifties. His background is either technical, as for example a college degree in engineering, or he has started his career as a trainee in one branch and then worked his way over to the IT department. His social status can be characterized as middle class. The parking lot is visible proof of that ; hundreds of cars are parked there, all coming from the same economic class. The dress code is casual; the farther away from the offices of top management, the more casual the dress code. They can be seen sporting bare feet and shorts in the most extreme cases. This stands in strong contrast to the headquarters of the Bank where business attire is the norm. Excluding the dress code and social status, the average top manager of the IT department is in many aspects similar to the average organizational member: white, male, and in his fifties. However, one thing worthy of note has changed over the last years: not everyone is of Nordic origin. Some organizational members come from the UK, while others are from the States. But it is clear that in looking at the average organizational member in the Nordic office we see someone who is: white, male, and in his fifties.

Philosophy of science

The field of process studies has long been dominated by studies that reflect a substantive metaphysics, in which the world is made up of things, and processes represent changes in these things (Langley et al., 2013). In essence, these studies are grounded in a substance ontology, in which the world is seen as consisting of entities whose interactions constitute processes. Thereby, processes become secondary to entities, because processes only exist as the interactions between entities. An example of this is that the organization remains a stable entity for the entire duration of the study (Hernes, 2007). These beliefs can be traced back to the Greek philosopher Democritus, who pictured all of nature as composed of stable material substances that change only in their positing in space and time (Rescher, 1996). Thus, this string of process studies relies on an ontology of *being*.

In contrast, process philosophy, which has informed this dissertation, is inspired by thinkers such as William James (1842-1910), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), with roots going back to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 540 BCE). Common for these thinkers is the belief that everything is always in process, which is captured in the well-known quote by Heraclitus ‘everything flows’, showing us that the world is to be seen as constantly on the move. That means, that process philosophical studies rely on process ontology, and are based in process metaphysics. Here, the assumption is that the world is constituted of ceaseless process, flux and transformation rather than a stable world of unchanging entities. Thus, when studying the world, it can be said that it is *becoming* rather than *being*. When the world is always in the state of becoming, things do not exist in themselves but are instead things in the making (James, 1909), or as Whitehead (1978/1929, p. 219) puts it: ‘the process itself is the constitution of the actual entity’. In other words, nothing is ever fixed and

instead, how something becomes, determines what it is (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014a).

Further, when grounded in process epistemology, process philosophical studies fundamentally see the world as a process and moreover, that this particular process is the becoming of actual entities (Whitehead, 1929). This means that primacy is to be given to the changeable and processual nature of reality. Central to these studies is the belief that ‘Everything in nature is a matter of process, of activity, of change’ (Rescher, 1996, p. 10). Thus, the world is composed of experiences rather than substantial entities (Langley et al., 2013). Studies grounded in this view are concerned with change and processes themselves and how they emerge and develop in time. Hence, organizations are seen not as ‘things made’ but as processes ‘in the making’ (Hernes, 2007). By that, the world is constituted by processes. Processes are prior to entities and entities are formed by the processes, which is why this view moves the attention from nouns to verbs (e.g. Bakken & Hernes, 2006).

When process philosophy is applied within organization studies, organizations are not conceptualized as solid, stabilized entities in themselves. Instead, they must be seen as constituted of temporarily-stabilized event clusters and abstracted from a sea of constant flux and change, or as (Chia, 2002, p. 866) argues ‘primordial soup’ of undifferentiated flux. That also means that an individual does not exist as an autonomous entity in his or her own right, but is shaped through relationships and history, making acts instead of things essential to this way of thinking. One of the consequences of becoming rather than being, is that movement or actual change simply does not exist, instead, these are to be understood as a matter of experience (Whitehead, 1978). Thus, if I am to study processes, I as a researcher must step into the stream of experience – and step out of it again, just as organizational members do themselves (Hernes, 2014).

Methodology

The complexity of process data reflects the complexity of the phenomena studied, which explains why there is no one easy and straightforward method for gathering process data (Langley, 1999). But with an aim of capturing the richness and complexity of an empirical phenomenon, an open approach towards the field is essential, as is always allowing mysteries to be accessible (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). One should also be on the lookout for serendipities (Hernes, 2014). Hence, this openness facilitates the possibility of capturing surprising and interesting data, unknown to the researcher beforehand. However, that does not mean the approach needs to be purely inductive. The approach applied in this dissertation is neither purely inductive nor deductive, but rather a process of abduction (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008). Hence, data and theory are closely intertwined, and the process is highly iterative, reflecting the process of shifting between empirical material and extant theoretical concepts.

With that said, when the focus shifts from studying predetermined organizational changes to a search for *emic* definitions of organizational change, the point of departure becomes close to inductive. This makes it essential to have an open approach when collecting and analyzing the data, while also maintaining an outlook that is not too narrowly grounded in existing theoretical concepts. The *emic* approach applied in this dissertation leans heavily on the most common definition of the term within anthropology, namely ‘the insider’s view’, which is in contrast to *etic*, standing for ‘the outsider’s view’ (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). Thus, while doing ethnographic fieldwork, I was able to look for organizational members’ own construction of organizational changes, rather than searching for organizational changes either predetermined by, for example, top management, or grounded in theoretical definitions.

In the following chapters, I have applied different methodological strategies to overcome the challenges of studying the ever-changing phenomenon of organizational change. Table 2 sums up the *methodological strategies* I have applied to answer the research questions posed, and to reach beyond the central dichotomies in play, within that particular chapter.

Table 2: RQs, central dichotomies and methodological strategies applied in chapter 4-7.

Chapter	Research questions	Central dichotomies	Methodological strategies
4. Insider or outsider? Exploring the fluidity of the roles through social identity theory	How is the role as insider shaped by the context and through interactions with organizational members <i>in situ</i> ? And how does that enable or constrain the ethnographer in that particular situation?	Insider – outsider	Shadowing and <i>in situ</i> observations Reflexive and scenic fieldnotes written in a dramaturgical-diary style
5. A drifting phenomenon: Organizational change failure in a becoming view	Why is organizational change failure under-researched within the field of the becoming view?	Past – present Top management – employee level Strategic – everyday routines Failure – success	Anthropological strategy of ‘studying through’ Multiple interviews with same org. member Data collected horizontally and vertically across the organization
6. Windows to ‘what really matters’: Organizational sensemaking of mundane change	How do organizational members make sense of mundane change?	Radical – mundane change Exceptional – nonexceptional Episodic – nonepisodic Certain change agents – everyone	Mixed methods incl. Narrative-inspired interviews, shadowing and observations of organizational members in their every organizational context
7. Anticipating Doomsday: Exploring future-oriented sensemaking through change metaphors	What does the organizational members’ metaphor-driven future-oriented sensemaking reveal about their experience of past organizational change?	Past – future Retrospective – prospective sensemaking Emotional – emotionless	Narrative-inspired interviews Metaphors as analytical strategy

In chapter 4 *Insider or outsider?* the aim is to unpack the fluid role I inhabited as researcher employed in the organization studied. To achieve this, I draw primarily on the use of fieldnotes, written while shadowing middle managers or making *in*

situ observations, which include reflexive fieldnotes as well as thick descriptions of the scenes played out within the organization. This method maintains similarities with other ethnographic study approaches, where the ethnographer ends up dedicating a chapter to self-reflection on his or her own role in the field such as ‘Appendix - Methods: A Confessional of sorts’ (Kunda, 1992) or ‘Chapter 2: Reflexibility – the Methodology of Fieldwork Among Lay Ethnographers’ (Krause-Jensen, 2010).

In chapter 5 *A drifting phenomenon*, I apply the anthropological method of ‘studying through’ in space and time. In so doing, I try to illuminate the ever-changing nature of organizational changes by following changes through the organization, by collecting different types of data over time, and from repeated encounters with the same organizational members. This chapter has similarities with the study conducted by MacKay and Chia (2013), who analyzed un-owned processes and the unintended consequences of an organizational transformation. Mackay and Chia (2013) as well as this chapter discuss failures and successes, with an interest in the consequences of processes, and both studies conclude that what at one point in time seemed to be a good decision or a potential catastrophe, might turn out to be the opposite at some later point in time.

In chapter 6 *Windows to ‘what really matters’*, the aim is to unpack the organizational sensemaking of mundane changes. I do that by analyzing fragments of stories coming from different organizational members. A method that has aspects in common with ‘narrative strategy’ (Langley, 1999) and the study by Abolafia (2010) where there is an unfolding of sensemaking processes through stories. However, chapter 6 of this dissertation does not draw on a strictly narrative strategy to define the plot, characters etc., of the story. In contrast, the chapter has similarities with other sensemaking studies with a focus on unfolding the meaning of processes. Furthermore, grounded in a process philosophical

assumption of organizational changes as part of everyday work activities and organizational routines, I study the organizational members in their everyday organizational context by drawing on the methods of both shadowing and *in situ* observations.

Lastly, in chapter 7 *Anticipating Doomsday*, the focus is on temporal processes, with an unfolding of how organizational members talk about organizational changes in the past and in the future, and how these two perceptions can be interlinked. This approach is taken in order to move beyond the idea of organizational change as something that must be studied *over* time to *in* time (Hernes and Schultz 2016). The study by Wiebe (2010) draws on a similar approach to process data by unpacking organizational members' sensemaking accounts on changes in the past, present or future. However, central for this study is that a narrative-inspired style of interviewing is drawn upon in order to capture and later analyze metaphors to unpack how retrospective and prospective sensemaking is interlinked.

In order to overcome the challenges of capturing and analyzing process data, this current study draws on different sources and strategies to both collect the data and to theorize from it. The data collected should be seen as one coherent study, but within each chapter, the data highlighted corresponds to the research question posed, so that the data that remains is considered more background information in that chapter. The strength in applying different methodological strategies in the chapters is that this method brings with it the possibility of capturing the richness and vividness of the ever-changing phenomenon that is organizational change.

Data collection

This study is a longitudinal two-year ethnographic study of the Bank, drawing on a number of methods. To capture how organizational changes evolve over time, it has been essential to draw on longitudinal data (Langley et al., 2013). However, where most longitudinal process studies rely on historical and archival data, I have collected *real-time* ethnographic data. This is particularly suitable to answer questions grounded in process ontology (Rasche & Chia, 2009).

As part of the ethnographic fieldwork, I have applied the methods observations and shadowing, which I have documented in fieldnotes. I have further conducted interviews, which have been recorded and transcribed. Lastly, I have collected different kinds of corporate material such as documents and recordings of presentations and meetings. Please, see an overview of the methods applied and the amount of data collected in table 3. An overview of the respondents can be found in appendix C. Applying a combination of methods is often referred to as mixed methods. The aim of applying mixed methods was to ensure to get as close as possible to the social phenomena in order to construct explanations of the organizational changes from which they arise (Mathison's 1988). Hence, ensuring that organizational changes were observed through different lenses e.g. a particular change discussed at a top management meeting was also observed in an informal dialogue with a shadowed middle manager and unfolded in more details in the interviews. This to serve the bigger purpose of getting beyond *a priori* determined organizational changes and to get closer to the construction of organizational changes by organizational members. In addition, I strived for transparency in all methods applied by for example writing rich and reflexive fieldnotes, not only describing the scenes played out in the field, but also including my own reflections of the observed.

Table 3: Overview of data collection.

	Method	Hours in total	Documented as	Pages in total
Ethnographic fieldwork	Observations	1300	Fieldnotes	81
	Shadowing	175	Fieldnotes	184
Interviews	Interviews	22	Transcriptions	689
Corporate material	Documents	-	Internal articles, Power point presentations, org.diagrams, e-mails, letters	200+
	Presentations	8	Video recordings	-
	Meetings	3 ½	Transcriptions	145

From the beginning, I was inspired by a narrative approach, why I entered the field by being especially attentive to stories and narratives told by organizational members. Collecting stories served as an open door to unfiltered and thick descriptions of organizational members' experiences – another way to get to the core of the experienced (Gabriel, 2000). The narrative approach has inspired me across the methods applied, but is more distinctive in the interviews, because of my more active role in the interviews compared to the rest of the methods applied. Further, I have strived to include my own reflexivity in the fieldnotes to be more explicit of my own reflections and role as co-producer of the data, which I found essential when being a corporate ethnographer.

Ethnographic fieldwork

I walk up the stairs and as soon as the automatic door opens, I'm met by a big smile. Suzan's smile. 'Signe, lovely that you are here today. I haven't seen you for a couple of days. How are you?' Michael is really

lucky to have such a nice secretary. And I'm really lucky to have such a nice colleague. It always feels like she has missed me. Liza starts asking me about my family. It's Tuesday morning so they haven't seen me since Friday. But they seem to have been missing me at the office Monday. So nice of them. We chat a bit about how we have spent the weekend before I start my computer and walk to the 'coffee man' together with Maria, as we always do.

Ethnographic fieldwork has been central for conducting a longitudinal study of the organizational members' construction of organizational changes in the Bank. Being a researcher employed in the organization, where the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted, has been termed corporate ethnographer by e.g. Cefkin (2009), Jordan (2013), and Sedgwick (2017). My role as corporate ethnographer is grounded in a cooperation between the Bank, Copenhagen Business School, Innovation Fund of Denmark and myself as a researcher. In practice it meant that I had to split my working time – more or less 50/50 – between the Bank and universities, primarily Copenhagen Business School but I also spent three months at Stanford University and Frankfurt School of Finance and Management, respectively. In this section, I will focus on my time in the Bank, which for two years, from 2016-2018, was primarily focused on conducting ethnographic fieldwork.

As the vignette above shows, in many respects I was accepted as a regular employee and colleague, even though my title and my work clearly stated that I was a researcher, researching in organizational changes in the Bank. Among others that made it possible to observe organizational members in their everyday organizational context and daily routines, which was essential because of the underlying process philosophical approach to organizational change. As Nayak and Chia (2011, p.283) argue: 'Such an intellectual orientation has much to offer

to the study of organization and organizational life. Instead of focusing on organizations and their attributes, attention is directed to the micro-practices of “everyday practical coping” (Chia & Holt, 2006) and ongoing “sensemaking” (Weick 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obsfeld 2005)’. However, one of the challenges was the question of whether the dialogue with organizational members were implicitly influenced by the fact that they knew I was a corporate ethnographer. I often observed that organizational members talked about organizational changes when I was around, however it was not possible for me to decide if this was because I was a researcher with a particular interest in organizational changes. But it could be a sign of the Hawthorne or observer effect, where other factors such as attention can influence organizational members’ behavior. Hence, they might have talked more about organizational changes because they knew I would then pay attention to them.

In the vignette about my morning routine, we see some of the strengths of doing ethnographic fieldwork. Ybema and Kamsteeg (2009) argue that ethnographic fieldwork involves ‘living with and living like those who are studied’ (p.101) in order to get as close to the field as possible and to experience and explore the everyday life of the organizational members. Ybema, Sierk, Kamsteeg (2009, p. 1) describe it this way: ‘...for organizational ethnographers much of the intriguing “mystery” of organizational life is hidden in the ordinary exchanges of ordinary people on an ordinary sort of day’. The challenge being that it is not easy to observe the usual, ordinary routines, because it tends to be our blind spot, we are not able to see the ‘ordinariness of normality’ (Ybema, 2009). This was an even bigger challenge because of my long-term employment in the Bank. To cope with this challenge, I conducted real-time ethnographic fieldwork (Langley 2013) including different methods such as the field methods shadowing and *in situ* observations to zoom in and out of the field.

The study has similarities with other ethnographic studies such as Orr (1996), Kunda (1992), and Weeks (2004). As the former, this study has an interest in everyday work practices. By zooming in on the micro processes of the work conducted by the organizational members, this study as well as Orr's study observe organizational phenomena through a particular lens, namely, the photocopier repair technicians and organizational members of the IT department, respectively. In addition, there are obvious similarities between the technicians in Xerox and the IT organizational members from the Bank. However, where this current study has a clear focus on a particular phenomenon as part of the everyday work practices, it is the work practices in themselves which are in the center of the study by Orr (1996). In Kunda (1992), we see a tech organization from within, and in Weeks (2004) we get the chance to observe a bank from within. Both studies have a clear interest in unfolding the work cultures, why it differentiates from this current study with a focus on the phenomenon of organizational change. However, the interest in studying organizations from within and paying attention to the everyday organizational routines are convergent with this current study.

Observations

I return to my desk and start looking through my mailbox. Behind me, I can hear two men talking while waiting outside of the meeting room.

One of them complains about an IT update on his computer, which he has postponed for weeks, and this particular morning it has resulted in that he couldn't access his mailbox and calendar. The other one makes a reference to the time when everybody had to shift from Lotus Notes to Outlook. What a hassle, he says while laughing, it took weeks before we were up and running.

Since the research commenced in 2016, I have aimed at pursuing organizational changes through an *emic* approach. This is mainly due to the observation, I included in the introduction, where I noticed that there was an inconsistency between what, on the one hand the top management viewed as organizational change and on the other hand what lower level organizational members experienced as organizational changes. Thus, I did not pursue organizational changes through an *etic* definition but instead I aimed for an open approach to how the organizational members constructed organizational changes. Observations has been a central method to accomplish that. In some of the chapters, I refer to *in situ* observations, everyday observations or participant observations. In this section, I will apply the terms interchangeable, however, the aim of this section is to elaborate on the terms and unpack to a greater extent than the chapters, how I have been an observer in the field, what type of observations I have made, and how I have applied the observations afterwards.

As part of the everyday job as corporate ethnographer, I had the opportunity to do everyday observations. Hence, the ethnographic study of organizational changes as part of everyday work practices was done where the work normally occurred. In that way, I made observations *in situ* of the organizational members' everyday work as Orr (1996) did while studying technicians work practices. My lens was shaped by the fact that my everyday work took place in the staff function of the IT department, which was where I was formally employed and placed physically. The staff function consisted of secretaries, executive assistants, and planning and communication consultants. The physical location of the staff function was an open office landscape in the corner of the main building, next to the offices of the top managers of the IT department. The physical area reminded me of a railway station, always a lot of activities with people coming and leaving, often only coming by to stay for a couple of minutes, exchanging information with

secretaries, planning consultants or top managers. By sitting in this area, I got access to information which were not accessible for all in the IT department, often overhearing conversations or people chatting with either me or another one from the staff function, when coming by to get some information or waiting for a meeting.

To discuss my role as observer, it is relevant to bring in the term participant observations. Adler & Adler (1987) and Spradley (1980) had created continuums to illustrate to which degree the researcher has full membership / complete participation in the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). To unpack my role as observer as part of my everyday work, I will draw on Spradley's (1980) terminology in order to discuss to which degree I was doing participant observations as complete, active, moderate, passive or non-participate in the different situations. When I was not directly involved in the conversation it can be categorized as passive participant. Here, I was passively listening without having an active role in the conversation. However, many of the conversations were rather sporadically which made me suddenly part of the conversation, when the participants as part of the conversation involved me, not as a researcher, but just as a colleague. Thus, I moved into the role as moderate or active participant. At other times, the conversation was going on across the open office landscape, which indirectly made all in the room moderate, active or complete participants (Spradley, 1980), depending on how much they participated in the conversation.

Another chunk of the observations stems from regularly participation in meetings. A series of meetings, I participated in, were with one of the top managers, discussing the transformation of the IT department and how to communicate a coherent story of the transformation to the rest of the IT department. These meetings origin from an interest from top management in communicating more about the transformation, which I had an active role in. The meetings were on a

quarterly basis throughout the research period. Some of the meetings were recorded and transcribed, which I elaborate on later in this chapter. My role in these meetings can be categorized as close to a complete participant due to my role as responsible for both inviting to the meetings, the meeting agenda, the content of the meetings and making deliveries based on the outcome of the meeting.

The last sub-category of observations stem from seminars and workshops. These were primarily the yearly IT senior management seminar and workshops with the management team of the IT Infrastructure area. My role in these varied.

Sometimes my role was to be a participant on more or less equal terms with the rest of the participants, as for example participating in exercises as every other participant. At other times, I was part of the planning group, responsible for the workshop or the seminar. This was another type of being an active participant, participating on more or less equal terms with the planning group. Lastly, at some of the workshops, I was invited as a researcher to observe and the level of participation was on a rather low level, close to Spradley's (1980) definition of passive participation.

As stated, the role varied between being a passive participant to being something close to a complete participant depending on relations and context. Emerson et al. (2011) argues why it is impossible to be a complete participant as an ethnographer: 'Yet, even with intensive participation, the ethnographer never becomes a member in the same sense that those who are "naturally" in the setting are members' (p. 5). In addition, the aim was not to be neutral or 'a fly on the wall', because the presence of me in the setting had inevitably implications and consequences for what was taking place. It was impossible to be a detached observer who was independent of the observed phenomena. Additionally, I could not take in everything, which meant that certain perspectives were in focus by engaging in some activities and relationships rather than others. Hence, the main

task for me was not to find ‘the truth’ but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others’ lives (Emerson et al., 2011). This was a challenge throughout the research period. In the beginning, I had a feeling of always observing, writing fieldnotes etc. But after a couple of months, I found a more natural level, which meant that observations from the everyday work at the desk in the open office landscape, were only written down as fieldnotes, when I found it surprising *and* related to an organizational change. Instead, I had intensive periods of collecting data, when I went out to do shadowing in an ‘unfamiliar’ part of the IT department. The two years of ethnographic fieldwork added up to 1300 hours of everyday observations, whereas 80 hours stem from leadership and strategy workshops or seminars. These everyday observations have been documented in 81 full pages of fieldnotes, which in average is a half page of computer written fieldnotes pr. day spend at the office.

Shadowing

At 10:32: James and I have just entered the telepresence room, when I can see Scott at the screen. We sit down at the round table. James does not introduce me as he did in the beginning, which is quite natural now that I have met Scott twice at the screen today. James: ‘Have you started to prepare your upcoming performance appraisals? You know, you can come to me if you are in doubt of the process’. Scott: ‘Yes, I’ve now booked all fifteen meetings. So, my calendar is fully booked the rest of the month. I already feel stressed. It takes up all my time!’

With an interest in studying organizational members’ construction of organizational changes, I knew from the very beginning that I needed to be ‘out in the field’, not only being part of the staff function, but meeting the average organizational member in his natural organizational context. In the staff function, the distance to information about the transformation or the strategic organizational

changes was relatively low due to the ongoing communication with top management and the physical short distance to their offices. This was very different from the majority of the IT department which was spread over a number of locations and communication often had to go through a number of managerial layers. Thus, I decided to use shadowing, inspired by Czarniawska-Joerges (2007) and Van Maanen (1975), with the aim of being able to better understand the everyday life of an 'ordinary' organizational member by 'living' like one of them for a period.

By using shadowing as a method, I got access to get closer to organizational members and to study their construction of organizational changes. As Czarniawska (2014) explains, participant observation of top management can be difficult, because in practice the researcher is often sitting in the secretary's office or in a coffee room observing. This situation can be related to the research project, where I was physically located in the staff function. In addition, I had an intention of observing middle managers because of their access to both top managers and employees. The problem in shadowing employees must be found in their working time is primarily dedicated to working in front of the computer, which I thought would not add much value to my data collection. The problem in shadowing top managers were their lack of interactions with employees and their calendar filled up with more strategic meetings which did not get me any closer to how organizational members construct organizational changes. Hence, I found it more beneficial to shadow middle managers, which gave access to meetings with employees as well as meeting with top managers. Thus, middle managers served as windows to all organizational levels in the IT department. Shadowing served not only as bringing me into the core of the organization, but also illuminated the everyday work activities of a middle manager with glimpse of employees' and top managers' everyday life in the organization. The method had played a central role

in the ethnographic fieldwork to let me into all kind of situations, both the more formal meetings but also the informal situations in the open office landscapes, over lunch etc. Another aspect of shadowing was that it not only revealed the organizational members' work, but also how they interacted with each other, in line with the overall methodical approach.

The first shadowed, James, was a middle manager from IT infrastructure. I pointed him out to be the first one to shadow for a number of reasons. First of all, I was located in IT infrastructure and thus, I found myself more familiar with the managers of that particular area why choosing one from this area was a natural starting point. In addition, IT infrastructure is the core of the IT department, seen from a technical point of view, with their central role in being responsible for all IT systems of the Bank. Lastly, this particular middle manager had more than 30 years of seniority in the Bank and was similar to the average organizational member of the IT department: White, male, and in his fifties.

The second shadowed middle manager, Thomas, was Head of Moonshot IT, part of IT development. From the beginning of the research, the idea had been to research not only in IT infrastructure but across the IT department. Thus, it was natural that the second manager was selected among managers from IT development. The reason why I chose this particular middle manager is to be found in his role as Head of Moonshot IT, which at least on paper was the area which experienced most organizational changes at this particular moment and was characterized as an innovative department. Moonshot IT had gone from being an innovation project with five project members two years earlier to be a department with more than 100 organizational members when the shadowing took place. This was in strong contrast to the department James was responsible for, which was characterized as being a stable organization which has not changed much during the years and which had a clear aim of creating stability for the IT systems in the

Bank. But similar to James, Thomas had more than 30 years of seniority in the Bank and was white, male and in his fifties.

Both middle managers were responsible for a department which was almost equally split into two different locations. The former in the main Nordic office as well as in the Eastern Europe office. The latter in another Nordic office as well as in the Eastern Europe office. In total, I shadowed the two middle managers for 21 days. I shadowed James over two periods, first for 9 days and a year later for four days. I also shadowed Thomas over two periods, for five days and a half year later for three days. After and between the periods of shadowing, I kept contact with the middle managers. Mainly by having informal lunches with them where I went back to my desk and wrote fieldnotes based on observations made. Thus, the informal lunches became part of my everyday observations. Further, I made recorded interviews with both of them, which I elaborate on below.

Fieldnotes

I'm standing next to my desk, talking to Karen, while her phone rings. Her gaze is fixed on the display when she says: 'I've to take this one'. She turns on her high heels and walks fast and determined towards Jeffrey's office, which we use as a regular meeting room. He is never here. In the beginning, he was here every Monday. Nowadays, it's maximum one day a month. A few minutes later Karen opens the door, talks in the direction of Sara with a loud voice which indirectly seems to be a message to all of us: 'Look at the portal.. Now!' While we all fumble with the keyboards, one says: 'He is fired! Jeffrey is gone'.

The fieldnotes have played a crucial role in remembering the observations made as everyday observations as well as from the periods of shadowing. Even though, I do remember many of the surprising experiences or 'mysteries' I have observed,

the fieldnotes have been essential to capture the many details which are forgotten over time. The fieldnotes cover observations made both in the everyday work, meetings and seminars, as well as observations stemming from periods of shadowing. The style of the fieldnotes leans heavily on what Czarniawska-Joerges (2007) names dramaturgical or what Agar (1995) calls the scenic method. The reason for choosing a dramaturgical-diary style is to get as rich descriptions as possible of the scenes playing out during the shadowing or observations. The scenes are written either few minutes after they played out or retrospectively during the night, constructed from the accounts of jottings taken during the day of shadowing. In addition, due to my role as corporate ethnographer the style of writing fieldnotes has similarities with what Shotter (2011) calls ‘witness-writing’ (as opposed to about-ness writing), which describe the situation where people write from within relationships and alongside people with whom they are working. Witness-writing is described as a ‘dialogical-prospective-relational’ style of writing and invites the practitioner-writers to get inside the living moment and write into and out of these moments (Shotter & Katz, 1999).

I found the dramaturgical-diary style of the fieldnotes helpful to describe a scene in rich details, and I also found it beneficial to include my own reflexivity (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009) of the scene playing out in the field. Thus, I used the fieldnotes to include a ‘recording’ of my own role as an observer (Anderson, 2006) – what I thought or felt about a scene – to create transparency of my role in the observations. In continuation of the above described scene, I would include a couple of lines reflecting on the situation:

I’m not surprised. But still - even though I haven’t spent much time with him physically - I can’t stop thinking that I will never meet him again. He is just gone. On his way back to the States. I wonder

whether it will influence our team? Will they continue to prioritize the cultural transformation of the IT department?

Ellis (2003) applied fieldnotes as a diary, almost like therapy. In my case, I used the fieldnotes as a kind of diary, both to remember scenes but also to place my observations and thoughts somewhere. Sometimes, I knew that I would not use them directly in my dissertation, but I felt that I had to write it down if it surprised me, annoyed me or my thoughts kept circulating around it. As an example, back in the fall of 2016, I had a meeting with a manager about shadowing one of his direct reports, a middle manager. The meeting was only 10 minutes long, but it felt like it took at least an hour. The manager had behaved in a way, I did not expect. He kept focusing on how many extra hours the middle manager would spend if I was going to shadow him. I tried my best to explain that he would actually not spend extra time, but it was a matter of him being willing to have me around for two weeks, letting me participate in everything. He ended the meeting by asking me to send him an overview of extra hours the manager would spend if I was to shadow him. Now, when I look at that particular fieldnote it makes more sense because it underpins the behavior of the average IT organizational member. At least to a certain extent. Because they like data, they like structure, and they don't mind me hanging around if I'm not giving them extra work. Thus, the fieldnotes have played a crucial role in confirmed other observations made or quotes from the interviews.

Throughout the study, the fieldnotes served more purposes. First of all, the fieldnotes were read, coded and analyzed on an ongoing basis and especially the fieldnotes written in the beginning of the study served as a way to be more focused, strengthen my lens of the field in the last part of the data collection to collect even richer data. Further, some of the observations written down in the fieldnotes fueled my interest for particular organizational changes which served as

inspiration for the interviews. In particular, observations stemming from the periods of shadowing were used to understand the context of the interviewed and to twist the questions to make them more relevant for the person interviewed. Lastly, some of the fieldnotes were applied directly in the analysis, which the next chapter is an example of. The total number of computer-written pages of fieldnotes are 265, including *in situ* observations and shadowing.

Interviews

Just finished the interview with Scott. Or actually, I stopped the recorder 20 minutes ago, but we kept talking while he showed me the other floors of the building. It's really nice here. Young and tech. I wonder why he seemed more relaxed after I stopped the recorder. It's the first time I've experienced such a difference. Is it because he is from the Eastern Europe office and the interview was in his second language? Or because he doesn't trust me? Or because he knows that I have been shadowing his manager?

In contrast to the other methods applied, interviews created a much more formal structure. However, this was also the method where I had the most active role and could ask relevant questions more directly. The interviews varied slightly in character but a common denominator in all interviews was that I aimed at posing questions which could lead to the organizational members sharing relevant stories, which was inspired by a narrative approach.

The first group of interviews in the fall of 2016 was characterized by being rather structured around a number of questions. See interview guides in appendix B. The purpose of the first interviews was to get a better understanding of specific departments or teams that have experienced organizational changes, such as

insourcing, growth in number of organizational members or similar. I often chose these interviewees based on my pre-knowledge of an organizational change and the involved organizational members. In these interviews, my preunderstanding of the department, the people, and the context were rather scarce, and the interviews were explorative with an aim of understanding both the organization and the organizational change better. These interviews centred around the factual side of an organizational change, rather than the personal experience of the change. However, the interviewee's own view of the organizational changes was most often included by the interviewee him or herself.

Another group of interviews was characterized by more open questions, aiming at getting the organizational members to point out the organizational changes, they thought were important (see interview guides in appendix B). This to come closer to an *emic* definition of organizational changes. This group of interviews was strongly inspired by narrative interviewing (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Söderberg, 2006), aiming at getting the interviewee to share stories to better understand their construction of organizational changes. These interviews were always placed after a period of shadowing and the interviewees were employed in the same department as e.g. direct reports, team leaders, project managers or employees of the shadowed. They were selected based on a few selection criteria, exclusively defined and assessed by me: *Have they been in the Bank for a longer period (at least two years)? Would they be interested in sharing their stories?*

These selection criteria meant that the organizational members were still employed in the organization and with at least a couple of years of employment, they might have been more influenced by dominating organizational narratives than if they were new to the organization. On the other hand, it meant that they had some years of experience in the organization to draw from when asked about experiences with organizational changes in the Bank. Further, I had always been in contact with the

interviewees beforehand and I knew they were willing to talk to me. However, risking that the organizational members more critical towards organizational changes in the Bank, might have avoided me to some extent. Because of the already established relations, I felt I could invite organizational members directly for an interview. All invitations were accepted. However, from the beginning I had my own doubts whether my role as shadow to their manager would result in declining of invitations. Afterwards, I have reflected on whether they did not want to decline exactly because of that; I had a close relationship to their manager. A related pitfall might have been that interviewees have not shared their honest stories, because of the risk of me sharing it with their manager.

The strength of applying a narrative approach in the interviews was that it served as a source to better understand the organizational members' experiences (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). One of the forces of a narrative approach was that it was well suited to give voice to a wide range of organizational members (Martin, 1992). From the beginning the idea was to use the narrative inspired interviews in combination with shadowing and observations to get rich stories about how the organizational members constructed organizational changes.

Narratives represent better the context and integrity of people's lives than more quantitative means of research (Freeman, 1998). However, the limitations must be found in that employees might have found it particularly challenging to tell their story to me as a researcher (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Though, an advantage could be that I was employed in the organization and thus, a colleague rather than an unfamiliar researcher. On the other hand, that might have created barriers for the sharing of narratives, especially if their story was critical to or differed from the more official story.

I used my pre-knowledge of their part of the organization and the already established relation to create a trusted room where they were willing to share their

personal stories. Further, I actively used their ‘own’ vocabularies, I have observed in the periods of shadowing, to ask questions which aimed at getting a bit deeper into the interviews. An example was in an interview with Steven, where he used the expression ‘double-clicking’ which can be translated to unfolding for example a project in more details. I then used the expression to get him to talk more about an organizational change he had brought up himself: ‘what if we double-click on that particular organizational change – what happened?’. Another example was when discussing a specific organizational change e.g. ‘the Separation’ to show the interviewee that I did understand what they were talking about and further, to avoid using the expression organizational change, though it was.

The total number of interviews was 36 with an average length of 37 minutes. All interviews started with a brief introduction of the research project. Thereafter, I asked the interviewee to tell about their personal journey in the bank (see interview guides in appendix B). The interviewee sometimes spent half of the interview telling about his or her journey and by themselves included organizational changes they have experienced throughout their career in the bank. At other times, I continued by asking questions such as: *‘If you look back at your time in the bank, which organizational changes stand out the most or which changes have had the biggest impact on you?’* In most cases, the interview would go from being guided by very open questions in the beginning, to focusing more and more on specific organizational changes, I had identified while shadowing in the organization.

To ensure a good setup for the narrative-inspired interviews, some of them were converted to walk-and-talk interviews, a method I developed to create a more informal atmosphere. I applied this method when interviewing James and Thomas, I had been shadowing, because I noticed how small talks over lunch or at the hallway has been filled with personal stories. This was not always the case when

interviewing. The setting of a white and cold meeting room did not invite to an informal interview situation, where stories were shared and unfolded in length and richness. However, the walk-and-talk interviews were different. When the interview was about to start, I invited him to the coffee machine or coffee bar, and asked for permission to put on the microphone and to put the recording telephone in the pocket. I then conducted the interview rather normal, though trying to create an informal atmosphere with open questions, implicitly inviting him to share stories. While interviewing, we would walk around in the building and end up in the meeting room where I would ask the final questions. The format of these interviews served as creating a more informal atmosphere, extending the view into the organizational members' everyday life.

In addition to the 36 recorded interviews, I have conducted a number of informal ones. These were often with top managers or middle managers either to discuss the possibilities of researching in their department or to keep in contact with them after more formal interviews or periods of shadowing. These were often lunch meetings. Not to ruin the informal and casual setup, the possibility of recording the meeting was not brought up. Shortly after the interview or meeting took place, I would write down the fieldnotes as thoroughly as possible. I did not bring pre-structured questions to guide the informal interviews, instead they were unstructured and low on uniformity, meaning the questions were not identical across the informal interviews (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 122). However, in most cases the interviews or conversations were not that different from the other types of interviews, though the informal tone of the questions differed from the others: *'Please, tell me more about your role here'* and *'Any changes in your department since our last talk?'* Due to the lack of recording of the informal interviews, none of them have been transcribed, but are written down as fieldnotes instead.

Transcriptions

In this research project, transcriptions are viewed as processes of construction, in line with the overall methodology. By that, both the recordings and the transcriptions are not treated as data which are given, but are seen as constructed due to the decisions made in the process (Hammersley, 2010). Thus, it has been essential to support quotes from the interview with observations, corporate material etc. to put the interview in a specific context and to unfold the relation between me and the interviewee. The decisions made related to transcriptions can be summed up in to two overall steps. The first one is about the level of details in the transcriptions. With a point of departure in a narrative approach, the pieces of transcriptions used in the analysis have primarily been stories, both shorter more metaphorically moments or short stories – or longer stories exemplifying an event or situation. With that in mind, I decided not to include details such as sounds, intonation, pitch, amplitude and pace of talk, but more focusing on the spoken words, combined with fieldnotes describing the interview situation when I found it relevant. However, laughter, longer pauses or sounds which might have changed the meaning of the spoken words were included.

The second step is related to how the transcriptions have been used. When I identified a relevant piece of transcription, I took the whole piece out and adjusted it to a coherent paragraph. Which meant that going from for example 20 lines of words, pauses etc. to one coherent paragraph, where pauses and repetitions were left out. Further, when possible I conducted the interviews in the interviewee's mother tongue because it can be easier to express him or herself in a more varied and unrestrained way in his or her native language (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004). This resulted in 25 of the interviews were in a Nordic language and 11 in English. The pieces of transcriptions were translated, when they were identified as relevant for the analysis.

Together these two steps are a combination or something in between the two extremes called ‘Strict transcriptions’ and ‘Descriptions’ by Hammersley (2010). The decisions made on how to transcribe in this research project has not been to include everything (strict transcriptions), neither was the aim to interpret and translate the recordings into descriptions. It became something in between, however, closer to ‘strict transcriptions’ than ‘descriptions’ because of the level of details included. I transcribed the interviews myself due to the secondary purpose of reliving the interviews and hearing the interviewee’s stories with his or her own words, not as written words in a transcription. The transcriptions were made in the software program NVivo, where I also coded the transcripts later in the process.

Corporate material

I’ve just read the farewell letter from Jeffrey, sent to his management team. I really like that it is so optimistic taking into account his situation. And it is much warmer than the rather cold article on the portal, telling about the structural reorganization top management made a few days ago. I wonder what consequences this might have for the IT department.

Corporate material has been a source to reach the organizational members I did rarely meet in face-to-face situations. Berger & Luckmann (1966) describe a continuum where one of the poles are the ‘inner circle’, the ones you frequently and intensively interact with. The other pole symbolizes the ones which are almost anonymous abstractions to you. In this case, I only occasionally had face-to-face meetings with top management, and rarely did I visit the other IT sites. However, through recorded presentations, recorded meetings, internal articles, letters from

top management etc. did I get access to periphery organizational members' construction of organizational changes.

Corporate material is a broad category and covers different types of data. In this study it includes two, namely documents and recordings. A number of types of documents exist. The first type is in this study called internal articles. These are articles found on the portal of the Bank which all organizational members had access to. I read a number of internal articles each week and picked out the ones, which seemed interesting and relevant for the research. This added up to more than 100 articles. These served mainly to understand the organization and context better. However, I have included some about organizational changes directly in chapter 5. In addition, I collected Christmas and farewell letters, e-mails, strategy presentations, updates etc. from top management. The vignette shows how these documents gave voice to top management who I did not meet that often in face-to-face situations.

Another central group of documents have been organizational diagrams. I used them for example to orientate myself in a department before shadowing a middle manager. I then followed the more structural organizational changes of this specific department over time by occasionally looking into the current organizational diagram. I applied this pre-knowledge in interviews to ask more specific questions about organizational changes I knew had taken place in that particular part of the organization. Thus, it made me able to follow organizational changes and supplement the more open questions with more specific ones in the interviews.

The other group of corporate material covers recordings of presentations and meetings. Top management held a number of presentations as for example town hall meetings for all employees or strategy presentations at leader workshops and seminars. Most of top management presentations were video recorded which I

collected and kept stored at my computer. I always watched these at least one time and I transcribed parts when I found it relevant. It added up to 9 video recordings of 45-60 minutes. Lastly, I participated in meetings with one of the top managers on a quarterly basis as described in *observations*. These meetings were recorded and transcribed, and in total added up to 205 minutes.

Moral and ethical considerations

Related to each method applied, there are some considerations to be made. One of the challenges of using shadowing is what Czarniawska-Joerges (2007) calls ‘psychologically uncomfortable’. Within the shadowing literature, some points at ‘courage’ as needed for the shadowing researcher because the researcher might experience feelings of being uncomfortable or awkwardness (van der Meide, Leget, & Olthuis, 2013). This had been a consideration when I selected the two candidates and it was a consideration throughout the period of shadowing to ensure that it was a smooth and comfortable period for both parties. I always had a meeting prior to the period of shadowing either face-to-face or by phone to ensure that they seemed comfortable with me shadowing them. During the periods of shadowing, I occasionally checked with them how they felt about having me around. Luckily, in both cases it seemed to be me who felt it was intimidating to be that close for several days more than they seemed to see it as a problem.

Another challenge can be on one hand to get access to meetings, shadowing the leader in everything he does, and on the other hand respecting the sensitive relationships, which can exist between employees and leader. I felt I had an important role in sensing when someone felt psychologically uncomfortable, especially when attending one-on-one between employee and leader. Simon (2013) explains well, how relational ethnography as well as autoethnography

brings in a relational awareness and transparency of the researcher rather than aiming for ‘performing the method properly’. These reflections have been source of inspiration in the fieldnotes as well.

Lastly, a consideration was related to the more ethical and moral questions (Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe, & Worthington, 2007). Even though it might have been possible to anonymize all participant, I decided never to use fieldnotes of observations from sensitive meetings and situations where it was clearly stated that I was under NDA (non-disclosure agreement). Among others, this was to be respectful of my role as corporate ethnographer where I had full access because of the position as employee in the organization. In order to stay in that role and not attract too much attention as a researcher, I never wrote down fieldnotes in front of the organizational members. Or at least, I did not say I did. When I was shadowing James or Thomas, I often jotted down some notes I would later use for my fieldnotes, when they spent their time between meetings on checking e-mails etc. Neither did I return to the organizational members with my observations of them. One reason for that is related to the fact that most organizational members simply forgot that I was observing them, which often happens in ethnography when the observed come to know the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The considerations mentioned here were related to all aspects of the ethnographic fieldwork, but doing shadowing most of them became more visible because of the close relationship to a particular organizational member and my access to meetings, conversations etc. which I did not naturally participate in.

Analytical strategies

When analyzing the data, I was inspired by a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). As the next four chapters show, the

process of going from data to findings varied between the four chapters, which I show in more details in each of the chapters. This was mainly because I in the initial phases played with the data to discover and identify themes of interest. With that said, they all followed to a great extent the same steps, which is similar to how other studies are applying a thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In the following, I will try to describe how these steps were interlinked and how it in practice unfolded as an iterative process, going back and forth between data, the field and theoretical concepts.

First step was to familiarize myself with the whole data set. I read through my fieldnotes several times while still conducting fieldwork and again after all data was collected. During the fieldwork, I found it beneficial to read my own fieldnotes, to recall situations I would like to explore further and to get deeper into the field. Similarly, I listen to recordings from meetings and interviews, and started transcribing while still collecting data. As I conducted more than one interview with several organizational members, I found it valuable to transcribe one interview before conducting the next. In that way, I had the possibility of returning to organizational changes the interviewee had mentioned in the first interview. By listen to recordings and reading through documents and own fieldnotes, I familiarized myself with the dataset as one coherent study.

The second step was initial coding. I used NVivo to transcribe the recordings as well as for the coding of the transcripts. With my search for an *emic* definition of organizational change, this step was characterized by having an open approach to the data, not overthinking or relating the spoken words to theoretical concepts. After a transcription was done, I read through it and created initial codes based on where I identified organizational changes. Either when the interviewee explicitly talk about an organizational change or when I identified it implicitly as something has changed.

The next number of steps differed in the chapters. In chapter 4, I only applied fieldnotes directly in the analysis of my role as researcher employed in the organization studied. Thus, I coded with a clear and narrow focus on my own role in the fieldnotes, but read through the rest of the data, I had collected at that point in time.

In chapter 5, I was interested in organizational changes grounded in an *emic* approach. To study why organizational change failure has been under-researched within a becoming view, I was inspired by the anthropological strategy of ‘studying through’. Hence, I decided to create themes across the data set, whenever I identified an organizational change more than once in the data set. The themes were closely linked to the data with names reflecting the spoken words. I worked on the analysis for almost a year, and I repeated the process of identifying organizational changes across the data set several times, while collecting more and more data.

In chapter 6, I applied the already coded organizational changes to create a more systematic data analysis. I took the 112 quotes, where I had identified an organizational change, and started to first create themes, then restructuring them based on three theoretical concepts I had identified as relevant and further develop them by creating sub-themes. Lastly, I compared the sub-themes with the rest of the data set to test and qualify the findings.

The idea for chapter 7 stems from a pattern, I identified in the data set in the first rounds of initial coding. While coding whenever I spotted an organizational change in the data set, I also created codes when something surprised me. After, I had coded a number of interviews, I had several times coded a piece of data with two codes, namely, *anticipated future organizational changes* and *dramatic metaphors*. Later in the process, Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen and I returned to the data set to explore it further.

Looking across the chapters 4-7, the thematic analysis was neither purely inductive nor deductive, but more an iterative process as abduction. The point of departure in the thematic analysis was characterized by an inductive approach, meaning that the themes identified were strongly linked to the data in order to pursue an *emic* definition of organizational change. In opposition to a deductive thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2015), which is strongly driven by a theoretical or analytical interest in the area, I tried not to fit data into a pre-existing coding frame. However, I was not neutral, and codes and themes were inevitably influenced by my pre-knowledge of the field and theory. Later, in the process and especially in chapter 6, the thematic analysis was inspired by a more deductive approach. The data had already been through a first round of coding, however, during the next steps it was with a clear interest in exploring the three anchor points grounded in differences between classic Weickian and post-Weickian sensemaking theory, why the process was more deductive than in the other chapters. Shifting between a more inductive and deductive approach to the data can be seen as strength to explore the data set and to unfold it in its richness.

Scholars drawing on processual data have applied different strategies to analyze process data and one of them being Langley (1999), who developed seven generic strategies. Each of the strategies varies in how to overcome the fluid nature of the data by fixing attention on some anchor point. Further, they differ in their capacity to generate theory that is accurate, generalizable and simple. This dissertation draws on a process ontology, why it can be placed at the continuum closest to 'narrative strategy' and 'grounded theory'. Given primacy to processes, the dissertation aims at unpacking how organizational changes are constructed by organizational members and thus, also the individual meaning of processes, why in-depth analysis of rich empirical material has been at the center.

If applying the categories of Thorngate (1976) as Weick (1979) and Langley (1999) do: *Accuracy*, *generality*, and *simplicity*, the overall dissertation is closer to accuracy than to generality and simplicity. This is due to the theoretical form developed by this study, which is closely linked to the data. The purpose is to unfold processes in depth through a single case rather than showing the breath in cases. Further, the dissertation aims at embracing complexity rather than aiming for simplicity in the theoretical contributions made. Even though there are some variations in the way each chapter theorizes from process data, they can all be placed in the category of *accuracy*, with some of them moving slightly towards the other two extremes. However, the term *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) might even better describe this study, because of the rich data set grounded in a longitudinal ethnographic study.

Closing remarks

Using an autoethnographic style in this chapter, I have sought to unfold how I studied the ever-changing phenomenon of organizational change. This chapter has revealed how one of the strengths of being a corporate ethnographer was the opportunity to study organizational changes from within. This opportunity along with conducting the longitudinal ethnographic study via shadowing and *in situ* observations, created a potent combination in which I was given the access necessary to study organizational changes as part of everyday organizational activities. This combination further was key to my ultimately being able to unpack its fluid nature. Moreover, by applying other methods such as interviews and corporate materials, I used a mixed methods approach, which has the strength of enriching the study even further by including more nuances related to the phenomenon. However, I found myself inevitably challenged by the fact that the

construction of organizational changes must be seen in relation to the context and individual relationships, making it impossible to generalize more broadly. The chapter concluded by showing how an iterative process, shifting between a more deductive than inductive thematic approach supported the aim of bringing in more nuances and richness when studying organizational changes.

4. Insider or Outsider?

Exploring the fluidity of the roles through social identity theory⁴

The role of insider has been a topic of interest within the fieldwork literature for decades and remains a topical theme. Within the field of anthropology and ethnography, there has recently been a general shift toward doing ethnography and anthropology in organizations (in opposition to what is sometimes called ‘real anthropology,’ the study of a foreign culture, e.g. an Indian tribe, Peluso, 2017). Organizational ethnography is not new, but the amount of studies of organizations has increased over the years (Cefkin, 2009). In addition, more and more organizational ethnographers are conducting research in organizations for the business as opposed to ethnographies of the business (Fayard, Van Maanen, & Weeks, 2016; Jordan, 2013; Malefyt, 2017; Peluso, 2017; Sedgwick, 2017). When the researcher is doing research for the business, the researcher is often categorized as an insider because of their affiliation with the organization, as sponsored by the organization (Fayard et al., 2016). Although this particular form of ethnography does not exhaust insider methodology, its growth does mean that debate of insiders is more relevant now than ever.

A number of scholars have discussed the concerns and challenges of being an insider (e.g. Alvesson, 2009; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). There is also a growing field of scholarship, informed by authors who are or have been insiders, that explores the spatial and temporal boundaries to insider research (e.g. Brun-Cottan, 2012; Fayard & Van Maanen, 2015; Fayard et al., 2016; Hepsø, 2012). Fayard and

⁴ Only few adjustments have been made to this chapter since it was published in the *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* (2019, vol.8, no.2, pp. 159-170).

Van Maanen (2015, p. 11), for example, pose the questions: ‘Who are the insiders? The outsiders?’ and argue that the boundaries are ‘unavoidably blurred and indistinct.’ Brun-Cottan (2012, p. 166) describes it with these words: ‘Labelling an ethnographer an insider or an outsider may well depend on the ethnographer’s relationship to the person who is doing the labelling.’ In contrast, this chapter seeks to move beyond the process of categorization and instead unpack the labeling by investigating how the role as insider or outsider is being assigned to the researcher *in situ* as influenced by context and interaction with organizational members.

This chapter falls in the latter of the two categories of literature, mentioned above, a study conducted by a researcher who is doing research for the organization studied, as sponsored

researcher. By following relational identity theories such as social identity theory and identity theory, the chapter argues that the role as insider is fluid and determined by the situation rather than *a priori* determined such as determined by the role as sponsored researcher. By building on the assumption that the role as insider is fluid, the chapter addresses two fundamental questions: How is the role as insider shaped by the context and through interactions with organizational members *in situ*? And how does that enable or constrain the ethnographer in that particular situation?

Studies of and by insiders, such as Brun-Cottan (2012), Fayard and Van Maanen (2015) and Hepsø (2012), examine both the none-fixed character of insiders and debate some of the consequences these might have for the researcher. However, these studies build on an assumption that the role of insider is dependent on the affiliation with the organization, or labeling, and hence static within a relationship with another organizational member. This leaves a research gap of debating the roles as constituted through interactions and context *in situ*,

where the fluidity of the roles must be investigated through the micro processes. By analyzing fieldnotes, written by the researcher while being in the field, the chapter demonstrates how the role as either insider or outsider is shaped in interactions with the organizational members *in situ*. It contributes to the insider–outsider debate with an empirical grounded discussion of the micro processes, illuminating the fluidity of the roles as insider and outsider. In addition, it contributes with a discussion of how that enables or constrains the ethnographer in that particular situation.

The insider–outsider debate

Definitions and discussions of the role as insider can be found in many shapes within the literature of organizational ethnography and business anthropology, e.g. insider (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Ybema, 2009), at-home ethnographer (Alvesson, 2009), corporate ethnographer (Cefkin, 2009; Jordan, 2013; Sedgwick, 2017), contract ethnographer (Fayard et al., 2016), consultant anthropologist and anthropologist for a business (Peluso, 2017). The literature tends to agree that the ‘insider’ is a label used to denote researchers who are doing research in an organization, they are either part of (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), have a ‘natural access’ to, are an ‘active participant’ in (Alvesson, 2009) or are sponsored by (Fayard et al., 2016; Peluso, 2017), for example, as an employee (Sedgwick, 2017). This might seem indisputable, but what the literature also reveals is the gray area, the blurred lines between being an insider and an outsider, a discussion which is much broader than a matter of an employee contract or affiliation with an organization.

Some accounts, such as Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) discussion of being an insider, as well as that of ‘at-home’ ethnography by Alvesson (2009) center on the

concerns and challenges posed by being an insider. This literature is limited in the extent to which it engages in a discussion whether and when the researcher is constituted as an insider. In contrast, other scholars question the apparently clear distinction between being an insider and outsider to argue that the positioning of *for* and *of* businesses is fluid (Cefkin, 2017; Fisher, 2017; Peluso, 2017). In addition to the literature of insiders and outsiders, there are a number of studies by insiders, literature written by scholars who has been in the role as insider (e.g. Flynn, 2009; Suchman, 1985; Wynn, 1979) and in some cases, explicitly discussing the role from within (e.g. Brun-Cottan, 2012; Fayard & Van Maanen, 2015; Fayard et al., 2016; Hepsø, 2012; Järventie-Thesleff, Logemann, Piekkari, & Tienari, 2016; Jordan & Lambert, 2009; Malefyt, 2017; Nagle, 2017). In other cases, the researcher's role could be called quasi-insider (Fayard & Van Maanen, 2015), where the researcher moves into a role close to the characteristics of an insider, even though the researcher is not, for example, sponsored or employed by the organization (e.g. Forsythe, 2001; Krause-Jensen, 2010; Kunda, 1992; Orr, 1996; Weeks, 2004).

What characterizes the studies by either insiders or quasi-insiders are the more complex and rich descriptions of the role of insider or outsider, unfolding either the blurred lines between being an insider and outsider or illustrating the fluid character as this quote by Fayard and Van Maanen (2015, p. 18) signifies: 'None of these roles were fixed or static but were rather fluid, continually being restructured, retained and abandoned in the course of our interactions with those in the company.' What this quote also shows is that the roles as either insider or outsider are not static, which is also argued in the study by Westney and Van Maanen (2011). Brun-Cottan (2012, p. 165) argues that the researcher can contain both roles within the scope of the same project: 'It would simplify discussion if the ethnographer steadfastly maintained the position of insider or outsider

throughout an engagement. However, in some cases, a person may occupy both roles within the scope of one project.’ This new wave of debates about the role of insider by insiders illustrates that discussions around the shaping of the role as either insider or outsider are relevant. This chapter falls into the same group of studies, discussing own role as insider from within the organization. However, there is still a gap in the literature required by the unpacking of the labeling and in addition, a need to explore the empirical dimension of how the fluid role as insider is being shaped through interactions and context in a particular situation. Offhand, the role as sponsored researcher falls into the category of insiders, but by applying relational identity theories, the chapter aims at unfolding the fluidity within that role.

Fluid identities

One’s identity, or self-definition, is a product of social interaction grounded in specific contexts as specific times such that one’s sense of self-in-organization is emergent and somewhat fluid. Thus, the process of identification is crucial because the nature of identity and the extent of identification are not determined by the preexisting nature of the person or organization. Individuals, groups, and the organization mutually shape one another over time and become comingled: Each level of analysis is neither static nor discrete, neither independent nor autonomous (Albert, Ashforth, Barker, & Dukerich, 1998, pp. 213-214).

Identity and identification have often been defined in fairly static terms, whereas Albert et al. (1998) above argue that identification and identity is more fluid, being shaped through social interactions and context, making the process of

identification crucial. Similarly, identity theory (e.g. Burke, 1980; Stryker, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and social identity theory (e.g. Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Henri Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982, 1985) focus on social interaction as influencing identities and acknowledge that situational factors are important in the construction and reconstruction of roles (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Hence, moving the focus from an individual level (particular in the fields of development psychology, social psychology, symbolic interactionism and psychodynamics) to a relational level (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). The assumption of the self as socially constructed shaped by interactions and situation makes contextual factors and relations to other organizational members crucial in defining the role in a specific situation.

Building further on identification as none-fixed, Pratt (1998, pp. 174-175) relates the discussion to organizational identification and argues that the lines between organizational insiders and outsiders are diffuse: 'Although studying phenomena such as 'organizational groupies' has remained largely outside of the scope of research on organizational identification, it is clear that this aspect of identification may become increasingly important as our notion of what an 'organizational member' is becomes broader and the boundaries between organizational insiders and outsiders become more diffuse.'

This chapter draws on a perception, similar to Albert et al. (1998), Pratt (1998) and scholars of identity theory, e.g. Burke (1980) and social identity theory, e.g. Henri Tajfel and Turner (1979), of identity and identification as fluid, relational and continuous, thus making the interactions and context crucial to understand where and how the researcher becomes an insider or outsider. By drawing on these scholars, it is possible to unfold how a role is shaped *in situ*, rather than making the affiliation with an organization determine for the role. To discuss the process of identification, it is essential to unfold the micro processes by showing the

interactions between researcher and organizational members as well as to include rich descriptions of the relevant context. Hence, this chapter draws on pieces of empirical material to illustrate how the identification process unfolds through interactions between researcher and organizational members in order to unfold the fluid role of sponsored researcher.

Methodology and data analysis

The study takes place in a large Nordic bank with approximately 20,000 employees. The bank consists of a number of business units as well as several staff functions. The unit of analysis in this study is the IT department of the bank. The IT department has approximately 2,700 employees, located primarily on three sites across the world. The department is divided into six areas; five of them are development areas and the last one is the infrastructure area. The main responsibility of the infrastructure area is the maintenance of all IT systems in the bank, whereas the development areas cooperate closely with the business units to develop new IT systems and solutions.

Throughout the study, the researcher was sponsored by and employed as a researcher in the IT department. Prior to being employed in the IT department of the bank, the researcher was, for five years, employed in the HR department of the bank at the headquarters. Because of that position, the researcher had already established relations with some in the IT department, mainly managers and HR partners from the HR unit of the IT department. The agreement of the IT department sponsoring the research was made between the researcher and top management of the IT department, while being employed in HR.

The empirical material used for this chapter is part of a wider research project focusing on organizational changes. Due to the employment in the IT department,

the researcher had a desk in the department, sitting next to secretaries, planning consultants, executive assistants and communication consultants. As part of the ethnography conducted, the researcher wrote fieldnotes based on more than 100 days of observations gathered through the day-to-day work in the staff function. The style of the fieldnotes leaned heavily on what Czarniawska-Joerges (2007) terms 'dramaturgical' or what Agar (1995) calls the 'scenic' method. The reason for choosing a dramaturgical-diary style was to get as rich descriptions as possible of the scenes played out in the field including the polyphony of voices involved in the scenes. The scenes were written retrospectively, shortly after the scene had played out or during the evening.

To explore the field in the beginning of the research, the researcher made an agreement with a middle manager from the infrastructure area to shadow (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007) him for two weeks. The researcher had met the middle manager a couple of times beforehand and because of his position as manager of one of the core areas of the infrastructure area as well as their already established relation, he had been selected. As part of the shadowing, the researcher followed him from morning, when he arrived at the office, to afternoon when he left the office. His calendar was almost filled up with meetings from morning to afternoon and the researcher attended all meetings except three during the two weeks of shadowing. Each evening, the researcher wrote fieldnotes of the observations made during the day, constructed from the accounts of jottings written between or during meetings. The 78 hours of shadowing resulted in 34 pages of fieldnotes. After the period of shadowing, the researcher interviewed both the middle manager who has been shadowed, as well as four of his direct reports. These interviews together with a number of explorative interviews resulted in 17 interviews in total. In combination with the daily observations, shadowing and interviews, the researcher had access to internal documents, meetings,

presentations and informal meetings. This triangulation served to provide a variety of perspectives and interactions with organizational members to illuminate the researcher's role in the field.

The analysis of the empirical material was an iterative process. After the two weeks of shadowing, the researcher started to read through the pages of fieldnotes and realized that there was something interesting around the researcher's own role in the field. How could the researcher end up, having so many reflections and observations of own role, when the aim of the shadowing was to observe the middle manager James and his job? It was a paradox. As a first step in the analysis, the researcher selected carefully all parts of the fieldnotes, which either described a scene involving own role explicitly or reflections made about own role in the field. These excerpts of fieldnotes were discussed with a number of researchers and scholars at different occasions: seminars, courses and supervision meetings, while the researcher simultaneously explored the theoretical discussions within the insider–outsider debate. After these discussions and insights from the literary field, the researcher pinpointed a research gap and the selected excerpts for this chapter were made solely by the researcher based on an assessment of which excerpts were most illustrative in the discussion of the role as insider.

Becoming an insider

This section presents one out of three excerpts of fieldnotes, illustrating the fluidity of the roles as insider and outsider. All three examples illuminate the micro processes that constitute the researcher's role as either insider, outsider or both in a specific situation. The first illustrates how the researcher becomes an insider.

Context

It's the seventh day of shadowing the middle manager James and he has a scheduled meeting with the HR partner Emma from the IT department. The researcher and the HR partner Emma know each other because of the researcher's former job in HR. The researcher is not aware of the participants or purpose of the meeting before the meeting takes place:

8:30-8:56 When we enter the meeting room, James asks Emma if she knows me. 'Of course [...].', she replies. We have cooperated, when I was employed in HR in the headquarters. It is actually a bit awkward because she obviously doesn't know what my role is in this meeting, even though James has explained it as 'my shadow for a couple of weeks'.

The first 10 minutes of the meeting is mainly small talk. James and especially Emma keep involving me in the conversation such as 'You have heard about the Specialist Program, right?', 'Have you met Poul Black' (former Head of the IT-department). I haven't thought that much about it during other meetings but normally it is only the first couple of minutes of a meeting that the participants notice me. After that point, they concentrate on the topic of the meeting and it seems like they totally forget, I'm there. But it is different this time. I think it is due to our relation – me and Emma's [...].

(Fieldnotes, 7. Day of shadowing; February 7, 2017).

Prior to this meeting, James and the researcher had attended a number of meetings together, often with James presenting the researcher as his 'shadow.' In most cases, there has been no questions from other organizational members in regard to

this introduction of the researcher. But in this case, Emma and the researcher already know each other because of the researcher's former position in HR, which influences the shaping of the role as insider in this situation. Within identity theory, it is argued that roles and related role behaviors are negotiated through interactions and when verified, a strong attachment to the group develops (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, Emma is confused about the researcher's role in this meeting because she only knows the researcher from the former position, where the role as insider or the role as part of the group of HR employees was negotiated. Now, in a new context because of the already established relationship between Emma and the researcher, the researcher is again assigned a role as insider. The first interaction between James, Emma and the researcher thus influences the rest of the meeting. As long as Emma sees the researcher as an insider, she expects the researcher to have knowledge about the matters of the meeting, and hence keeps involving the researcher in the conversation. James builds on this perception as well by involving the researcher as an insider in the conversation, which is unusual for the meetings, James and the researcher have participated in together. In opposition to an *a priori* categorization of the researcher, this interaction shows how the role as insider is shaped through the interactions by the organizational members including the researcher and the context. In this situation, the researcher's role is shaped as an insider due to an already established relation to one of the organizational members. In addition, James accepts that the researcher is assigned a role as insider and builds further on this by involving the researcher in the conversation as an insider.

Becoming an outsider

In contrast to the empirical material above, showing how the researcher's role as an insider is constituted by the interactions with the other organizational members, the next piece shows a different situation: how the researcher's role is constituted as an outsider.

Context

It is the second day of shadowing the middle manager James and this excerpt describes pieces of a 45 minutes scene from the morning in the open office landscape. The researcher stands in the open office landscape together with the management team, consisting of Simon, James, Casper and Philip:

8:05 James arrives and jokes about his bus drive this morning. After some small talk, he tells me that he had asked Michael (from top management) about me attending the CAD-meeting (with external vendors) later on today. Michael said 'fine'. That was exactly my thought. That Michael would be okay with that. He always is. But I don't want to seem that I know Michael that well. Yesterday, James came with a joke to another colleague (I haven't met before), in front of me, that I would hand over a report to Michael after these two weeks of shadowing.

8:43 Simon arrives and tells an anecdote about his car, while he starts his computer at the desk next to mine. He tells it to Casper and James, but it seems that they ignore him and just keep working. James only response with a 'Oh'. Simon continues the story about his car. They still don't respond to it. I find a bit awkward because I stand in the

middle and I don't want to try to be part of the conversation if Simon doesn't want me to.

8:46 Awkward with Simon – we hadn't really said 'Hi' and we stand next to each other. What is he thinking about me?

8:49 I stand up just because everybody else does, even though I normally don't. But Casper made a joke about it (me sitting down while they all stood up) yesterday and I just want to fit in. We all stand up: Me, James, Casper, Philip and Simon. Still feels a bit awkward to stand with the management team, I normally don't have anything to do with.

(Fieldnotes, 2. Day of shadowing; January 31, 2017).

In this excerpt, there are at least four indicators of the researcher being assigned a role as outsider. In the beginning, James talks, to and about, the researcher as an outsider. First, he refers to a conversation he had had with Michael, where he asked Michael about the researcher attending a specific meeting. It could be questioned if James would have asked for permission if the researcher was indisputably an insider. In this case he does, making the researcher an outsider where access must be negotiated.

Second, James had, the day before, made a joke about the researcher handing in a report of the observations made in the period of shadowing. In that situation, James alludes that the researcher is an outsider. If he saw the researcher as an insider, as just one colleague among many, he would probably not joke about the researcher using the observations of him as part of a report to top management.

The continuation of the researcher's observations made that morning builds further on to the shaping of the researcher's role as an outsider. In the second part,

the role of outsider is implicitly shaped by (a lack of) interactions between the researcher and the organizational members. Because they, or at least one of the managers, ignore the researcher, the researcher becomes an outsider in opposition to being part of the in-group as an insider. Identity theory builds on an assumption that people come to know who they are through interactions with others and in this situation the researcher reflects on own role as an outsider. Not defining own role as a member of the group of managers, because of the lack of interaction with them, and the context.

In addition, the researcher reflects on the situation the day before, where the role of outsider was constituted in the joke made by Casper about the researcher being different. Drawing on identity theory, the situation can be described as the researcher tries to adapt to the role as insider, by matching what the researcher thinks are the expectations of appropriate prescribed behavior by the other organizational members, by standing up as the others (Hogg et al., 1995). Even though, the researcher tries to match what they expect from an insider, the researcher ends up in a role as outsider.

Shifting roles

The excerpts above illustrate how the researcher in the first case is assigned a role as insider, and in the next as an outsider. However, the fluidity of the roles as insider and outsider can sometimes be identified within the same situation. This shift in roles is illustrated in the excerpt below.

Context

It is the afternoon of the second day of shadowing the middle manager James. James and the researcher have joined a Skype meeting about an IT incident

together with Peter, who is a direct report to James. The three of them are sitting together in a meeting room. On the table in the middle of them, there is a speaker connected to a computer, from which there is constantly people talking. During the first two days of shadowing James, the researcher had participated in a couple of similar calls. Though this is the first time that Michael from top management chooses to participate in the call:

15.30-16.16 [...] While we are sitting at the call, Michael (from top management) walks by, looks through the windows into the meeting room and enters the door. It does not seem to bother either James or Peter, who almost don't react to it. Even though, I don't think he comes by often – it is pretty far from his office. It must be only at special occasions like an incident, a breakdown [...] The meeting continues [...].

Shortly after the call has ended, Michael turns to me: 'So, what did YOU get out of that?' I really don't know which kind of answer he expects from me, so I feel my way around by saying 'Now, I have been here for two days [...]'. Michael interrupts me with a 'No! What did you get out of this specific meeting?' I try with a 'so, now I start to see a pattern [...]' James interrupts me and say: 'Tell about the matter of the meeting'. Michael responds with a 'No, about the form'. I continue with 'It's okay, James [...]', while raising my hand to say that I'm okay with the question, '[...] because I see a pattern [...]' [...] I continue, telling about what I saw happening in the meeting [...]. Michael says: 'Yes! Please, handover these observations to the OS team [...] this is an outside-in perspective'. James turns to me and says: 'I will help you with the contact details'. I respond to them with

‘I will write down my unpolished observations’. Michael ends the conversation with ‘Yes, please’.

(Fieldnotes, 2. Day of shadowing; January 31, 2017).

In the beginning of the excerpt, the researcher describes a situation which is similar to many others during the two weeks of shadowing: James, and in this case Peter and the researcher attend a Skype meeting. The researcher’s role in the meeting is rather natural in the room, as an insider. When Michael from top management enters the room, it changes something in the mind of the researcher due to Michael’s role as sponsoring part of the research project. When Michael opens a conversation with the researcher by saying: ‘So, what did YOU get out of that,’ it changes the role of the researcher in relation to the other organizational members. In other meetings, and the beginning of this meeting, James (and Peter) more or less ignore the existence of the researcher, taking the researcher as a natural part of the situation. But after Michael had started a conversation with the researcher, not being able to answer the question or at least in need of support, James starts to help the researcher by answering which confirms the role as an outsider. What also happens during this conversation could be argued to be a negotiation between the group members Michael and James about the researcher’s role as either in or out of the group. In the last part of the excerpt, Michael says explicitly that the researcher brings an outside-in-perspective with the response to his question and James builds further on the role as outsider by saying that he can help with contact details. This situation illustrates how the role as either insider or outsider is being shaped by interactions and how a shift in interactions can change the assigned role. Throughout the meeting, the researcher’s role shifts from insider to outsider, but the context stays the same.

Thus, the fluid character of the role, shaped through interactions, has been illustrated by first a situation where the researcher’s role can be described as an

insider, thereafter as an outsider and finally, a situation showing a shift from insider to outsider through interactions with organizational members. In addition, the context plays a crucial role. James is a constant part of the interactions in all three excerpts, however, the contexts shift throughout the scenes, as does the researcher's assigned role as insider or outsider.

Discussion: consequences for the ethnographer

The excerpts above illustrated how the role of insider might be usefully considered to be fluid rather than an *a priori* categorization. The context and interactions with organizational members in a situation shape the role of the researcher as insider or outsider. However, a central question still remains unsolved: How does fluidity enable or constrain the researcher as ethnographer in that particular situation?

Within identity theory, the concept of self-verification underlies the behavioral processes, where in this case the researcher acts in accordance with the assigned role to maintain consistency. Hence, leading the researcher to act in keeping with that which most clearly represent the assigned role enables and constrains the researcher in that particular situation (Stets & Burke, 2000). For that reason, it is crucial to discuss what practical consequences the assigned role, as either insider or outsider, have for the researcher as ethnographer.

The practical implications for the ethnographer can both be found in the assigned role of insider and outsider. In the first excerpt, the researcher is assigned a role of insider during the interactions with James and Emma. The researcher's assigned role of insider creates a barrier for James and Emma to move on to discuss the matter of the meeting. While engaging the researcher in the conversation, they spend the first 10 minutes of the meeting involving the researcher in the conversation and as a result end up small talking rather than focusing on the

matter of the meeting. However, the insider knowledge the researcher has in this meeting might enable the researcher to understand the matter more in details than if not having any pre-knowledge of the matter.

In the second excerpt, the researcher is assigned a role of outsider while standing in the open office landscape with a management team. As an example, the comment about the researcher handing in a report to top management can create a barrier to the respondents to speak honestly while the researcher is around. Contrary to that situation, when the management team does small talk as part of their morning routine, the researcher's lack of involvement in the conversation, because of the assigned role of outsider, might mirror the daily routines better than if the researcher was involved.

Finally, in the third excerpt, the researcher is asked to give an outside-in-perspective, which changes the role as purely researcher to be a kind of consultant. This can constrain the researcher in focusing on the research, while being expected to advise the organizational members as well. What constrains and enables the researcher as sponsored researcher become visible in this case. One on hand, the sponsored role enables the researcher to naturally enter into different situations and relations. On the other hand, the researcher is expected to give something in return as, for example, consulting advices.

The shifting role of insider or outsider enables and constrains the researcher depending on the particular situation. If succeeding in gaining from both roles, the researcher can experience the world freshly from the outside and knowingly from the inside (Davis, 1973). However, the shifting identities as a result of interactions with organizational members as well as determined by a particular context or situation made the shift between insider and outsider uncontrollable by the researcher. Thus, it is difficult for the researcher to benefit from both roles, but this should not hinder the researcher in attempting to experience the field freshly

from the outside and knowingly from the inside. By experiencing both roles during the fieldwork, the researcher can benefit from rich empirical material containing both perspectives.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to explore the fluidity of the roles as insiders and outsiders, by first investigating the literary debate about insiders and outsider. Traditionally, the literature of insiders has circulated around the pros and cons of being an insider, moving into a bigger field of scholars writing about their own experiences as sponsored by the organization or doing ethnography for the business. The latter part concludes that the idea of pure insiders is gone to be replaced by a more blurred picture of the lines between being insider and outsider, and between doing ethnography *for* and *of* businesses. However, the insider–outsider debate still lacks an empirical discussion of how these roles are shaped and assigned *in situ*, unfolding the labeling of roles. At first, this chapter can be placed in the latter category of studies because it is written by a researcher who is sponsored by the organization studied. However, the chapter also argues that we need to move beyond the discussion of pros and cons of being an insider, beyond the argument of blurred lines between doing ethnography *of* and *for* a business, and instead unfolding the micro processes of the shaping of those roles. Founded in social identity theory and related approaches which posit identity and identification as fluid, shaped by interactions and context, the chapter illustrates how the researcher is assigned roles as insider or outsider depending on situation, relations and interactions rather than determined by affiliation with the organization as sponsored researcher. By contributing with an empirical grounded discussion of how the roles as insider or outsider are fluid and can shift swiftly,

the chapter has a contribution to the identified research gap within the insider–outsider debate. Finally, the chapter argues that the assigned role has consequences for the researcher as ethnographer in that particular situation. While unfolding how the roles enable and constrain the researcher as an ethnographer, the chapter not only discusses how and when the researcher is assigned a particular role, but also which practical consequences that role has for the researcher in that particular situation.

5. A drifting phenomenon

Organizational change failure in a becoming view⁵

Change is subtle, agglomerative, often subterranean and heterogeneous. It spreads like a patch of oil (Chia, 1999, p. 222).

In 1999, in an article written by Chia, change is viewed to be a non-static and natural phenomenon, in contrast to the traditional view on change. Since then, other scholars have followed this line of thinking which can be called the ‘becoming view’ as coined by Hernes and Schultz (2016). Central to this view is Tsoukas and Chia's (2002) article on organizational change, where they unravel how this view differs from more traditional ones (e.g. Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1947): ‘If change is viewed as the exception, the occasional episode in organizational life, we underestimate how pervasive change already is’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 568).

This chapter is grounded in the becoming view and the aim is to investigate the phenomenon of organizational change failure. However, it seems hard to come by the phenomenon within the existing literature on this view. Instead most studies of organizational change failure draw on what could be called the planned view (e.g. Jones, Firth, Hannibal, & Ogunseyin, 2018; Kotter, 2008; Senturia, Flees, & Maceda, 2008) or the evolutionary view (e.g. Amburgey, Kelly, & Barnett, 1993; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Muluneh & Gedifew, 2018), making it a matter of taking the right decisions and actions or adapting to contextual factors. However, if

⁵ Only few adjustments have been made to this chapter since it was published in the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (2019, vol.32, no.6, pp. 605-620).

organizational change is accepted as natural and pervasive, it calls for studies on organizational change failure grounded in that definition in order to extend the becoming view.

Using an *emic* approach to organizational changes, empirical data gathered through a longitudinal study in a Nordic bank is analyzed in the pursuit of unfolding why organizational change failure is under-researched within the becoming view. To overcome the challenge of studying an ever-changing phenomenon and inspired by Wright and Reinhold (2011), organizational changes are ‘studied through’ in space and time from within this particular organization, with an aim of unfolded the fate of organizational change failure. Thus, the main research question informing this chapter is: *Why is organizational change failure under-researched within the field of the becoming view?*

In order to study the almost missing phenomenon of organizational change failure, the chapter analyzes organizational changes with the goal of getting to the root of their fate. The chapter finds that while following a particular organizational change through the organization or in time, it simply drifts away, either by slipping into everyday practices or by drifting away in time when reinterpreted. By unfolding the indicators of a potential organizational change failure from the empirical data, the chapter further finds that the phenomenon of organizational change failure has suffered the same fate as organizational changes more generally. With these findings, the study has two main contributions. First, it contributes to the becoming view by illustrating how methodologically an ever-changing phenomenon such as organizational change can be studied. Second, it contributes to the field of organizational change failure by unpacking the fate of organizational change failure grounded in the becoming view.

A becoming view

The field of organizational change is extensive, with scholars having written about the subject for decades. The way organizational changes are defined and viewed varies within the field, with many scholars working to map it (e.g. Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Burke, 2002; Todnem, 2005; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Weick & Quinn, 1999). In accordance with Hernes and Schultz (2016), the literature can be divided into three main viewpoints: planned, evolutionary and becoming.

The first, planned, is the most traditional view on organizational changes and is often characterized by applying models representing a simple, linear and practical way to understand organizational changes. A number of studies have stated that 70 percent of all organizational changes fail (e.g. Beer & Nohria, 2000; Kotter, 2008; Senturia et al., 2008), which is rooted in the planned perspective, with a strong belief in evaluation and quantification. A fundamental belief here is that organizational changes can be managed and controlled, an organizational change failure will often be due to errors in executing the planned steps (Kotter, 1996).

The second, evolutionary view, is inspired by biology and views organizational changes as recurrent, emergent and proceeding through continuous cycles. When it comes to organizational change failure, scholars (e.g. Dunphy & Stace, 1993; Hughes, 2011; Walker, Armenakis, & Bernerth, 2007), argue that the planned view has a limitation in its lack of focus on contextual factors. Thus, determining whether an organizational change is a failure or not, becomes conditional on who is doing the assessment and when the judgment is made within the evolutionary view.

The third view, becoming, is grounded in a process-philosophical tradition inspired by Bergson (1946) and James (1909). According to one of the central scholars of the becoming view, Chia (1999, p. 222), change ‘occurs naturally,

incrementally, and inexorably through “creep,” “slippage” and “drift,” as well as natural “spread.”” This quote illustrates the essence of the becoming view. First, change is seen as a natural and normal condition of organizational life. It is similar here to the evolutionary view in its incremental and emergent nature, however, it differs when it comes to its natural spread and in how it is also inexorable. Further, it is characterized by being subtle, agglomerative, subterranean and heterogeneous, which makes it difficult to get a hold of. In contrast to the other views, change often comes by surprise, because it creeps in and drifts away naturally (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Both Chia (1999) and Orlikowski (1996) have argued for paying attention to microscopic changes, because they reflect the actual becoming of things and due to changes emerge imperceptibly, in the slippages and improvisations of everyday activity. A central assumption here is that everyday activities cannot be separated from routines, as a lot of work done in organizations is performed through routines. As March (1981, p. 564) states: ‘in its fundamental structure a theory of organizational change should not be remarkably different from a theory of ordinary action.’ Continuing from this, Feldman (2000) and Tsoukas and Chia (2002) have argued that routines are not as stable and unchanging as is so often presented in studies within a planned or evolutionary view. Instead, Feldman (2000) and Howard-Grenville, Rerup, Langly, and Tsoukas (2016) point out how the internal dynamic of a routine is a source of change in and of itself. Some empirical studies have been focused on how institutional changes influence everyday practices as for example in the studies by (Kellogg, 2009, 2019) of two US hospitals.

Central for the becoming view is that everything is always in a state of becoming, and for that reason ‘Everything must be understood in the light of its development over time and space, according to Whitehead’ (Bakken & Hernes, 2006, p. 1610). The spatial dimension is not only the physical or geographical, it is also the social

dimension that an organizational member's 'manipulatory zone intersects with that of others' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 40). An example of this is the empirical study by Sonenshein (2010), illustrating how organizational changes can be interpreted differently by top managers and employees, respectively. Another empirical study, concerned with the spatial dimension of the becoming view, is Hernes et al. (2015). In this study, Hernes et al. (2015) unpack a strategic change program in two different teams within the same organization, making the spatial dimension a physical one. Even though both studies are occupied with the spatial dimension, none of them view organizational change as occurring inexorably through slippage or drift. Instead, they focus on strategic or *a priori* defined organizational changes, underlining that only few empirical studies grounded in the becoming view exist.

Further, the becoming view differs from the others with regards to the temporal dimension. In the planned and evolutionary view, time is seen as a linear progression from past to present to future, but scholars of the becoming view have criticized this particular point (e.g Chia, 2014; Hernes & Schultz, 2016). They contend that it offers little insight into the more unpredictable events that change the course of the history within the organization and the subjectivity of time (Lord, Dinh, & Hoffman, 2015). By using the term 'in time' instead of 'over time,' it enables reconstruction of the temporal meaning of a given phenomenon. Thus, the ever-changing character of the past, present and future, means that nothing is ever fixed or stable but instead stays open to reinterpretation and enactment. In other words, the organization is always in a temporal becoming influenced by actors who are constantly engaged in the work of connecting and reconnecting events which perform the becoming of the organization (Hernes & Schultz, 2016). Empirical examples are Wiebe (2010) and MacKay (2009) arguing that organizational change do not unfold within time, rather focusing on how

organizational members draw on time to frame organizational changes, thereby reconfiguring the relationship of past, present and future.

Within the becoming view change has been an ongoing subject of discussion, which is quite natural considering that everything is seen as always in a state of becoming, always changing. However, the phenomenon of organizational change failure seems to be under-researched within the field, with the study by MacKay and Chia (2013) as an exception. In their study, they discuss the unintended consequences of strategic change while studying ‘unowned processes,’ including a discussion of organizational change failure and success. Again, it differs from this current study by focusing on strategic changes rather than studying organizational changes through an *emic* approach. The reason for organizational change failure not being studied systematically grounded in the becoming view might be found in the difficulties of studying an ever-changing phenomenon, which this chapter aims at doing.

Methods

To develop a rich understanding of organizational change, I conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of an IT department in a large Nordic bank. Using an inductive approach with the aim of developing new theory (van Maanen, 1988), I studied employees and leaders in their everyday organizational context for two years (August 2016–August 2018). This was essential because of the difficulties in studying organizational changes as processes (Langley et al., 2013), as ever-changing phenomena, and further, as not linked to already identified strategic events.

Following Tsoukas and Chia (2002), changes must be approached from within, and not as an abstract concept, in order to really understand how change is

accomplished. Similar to other studies (e.g. Fayard & Van Maanen, 2015; Hepsø, 2012; Nagle, 2017; Suchman, 1985), the role as insider or ‘corporate ethnographer’ (as applied by Cefkin, 2009; Jordan, 2013; Sedgwick, 2017) covered the dual role of being employed in the organization studied while doing ethnographic fieldwork, which provided access to study the organization from within (Bruskin, 2019). As Fayard and Van Maanen (2015) argue, the role as corporate ethnographer, working in (and for) a large company, implies not only new knowledge developed but also a role as co-producer of the organizational life studied. In this study, the risk of ‘going native’ was delimited by spending only half of the weekly working hours in the organization as well as not being physically in the organization for longer periods of up to three months. The strength of being an insider was the opportunity to make *in situ* observations, shadow managers for weeks, and conduct interviews at all levels across the IT department – never being denied access.

The research was situated in the IT department of the Bank (a pseudonym). Historically, the more than 100 years old bank had been well-known for being traditional, conservative and with high seniorities. However, the financial industry had changed dramatically over the last decade due to digitalization, changes in customer demand, increased regulation, etc., and the Bank was no exception. The IT department was at that point undergoing remarkable changes and had done so for 3–4 years; hence, it offered a unique and valuable case for studying organizational change. The data were primarily collected in the two Nordic offices of the IT department; however, seven interviews were conducted in the Eastern Europe office as well as observations stemming from four days spent at that particular office.

Ethnographic data collection

This chapter draws on data collected from four data sources; shadowing, interviews, *in situ* observations and desk research. The mixed methods have been crucial to examine contemporary processes in depth (Langley et al., 2013). A summary of the empirical data can be found in Table 4. In order to gather process data of changes, which have a fluid character and are spread over space and time (Langley, 1999), I was inspired by the methodological strategy of ‘studying through’ by Wright and Reinhold (2011). Intrigued by this strategy, I followed organizational changes through the organization as well as in time.

Table 4: Summary of empirical data.

Empirical data	Units
Observations	1300 h / 81 pages of fieldnotes
Shadowing	175 h / 184 pages of fieldnotes
Interviews	36 interviews / 37 average minutes/interview
Recorded meetings and presentations	14 recordings / 50 average minutes/recording
Other material	E-mails, articles, PowerPoint presentations, photos

Shadowing

I applied the technique of shadowing (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007) as a method to ensure a deep and rich understanding of organizational members in their natural organizational context and to capture when organizational members talked about organizational changes in everyday work situations. I shadowed two middle managers, who were selected based on their position and department. Compared to top management or employees, middle managers offer a broader view of the entire organization from all levels. In order to capture the breath of the organization, the

two managers chosen were positioned in two different departments. Both managers were Nordic and worked primarily out of one of the Nordic offices, however, in two different parts of the same country, and both departments had approximately half of the organizational members located in the Eastern Europe office. The first was Head of IT Infrastructure (pseudonym), leading a department of 50 organizational members including four team managers. This particular department was by other organizational members categorized as a stable one; it has existed for a number of decades without notably changing much technologically speaking, the seniority among organizational members were high, and the department has been led by the same middle manager for more than 15 years. By shadowing this middle manager, I had access to a department which had a long history together and thus, had experienced the same organizational changes. I shadowed the middle manager for 9 days in the winter of 2017 and again a year later in 2018, this time for four days. The second manager was heading Moonshot IT (pseudonym), a department of more than 100 organizational members, including six team managers. This department was often categorized as being one of those that had undergone the most change over the past four years, as it had grown from a team of just five to more than 100. By that I had access to a department which in contrast to the other department had experienced lots of radical changes the last four years. I shadowed the middle manager over two periods: first, for five days in the fall of 2017 and then again, a half year later, in the spring of 2018 for three days. Combined, these 21 days of shadowing resulted in 184 full computer written pages of fieldnotes.

Interviewing

The second method applied was conducting interviews. Over the two-year period, I conducted 36 interviews across the IT department, both vertically and

horizontally. Out of 28, 7 interlocutors were interviewed at least two times over the two-year period in order to study through changes in time. Half of the interviews were conducted in continuation of the periods of shadowing including both the shadowed, their team managers and employees. That strategy made it possible to study through changes down the hierarchical layers. The rest of the interviews were conducted in other areas to ensure that changes were studied through across the organization. The interviews served as a way to get rich answers on phenomena, I have found particular interesting in the field. The purpose of the interviews was two-fold. First to get the interlocutors to point out organizational changes they had experienced in the Bank and second, to get them to talk about organizational changes, I have picked up from other organizational members in order to study through particular changes. Thus, the interviews were inspired by a narrative style to make the interlocutors include deep and rich accounts of experienced organizational changes. The opening question of the interviews was: ‘Could you please tell me about your personal journey in the Bank?’ Followed by questions to make the interlocutors elaborate on organizational changes, they included in their story of their personal journey. The latter part of the interview was characterized by questions about particular changes, I have picked up from other organizational members, e.g. ‘Last week a restructuring of the Bank was announced – how do you see that?’ The length of the interviews varied but on average were 37 min long. All interviews were recorded, and I personally transcribed each one of them.

In situ observations

As corporate ethnographer, I was physically placed in the staff function of the IT department in one of the Nordic offices. My role as corporate ethnographer with a particular focus on organizational changes were well-known to all organizational

members, however, I was included in the organization as a ‘regular employee.’ Here, I had a desk in the open office landscape together with personal assistants, communication consultants and secretaries, all of whom were placed next to the offices of the top managers. When being in the organization, unless I was shadowing or participating in seminars or meetings, I was sitting at my desk as a regular employee, though observing and taking fieldnotes whenever I found it relevant. I did not share these notes with the organizational members in order not to break with the role as regular employee. This gave me access to observe how organizational members talked about organizational changes as part of their everyday work and to capture *emic* definitions of organizational change. This resulted in more than 1,300 h of *in situ* observations and 81 full computer written pages of fieldnotes.

Desk research

Further, I drew on organizational documents to check my observations and impressions made through the shadowing, interviews and *in situ* observations. In addition, the documents were essential when following changes through space and time. Especially, in order to study organizational changes through different sources of data. The organizational documents included internal articles available at the intranet, presentations from seminars and town hall meetings, e-mails, and photos taking of anniversaries or other posters. In total it added up to hundreds of documents. Lastly, I had access to a number of meetings and presentations. Team meetings and meetings with colleagues were not recorded to maintain the role as regular employee. However, meetings and presentations with top management were recorded, which added up to 700 min of recordings.

Data analysis

In analyzing the gathered data, I was inspired by a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke et al., 2015). The analysis was conducted in four separate phases with a point of departure in an inductive approach, but along the phases moving toward an iterative approach, shifting between data and theoretical ideas. The inductive approach allowed me to build the analysis grounded in *emic* definitions of organizational change as well as establish a firm link to the becoming view.

The first phase was conducted during the fieldwork, where I listened to recordings of meetings, transcribed interviews and read through fieldnotes and collected documents. NVivo was used to inductively code the data, not drawing on any particular theoretical perspective. The second phase was conducted after all data was collected, where I began to rename the inductive codes. Drawing on a broad definition of change as ‘make or become different’ as it is defined by Oxford Dictionaries, I started to name each particular change identified in the data set. An example was ‘the separation’ which was the often-mentioned change as Moonshot was separated from the Bank as a subsidiary or ‘the reshuffle’ which referred to the organizational restructuring of the Bank. The names of the codes were grounded in the words applied by the organizational members to ensure that the codes were strongly linked to the data. However, even though the codes were data-driven, they were inevitably influenced by my prior-knowledge of the field and related theories, why the approach moved toward what could be categorized as abductive.

In the third phase, I started to group the renamed codes into themes. Again, I was inspired by the anthropological method ‘studying through’ in order to capture the ever-changing phenomenon of change. This time, I modified it and applied it as an

analytical strategy to study through identified changes in the data set. As an example, I followed the change ‘the separation’ through the whole data set by collecting all data pieces which I have coded ‘the separation.’ By that I identified a theme which included a number of different accounts, both spatial and temporal, of the organizational change ‘the separation.’

In the fourth phase, I explored each theme further in order to create sub-themes. Here, a pattern began to emerge: each change followed through the different accounts seemed to ultimately drift away. The sub-themes were changed and refined several times during this phase, but finally each theme, e.g. ‘the Separation’ was split into two sub-themes: ‘Studied through in space’ and ‘Studied through in time.’ See more examples of the former in Table 5 and the latter in Table 6. At this point, the extracts included in this chapter were identified and the analysis completed.

Analysis: organizational changes drifting away in space and time

The analysis is structured in two parts, with the first part being focused on following organizational changes in space, and the second part, in time. All names are pseudonyms.

This part of the analysis is focused on studying through organizational changes in space. The spatial dimension includes both a geographical and physical one, a social one, as well as across data sources. To support this part of the analysis, please see Table 5 for more empirical examples, followed by two empirical examples which are unfolded more in depth.

Table 5: Empirical examples of organizational changes studied through in space.

Identified organizational change	Account 1	Account 2
The Insourcing	Internal article (February 2017): <i>Insourcing from ITEC</i> ‘Because of the insourcing, IT Infrastructure will need to take on more employees going forward. About 15 of them will come from ITEC’.	Fieldnote from shadowing (February 2017): Michael (top manager) comes by and joins us for lunch. He starts talking about the insourcing announced yesterday. He tells us that he and Tim (Program Manager) went to ITEC yesterday in order to welcome 15 employees back to the Bank. He further tells us that the employees have all been part of the outsourcing in 2005 and joked with Michael and Tim about why it had taken such a long time before the Bank insourced the contract again. Michael explains how he does not think that the change is radical to them – they see it as just coming back home to the Bank.
The Reshuffle	Fieldnote from shadowing (April 2018): (8:56 a.m.) On our way to the reception to pick up Charlie, James looks at his phone and tells me that there are major organizational changes in the Bank. He tells me that one from the board has been fired. (10 a.m.) It is time for a management call, filmed directly from the Hall, where Pete Brown (CEO) tells more about the new strategy and the organizational changes made. All managers in the Bank are invited to the livestreamed town hall meeting.	Fieldnote from shadowing (April 2018): (11:58 a.m.) Management meeting with James and his four team managers. James first asks if they listened in on the call with Pete Brown. Only two of them did. Not Scott from the Eastern Europe office. James talks for 5–10 min about his interpretation of the new strategy and organization. After that, he asks them what they think. Not many reactions to identify among the three managers.
Growth of IT NI	Christopher (interview, December 2016): ‘You could say, the change that has happened [...] we have gone from being a team of nine, as you can hear [...] now, we are close to 60’	Christopher (interview, December 2016): ‘So for me, that organizational change, it is more like a change within me [...] so it is not [...] There has not been a dramatic change in the organization, but I’m the one who needs to change. I do not need to have dirty fingers, I don’t have to put my fingers in the mud, it is the others [...]’

In the following empirical example, we meet John, a project manager from Moonshot IT. He is middle-aged and has acquired 26 years of seniority at the

Bank. Over the past three years, he has been employed in Moonshot IT. An extract of the second interview with him, conducted in April 2018, follows, which was completed six months after the first interview was conducted. The excerpt begins three minutes into the interview:

Interviewer: If we now take a look at the past half year, has there been [...] or do you see any changes?

John: Well, there is a big organizational change coming up, right

Interviewer: You are thinking of [...]

John: Yes, the whole reshuffle, you could say [...] with Richard Brown [Executive Board member] and Derrick Williams [Executive Board member] [...] now, an organizational change in the IT department has just been announced as well [...] And Joe [Top Manager] has started and so on [...] and let's see what that will bring [...] I have come to take it for granted that we are used to see these coming [...] and then we wait for a while to see what it will bring [...] if you consider our organization in all of this, offhand it doesn't seem like big changes - to us - so in the grand scheme of things, I'm thinking that it is business as usual [...]

In the above quotes from John, we follow an organizational change in space, in this case down through the hierarchical layers of the organization. In the beginning, he talks about the reshuffling of top managers at the Bank. In accordance with more traditional scholars of change, this is a classical organizational change, in that it details the reshuffling or restructuring of the organization. Seen from the outside, it could be considered a major change to the organization. John explains how the change then trickles down to the top management of the IT department and, at the end of the interview, he reflects upon

these changes from the level of the employee. His conclusion is that at the point when it hits the very lowest level of the organization, of which he is a part, by then the actual organizational change has drifted away. The change has slipped into everyday practices. In the second to last line, John explicitly says ‘business as usual,’ which gives an indication as to why changes have a tendency to drift away. What John considers to be a change will not be a change with consequences for the organization as a whole but are instead smaller changes that influence his everyday activities. These changes might even slip into everyday practices without him noticing, and he will logically experience this as ‘business as usual.’ While studying the organizational change through all the way down to the employee level, it naturally slips into the everyday activities of the organization.

David is the next person to meet. He is in his mid-30s and has been working at the Bank for 11 years. He has been part of Moonshot IT from the very beginning when it was still a small project team all the way to today, where it is an organization consisting of more than 100 employees. This expansion is the change he is referring to in the excerpt below from an interview conducted in October 2017:

Interviewer: If we revisit this again – what other changes have there been?

David: Well, our [...] We keep changing seats. [...] But we have changed seats a couple of times. But, well, some of us care a lot about it and others don’t care at all [...] but, you could say that changing seats actually is an expression of organizing and a restructuring, well, you don’t just change seats for fun. It has to mirror something – and what it does mirror is actually also an expression of what we exactly [...] from being a team – like everyday heroes just running around after each little ball that looks exciting - has a dedicated area of

responsibility. It is also mirrored in the way we are sitting and working. Well, it is also a clear change that we have gone from being [...] you help where you can, to being rather bound by specific areas of work and responsibility where you know approximately which direction to throw the ball [...]

In the above excerpt, we meet David who began answering the question related to organizational changes by talking about the physical seating and office layout. Later, he related it to the particular change of transforming from a small team to a large department. This is an example of how organizational changes influence everyday practices and routines, such as how employees are physically situated. David explains that the many organizational changes, they have experienced while the team has grown, have been followed by several physical changes in their offices, such as getting new seats. In this interview, the change in question is the growth of the team and what we see when David relates it to the physical changes of altered seating, are how the change slips into everyday routines. Subterranean and subtle, it naturally becomes part of the smaller changes in everyday practices and as a big change in itself, it has drifted away.

Like the first empirical excerpt, this is in-line with the argument that organizational changes tend to drift away in space. In the first piece, we saw how that particular change started out as a classical change in the form of a reshuffling of top management, and then drifted away through the hierarchical layers. By the time one focuses on the employee level, the change has slipped into everyday practices, leaving John to experience it as ‘business as usual.’ In the second piece, the change had to do with growing in size from a small project team to an eventual larger department, and we followed the change through space by hearing David’s account of how the change was visible in everyday life. On the subterranean level, the change became part of everyday practices and routines, in the form of the

physical changing of seats. In both cases, when the changes drifted away, it was because they had naturally slipped into the everyday practices and routines of the organization.

The next part of the analysis is focused on studying through organizational changes in time. The temporal dimension includes both following changes over time but also the reinterpretation of changes in time. To support this part of the analysis, please see Table 6 for more empirical examples. It is followed by an in-depth analysis of two empirical examples.

Table 6: Empirical examples of organizational changes studied through in time.

Identified organizational change	Account 1	Account 2
Merger & acquisitions	Christian (interview, February 2017): ‘I have always been working – not for the Bank – but for some of the companies which later have been acquired by the Bank and merged. [...] it is such a long [he knocks three times] story with tons of acquisitions and outsourcing and insourcing. But it is important to understand that for many years, I haven’t been a technician, I’m a project manager!’	Christian (interview, February 2017): ‘You know, we have made big things with outsourcing and insourcing and that are HUGE tasks [...] and before that, we run all these migration projects [...] and these were HUGE projects’.
The New IT Culture	Fieldnote from observation (August 2017): Lunch with James. Suddenly, James begins to tell me that rumor has it that top management are about to make a big change by starting something called the New IT Culture. He talks about how it has created a wave of uncertainty. He tells me that people are talking about what it might be and how it could potentially influence them and their team. He says that some people have asked whether it means that they will be fired.	Fieldnote from observation (June 2018): Lunch with James. James starts talking about the New IT Culture and how he has become involved in the program. He keeps talking about his role as responsible for the leadership stream in the program and how passionate he is about changing leadership in the IT department.
The Separation	Fieldnote from shadowing (September 2017): (2:15 p.m.) Two from the Legal department join the management meeting. They talk about competition law, now that Moonshot is no longer part of the Bank. This is very much on the agenda these days, both in Moonshot and in Moonshot IT. Managers are faced with many challenges due to the wall between Moonshot and the Bank, dating from October 2017.	Fieldnote from shadowing (April 2018): After three days of shadowing Thomas, it is interesting to reflect on how the last time I was here, they kept talking about the Separation and now, they don’t even mention it anymore. Clearly, it is no longer at the top of their agenda.

The next couple of empirical excerpts are related to a particular organizational change, referred to here as ‘the Separation’ (a pseudonym), which is the separation of Moonshot from the Bank. From that point, Moonshot officially becomes a subsidiary of the Bank, while the IT section, ‘Moonshot IT,’ continues as part of the Bank, and it is from this department that the empirical data are gathered. In the first example, we meet John again, a Project Manager from Moonshot IT. T1 stems from an interview conducted with him a couple of days after the official Separation date in October 2017. In the interview, he reflects upon the possible consequences of the Separation. T2 was conducted with John a half year later and he is again asked about the Separation:

(T1) Interviewer: What if you now – now, I had followed the Separation a bit and that – what do you think that it does to Moonshot IT?

John: Yes, that is a good question, because right now we are in the Bank and will we stay here? Is Moonshot going to keep using the Bank or – you do hear – I think it was somewhere, you do hear that somewhere they [Moonshot] have a dream of just being able to replace the IT supplier in principle, if they need to.

(T2) Interviewer: And then I thought – if we look back on it now [the Separation] – has anything changed in your opinion? Well, for your work or [...]

John: That is a good question, hmm. Yes, well, in a way it has changed something. [...] we experience, as an example, this – if we need help in relation to implementing something, we have an external consultant who might need access to some databases. He might have had access previously, but now he has to specifically apply for it, because we are

separated. Now, it is two different companies. We have bumped into a couple of occasions where this has implied some challenges, or some longer time to get things done. Because then he has to gain access and he is sent around between 20 different mailboxes. Well, that is it. Otherwise I actually don't think that the change has been so – super big – of course, there is something about how now we have other stakeholders and they need to be updated a bit and we have to be aware of that when we implement anything new. And otherwise, I don't think that we have experienced such a big change. We still have Thomas [Head of Moonshot IT], we still have Daniel [CEO of Moonshot], Julie [Manager in Moonshot], so in that way, our stakeholders are relatively – unchanged.

The above excerpt contains similarities with the two prior ones. As we saw before, the change slips into the routines and everyday practices, as John points out that the change can be observed in the everyday practices of external consultants. He points out that the change has created extra work for the consultants and that this can be time consuming. In other words, in T1, John talks about the change as being a potentially big and dramatic organizational change, whereas in T2, it has slipped into the everyday practices. However, something else is observable with regards to the change in time. In T1, John talks about the Separation at an organizational level; he talks about the potential consequences of the big change of Moonshot being separated from the Bank, and that this can mean that Moonshot IT will be replaced by another vendor. It is a matter of life or death for Moonshot IT. However, in T2 he reinterprets the organizational change of the Separation and its potential consequences. In T1, he talks about the Separation as a rather big change, whereas he explicitly says in T2 that he does not see it as 'super big.' Further, in T1, he raises his concerns about the threat of Moonshot with Daniel as

CEO, and that he could decide to change vendors and, in that way, make Moonshot IT redundant. By John's reinterpretation of the organizational change in time, we see how things are never fully stable and fixed, but rather possess an ever-changing character. In T2 he talks about the management of Moonshot again, but this time refers to them in a new way: as harmless stakeholders. That which the change was in the present has undergone an alteration when in the past. Now that the change is in the past it is no longer a matter of life or death, as it was in the present. Thus, it also erodes the idea of a linear progression of time from past to present to future, because the nature of the change has changed in time as well.

Below, we meet Steven, a newly appointed Team Manager at Moonshot IT. He started in the Bank 20 years ago and has spent the last few years at Moonshot IT. The two pieces that follow are from interviews conducted in October 2017 (T1) and in April 2018 (T2), respectively. In both interviews, Steven is talking about the Separation. In T1, he has just brought the Separation up spontaneously himself and subsequently he is asked directly about it:

(T1) Interviewer: Is it of any importance or what is the importance of it [the Separation]?

Steven: Yes, but it definitely has – it is also something I think the employees think about, whether organizationally we will stay on in the Bank as part of the IT department. [...] Well, we put a bottle of champagne at all, I can show it to you afterwards, a bottle of champagne at everybody's desk, me and Thomas [Head of Moonshot IT]. And a note that precisely addressed that issue. [...] But, but there is no doubt that when we move out onto the new – our new platform and everything is up and running and we get a more mature hook-up compared to the Bank – then it's the next logical move to separate us from [...] from the Bank as well. [...] But it will be a big change for

many, but so – but also because, okay – you might have been in the Bank for many years and it is a kind of safe haven, right. But what is Moonshot actually? And how are the conditions there?

(T2) Interviewer: [...] So, if we go back in time and take a look at the Separation, if you look at it today, has it changed anything? For Moonshot IT or your job or [...]

Steven: Eh. No, actually it hasn't because [...] well, mentally, I think I also said this last time, mentally we have actually been on that journey for a long time so, so it is just an indication that you move further and further away. Meanwhile, there has also been an organizational change in – in the Bank. Or there have actually been several, also in our – which have influenced our former department and they totally ran under the radar because we are just so far away from that now, that it is of no importance.

In the empirical example with Steven, we see how the course of history can change over time. In T1, the Separation was a first step toward a potential farewell to the bank, which meant insecurity with regards to the new working conditions, the leaving of the safe haven, etc. At that point, Steven was very concerned with how big the change would be for organizational members and what the consequences might be. Each time he talked about it in the interview he paused, as it was a difficult subject for him to discuss. An example of that is the following quote, which is from where he spontaneously brings up the Separation: 'As you may already have heard about [...] eh [...] where we become an independent company [...] you see, it is something which goes across of everything [...].' Even though, it seemed to be a difficult subject for him to talk about, he kept returning to it by referring to former informal conversations, we have had, or former situations, I might have heard about while shadowing his manager. An example of

that is when he brings up the note and the champagne in the excerpts above, which his manager, the one I shadowed, might have told me about beforehand.

In the interview, Steven in fact changes the course of the history. In T2, he refers to Development as ‘our former department’ even though Moonshot IT is still part of Development. In the excerpt, he even adds an example of a big change in Development, which would normally have impacted them but did not because they had already ‘moved on,’ which is the expression he uses later in the interview. What we see here is an organizational change being reinterpreted in time. In addition, what could have potentially produced negative consequences after being separated from the Bank, instead drifts away in time, and in some way has already happened, because of a mental shift in the organizational member’s perception of the organization. In other words, the change has occurred naturally and incrementally, and the course of the history has thus been changed in time.

When examining the last two excerpts, not only do the changes slip into the everyday practices, but in addition the nature of the organizational changes is also changed in time. In the first part, we saw how the change was reinterpreted and in T2, it has subtly drifted away from being a dramatic change to an almost harmless one. In the second excerpt, the nature of the organizational change has similarly changed from being a potential dramatic change to a natural and incremental one. Again, in time the change has drifted away and has instead become a natural part of everyday practices.

Discussion

This study has investigated how organizational changes empirically drift away when they make their way through the organization or in time. The analysis reveals that organizational changes occur naturally, but tend to drift away by

slipping into everyday practices or subtly drift away in time, when reinterpreted. Thus, making organizational changes drifting phenomena. The chapter has two main contributions. First, it demonstrates a methodological strategy to overcome the challenges of studying an ever-changing phenomenon, which contributes to the becoming view.

Second, the chapter contributes with a discussion of the fate of organizational change failure grounded in the becoming view and by that, it extends the field of organizational change failure which has been characterized by studies grounded in a planned or evolutionary view.

Studying an ever-changing phenomenon

This chapter has point of departure in an *emic* approach to organizational change, which has led to study change as an ever-changing phenomenon. Studying a phenomenon always in a state of becoming is within the becoming view (e.g. Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) and the field of process studies (e.g. Hernes, 2014; Langley, 1999) a well-known challenge, because of the complexity and ambiguity of the process data. Hence, most studies grounded in the becoming view have typically been philosophical reflections rather than empirical studies (e.g. Chia, 2014; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Thus, this chapter has a contribution to the becoming view by illustrating how ever-changing phenomena methodologically can be studied.

The study draws on several methods as part of the ethnographic fieldwork including shadowing, interviews, and *in situ* observations as corporate ethnographer. This chapter shows how the role as corporate ethnographer and applying methods such as shadowing and *in situ* observations have been crucial to study organizational changes from within. By being in the field observing

organizational members in their everyday organizational context have made it possible to capture what organizational members see or talk about as organizational changes in everyday practices and routines, rather than relying on the organizational changes they are capable of articulating in interviews. Thus, it has also led to capture organizational changes, which are not linked to strategic events.

Further, by applying the anthropological strategy of studying through (Wright & Reinhold, 2011), the drifting nature of changes have been possible to capture both through the organization as well as in time. The interviews have supported that strategy because observations of interlocutors in their everyday organizational context have been followed by at least one interview to include the temporal dimension. Further, by interviewing through the organization, both hierarchical and horizontally, it has opened up the opportunity to include the spatial dimension. These methodological choices have provided me with strategies to overcome the challenges of studying ever-changing phenomena and by that, the chapter has a contribution to the becoming view, which primarily builds on conceptual ideas.

The fate of organizational change failure

The field of organizational change failure has been characterized by studies grounded in the planned or evolutionary view. The former group of studies has argued that organizational change failures are directly linked to decisions or actions made – or short of this (Jones et al., 2018; John P Kotter, 2008; Senturia et al., 2008), whereas the latter group of studies has explained it by emphasizing the situational and contextual factors (Amburgey et al., 1993; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Muluneh & Gedifew, 2018).

However, by having empirically studied the phenomenon of organizational change, I have drawn closer to answering the question posed, namely, why organizational change failure is under-researched within the field of the becoming view. In the analysis above, we hear from a series of interlocutors talking about potential organizational change failures. As an example, we have Steven referring to the potential risk of Moonshot choosing another supplier over Moonshot IT, which would effectively eliminate them. He talks about the subsequent insecurity the employees feel with their situation. Steven even adds that Thomas and he tried to solve the problem by giving each of the employees a bottle of champagne, together with a note. This can be interpreted as the management taking action to reduce the risk of an organizational change failure. This maneuver happened in T1 and what we see in T2 is that the risk of an organizational change failure has drifted away in time, and instead the change that occurred was natural and subtle. It is a similar situation, when John in T1 points out a potential risk of being replaced by a new external vendor. In T2 the potential crisis is over, it has drifted away in time and the consequences can only be observed in the everyday practices of the external consultants. When considering the examples, where we follow changes in space, the potential organizational change failure is not as immediately evident. In the first example with John, he talks about a reshuffle in top management. If this were to go wrong, it would be a potential failure. But John ends his quote by saying that this reshuffle will in his mind, not have any consequences at the employee level and is just 'business as usual.' Thus, this is what he calls the potential organizational change failure, as we saw in the examples of following changes in time.

From these examples, we can begin to get a sense of why organizational change failure as a phenomenon is missing from the field of the becoming view; it either slips into everyday practices or drifts away in time because of reinterpretation. By

getting to the root of the fate of organizational change failure, this chapter has a contribution in extending the field of organizational change failure, which lacks studies grounded in other views than the planned or the evolutionary. It illustrates how organizational change failure in itself does not make sense if it is grounded in a definition of change as an ever-changing phenomenon. This is because the change will always be in a state of becoming, thus making the ultimate definition of the change as a failure impossible, which is in contrast to the existing studies of organizational change failure, where organizational changes have an end point.

Concluding remarks

This chapter shows that organizational change failure has been under-researched within the field of the becoming view, because of its slippery, subterranean and drifting nature. It simply slips into the routines and everyday practices, as well as drifts away in time because of reinterpretation, which is similar to the fate of organizational changes more generally. By studying organizational changes through an *emic* approach, applying several ethnographic methods as well as being inspired by the anthropological strategy of studying through, this chapter contributes to the becoming view by illustrating how the ever-changing phenomenon of change can be studied. Further, the chapter contributes with an extension of the field of organizational change failure, which has been characterized by studies grounded in a planned or evolutionary view, by unfolding how organizational changes are always in a state of becoming and thus, impossible to categorize as failures.

The study contributes to praxis as well. While organizations are often occupied with ‘implementing organizational changes’ and categorizing them as either successes or failures, they are notably focusing on something which has a

tendency to in the end spread out into the organization and slip away from their view. This chapter suggests that instead of aiming for the ultimate categorization the focus should be on keeping an eye on the spread of the change while also adapting a richer vocabulary of change terminology to draw from, in order to see the consequences so often revealed by the organizational members themselves, while they are experiencing the changes.

6. Windows to ‘what really matters’

Unpacking organizational sensemaking of mundane changes⁶

Change is the only constant in life (Heraclitus, c. 540 BCE)

This chapter is about mundane change in organizations. *Mundane* can be translated to ‘dull’ and relates to the study of changes as part of everyday activities. *Change* is in this chapter defined as ‘make or become different’ as it is defined by Oxford Dictionaries. By that definition, the chapter is in line with Heraclitus and see changes as a natural part of the mundane life of organizations.

The field of change is well-researched and widespread but key puzzles remain. Several literature reviews show that the field is dominated by studies treating organizational changes as episodic events (e.g. Porras & Silvers, 1991; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Weick & Quinn, 1999), making changes exceptional rather than constant. Mundane changes that are part of everyday organizational activities are less studied (Brown et al., 2015; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015), which is surprising considering the common expression and well-accepted idea of change as ‘the new normal’ (Anthony, 2009; Bruce, 2018; Falkenberg & Ashurst, 2010) or the above quote by Heraclitus (c. 540 BCE). If accepting the idea of change as constant in organizations, moving away from the belief of change as episodic and exceptional, then our knowledge of how organizational members make sense of changes is limited.

Sensemaking is about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on. A change can upset the frame and trigger sensemaking by interrupting

⁶ Only few adjustments have been made to this chapter since it was submitted to the Journal of Change Management.

ongoing activities. Hence, change is seen as a powerful occasion for sensemaking because of the disruption it brings to established ways of working (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1995). Even though, a fundamental assumption in classic Weickian sensemaking (1969, 1979, 1995) is that change is emergent, many studies grounded in this perspective have been focused on strategic changes such as organizational restructuring or mergers (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). This is fundamentally different from studying mundane changes, which are not changes initiated by top management. The reason why studies of more mundane changes grounded in classic Weickian sensemaking are almost non-existing might be due to the challenge of empirically studying processes rather than things (Langley et al., 2013, p. 6). When radical changes, such as mergers and acquisitions, are studied as processes, they have the advantages of being confined to exceptional episodes. Further, these are produced or influenced by certain people often managers. In opposition, mundane changes are not episodic changes with exceptional effect. Instead, they occur naturally in the organizations, where their subtle nature makes them hard to identify and study.

Sensemaking scholars such as Chia (1999, 2014), Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015, 2019), and Tsoukas and Chia (2002) focus on change as part of everyday activities in organizations. In this chapter, I draw on the term 'post-Weickian sensemaking' as Gephart, Topal, and Zhang (2010) do when referring to this group of scholars. While drawing on Weick's work post-Weickian scholars have further developed the sensemaking perspective by challenging three core assumptions of classic Weickian sensemaking: changes as exceptional, changes as episodic, and changes only produced by certain people (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Instead, they argue that changes occur naturally, imperceptibly in the slippage of everyday activities

without being influenced by certain people. These assumptions of change go well with mundane change, however, the post-Weickian sensemaking tradition have typically been philosophical reflections rather than empirical studies (e.g. Chia, 2014; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). While these studies draw on empirical work concerned with changes in routine work (Feldman, 2000) or in everyday practices (Orlikowski, 1996), we still lack empirically grounded studies based on post-Weickian arguments which only few have done (e.g. Hernes, Hendrup, & Schäffner, 2015).

A study of mundane changes would not be in opposition to the work done by Weick. Quite the reverse, Weick has questioned why the literature mainly focus on creating change rather than ceasing change, and arguing that organizations experience a multitude of disturbances in ongoing routine activities (Weick, 2009). Powell & Rerup (2017) made a similar reflection, when they questioned why the literature on sensemaking has been focused on episodes creating sensemaking rather than sensemaking as continuous processes. Thus, these statements support the relevance of empirically studying sensemaking processes of mundane changes and emphasize that everyday change in organizations is an understudied area. This present study can potentially help us explain how organizational members make sense of not only the few radical changes in organizations, but also the changes that are a natural part of everyday organizational life. Thus, a central question remains unanswered: *How do organizational members make sense of mundane change?* This chapter pursues this question by exploring empirical data collected via a longitudinal study of a Nordic bank.

The chapter has two contributions. The first being empirically showing how mundane changes serve as windows to see what changes that matters the most to the organizational members. By that it illuminates how the organizational

members' sensemaking processes of changes are determining whether a change is radical or not. Second, the chapter has a contribution in showing how the two perspectives, namely the classic and the post-Weickian sensemaking perspective, have their limitation in mainly focusing on either the sensemaking of radical changes or philosophically focusing on mundane changes. Instead, the chapter illuminates that discussing mundane or radical changes are two sides of the same coin, which call for further research in order to extend the theoretical perspectives.

Sensemaking of change

Karl E. Weick (1995) originally developed the sensemaking perspective and in its core, sensemaking can be defined as the process of social construction that occurs when discrepant cues interrupt individuals' ongoing activities. Then retrospectively plausible meanings are developed to rationalize what people are doing by extracting and interpreting cues from the environment (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Essentially, sensemaking is about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on.

Change is a well-studied topic within sensemaking theory. By drawing on the categorization made by Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) sensemaking of change is triggered by events that are major or minor and planned or unplanned. Strategic changes such as organizational restructurings (e.g. Lüscher & Lewis, 2008) and mergers (e.g. Monin, Noorderhaven, Vaara, & Kroon, 2013) are major planned events. These strategic changes interrupt common ways of accomplishing things and thereby forcing organizational members to make sense of how they are to carry out their work stipulated by planned changes (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). When changes are major unplanned events, they often have similarities with

organizational crisis (Weick, 1988), where the events interrupt organizational activities and trigger organizational members' sensemaking.

Mundane changes can be placed in the category of minor unplanned events, which emerge frequently in everyday activities. Mundane changes are in this chapter defined as changes occurring as part of everyday activities in organizations. An example of a minor unplanned event is the study by Bartunek et al. (2008), when they research collective turnovers in organizations. Minor planned events are smaller but frequently interrupting organizational activities, triggering organizational members into sensemaking efforts to restore the interrupted activities (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Organizational changes such as new employees, merging of teams, and a new team manager are examples of minor planned events. Looking broadly at sensemaking studies of change, the majority has been on major rather than minor events. Thus, only few have studied sensemaking of changes as mundane activities, where sensemaking is triggered by smaller disturbances in ongoing routine activities (Brown et al., 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

Post-Weickian sensemaking scholars (e.g. Chia, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) have turned their attention towards changes as part of everyday activities. This quote by Tsoukas and Chia (2002) illustrates well how they define changes differently from classic Weickian sensemaking: 'We start from the assumption that to properly understand organizational change (in the sense argued by Orlikowski, Weick, and Feldman) we need to stop giving ontological priority to organization, thereby making change an exceptional effect, produced only under specific circumstances by certain people (change agents). We should rather start from the premise that change is pervasive and indivisible (p. 569)'. This quote underpins the differences in assumptions of change between the

classic and post-Weickian sensemaking perspectives, which is summarized in table 7 and will be further elaborated below.

Table 7: Assumptions of change.

Assumption of change	Classic Weickian sensemaking	Post-Weickian sensemaking
Exceptional effect	‘Although sensemaking is triggered by any interruption to ongoing activity, crisis and change are conditions that, because of the degree of disruption they incur, offer particularly powerful occasions for sensemaking’ (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 552).	‘If change is viewed as the exception, the occasional episode in organizational life, we underestimate how pervasive change already is’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; p. 568).
Specific circumstances	‘It is triggered by an equivocal event that interrupts actors’ ongoing activities, ‘forcing’ them to retrospectively make sense of the disrupted activity in order to restore it’ (Weick, 2001)	‘Rather, it (change) is often realized through the ongoing variations which emerge frequently, even imperceptibly, in the slippages and improvisations of everyday activity’ (Orlikowski, 1996, p. 36).
Certain people	‘Role of change agent: Sense maker who redirects change’ (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 366).	‘A manager is as much an agent of change as everybody else is’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 579).

Exceptional effect

The first point to notice in the sentence by Tsoukas & Chia (2002, p. 569) is ‘making change an exceptional effect’. Drawing on classic Weickian sensemaking, scholars such as Maitlis & Sonenshein (2010), have argued for the similarities between crisis and change related to sensemaking, thus, making change exceptional. They have argued that because of the degree of disruption

changes imply, make them particular powerful occasions for sensemaking. This nature of change differs from a post-Weickian sensemaking view on change, where change is by definition pervasive and occurs subterranean (Chia, 1999). This perspective further emphasizes that: ‘Change then appears as a naturally occurring phenomenon that does not attract undue attention, alert concerns or generate anxieties’ (Chia, 2014). In a similar vein, related to sensemaking Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015, p. 15) argue that sensemaking must be seen as ubiquitous rather than exceptional, and Tsoukas & Chia (2002, p. 580) state that ‘we risk missing all the subterranean, microscopic changes that always go on in the bowels of organizations’.

The difference between the two perspectives must be found in the degree of disruption it implies on everyday activities. Where a classic Weickian sensemaking perspective emphasizes that changes are particular triggers of sensemaking because of the degree of disruption they imply, it stands in contrast to post-Weickian sensemaking scholars arguing that if we only pay attention to disruptive episodes that might lead to oversimplified models (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). If we ignore the microscopic changes that do not have exceptional effect on organizational life, we risk missing what is most important to the employees and leaders.

Specific circumstances

The second difference in assumptions of change is ‘specific circumstances’, often referred to in the literature as episodes (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). This is central for classic Weickian sensemaking, where sensemaking is seen as something confined to specific episodes that occur from the moment some ongoing organizational activity is interrupted and is satisfactorily restored.

Specific circumstances and events are central for classic Weickian sensemaking, but also an often stated criticism (e.g. Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). By focusing exclusively on episodes or specific circumstances, the post-Weickian sensemaking perspective argues that it is at the expense of more mundane forms of sensemaking and change implicated in routine and everyday activities (Feldman, 2000; Orlikowski, 1996; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). In fact, if we only focus our attention on specific circumstances we risk overlooking immanent sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015), and ‘the rich and sometimes dark histories and accidental turns that have brought them into being’ Chia (1999, p. 221).

The difference between the two perspectives is centred around whether changes are episodic or not and here, the role of interruptions are central to unfold.

Interruption is essential in the classic Weickian perspective, because interruptions are consequential occasions for sensemaking (Weick, 1995: 105). Weick (2006, p. 1731) wrote: ‘Order, interruption, recovery. That is sensemaking in a nutshell’, emphasizing that interruption plays a central role in sensemaking processes.

However, in a post-Weickian sensemaking perspective changes do not interrupt organizational activities because they occur imperceptibly and unnoticed in the slippage of everyday activities (Chia, 2014). If we only pay attention to changes related to specific episodes, we risk overseeing some important ones, because some changes happen naturally and are immanent in everyday activities.

Certain people

The third point to notice in the quote is ‘certain people’ or change agents. This phenomenon is well-known within classic Weickian sensemaking and with the words of Weick & Quinn (1999, p. 381): ‘[...] the role of the change agent

becomes one of managing language, dialogue, and identity. Change agents become important for their ability to make sense (Weick, 1995) of change dynamics already under way'. Further, studies such as Balogun & Johnson (2004, 2005) show how middle managers play a crucial role as change agents in organizational changes, and others (e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hope, 2010; Kraft, Sparr, & Peus, 2015; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Rouleau, 2005; Sparr, 2018) focus on sensegiving, which is organizational members (often managers) attempt to influence organizational changes. This stands in opposition the post-Weickian assumption that managers are as much agents of change as all other organizational members, thus, the only difference is that they are endowed with 'declarative powers' (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 143; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 579). They argue that managers have the power to declare that a change has occurred, however, they are not able to influence the changes. Hence, the role of change agents is absent from a post-Weickian sensemaking perspective.

Central to understand how the two perspectives differ in assumptions of change agents is whether the sensemaking of changes are influenced by humans or not. In the classic Weickian sensemaking perspective, the connection between cues and frames can intentionally be influenced by other organizational members as sense givers or change agents, however, that is not present in a post-Weickian sensemaking perspective. Here, no organizational members have the power to influence the sensemaking process, it is rather a matter of just letting happen (Chia, 2014). If we only focus on whether change agents exist or not, we risk overseeing the broader view on human influence in changes. The current discussion of change agents could benefit from a more nuanced discussion of which role humans play in the sensemaking of changes in organizations.

Comparing the two perspectives, the limitation of the classic Weickian sensemaking perspective must be found in the lack of focus on mundane changes.

That is well-developed within a post-Weickian sensemaking perspective, however, that perspective lacks empirical studies unfolding how organizational members make sense of mundane changes. Grounded in an empirical study, this chapter aims at unpacking sensemaking processes of mundane change through the three anchor points of exceptional effects, specific circumstances, and certain people.

Methods

To develop a rich understanding of organizational members' sensemaking processes of changes in everyday activities, I conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of an IT department in a large Nordic bank. Using an inductive approach with the aim of developing new theory (e.g. van Maanen, 1988), I studied employees and leaders in their everyday organizational context for two years (August 2016 – August 2018). This was essential because of the difficulties in studying changes as processes (Langley et al., 2013), and further, when studying changes as not linked to already identified events. Further, the inductive approach was particularly helpful to answer the 'how' research question and to open new areas of inquiry (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007).

Following Tsoukas and Chia (2002), changes must be approached from within, and not as an abstract concept, in order to really understand how change is accomplished. Similar to other studies (e.g. Fayard & Van Maanen, 2015; Hepsø, 2012; Malefyt, 2017; Nagle, 2017; Suchman, 1985; Wynn, 1979), the role as insider or corporate ethnographer, gave me access to study the organization from within. As Fayard and Van Maanen (2015) argue, the role as corporate ethnographer, working in (and for) a large company, implies not only new knowledge developed but also a role as co-producer of the organizational life studied. In this study, the risk of 'going native' was delimited by spending only

half of the weekly working hours in the organization as well as not being physically in the organization for longer periods of up to three months. The strength of being an insider was the opportunity to make *in situ* observations, shadow managers for weeks, and conduct interviews at all levels across the IT department – never being denied access.

The research was situated in the IT department of the Bank (a pseudonym). Historically, the more than 100 years old bank had been well-known for being traditional, conservative and with high seniorities. However, the financial industry had changed dramatically over the last decade due to digitalization, changes in customer demand, increased regulation etc., and the Bank was no exception. The IT department was at that point undergoing remarkable changes and had done so for 3-4 years, hence, it offered a unique and valuable case for studying changes in an organization. The data was primarily collected in the two Nordic offices of the IT department; however, seven interviews were conducted in the Eastern Europe office as well as observations stemming from four days spent at that particular office.

Ethnographic data collection

This chapter draws on data collected over a two-year period. I drew on four data sources – shadowing, interviews, *in situ* observations, and documents – to capture the sensemaking processes of change in everyday activities. A summary of the empirical data can be found in Table 8. Shadowing was the method to ensure a deep and rich understanding of organizational members in their natural organizational context. Half of the interviews were conducted in continuation of the periods of shadowing including both the shadowed, their team managers and employees. The rest of the interviews were conducted in other areas to ensure the

breath in the organization, and the interviews served as a way to get rich answers on phenomena, I have found particular interesting in the field. These sources of data were supplemented by day-to-day observations as well as documents such as presentations, internal articles, e-mails etc. to test and qualify the data collected.

Table 8: Summary of empirical data.

Empirical data	Units
Interviews	36 interviews / 28 respondents / 37 average minutes/interview
<i>In situ</i> observations	1300 hours / 81 pages of fieldnotes
Shadowing	175 hours / 2 managers / 184 pages of fieldnotes
Recorded meetings & presentations	14 recordings / 50 average minutes/recording
Organizational documents	E-mails, articles, PowerPoint presentations, photos

Shadowing

I applied the technique of shadowing (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007) as a method to dive deeper into the field. In doing so, I shadowed two middle managers, whom were selected based on their position and department. Compared to top management or employees, middle managers offer a broader view of the entire organization from all levels. In order to capture the breath of the organization, the two managers were chosen due to them being positioned in two different departments. The first was Head of IT Infrastructure (pseudonym), leading a team of 50 organizational members including four team managers. This particular team was by other organizational members categorized as a stable team; it has existed for a number of decades without notably changing much technologically-speaking and has also been led by the same middle manager for many years. I shadowed

him for 9 days in the winter of 2017 and again a year later in 2018, this time for four days. The second manager was heading Moonshot IT (pseudonym), a department of more than 100 organizational members, including six team managers. This team was often categorized as being one of those that had undergone the most change over the past four years, as it had grown from a team of just five to more than 100. I shadowed the middle manager over two periods: first, for five days in the fall of 2017 and then again, a half-year later, in the spring of 2018 for three days. Combined, these 21 days of shadowing resulted in 184 full computer written pages of fieldnotes.

Interviewing

The second method applied was conducting interviews. Over the two-year period, I conducted 36 interviews across the IT department, both vertically and horizontally. Seven out of the 28 respondents were interviewed at least two times over the two-year period. The style of interviews ranged from explorative, with an aim of understanding, for example, the tasks and responsibilities within a specific team, to a narrative approach with the aim of getting the respondents to include rich stories. Common for all interviews were a few pre-prepared guiding questions, though all follow-up questions were shaped in accordance with the responses received from respondents in order to gain richer accounts of their view on changes. The length of the interviews varied but on average were 37 minutes long. All interviews were recorded, and I personally transcribed each one of them.

In situ observations

As corporate ethnographer, I was physically placed in the staff function of the IT department in one of the Nordic offices. Here, I had a desk in the open office landscape together with personal assistants, communication consultants and secretaries, all of whom were placed next to the offices of the top managers. When being in the organization, unless I was shadowing or participating in seminars or

meetings, I was sitting at my desk as ‘a regular employee’, though observing and taking fieldnotes whenever I found it relevant. This resulted in more than 1300 hours of *in situ* observations and 81 full computer written pages of fieldnotes.

Documents & recordings

Further, I drew on organizational documents to check my observations and impressions made through the shadowing, interviews and *in situ* observations. The organizational documents included internal articles available at the intranet, presentations from seminars and town hall meetings, e-mails, and photos taking of anniversaries or other posters. In total it added up to 100s of documents. Lastly, I had access to a number of meetings and presentations. Team meetings and meetings with colleagues were not recorded to maintain the role as insider without risking moving into the role as outsider. However, meetings and presentations with top management were recorded, which added up to 700 minutes of recordings.

Data analysis

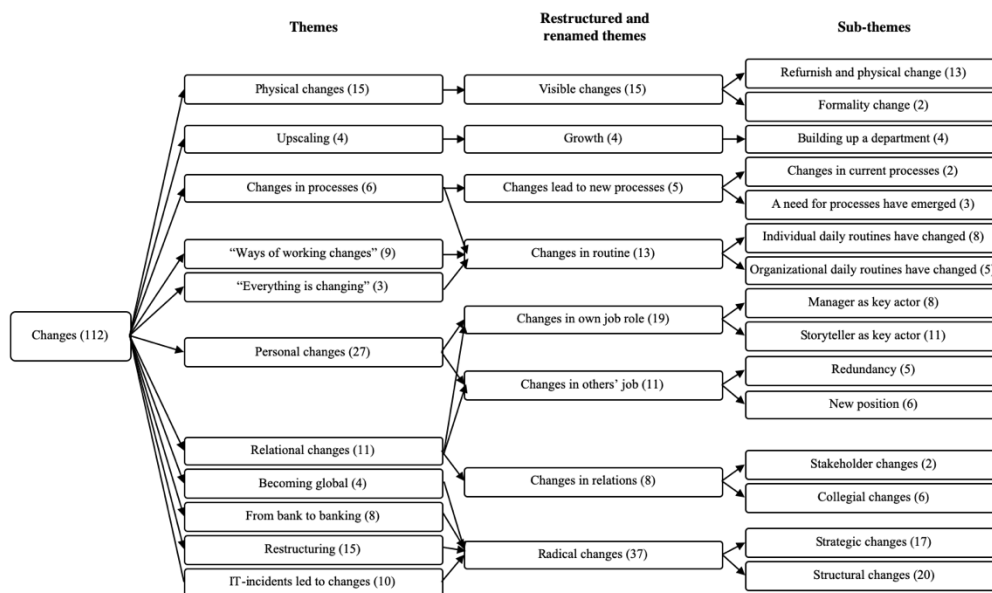
In analyzing the gathered data, I was inspired by a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). The analytical process consisted of six phases and was highly iterative, involving going back and forth between collected data, the field, and the literature. This approach allowed me to stay close to the field and collect data which was linked to my theoretical interest in changes as part of everyday activities. In addition, it allowed me to narrow my focus more and more during the process and in the end be keener on the three theoretical concepts related to mundane change: non-exceptional, non-episodic, and not produced by certain people.

The first phase was initiated while still conducting fieldwork. Here, I started to listen to recordings, transcribing interviews and read through the already-compiled fieldnotes. At this first phase, I also started a process of initial coding, by creating codes using the software program NVivo. The codes were closely linked to the data, not drawing on any particular theoretical perspective, however, inevitably pre-knowledge influenced the process. In this way, I started to get familiar with my data, and being aware of how to collect rich data when returning to the field. The second phase was initiated after all data was collected. With a point of departure in the definition of change as 'make or become different', all data was read through. Each time, the definition of change could be identified in the data, I coded it as 'change'. But when someone talked about a particular change without stating that something has become difference, it was not coded as a change. In the end, it added up to 112 times that a change could be identified in the data. These data were re-read and color-coded in themes. In the process of thematizing, 11 themes emerged, which figure 2 show. The names of the themes were closely linked to the data, and some of them, as for example 'Everything is changing', was taking directly from a quote in the data.

In the fourth phase, I identified exceptional effects, specific circumstances, and certain people as three relevant theoretical concepts to explore in my data, in order to unfold the phenomenon of mundane change. With that in mind, I started to restructure the themes and renaming the new emerging ones. These are also shown in figure 2. The names of the new themes served as a way to bridge the empirical data with relevant theory. As an example, 'Everything is changing' became part of 'Changes in routine'. Routine changes have been widely discussed within post-Weickian scholars why this new name placed the empirical data in a relevant theoretical discussion. In the fifth phase, I created sub-themes out of the eight restructured themes. The aim was to make the sub-themes reflect the bridge

between data and theory even more precisely. As an example, the category ‘Changes in routine’ was split into two sub-themes ‘Individual daily routines have changed’ and ‘Organizational daily routines have changed’. The result of this phase was 15 sub-themes. The last phase was concerned with comparing the restructured themes and sub-themes across the whole dataset. This was to test and qualify the findings. Lastly, excerpts within a particular sub-theme were identified to be applied in the analysis.

Figure 2: Data analysis.



Unpacking the sensemaking processes of mundane changes

To unfold the sensemaking processes of mundane changes the three theoretical anchor points of exceptional effects, specific circumstances, and certain people will be explored through the collected data. Each anchor point is essential to get closer to what mundane changes are and to unpack how organizational members make sense of these.

Nonexceptional changes

A common thread in the dataset was that changes not necessarily had exceptional effects. An example of this could be found in the organizational members several times pointing out physical changes – such as refurnished offices – as some of the changes they had experienced in the organization. Below a fieldnote written while shadowing the middle manager James is selected to illustrate this. James is from IT infrastructure and have more than 30 years of seniority in the Bank.

Fieldnote, 30 January 2017 at 10:02am. James and I have entered the meeting room again because it is time for a Skype meeting. But for some reason it is cancelled. Instead, James starts telling me about what it means to him that he now sits in an open office landscape, when he for 20 years has had his own office. He explains how he has accepted to do it when Simon (his immediate manager) has asked him to – but that he feels intimidated: ‘It takes time to get used to it. Simon has another leadership style and is used to the open office landscape from his time in the headquarters. I think young leaders are more used to that than us more senior ones’. He explains further how it probably would be less of a problem if he was hired to a new position in another company. He tells me that he really hates that he has to speak next to others as for example when he talked to Peter just before and continues: ‘We moved to this new setup back in November-December but before that my door was always open. Peter was placed close to my office and he could always come in and we would have had the same talk, like we had before. But now, we have to go into a meeting room, and it seems so formal than’.

This fieldnote about James, together with other examples of physical changes,

shows that changes are part of everyday activities in the organization, and not exceptional. Changes as refurbished offices are not big disruptions of everyday activities because they occur often as well as do not attract undue attention. In the fieldnote, James is telling about how he has gone from having his own private office to now being seated in the open office landscape. He relates this change to his new manager Simon coming into the organization having a different leadership style. Further, he brings up that it is a broader tendency of hiring younger leaders into the IT department. By that, James makes the physical change of moving from a private office to the open office landscape a reflection of the more radical change of younger leaders coming into the organization. Even though the physical change is nonexceptional in the eyes of James, the fieldnote reveals that it is a crucial change to James. The reason for that can be found in him pointing out that the physical change reflects another change, namely the shift in management style and the consequences of new and younger managers taken up positions in the organization.

Similarly, another manager Thomas explains how employees joke about the fact that they keep changing desk: ‘Do we have an idea that we will have an average of more than two months at our desk – or is this the level we will keep?’. By that joke, the employees implicitly state that they keep changing desk so two months without physical changes would be new to them. Thus, visible changes in the form of refurbished offices or moving to a new office are nonexceptional changes. On the other hand, the fieldnotes also show that changes not necessarily occur subterranean. James and the other organizational members talk about physical changes that they have obviously noticed; thus, the changes did not occur without anyone noticing them. In other words, this shows us that these physical changes might not be exceptional but neither did they just creep in unnoticed.

Not only in the fieldnote about James, but also in other excerpts about physical

changes, do the visible changes reflect more radical changes in the organization. Another example is David, an employee from Moonshot IT, telling about how they often are changing seats. Changes such as the physical ones are windows to see how David, in this example, make sense of changes in the organization. The physical changes are cues which he relates to his existing frame of physical changes as mirrors of structural organizational changes. He explains further how the physical changes are reflections of their growth in size from being a team consisting of a few employees to a large department. He adds that the everyday heroes, who existed when they were a smaller team, are now replaced by more structure and clearer responsibilities.

Together these examples show that mundane changes, in this case in the form of physical changes, are windows to what really matters to the organizational members. Thus, it illuminates that it is impossible to predetermine what are the radical changes to these organizational members. Instead, it is the organizational members' sensemaking of changes, that determine what are the radical changes in the organization. Further, these examples push the theoretical discussion from neither being a matter of organizational changes as having exceptional effect (classic Weickian sensemaking) nor a matter of changes as occurring subterranean (post-Weickian sensemaking). Mundane changes such as physical changes are not big disruptions and do not have exceptional effect. However, neither do they occur without anyone noticing them. Instead, they are two sides of the same coin with mundane changes acting as reflections of radical changes in the organization.

Non-episodic changes

Another common thread in the dataset was that changes not only occurred under specific circumstances. The changes could be traced in all shapes and sizes, which

not necessarily were linked to specific episodes. An example of this, could be found in how the daily routines had changed naturally without any episodes interrupting the everyday routines in the organization. The excerpt below by the middle manager Thomas shows that.

Thomas: Well, I think that.. Some of it, I think sometimes – also this year – when I returned after summer vacation that it has been, well, I think the pace in the way we work has just.. is just remarkable different from the last.. now, I say 10 years, but I also think that it is the last 5 years.. I think, previously, when you returned it took a week or so and you just had to get started – now, you get back and it takes.. at Tuesday then you have almost forgotten that you have had three weeks of vacation.. [...] I think the soft beginning, it is almost gone... (Thomas laughs)... Well, I'm really not kidding, you just feel it.. you spent an hour at – what had happened, and nice vacation and yes yes.. and then, I just think you are back in that mode again.. then it might be that the first week, especially this year because not many have returned because our vacation was early this year, so there wasn't many meetings and stuff.. but as soon as people is there, it's just (Thomas snaps his fingers)... then we are up and running.. that is.. so I think the pace, the pace is extremely fast..

In this excerpt, Thomas explains how his routine when returning from vacation has changed. He argues that the last five years it is has changed remarkable and nowadays, you just start working as soon as you return, which was different years ago. At that time, it was a softer beginning when returning. By that example, we see how a change can slip into the everyday routines without being confined to a specific episode. The change cannot be observed as a process starting from an ongoing activity being interrupted until it is satisfactorily restored again. Instead, it

is an immanent change in organizational routines, changing the routines without any interruptions of everyday activities. Even though Thomas primarily talks about how it feels different to return from vacation now than it did five years ago, it shows us a more radical change. The pace in the organization has changed. Similar examples can be found in the dataset, where David for example points out how Moonshot IT has changed from being a cowboy land to an organization with clear governance. Nicholas explains the same change as going from being an organization of innovators to be an organization of frustrated people.

What the excerpt also reveals is that the changes in routines after vacations, reveals more radical changes in organizational life. Thomas explains that the changes are reflections of the faster pace in general in the organization. Thus, the changes in routines are not only limited to the weeks after vacations but are also the routines the rest of the year. Thereby, this excerpt is a window into how the middle manager Thomas make sense of changes in the organization. The faster pace is one of the more radical ones, he points out. This excerpt can be used to understand Thomas' sensemaking processes of changes as well as it reveals the darker – or just richer – stories of changes in the organization. By this example, we see how unpacking the sensemaking of changes in routines offers a lens into an organizational member's sensemaking of changes in general in the organization.

By unfolding changes in everyday routines reveal that changes not necessarily are episodic or only occurring under specific circumstances. They are not always observable in the simple form of order, interruption, recovery. Instead, they can slip into the organizational routines naturally over the years and still be the ones that matter the most to organizational members. In addition, the changes do not necessarily occur imperceptibly and unnoticed, which the many quotes about the changes are good examples of.

Non-static change agents

A third common thread in the dataset was that changes are not only produced by certain people – such as middle managers. Several examples pointed at the storyteller him or herself as the main character of their own stories and themselves as the one influencing their sensemaking of changes. Other examples showed that there were several change agents, but who they were was fluctuating and shifted during a story. To explore who the change agents are, an example below is selected. The excerpt is representative for the dataset and illustrates the fluctuating roles as change agents. It is from an interview with Christian, an employee from IT Infrastructure.

Christian: [...] it must have been in the end of the 90s, I think it happened. All these old systems, I have been responsible for were about to be migrated into the Bank. At that time, I was hired as a consultant into James's department in the Bank. For two years, I was employed in BB data but worked as a consultant for James. After two years – because I didn't think it was a tenable situation – I was hired by James. Then it happened in the mid-00s that all IT was outsourced to ITEC and then I followed James and the team and some of them out there – though, we were also colleagues at that point in time – to ITEC. And now, it is all back again. I came back, James was the first to come back and then a few, including me, came back – who on their own sought back to the Bank over a long period. For me, some of the functions, I have had in ITEC, was applicable in the Bank – to control the deliveries from ITEC. Because, in the beginning, there were only one who had the whole responsibility of the systems. James had one guy, who tied it all up; Matt Jefferson at that point. Then some said

that it doesn't work – he might have gone down with stress and more. Because of that, some wanted to build up a small infrastructure organization who could control ITEC. At that point, I sought back and was asked if I wanted to come back and then I came back. And then the rest followed at a later point.

In this story, we see how Christian makes sense of the changes he has experienced during his career in the Bank. The changes mentioned by Christian is part of his personal journey, however, the changes also reflect more radical changes in the organization. The first personal change, he talks about is when he is hired as a consultant for the Bank. He links this change to the radical organizational change of the organization migrating several IT systems into the Bank. Later, he talks about how he moved to ITEC together with his manager James. This change in his career reflects the radical change in the organization when outsourcing several 100s of organizational members to ITEC. The same goes for the change when he was rehired to the Bank, which reflects the radical organizational change as insourcing from ITEC. That the smaller changes are reflections of more radical changes in the organization is similar to what we have seen in the above discussed excerpts.

During the story, Christian's manager James is one of the main characters. Because of James' role as manager, he might just be endowed with 'declarative power', making him able to bring about a change by declaring it has been changed, rather than being a change agent. An example of that is when James tells Christian that he is hired. Further, it could be argued that there are two other central characters in the story, Matt and the storyteller Christian, and they could be change agents on equal basis as James. In particular, we see in the end of the story that Christian makes sense of him being rehired to the new IT Infrastructure organization by telling about Matt suffering from stress. Thus, Matt also becomes

a central character in Christian's sensemaking account of the change.

By unfolding this quote two elements stand out. The first is that changes in Christian's personal career reflect more radical changes in the organization. This is similar to what we have seen in the former two analysis, showing that mundane changes are reflections of radical changes. The other being that change agents are not limited to the role of middle managers. Several organizational members have a role as change agents in Christian's story. Being a change agent is not predetermined because of formal roles, but the role as change agent becomes fluctuating, shifting during the stories. Thus, the roles as change agents are non-static. Change agents are neither limited to middle managers or other predetermined roles, nor are they non-existing. Instead, every organizational member is a potential change agent. However, no one is always in the position of change agent, instead the role is fluctuating and non-static. This underpins that organizational members' unique status as change agents fades away and only their interactions are at certain points in time influencing the sensemaking processes and shape changes in unforeseeable directions.

Concluding discussion

This chapter unpacks sensemaking processes of mundane changes by exploring changes as non-exceptional, non-episodic, and not shaped by certain people. The literature of sensemaking of changes can be divided into two; the classic Weickian sensemaking perspective and a post-Weickian sensemaking perspective. In the former, changes have often been studied as episodic events with exceptional effect, influenced by change agents. Whereas the latter has challenged these assumptions and defined changes as occurring subterranean and imperceptibly in the slippage of everyday changes without being influenced by certain people.

However, this chapter challenges both theoretical perspectives grounded in empirical findings.

The chapter has two contributions. The first being empirically unpacking the sensemaking processes of mundane changes, which shows that these are windows to what changes that matters the most to organizational members. In other words, it is the organizational members' sensemaking of changes which are the predominant in determining the character of the change and to point out what changes are radical. Second, the chapter has a contribution in showing how the two perspectives, namely the classic and the post-Weickian sensemaking perspective, have their limitations. The chapter illuminates how mundane changes are reflections of radical changes. Thereby, the chapter shows that discussing mundane or radical changes are two sides of the same coin, which call for further research in order to extend the theoretical perspectives.

The chapter shows how changes in everyday activities are crucial to understand what really matters to organizational members. The ethnographic design and my role as corporate ethnographer were essential to capture everyday changes. If being in the role as 'outsider' to the organization, I would most likely have had difficulties in getting into the roots of the organizational members' sensemaking of *mundane* changes. The challenge is to collect data about something which is nonexceptional, non-episodic, and is not produced by certain people. That might also be the reason for mundane changes to be understudied, and the existing literature by post-Weickian scholars mostly being grounded in philosophical rather than empirical arguments. Hence, this chapter illuminates two under-researched aspects of mundane changes.

First, the chapter shows how changes in everyday activities reflect more radical changes in the organization. Refurnished offices, changes in daily routines, new job role etc. are all everyday changes, however, they also reflect radical changes

such as new management, faster pace in the organization, and insourcing or outsourcing of more than 100 organizational members. Thereby, mundane changes act as reflections of radical changes in the organization. Second, by that it challenges the classic Weickian sensemaking approach of studying organizational members' sensemaking related to radical changes. The consequences of the former argument are that to capture sensemaking processes, it is essential to investigate mundane changes. They are not only windows to the broader more radical changes, they are also the most important changes in the eyes of organizational members. This study extends the existing literature by post-Weickian scholars by showing how mundane changes are essential to unfold sensemaking processes of change in organizations. However, it also challenges the assumptions of changes as only occurring subterranean and imperceptibly without being shaped by organizational members. Therefore, it calls for further research to develop a third theoretical perspective.

This chapter draws on data collected in a Nordic bank. As all organizations to different degrees experience changes, the finding of mundane changes as essential to unfold what happens in practice is also relevant for other organizations. However, if the data was gathered in another organization the experience of what changes that matter the most would probably have been different, because it is a matter of subjective experiences. Nonetheless, if changes are seen as the only constant in life, the concluding findings would be relevant in explaining practice independent of the particular organization under study.

7. Anticipating Doomsday

Exploring future-oriented sensemaking through change metaphors⁷

When asked what you expect, you first have to specify some outcome, the point where you want it to come out, and then you have to write a plausible history that will get you there. In essence, you have to think in the future perfect tense (Weick, 1979, p. 197).

Future-oriented sensemaking is often defined as thinking in the future perfect tense (Weick, 1979), which is about imagining the future as if it has already occurred, that is, through retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995). However, a growing body of theorizing and empirical research insist that sensemaking can be distinctively oriented towards the future and can occur prospectively (e.g. Wiebe, 2010; Ganzin, Islam and Suddaby, 2019). These scholars distinguish between sensemaking of the past (retrospective) and sensemaking of the future (prospective) and examine future-oriented sensemaking as interpretation and enactment that are beyond future perfect thinking (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013). They see the heavy emphasis on retrospect as problematic, particularly in circumstances where complexity and uncertainty are predominant and when expectations to the future are ambiguous or unclear (MacKay, 2009; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). Calls have therefore been made to challenge that idea that sensemaking is by necessity retrospective (Brown et al., 2015; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015), in particular to unpack the interplay of retrospective and

⁷ This chapter is co-authored by Associate Professor Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen. Only few adjustments have been made to this chapter since it was submitted to the Journal of Organizational Change Management.

prospective aspects of sensemaking (Konlechner, Latzke, Güttel, & Höfferer, 2018).

This chapter intends to contribute to the emerging scholarship on future-oriented sensemaking by examining more closely organizational members' sensemaking processes of potential future organizational changes. To do so, we present interview data conducted as part of an ethnographic case study of organizational changes at an IT department of a Nordic bank. While the organizational members applied trivializing metaphors of changes they had experienced in the past as the everyday humdrums of work, this contrasted with how they envisioned the future as uncertain and gloomier. Specifically, their sensemaking of future organizational changes was accomplished through dramatic and depressing metaphors. Grounded in this empirical observation, we address the following research question: What does the organizational members' metaphor-driven future-oriented sensemaking reveal about their experience of past organizational change? Our object of inquiry in this chapter specifically concerns the dynamics between retrospective and future-oriented sensemaking of change and the chapter contributes with a discussion on how these two may be interlinked by emotions. Further, grounded in the findings it contributes to the field of future-oriented sensemaking by showing that the future can be undesired.

Future-oriented sensemaking: An emerging field

Sensemaking is a critical activity that lies at the very heart of organizing. Rooted in symbolic interactionism, sensemaking is the process by which individuals try to understand novel, discrepant or surprising events and take action on the basis of that meaning to deal with equivocal or unsettling events (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Weick argues that '[t]he basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an

ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs' (1993, p. 635). Sensemaking happens when discrepant cues interrupt individuals' ongoing flow of activity and create uncertainty about how to act. Sensemaking is therefore about developing plausible meanings that explain what has occurred (Weick, 1995). Major organizational changes serve as key triggers of sensemaking because they introduce discrepant cues that frequently lead to cognitive disorder, creating anxiety and tension among sensemakers (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Sensemaking is a social process because the construction of meaning happens through social interactions with others. Sensemaking should therefore be studied, as argued by Gephart (1993), in the intersubjective social world of organizational actors by examining their use of language in talk and discourse because that is how people construct a sense of shared meaning and how organizing occurs.

Sensemaking has primarily been constructed as a retrospective process, which occurs as we look back at actions that have already taken place (Weick, 1995), but in recent years, there has been increasing attention to sensemaking as a future-oriented or prospective activity (e.g. Gioia, Corley and Fabbri, 2002). Although Weick (1979) acknowledges that people's actions may be guided by future-oriented thoughts, he nevertheless asserts that the understanding that derives from sensemaking occurs only after the fact, foregrounding the retrospective quality of sensemaking even when imagining the future. This, Weick (1979) argues is because thinking about the future is done, not in the future tense, but rather in the future perfect tense. Thus, when considering sensemaking about the future, Weick adopts Schutz' (1967) idea of thinking in the future perfect tense.

To understand what this means, we unpack the term semantically. The future perfect tense is an inflection form that refers to a completed action in the future. Future indicates that the inflection form is used to describe a future action, and

perfect indicates that the action will have been completed, i.e., finished or perfected, at some point in the future. The tense is formed with will plus have plus the past participle of the verb, for example, we will have finished this chapter before submitting it. Thus, when we use this tense, we are projecting ourselves forward into the future but looking back at the action as if we have already done it, although it will be completed sometime later than now. Supporting Weick's claim that future perfect thinking essentially derives from retrospective sensemaking, researchers have argued that interpretation of events in the future is essentially retrospective because it is made by using existing knowledge of the past (Colville, Brown, & Pye, 2009; D. A. Gioia et al., 2002). Envisioning the future thereby become a product of the past, as future perfect thinking is about imagining the future as if it has already occurred, that is, through retrospective sensemaking.

While most researchers have adopted a Weickian perspective on sensemaking, emphasizing its retrospective qualities, a growing body of theorizing and empirical research insists sensemaking can be distinctively oriented towards the future and can occur prospectively (e.g. Gioia, 2006; Gephart, Topal and Zhang, 2010; Ganzin, Islam and Suddaby, 2019). Recent research specifically examines prospective sensemaking as interpretation and enactment that are beyond future perfect thinking (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013). Pitsis et al. (2003) argue that the idea of future perfect thinking is restricted to more stable environments where planners have control over their material and social context but is very inadequate for unclear and ambiguous environments such as change situations (e.g. Gephart et al., 2010; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). MacKay (2009) additionally goes beyond the future perfect thinking by considering the role that counterfactual and prefactual processes play in future-oriented sensemaking processes. He finds that sensemaking processes can be prospective in that they can include prefactual what ifs about the past and the future, essentially generating the notion of open futures.

Although research in future-oriented sensemaking has grown, it is highlighted (e.g. Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013) that this area of sensemaking is under-researched and undertheorized, criticizing the dominant attention to retrospective sensemaking as it is conceptualized by Weick. Calls have therefore been made to rethink how we make sense of the future that conceptually goes beyond Weick's view of it as being a derivative of retrospective sensemaking (Brown et al., 2015; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Specifically, future-oriented sensemaking during times of change needs more attention (MacKay, 2009), particularly the interplay of retrospective and prospective aspects of sensemaking (Konlechner et al., 2018).

Methodology

The research was situated at the IT department of the Bank (pseudonym). Historically, the 100 years old Nordic bank was well-known for being traditional and conservative, though having experienced a number of changes over the years, such as downsizing and merger and acquisitions with other banks. However, the last four years the Bank and in particular the IT department had been undergoing considerable change such as growth from 2700 to 3600 organizational members, insourcing from an external vendor, and building of new IT sites in Eastern Europe and India. The department was therefore a unique and valuable case for studying sensemaking and change.

This chapter draws on 26 interviews conducted as part of a longitudinal ethnographic study. While the first author conducted the ethnographic fieldwork including the interviews, the second author played a crucial role in analyzing the data. The interviews were primarily conducted at the IT department's two Nordic offices; however, five interviews were conducted in the Eastern Europe office. 19 organizational members across the two IT departments, including middle

managers, team managers, and employees were interviewed. Six organizational members were interviewed at least two times. The ethnographic fieldwork played a crucial role to ensure that the interview questions asked were relevant and fostered rich answers. All interviews were structured by a number of questions, whilst all follow-up questions were shaped by the responses received in order to gain richer accounts of the interviewees' views on change. Examples of an interview question is: What is your journey of working at the Bank? This was followed up by questions such as: Could you please elaborate on that part of your story? All interviews lasted from 20 to 75 minutes and all were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis: Metaphors as an analytical strategy

Analyzing the data, we have been inspired by a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted in four separate phases moving iteratively between data analysis and theoretical ideas, although our approach to begin with was to work inductively with the data. This inductive approach allowed us to establish a firm link between the themes of data and the theoretical interest in retrospective and prospective aspects of sensemaking.

The first phase was conducted during the fieldwork, where the first author listened to recordings of meetings, transcribed interviews and read through fieldnotes. NVivo was used to inductively code the data, not drawing on any particular theoretical perspective. The second phase was conducted after all data was collected, where the first author began to group the inductive codes into themes. Here, a very interesting connection emerged between two separate codes, namely, anticipated future organizational changes and dramatic metaphors. This connection was further explored in the third phase where both authors read

through the coded data to discuss relevant themes and sub-themes and began to get acquainted with the literature about future-oriented sensemaking. In the last phase, both authors reviewed the data again and sorted it into the main themes of past organizational changes and future organizational changes. Metaphors were sorted into sub-themes; such as uncertainty metaphors, war metaphors and Doomsday metaphors under the main theme of future organizational changes.

The reason for applying metaphors as an analytical strategy is because metaphors were repeatedly used by interviewees when talking about change. Metaphors are figures of speech, referring to words or expressions that mean something different from their literal definition. With metaphors, information from a more familiar domain is applied to an unfamiliar situation or less known topic domain (Tsoukas, 1991). Metaphors are often used to express that which is difficult or impossible through the use of graphical rather than literal language. They are often used to paint a richer and more detailed picture of subjective experience and may enable the articulation of ambiguous and complex experiences (Ortony & Fainsilber, 1989). Given metaphors widespread usage and ability to compress meaning, they play a key role as a means of sensemaking (Cornelissen, 2002; Weick, 1995). To make sense of ambiguous events like organizational change, organizational members often make use of symbolic processes, particularly metaphors as they represent an important symbolic activity (Patriotta & Brown, 2011). Thus, we identified the metaphors in interviewees' response as possible windows to their sensemaking accounts.

Findings

Trivializing past changes as everyday humdrums

Talk about past organizational changes was central in organizational members' accounts. However, in contrast to existing research (e.g. Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis, 2011; Helpap and Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, 2016), which emphasizes that organizational change efforts often pose great emotional challenges to its members, the data in this study showed that organizational members on the surface seemed unaffected by past changes and talked about it in trivializing terms. Specifically, they talked about past changes in rational and practical terms and the metaphors they applied were trivializing in character. An example of rational talk about former changes is found in an account by the middle manager Thomas, where he talks about a particular organizational change of the past:

I think that if you stand outside and look in, some will think that it was a huge change. But for us, who are in it, it's just... It's just a lot of people who had to get out, because it's the natural development of things, it's just the next bead on the string, so what happens is just natural.

The metaphor of beads on a string is typically used when talking about something that occurs frequently and is similar in height, weight, and color. In this quote, Thomas uses the bead metaphor to illustrate that he has experienced several organizational changes in the past, where each change is symbolized by a bead, which together form a long string of beads. None of them stands out in his memory, rather, he sees them as similar in shape and size. By using the bead metaphor, he talks about change as one in many and thereby he downgrades the importance of past change experiences because they occurred so frequently. In other words, he has experienced so many organizational changes in the Bank that

he has grown accustomed to them.

Several other organizational members talked about past changes in similar terms with quotes such as 'It's always been such a long list of changes' by the employee Christian and the team manager Steven who said, 'It is like a muscle, right, a muscle that needs to be trained all the time, and I think that's how we deal with changes. There are just so many of them occurring all the time'. Both Christian and Steven make sense of past change as a frequently occurring phenomenon. While Christian trivializes past organizational changes because of their frequency, Steven applies a muscle metaphor to illustrate that organizational members deal with change in a rational way; that is, by growing so accustomed to organizational change that they are always ready for more to come. By using the muscle metaphor, Steven trivializes change as something that you can train for.

Besides trivializing the numerous experiences of organizational change in the past, organizational members avoided talking about how organizational change had affected them personally. Again, a rational and often practical view on past organizational changes permeated organizational members' sensemaking accounts. An example can be found in team manager Nicholas' sensemaking account when he talks about a particular organizational change he experienced in the past:

It was just some organizational diagrams that was adjusted and some directors who changed stools and so on...but nothing really happened.

The expression *changing stools* in the Nordic languages is often used to talk about structural reorganizations. It can be applied to the phrase, the manager is distributing the new positions, with the Nordic expression being the manager is distributing the stools. In the quote above, Nicholas minimizes the impact of the change experience by using an expression that turns organizational change into a

matter of adjusting a chart on a piece of paper or physically moving some chairs around. Thus, to Nicholas, it seems like change is a matter of practical rearrangements rather than a subjective experience which affected him. He underlines this in the second part of the quote where he says that ‘nothing really happened’.

Similar ways of talking about organizational change in practical rather than emotional terms were seen in interviews with for example the middle manager Thomas, who said, ‘you have to try to organize and think of a way.. okay, something happened so I have to reorganize’ and the employee Adam, who said, ‘a mechanism which just works, yes, it comes every few years.. something gets decentralized and then afterwards, three or four years later, it is being merged and then separated again’. These quotes making it a matter of practical reorganizing at the top, which does not affect lower level organizational members.

The analysis of organizational members’ sensemaking accounts of past organizational changes shows us that they talk about organizational changes as the everyday humdrums of work. They largely trivialize the organizational changes by downgrading their significance. Instead, they talk about them as occurring frequently and as being of rational and practical character, which do not affect them emotionally. These reactions are however in contrast to many studies of organizational change, including sensemaking studies, where changes are seen as triggers of sensemaking because they often create uncertainty, anxiety and fear (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1995). We therefore continued to pursue how organizational members talked about potential future changes.

Anticipating future change as Doomsday

In contrast to talking about organizational changes of the past in trivializing terms, we found that organizational members made sense of potential organizational changes in the future very differently. As soon as their talk turned to potential future changes, their vocabulary and metaphors-in-use changed. Their sensemaking accounts of future changes were dramatic and depressing, often portraying worst case scenarios in stark contrast to how they trivialized past changes. Intrigued by this contradiction, we explored why they imagined future organizational changes as significantly more devastating than the multitude of organizational changes that they had experienced in the past. One central theme was insecurity about the future. The team manager Steven for example expressed that he felt very insecure about changes in the future:

It's because I'm a bank nerd, right. I can see that in 10 years, the world will look roughly as it does today, financially, but on top of that you can't control it... it can be a boy or a girl.

The expression *it can be a boy or a girl* is a baby metaphor illustrating that the gender of the baby is impossible to predict. This metaphor is often used to demonstrate an uncertain outcome, and, in this case, Steven uses it when he talks about the future of the financial industry, which he sees as uncertain. Other organizational members' sensemaking accounts about the future were similarly marked by insecurity. Some talked about the uncertainty of the industry and whether the Bank would survive, whilst others focused more on their own job and job role at the Bank. The employee John for example said, 'these decisions are outside of your control. If you can't stand the heat in the kitchen then get out', and team manager Liz said, 'there is no doubt about that what he or we are doing is a change agenda... some has already skid in the bend'. These examples underpin

how organizational members' sensemaking about the future is characterized by uncertainty and lack of control. The expression *if you can't stand the heat in the kitchen then get out* used by John is a rather depressing phrase. It means that if the pressure is too much for you or if you can't cope, you should leave the job to someone who can. In this case, it illustrates that John thinks that if he does not like the way the Bank changes in the future, he will have to leave the Bank even though he has been employed in the Bank for more than 10 years. Liz uses the expression *skid in the bend* which is a Nordic expression best translated as *kick the bucket*. It is normally applied in the Nordic language to express that you lose or in this example have lost your position. By that she emphasizes that the consequence of the change agenda is that organizational members risk getting fired, which underpins the job uncertainty in the future.

While feelings of insecurity were central in organizational members' sensemaking about potential future organizational changes, some expressed this in very dramatic terms, making the picture of the future even gloomier. Specifically, being prepared for whatever the future may hold was expressed through the use of war metaphors. Middle manager Larry kept referring to his career in the army to explain how he was going to deal with changes in the future and team manager Steven talked about the future in the following way:

It's like being at war, right. If you ask a soldier, who he's fighting for at the battlefield, he'll not say it is his country, he'll say it's the guys standing next to him.

The guys standing next to you illustrates the brotherhood between the soldiers at war. They have each other's backs and will fight for each other rather than their home country. Applying this metaphor, Steven compares working at the Bank to being in a battlefield, where it is not only a matter of uncertainty, but also includes a sense of danger and one must therefore always be prepared for the worst. Thus,

before the enemy opens fire, one must have chosen side. Other organizational members applied similar war metaphors. Middle manager James for example said, ‘when I started at the Bank, you swore an oath of allegiance’, and team manager Nicholas said, ‘either we succeed, or we fail. And if we fail, then Moonshot does not exist in 10-15 years’. The former illustrates the strong commitment of soldiers, who go to war bearing in mind that they might not return. Given that they trust each other and promise to fight together against the enemy, they swear an oath. James similarly swore an oath when he began working at the Bank, illustrating his strong commitment. However, he continues by explaining how that have changed during the years and nowadays people aren’t that committed anymore. Again, the war metaphor illustrates that you must have decided how committed you are to the Bank if danger suddenly erupts. The quote by Nicholas is a classic win-lose metaphor. War is a win-lose game, because either you win the battle and survive or you lose the battle and as Nicholas says, then you will not exist in the long run. Applying the win-lose metaphor, Nicholas emphasizes how he sees the future as a battle, which he or the Bank might lose. Together, these war metaphors illustrate how the organizational members make sense of the future as if they will be in a war zone, where they must be prepared for the worst to come.

A third theme that characterized organizational members’ sensemaking of potential future organizational changes was the anticipation of Doomsday. Many talked about the future as if the upcoming battle had already been lost. The employee David for example said:

I have talked with my wife about whether we are cutting the bough we are sitting on. We’ve worked our pants off to separate Moonshot but doing that, we’ve also given Jones the power to fire us.

By using the bough metaphor, David says that whilst they have been working really hard with Moonshot, their hard work will end up hurting them instead of

benefitting them. By connecting their hard work to the ruining of future employment, he anticipates that the future will bring the end of working at the Bank. In this context, the bough metaphor is closely connected to the future-oriented sensemaking expressed by the war metaphors above. Using the bough metaphor, David emphasizes how they have put up a great fight, but the battle nevertheless seems to be lost. He ends by saying that they will probably be fired, illustrating that he is already envisioning the end; that is, Doomsday, in terms of working at the Bank. Other organizational members applied similar depressing expressions, such as team manager Nicholas, who said, 'If we can't be a speedboat, then we end up suffocating Moonshot' and middle manager James who said, 'I have also written in my performance appraisal that if I'm fired tomorrow I won't be surprised, but I'll be sad'. Both Nicholas and James emphasized, similarly to David, that they saw the future as bringing the end for them at the Bank. Other organizational members similarly talked about their role as for example project managers, as if these roles would not exist in the future. Together these examples illustrate how organizational members make sense of potential future changes by anticipating Doomsday, that is, the end of working at the Bank. The analysis of organizational members' future-oriented sensemaking of potential organizational changes shows that they draw on dark metaphors and dramatic scenarios to express emotional reactions that arise from uncertainty about the future. The metaphors reveal that they envision future changes to be like a battlefield, which they anticipate that they will lose.

Discussion

By analyzing metaphors of change, we have found that organizational members at the Bank make sense of past changes through trivializing metaphors. This is in

stark contrast to how they anticipate worst case scenarios when making sense of potential future changes by drawing on war metaphors. To explore the link between past and future-oriented sensemaking, we will proceed by discussing the role of emotions in sensemaking and how prospective sensemaking may reflect an *undesired* future.

Emotions in sensemaking

Following Konlechner's et al. (2018) call to unpack the interplay between the retrospective and prospective aspects of sensemaking, we argue that how emotions may provide the missing link between sensemaking accounts of past and future organizational changes. To access research participants' emotions, we studied metaphors as our analytical strategy. While metaphors are much researched as providing insight into how people understand events, often being explicitly linked to processes of sensemaking (Patriotta and Brown, 2011), the emotional dimension of metaphors has only received scant attention. We however tend to use metaphors more frequently when issues are emotional because of their ability to express affective states (Crawford, 2009). Metaphors are strong communicators of emotions and we tend to use them especially if those emotions are or were intense and/or negative (Ortony & Fainsilber, 1989). Metaphors can therefore be seen as windows to emotions, thoughts and feelings that are difficult or impossible to express. Given that they are part of everyday language, they may be used by organizational members with more or less intent and consciousness (Smollan, 2014), thereby conveying potentially hidden or forgotten experiences and emotional states. To understand organizational members' subjective emotional experiences, we therefore attended to their metaphorical language in use as this conveyed the vividness of their intense emotional states whether conscious or not.

Decoding the emotional elements of metaphors was therefore particularly apt for gaining deeper insight into how they make sense of organizational change (Smollan, 2014). Analyzing the metaphors, our findings revealed that organizational members applied emotionless rational and practical metaphors to describe past changes but that this was in stark contrast to the dark, dramatic and emotionally charged metaphors they used when talking about future change, showing their anticipation of a gloomy future.

To account for this contrast, we suggest that the emotionally charged sensemaking of potential future changes can be a product of their past experiences with change, which have been forgotten or suppressed to keep control of the situation. This urge for control can be grounded in their professional identity, which is characteristic for technical professionals (Orr, 1996) – and for employees or leaders working specifically in the financial industry (Weeks, 2004), where it can be seen as face saving or a coping strategy in terms of handling their emotions. By using unemotional and trivializing metaphors organizational members refrain from revealing their emotionally charged experiences of past changes. However, given the overwhelming uncertainty of the future and their fear that future changes being similar to those they have experienced in the past, it becomes impossible to stay in control and they therefore express themselves through emotionally charged dramatic metaphors.

While the emotional aspect of sensemaking has been highlighted as an understudied area of research (e.g. Maitlis, Vogus and Lawrence, 2013; Steigenberger, 2015), this study shows the unexplored potential of focusing on emotions in future-oriented sensemaking. Focusing on emotions allowed us to move beyond the primarily cognitive dimension of the Weickian future perfect lens and provide a more nuanced understanding of how future-oriented sensemaking might be interlinked with forgotten or suppressed sensemaking of the

past.

Anticipation in future-oriented sensemaking

In contrast to previous literature, we show that organizational members do not anticipate a desired future. Many future-oriented sensemaking studies use future perfect thinking to indicate that sensemakers project a *desired* future even though the term future perfect tense in its original form does not distinguish between desired and non-desired futures. Gioia and Mehra (1996) for example argue that prospective sensemaking ‘structure the future by imagining some desirable (albeit ill-defined) state’ (p. 1229), and Gioia et al. (2002) equally state that ‘people envision a desired or expected future event and then act as if that event had already transpired, thus enabling a retrospective interpretation of the imagined event’ (p. 623). Especially researchers in the area of strategy, forecasting, and organizational change have picked up this idea of prospective sensemaking as a projection of desirable future states (e.g. Tapinos & Pyper, 2018; Wiebe, 2010). Being explicitly concerned with the future, these scholars use the idea of prospective sensemaking as a controlled or predetermined way of imagining the future.

Our data however revealed that future-oriented sensemaking is not necessarily preoccupied with imagining a desired future in predetermined ways. Building on MacKay’s (2009) assertion that prospective sensemaking can include ‘what if’s’ about the futures, we showed that organizational members projected prefactual worst case scenarios into their sensemaking about the future. They specifically did that by comparing the future to a battlefield and by anticipating that they would lose this battle. Drawing on Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015, p. 24) who states that: ‘Anticipating what may come next is a distinguishing aspect of the temporality of

human existence, which stems from actors' immersion in a particular practice', we argue that organizational members anticipate the future by drawing on past experiences. Given that they specifically anticipated an undesired future, we infer that this anticipation stems from forgotten or suppressed experiences of organizational changes in the past.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the link between the undramatic metaphors applied by organizational members at the Bank when talking about past changes, and their dramatic metaphors applied when imaging future changes. By discussing how the metaphors potentially act as a coping strategy to stay in control of the situation and how the anticipated future is *undesired*, the chapter has two main contributions. First, we have demonstrated the unexplored potential of focusing on emotions to unpack the interplay between retrospective and future-oriented sensemaking. Second, and in contrast to previous literature, we have shown that organizational members anticipate an *undesired* future rather than a desired one, which may stem from their forgotten or suppressed experiences of change in the past.

8. Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to return to the overall research question posed, by summarizing the key findings of all the chapters, and proposing two discussions central for this particular study. Lastly, this dissertation is closed with a conclusion. As stated in the introduction, the research question I pursued over the course of this dissertation is: *How do organizational members construct organizational changes?* To re-examine and answer this research question below, I will start by returning to the findings from each chapter.

In chapter 2 *Literature: The new story of changing*, I explored and combined two existing dichotomies in the field of organizational change: planned – emergent change and major – minor change. Here, I found that there are two central gaps in the field. One being empirical studies of minor organizational change and the other being empirical studies occupied with organizational changes moving along dichotomies rather than staying within one extreme or category.

Chapter 3 *Methodology: In pursuit of organizational change* was concerned with methodological strategies and considerations. I found that in order to study organizational change as a fluid phenomenon grounded in a process ontology and through an *emic* approach, the longitudinal ethnographic research design was essential. Here, as a corporate ethnographer, I got access to study organizational changes from within. I further, draw on a mixed methods approach, including narrative interviews and reflexivity of my own role as a corporate ethnographer, in order to capture organizational change as an ever-changing phenomenon, always in a state of *becoming*. Lastly, the iterative process of deduction and induction supported the aim in the process of analyzing the data.

An overview of the findings from chapters 4-7 follows in table 9. Chapter 4 *Insider or Outsider?* continued with methodological findings, showing that independent of my role as sponsored by the organization, the interactions with organizational members and context determined whether I was being assigned a role as insider or outsider, or even both within the same context.

In chapter 5 *A drifting phenomenon*, I found that organizational changes drift away, either by slipping into the everyday practices of the organization, or by drifting away in time when the past is reinterpreted. The chapter provided a discussion of how organizational change failure has suffered the same fate as organizational change more generally, and thus, is under-researched within the field of process philosophy.

In chapter 6 *Windows to 'what really matters'*, I found that the more mundane changes as part of everyday work activities and organizational routines reflect radical changes to the organization. Further, grounded in a discussion of the three theoretical differences between a classic Weickian and post-Weickian sensemaking perspective, I argued that there is a need for extending the existing literature on organizational sensemaking of mundane changes.

In the last chapter of the analysis, chapter 7 *Anticipating Doomsday*, we found that organizational members draw on dark metaphors when anticipating the future. These dramatic illustrations were in stark contrast to the sensemaking of organizational changes of the past, which continuously were described in trivializing terms and characterized as being quite undramatic. The chapter contributed with a discussion of how emotions potentially create the link between the organizational members' future-oriented sensemaking and suppressed or forgotten experiences of organizational changes in the past.

Across the findings, there are two themes particularly relevant for further discussion. The first implies a return to the theoretical fundament of exploring existing dichotomies in the field of organizational change including revisiting the dichotomy of change – stability, a point previously highlighted in the introduction. The second theme is a more methodological one, grounded in the process philosophical approach to organizational change and the field of process philosophy's lack of empirical studies as supplements to the conceptual ones, which currently dominate the field.

Table 9: RQs, central dichotomies and findings from chapters 4-7.

Chapter	Research questions	Central dichotomies	Key findings
4. Insider or outsider? Exploring the fluidity of the roles through social identity theory	How is the role as insider shaped by the context and through interactions with organizational members <i>in situ</i> ? And how does that enable or constrain the ethnographer in that particular situation?	Insider – outsider	- Independent of the researcher’s own role as sponsored by the organization, the interactions with organizational members and context ultimately determine whether the researcher is assigned a role as insider or outsider, or even both within the same context.
5. A drifting phenomenon: Organizational change failure in a becoming view	Why is organizational change failure under-researched within the field of the becoming view?	Past – present Top management – employee level Strategic – everyday routines Failure – success	- Organizational changes drift away by slipping into everyday practices or by being reinterpreted in time.
6. Windows to ‘what really matters’: Organizational sensemaking of mundane change	How do organizational members make sense of mundane change?	Radical – mundane change Exceptional – nonexceptional Episodic – nonepisodic Certain change agents – everyone	- Mundane changes act as reflections of radical changes in the organization.
7. Anticipating Doomsday: Exploring future-oriented sensemaking through change metaphors	What does the organizational members’ metaphor-driven future-oriented sensemaking reveal about their experience of past organizational change?	Past – future Retrospective – prospective sensemaking Emotional – emotionless	- Organizational members draw on dark metaphors when anticipating future changes, which is in contrast to their sensemaking of organizational changes in the past, characterized by undramatic metaphors.

Beyond dichotomies

This study both explored and challenged existing dichotomies within the field of organizational change, with the aim of studying organizational changes in their full vividness. Paradoxically, the term *organizational change* contains in itself an

oxymoron according to process philosophers (e.g. Chia, 1999, 2014; Nayak & Chia, 2011; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), or, as I would argue, an immanent dichotomy. This is because *change* is ‘an ongoing process’ (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 580), where in contrast *organization* is about ‘stabilizing and simple locating’ (Chia, 1999, p. 224). Hence, change becomes natural and primary, and organization becomes secondary as an attempt to stabilize, and thus is the exception rather than the rule (Chia, 1999). In this way, the term organizational change contains an immanent tension where, on the one hand, it is the essence of changing, and on the other hand has the aim of stabilizing. When bringing the two words, organization and change together, they reflect how phenomena often contain two opposite poles. Hence, the term underlies the strength of embracing both poles of a dichotomy rather than exploring only one end – e.g. organization or change.

Where organizational changes in the past have most often been studied as, for example, either planned or emergent, few have studied organizational changes as a movement between two extremes or together as two opposing poles in a dichotomy. However, one example is Hernes and Pulk (2019), who discussed how continuous change enables the emergence of episodic change even though continuous and episodic change historically have been seen as two extremes of a dichotomy. In line with Hernes and Pulk's (2019) call for more studies to include both episodic and continuous change, I would argue that including both poles is in fact relevant for all dichotomies within the field of organizational change. This is because the strength of dichotomies must be found in the movement between the two poles, rather than reliance on just one end or the other. Thus, this dissertation calls for more studies exploring, challenging and creatively applying dichotomies within the field of organizational change in order to better study organizational change in its full vividness, and to extend the breadth of the field and overcome

the too narrow categorization and *a priori* determined view that currently dominates.

When returning to the dichotomy of change – stability, there exists the potential of engaging with scholars such as Weick (1979), Weick & Quinn (1999), and Bakken & Hernes (2006), all of whom have argued for a move from *change* to *changing*. Their argumentation has more generally been supported by process philosophical scholars grounded in the assumption of phenomena always being in a state of becoming rather than being. This particular shift from change to changing, exceeds the dichotomy of stability – change by focusing on moving between the two poles rather than relying on only one of them. In contrast, if grounded in substantive metaphysics in which the world is viewed as made of things, then the study would be occupied by the two poles of change and stability. Thus, this current study can be seen as a continuation of the discussion of the move from change to changing, by having explored and exceeded the dichotomy of stability – change, and by focusing on organizational change as an ever-changing phenomenon.

In practice, we often hear that organizations articulate change, as this understanding has become more widespread now than ever before, which underlies the general tendency to overuse the term *organizational change* in corporate language. However, organizations still tend to focus on the few – on paper – radical changes as in e.g. mergers, acquisitions and major reorganizations. However, this study has shown that what is radical to organizational members are the more mundane changes as part of everyday organizational activities. Thus, the practical implications of this study, is that if organizations want to support organizational members in organizational changes, which are often said to be psychologically challenging, the organizations must start by focusing on the organizational changes that matter most to its own organizational members. While

this could most easily be achieved with a simple step-by-step model, in reality, it involves rather the commitment to close-listening to the voices of the organizational members themselves.

An empirical inquiry

This study has pursued to examine organizational changes from within. The aim was to fill the gap in the field of process philosophy, a field which had become overpopulated with conceptual views based on philosophical ideas, rather than on empirical studies. Two main characteristics of this particular study are worth discussing further. The first being, that in order to study organizational changes grounded in an *emic* definition, the study must be designed in a longitudinal, ethnographic manner. This will allow for the inclusion of data not necessarily linked to, for example, strategic events. In this way, it becomes possible to capture the ever-changing phenomenon of organizational change as part of the organizational members' everyday work activities and organizational routines. Thus, in this study, my role as corporate ethnographer gave me the necessary access to study organizational changes from within, along with permitting me to get close to the organizational members themselves. However, the challenges for me were not to get sucked into the field, as it remained important to keep a distance, and reflect on my own role on an on-going basis, a challenge elaborated upon in chapter 4.

The second main characteristic of this study, is that in order to explore and exceed dichotomies, a choice was made early on to apply a mixed methods approach, where the methods acted to supplement each other. In taking this approach, I was able to conduct research that extended beyond the poles in a dichotomy and included more detail and nuance, which was crucial when trying to show how

neither of the poles alone in a dichotomy manage to illustrate the full empirical reality. In order to collect richer and more detailed accounts, I was inspired to take a narrative approach, especially when conducting the interviews. Here, the stories and metaphors collected offered rich accounts of the experienced organizational changes, which were of great interest when unpacking the organizational members' own construction of organizational changes. Similarly, my own reflexivity included in the fieldnotes allowed me to reflect more fully upon my own role as co-producer of the data collected.

Where each of the methods does have its own limitations, as for example interviews, which are themselves a constructed situation that to a high degree is co-constructed by me as interviewer, the everyday observations and shadowing gave me the access necessary to study organizational changes while they were being constructed. Studying organizational changes *in situ* and in real-time is quite unique, thus this study offers a contribution in that it shows how the researcher may be enabled to gain knowledge and data of the construction process of the organizational changes, crucially while it is taking place. Further, applying a mixed methods approach as part of a longitudinal ethnographic study allowed me the possibility of capturing organizational change as a drifting phenomenon, always in a state of *becoming*.

If we turn to the existing empirical studies within the field of process philosophy, we often see studies of a particular *a priori* determined change, such as with Hernes, Hendrup, & Schäffner (2015) and MacKay & Chia (2013). Grounded in an *emic* approach to organizational change, this current study has shown that there are unexplored opportunities in studying organizational changes which are not *a priori* determined, not episodic, not strategic and not necessarily radical on paper. Therefore, this study calls for more empirical studies on mundane organizational changes which take their point of departure in everyday work activities and

organizational routines, and proceed by studying the organizational changes pointed out by organizational members themselves, as these are the changes perceived to be the radical ones.

Conclusion

As a final remark, let's return to the overall research question: *How do organizational members construct organizational changes?* First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that there is no simple answer to this question. Partly, this is due to what the findings have shown: that the construction of organizational changes change in time and through an organization. Thus, the construction of organizational changes differs among organizational members, both from a hierarchical and horizontal standpoint. Furthermore, what might at one point be constructed as an organizational change, might not be considered as such at another point in time, because the past has been reinterpreted. Another part of the answer is that the construction of organizational changes must be seen as an interplay with context and relations. In this study, the organizational context has consisted of an IT department at a bank, however, the initial empirical observation of lower level organizational members constructing organizational changes different to those of top management might be generalizable to other large complex organizations. Even though the findings show that organizational members construct organizational changes differently and the construction changes in time, the findings also reveal how attention must be directed towards everyday work activities of the organizational members themselves. By closely studying organizational members in their everyday work activities and organizational routines, it becomes possible to study how organizational changes are constructed in a particular organizational context, by a particular

organizational member, at a particular point in time. Indeed this is the picture we see while remembering that it might change in the next second.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Co-author declaration



Co-author statement

Title of paper	Anticipating Doomsday: Exploring future-oriented sensemaking through change metaphors
Journal and date (if published)	Journal of Organizational Change Management

<p>1. Formulation/identification of the scientific problem to be investigated and its operationalization into an appropriate set of research questions to be answered through empirical research and/or conceptual development</p> <p>Description of contribution:</p> <p>Signe Bruskin identified a pattern in the data set and invited Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen to co-author the paper. Ideas and research questions have developed through dialogues between Signe and Naima.</p>
<p>2. Planning of the research, including selection of methods and method development</p> <p>Description of contribution:</p> <p>Signe planned the research and selected the methods applied.</p>
<p>3. Involvement in data collection and data analysis</p> <p>Description of contribution:</p> <p>Signe collected the data but both authors have contributed equally to the data analysis.</p>
<p>4. Presentation, interpretation and discussion of the analysis in the form of an article or manuscript</p> <p>Description of contribution:</p> <p>The interpretation of data and the framing of the argument was carried out in collaboration between the authors.</p>

1. Co-author (PhD student)	Signe Bruskin
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
<u>November 22 2019</u> Date	<u>Signe Bruskin</u> Signature

2. Co-author	Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
<u>22/11-2019</u> Date	<u>[Signature]</u> Signature

3. Co-author	
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
_____	_____
Date	Signature

4. Co-author	
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
_____	_____
Date	Signature

Appendix B: Interview guides

Interviews of explorative character (1. Round of interviews)

Intro

- Brief introduction of me as a researcher: I am employed in the IT department as an industrial researcher and I am researching in organizational changes and how these are experienced by employees and leaders in the IT department.
- Why I have invited to this interview: I am curious about your job, this particular part of the IT department and how the department has changed over the years (personalized in regards to why I have contacted this particular organizational member)

Opening question(s)

- Could you please start by telling a bit about yourself and your job?
- Could you please tell me more about your team / department?
- *Follow-up questions:*
For how long time have you been employed here?
Could you please elaborate?
Are you all physical located here?
How is the department / team structured?
Do you have examples?
How long have you been in this part of the organization?

Topic specific questions

- Have your department / team changed?
- What organizational changes have you experienced?
- *Follow-up questions:*
Why has it changed?
Can you elaborate?
Do you have concrete examples?
What happened?
Please, tell me more about the change.
Have your job changed?

Closing question

- I have one last question: What do you think the future will bring? If I come back in 5 or 10 years' time, what has changed then?
- *Follow-up questions:*
How will you be able to see the changes?

Could you please elaborate?
Why do you think that?

Outro

- Asking for permission to do another interview later in the process: As part of my research, I might come back to this part of the organization to see whether anything has changed. Would you be interested in an interview again if I come back?
- Thank you

Interviews of narrative character (2. Round of interviews)

Intro

- Brief introduction of me as a researcher: I am employed in the IT department as an industrial researcher and I am researching in organizational changes and how these are experienced by employees and leaders in the IT department.
- Why I have invited to this interview: I am researching in how organizational changes are experienced by employees and leaders, and I want to hear *your* stories and how *you* have experienced it (personalized in regards to how we have come to know each other).
- Structure of interview: The interview is guided by a few questions because I am more curious about your experiences than I am looking for a specific answer.

Opening question(s)

- Can I start by asking you to tell about your personal journey in the Bank? When and where did you start?
- *Follow-up questions:*
And what was your next position?
What then happened?
Could you please elaborate?
Please, tell me more about that.
How did you experience that shift / change?

Topic specific questions

- If you look back at your time in the Bank, which organizational changes stand out the

most?

- Can you recall other organizational changes you have experienced?
- During the period of shadowing, I have observed that many talk about xx (e.g. a reorganization, outsourcing etc.), how do you experience xx?
- *Follow-up questions:*
Can you elaborate?
What happened?
Please, tell me more about the change.
How was the change different from other changes you have experienced?
Do you have an example?
How did you react?
Did that change anything?
If I ask some of your colleagues, how do you think they will describe the change?

Closing question

- I have one last question: What do you think the future will bring?
- *Follow-up questions:*
How will you be able to see the changes?
Could you please elaborate?
Why do you think that?

Outro

- Asking for permission to do another interview later in the process: As part of my research, I am interested in following organizational change over time. Would you be interested in an interview again if I come back?
- Thank you

Appendix C: Overview of respondents

Respondents	Position	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018
Jeffrey	Top manager	RP		2 RP	RP
Joe	Top manager				2 I+ RP
Michael	Top manager	2 RM + RP	RM	2 RP	RP
Lukas	Top manager	I			
Edward	Top manager	I			
Christopher	Top manager	I			
Karen	Middle manager, IT Infrastructure	2RM	I + 2 RM		
Julia	Middle manager, IT Infrastructure			I	
Mark	Middle manager, IT Infrastructure			I	
James	Middle manager, IT Infrastructure	I	S+I		S+I
Frank	Middle manager, IT Infrastructure	I			
Larry	Middle manager, IT Infrastructure	I			
Thomas	Middle manager, Moonshot IT			S+I	S
Jacob	Middle manager, staff function	I			
Mary	Middle manager, staff function	I			
Scott	Team manager, IT Infrastructure		I		I
Eric	Team manager, IT Infrastructure		I		I
Peter	Team manager, IT Infrastructure		I		
Patrick	Team manager, IT Infrastructure			I	
Liz	Team manager, IT Infrastructure			I	
Steven	Team manager, Moonshot IT			I	I
Nicholas	Team manager, Moonshot IT			I	
Simon	Team manager, staff function	I			
Rob	Employee, staff function	I			
Christian	Employee, IT Infrastructure		I		I
Adam	Employee, IT Infrastructure				I
Cecilia	Employee, IT Infrastructure				I
Suzan	Employee, staff function	I			
John	Employee, Moonshot IT			I	I
David	Employee, Moonshot IT			I	

I: Interviews

RM: Recorded meeting

RP: Recorded presentation

S: Shadowing

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