IN THE NAME OF EFFICIENCY: CHANGE COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP IN THE DANISH PUBLIC SECTOR

A comparative study of the Danish police and hospital service

Master's thesis, cand.merc.(kom.)

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"We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation."

- Most commonly attributed to Gaius Petronius, c. 66 AD

Resumé

Denne kandidatafhandling har til hensigt at besvare spørgsmålet om, hvordan det danske politi og hospitalsvæsen kan lære fra hinandens tilgang til at skabe og håndtere effektivitetsforandringer gennem kommunikation og ledelse i den offentlige mellemleders krydspres-situation. For at skabe et stærkt empirisk belæg for besvarelsen af dette udføres 18 kvalitative interviews fordelt ligeligt mellem politiet og hospitalsvæsnet. Hermed formes afhandlingen af en socialkonstruktivistisk virkelighedsforståelse, hvori både en objektiv og subjektiv virkelighed anerkendes.

Forskningsspørgsmålet skal endvidere forstås ud fra den problematik, der ses i det danske samfund, hvori New Public Management siden 1980'erne har rettet fokus mod effektivitet, kvalitetskontrol og besparelser, hvilket påvirker de forandringskrav, politikerne stiller til de offentlige institutioner. Disse krav frarøver de offentligt ansattes tid brugt på kerneserviceydelserne for de danske borgere, hvilket skaber stor utilfredshed blandt især mellemledere og ikke-ledende medarbejdere. Hermed sættes særligt mellemlederne i et krydspres mellem politiske effektivitetskrav og operationelle behov.

Med afsæt i en forståelse af kommunikation som performativ søges først en indsigt i de subjektive præmisser, der ligger til grund for at skabe og håndtere forandringer, der forlanger effektivisering af henholdsvis politiet og hospitalsvæsnet. Her fremgår det af vores data ved hjælp af Arbnor og Bjerkes (2009) konstruktionsproces, at især tilgangen til management i de to institutioner skaber forskellige præmisser for håndtering af forandringer i relation til de negativt stemte medarbejdere. Herefter trækkes yderligere på frameworks fremsat af Ford og Ford (1995) samt Robichaud, Giroux og Taylor (2004) for at undersøge, hvordan forandringer skabes og håndteres i de to institutioner på baggrund af disse præmisser. Her står det klart, at hverken politiets eller hospitalsvæsnets mellemledere formår at skabe fælles forståelse for forandringerne gennem kommunikation. Som resultat heraf opstår negativ italesættelse af, og forventning til, forandringer og dertilhørende faktorer blandt begge grupper af medarbejdere samt til dels også hospitalsvæsnets mellemledere. Dette fordrer, at selvom langt de fleste effektivitetsforandringer bliver en accepteret og vanlig del af dagligdagen i de to institutioner grundet de politiske vilkår, formår forandringerne sjældent at blive legitime for medarbejderne, fordi de ikke giver mening i forhold til den operationelle opgave, og fordi mellemlederne fremstår hykleriske i deres håndtering af forandringerne.

Hermed identificerer vi tre ens sammenbrud i skabelsen og håndteringen af forandringer i begge institutioner på trods af tydelige forskelle i mellemledernes kommunikation og tilgang til

management. Disse er: en utilstrækkelig forandringsforståelse, negativ italesættelse og manglende forandringslegitimitet.

Dette skaber grundlag for en diskussion af, hvordan disse sammenbrud potentielt kan udbedres gennem et ledelsesperspektiv. Her stilles der spørgsmålstegn ved, om der skal være mere fokus på mellemlederne og deres ledelse, om mellemlederne ikke skal lede i en forandringskontekst, eller om der skal skabes et tredelt fokus på lederne, deres følgere og den kontekst, som de interagerer i. En sådan diskussion muliggøres af vores påstand om, at ledelse opstår i kommunikation med afsæt i Alvesson og Spicers (2011b) tilgang til ledelse som et flertydigt og svært fortolkeligt fænomen.

Med afsæt i denne diskussion opstiller vi endeligt to konkluderende, tentative anbefalinger til, hvordan politiet og hospitalsvæsnet specifikt kan lære af hinandens tilgang til ledelse i den offentlige forandringskontekst på baggrund af institutionernes største lighed og forskel. Vi foreslår derfor, at begge institutioner – med et praktisk fokus – potentielt bør fokusere på kontekst og følgere ved at bringe politikerne og medarbejderne tættere på hinanden gennem øget forståelse samt lokal forankring af effektivitetskrav. Dertil kan mellemlederne placere sig uden favorisering af den ene eller anden gruppering ved at fokusere på praktisk oversættelse mellem politikere og medarbejdere, hvilket gøres muligt gennem management-uddannelse og deltagelse i operationelle opgaver.

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1 Introduction

Ever since New Public Management (NPM) made its entry into the Danish public sector in the early 1980s, the majority of public institutions have struggled to accommodate the pursuance of a marketisation of Danish public services. The NPM movement, which is governed by politicians who take inspiration from the private organisations' work with efficiency, increased productivity, and quality control, has prompted a modernisation of public management within the Danish public institutions resulting in public management being restricted to efficiency demands for quality control, cost savings, and registrations (Østergaard, 2018: 31).

As a consequence of being under the constant surveillance of NPM control, which deprives the public managers of time spent on the core service tasks, the opposition from several public managers now results in their resignation. This tendency is especially traceable in the Danish police and hospital service. Here, a poll drawn up from three of the twelve different police districts indicates that more than half of the 193 participants are considering leaving the police, where every fifth has already submitted their resignation (Kejser et al., 2017). The explanation for this is found in the fact that many feel the police has become top-heavy, and that the public managers are too busy doing administration rather than supporting their staff around the clock in preserving the safety of the Danish citizens (Ibid.). A similar development is taking place within the Danish hospital service where especially the recent resignation of the clinic manager, Jakob Trier Møller, from the national hospital has brought attention to the debate of how a focus on patient care has been replaced with continuous demands for efficiency improvement (Reinwald, 2019). Backing Møller's resignation, thousands of doctors, nurses and other health professionals stand united in their objection against a pressured health care system allegedly too caught up in efficiency control, measurements, and economy to preserve the well-being of the Danish citizens (Dalgas, 2019).

Evidently, the traditional focus of the welfare state has shifted from citizen care and security to growth of the institutions, where public managers are forced to use their time and resources on controlling and monitoring processes within the institution rather than making sure to provide the best public service for citizens outside of the institution (Østergaard, 2018: 42). As a result of the ongoing demand for efficiency improvement in a sector that should first and foremost preserve the safety and well-being of citizens, a clear detachment arises between political leadership and operational practice. The ideology of NPM enforced by the Danish politicians, on the one hand, and the reality of public employees responsible for carrying out the public services, on the other hand, are simply worlds apart.

The question, therefore, becomes how public middle managers can implement and communicate efficiency changes to their operational staff when these changes both impede and shift focus away from the core operational service task?

1.1 Motivation for research

On the basis of the above introduction, we choose to centre our master's thesis on the change communication and leadership taking place within the Danish police and hospital service in the wake of the increased demand for efficiency improvements deriving from the NPM rule, which public managers struggle to comply with.

The reason for limiting our scope to these two institutions is found in their uniform purpose to preserve the safety and well-being of the Danish citizens while having to comply with certain framework conditions that both institutions are governed by as a result of their role within the Danish public sector. Furthermore, both institutions face a troubled past of having to accommodate continuous strict demands for efficiency and streamlining ever since NPM marked its territory on the organisation and functionality of the Danish public sector. It seems that, although the Danish police and hospital service deliver two of the most crucial operations of our welfare society, the political agenda continuously affects the public middle managers by dictating new reforms and changes that demand efficiency, which work against the public manager's relation to his operational staff and to the core operational service task.

Since we have previously encountered this dilemma in conversations with public managers in our peripheral network, the relevance of the dilemma has never been in question to us. Thus, it was also through our peripheral network that qualitative data became accessible to us in the police and hospital service. Moreover, this choice of topic is very consistent with our academic specialisation in Leadership, Organisation, and Communication, since we in this paper explore similarities and differences within change communication and leadership across the two institutions in-depth.

2 Problem area

Distinctive to management in the Danish public sector, as an integral component of the country's renowned welfare state, are a number of framework conditions, which the public manager must

comply with as these, among other things, influence how he can implement and communicate changes.

The public manager is not part of an organisation that is run solely based on a need for profit but must also consider societal needs, goals, and trends as well as changeable political agendas, among other things. Thus, the public manager will, as a consequence of NPM, more often than not be subject to strategic and operational efficiency demands set by politicians who are administratively in charge, yet not a part of the institution and therefore not well-acquainted with current operational practices and challenges. Furthermore, incoherent and even contradictory demands are not unusual due to changing value-based politics that continuously draws up new strategic directions and targets for the public institutions. In other words, the public manager must continuously and readily implement and communicate change in his day-to-day operations to accommodate the political scene, which may not always be positively received by employees (Munk, 2011).

Altogether, these conditions will more often than not place the public middle manager in what is most commonly referred to as a "cross-pressure" when trying to perform his daily tasks. Thus, communication and leadership of the warranted changes must both accommodate and take place within this pressure. Situations with cross-pressure are often characterised by ambiguity and conflicting considerations. In these cross-pressure situations, the manager is faced with a dilemma in which he, with almost certainty, cannot satisfy everyone no matter which solution is chosen and where he, therefore, must consider the best solution for each specific situation (Klausen, 2014: 58).

For the public middle manager constituting the bottom management level, the cross-pressure between efficiency demands caused by political focus on NPM on the one side, and more practical, operational claims from the employees on the other side, is especially prevalent. We argue that this is particularly noticeable in the police and hospital service as their purpose of preserving the well-being and safety of all Danish citizens puts them in the centre of political attention and debates, leading to a high number of change demands. In this cross-pressure, the middle manager will continuously receive demands from above, which may sometimes be inconsistent with previous orders or contradictory to what the middle manager believes to be right based on personal experience, and it is then his job to best convert these demands into actual change, whether his employees are receptive or resistant. However, as this conversion happens within the cross-pressure, it is hereby subject to a range of pre-set, narrow working conditions to which the middle manager's change communication and leadership must adhere. Furthermore, the middle manager must consider that the frequency and sometimes

contradictory nature of changes in the police and hospital service may affect the employees' attitudes towards these.

Thus, we argue that this crucial dilemma of public middle managers being restricted to continuously manage change within the cross-pressure in the Danish public sector raises several unresolved issues: how are changes managed by the middle managers in the public sector if they must satisfy both the levels above and below them, even when these demand contradicting solutions and results? And no matter which solution is chosen in an institution, how does the middle manager then communicate the change and engage in context-appropriate leadership so that the employees understand the situation and continue to trust him while he remains loyal to the top management and the politicians in general?

Consequently, this paper aims to investigate how public middle managers in the Danish police and hospital service communicate and manage intentional change demands for efficiency enforced by politicians while simultaneously accommodating the lower staff's operational claims. By comparing the two institutions, we wish to gain a more thorough understanding of how communication and leadership are practised within the perceived cross-pressure of the Danish public sector with the aim of providing tentative recommendations for public middle managers' strategic use of communication and leadership in a change context.

2.1 Research question

On the basis of our above considerations, we put forward the following research question and appertaining sub-questions:

How can the Danish police and hospital service learn from each other's approach to creating and managing efficiency changes through communication and leadership in the perceived cross-pressure of public middle managers?

1. What are the premises for change in each institution?
2. How is change created and managed in the two institutions?

3 Structure and aim of the paper

In the following, we present a high-level review of the paper's structure determined to optimally achieve the aim of investigating how efficiency changes are created and managed in the Danish police and hospital service in order to provide recommendations for public middle managers' strategic use of communication and leadership in a change context.

In the 1st section of this paper, we introduce the Danish public sector context and how its structural dynamics necessitate questions related to effective communication and leadership in a change context. Subsequently, we explain our motivation for examining this and specify the problem area concerning public middle managers as it appears to us, leading to the establishment of our research question and appertaining sub-questions.

The 4th, and hereafter following, section is used to clarify the key concepts of managers and leaders as well as change, furthering a basic understanding of the succeeding analysis and discussion.

After this, we account for our paradigmatic approach to the theory of science, determining our fundamental, social constructivist understanding of reality as inspired by the works of Berger and Luckmann (1991 [1966]) and subsequently Arbnor and Bjerke (2009). From this follows a thorough review of our methodological reflections and decisions in relation to our extensive data collection, as prescribed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2018), before we present our main analytical framework derived from social constructivist literature. We then in section 7 introduce additional primary theoretical concepts and frameworks applied in this paper and explain how and why we have chosen to include them, besides establishing how we fundamentally perceive communication as constitutive of organisations.

Hereafter, section 8 and 9 constitute our analysis, including relevant secondary theories, as they provide answers to the sub-questions. In this, we structurally apply Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) construction process to interpret our empirical data in a comparative analysis of the change creation apparent in the Danish police and hospital service with focus on the subjective premises for change – section 8 – and the objective reality in and to which changes are created – section 9. To deepen the understanding of performative communication in change creation, we incorporate Ford and Ford's (1995) conversations of change as the theoretical context to explain and analyse how change can be created and organised through conversations. Expanding the recursive communicative aspect of their

theory, we furthermore apply Robichaud, Giroux, and Taylor's (2004) framework for creating a metanarrative through interconnected metaconversations.

In the 10th section, we take a leadership approach to our discussion of how the breakdowns in change communication, as identified in our analysis, may be remedied to improve the processes of change creation and management in both institutions. To do so, we primarily draw on Alvesson and Spicer's (2011b) perception of leadership as an ambiguous and potentially problematic phenomenon, recognising that leadership happens in communication and may be addressed through the use of metaphors. This discussion forms the basis for section 11 in which we provide strategic recommendations for future change communication and leadership. Adhering to our social constructivist approach and factoring in the public sector context, we strive to present these recommendations not as universal solutions, but as practical suggestions for future change efforts.

Finally, section 12 constitutes the conclusion to our research question, presenting key findings from our analysis and the main elements of our discussion before addressing our recommendations. In the following 13th section, we address the potential implications of our thesis in regard to societal practices and future research.

4 Clarification of concepts

Due to the relativistic nature of the cognition which this paper relies on, some of the key concepts and terms applied throughout it may entail a differing or even disputed understanding. Consequently, we will in the following subsections clarify key concepts and terms used in our analysis and discussion to improve the readability of the paper and establish an initial, shared understanding.

With this in mind, we will only use 'he' as a pronoun referring to individuals of undefinable gender throughout the paper. This will therefore not include references to our informants. Furthermore, theoretical concepts or terms used in this paper is written in italics when first introduced in the descriptive sections and in the analytical and discussion sections, respectively.

4.1 Managers and leaders

To determine our understanding of the often-discussed terms *manager/management* and *leader/leadership*, we draw on Alvesson & Spicer (2011a).

The scholars advocate a dynamic distinction between management and leadership whereby they are seen as intertwined phenomena. Thus, the controlling, bureaucratic manager cannot always be directly juxtaposed to the dynamic, motivational leader – as it often happens in leadership literature – since the terms are not mutually exclusive and an individual may, therefore, engage in both. This is especially relevant in the context of change as the "*hard work of helping people to understand the purpose of an instruction, and creating meaning around it, frequently transgresses any clear distinction between management and leadership*" (Ibid.: 12).

However, Alvesson and Spicer further recognise that management and leadership are not interchangeable concepts either as there are several examples of management that are not also leadership, e.g. administration and monitoring of output. To them, leadership is more closely related to the management of meaning (Ibid.: 11-13).

Accordingly, we will initially refer to the individuals with direct responsibility for others in a work situation as "managers" due to their basic administrative tasks and will subsequently address in the paper whether they also engage in leadership-like actions during the change process. For further elaboration of our approach to leadership, see sections 7.4 and 7.5.

4.2 Change

We rely on Ford and Ford's (1995) concise approach to change as it acknowledges the concept's dynamic nature. They initially describe *change* as something new that was not originally there and define it as "*the difference(s) between two (or more) successive conditions, states, or moments in time*" (543). However, they further acknowledge that change is not only the comparable differences between moments in time but also the dynamic process of creating these differences, enabling our academic focus on the process of change creation. They state that: "*Planned organizational change involves taking intentional action with a commitment to producing an a priori specified outcome*" (Ibid.: 543-544).

It hereby also becomes apparent that Ford and Ford distinguish between *unintentional change* and *intentional change*. The first is revealed as accidents or unexpected side effects of specific actions, while the latter happens when one or more individual(s) purposely takes action to bring about new and different conditions for themselves and their peers. By this, the individuals become so-called "change agents" and we can thus claim that public middle managers act as change agents when they attempt to create intentional change in their institutions (Ibid.: 543).

Due to our perception of NPM and its continued focus on efficiency as problematic, we will in this paper focus on changes intentionally brought about by politicians and top management, which predominantly consist of efficiency demands, and we will therefore not directly address changes originating at middle manager level nor unintentional changes happening in the institutions.

5 Theory of science

In the following, we will present our chosen paradigmatic approach to the identified problem area, specifying what is real and how we acknowledge it. This approach directly forms the basis of our research design and analytical framework.

5.1 Social constructivism

In this paper, we draw on the realisations of the *social constructivist* paradigm to acknowledge the reality in which we live. Consequently, we adhere to the belief that social reality is individually and intersubjectively constructed through language and explicit communication by the individuals acting within it. The individual is hereby continuously constructing his reality on the basis of his background; subjective understanding being a key driver for personal and institutional actions as the individual not only arranges and interprets the institutional reality but also builds on it (Holm, 2018a: 141-142, 157).

A classic example of how that, which seems "natural" to us, is actually being socially constructed is the perception of money as valuable. Holm explains that "*money is valuable because we* agree *that it is valuable. Because everyone acts* as if *money has value, it actually becomes valuable*" (Ibid.: 141). Following this line of thought, middle managers act in a cross-pressure and must take this into consideration when acting *because* we agree that a cross-pressure exists.

However, when taking a social constructivist approach, we must recognise the varying radicalism apparent among the paradigm scholars concerning the dualism between a socially constructed reality and an objective reality, which we will elaborate on in the following section (Ibid.: 150).

5.1.1 The objective and subjective social reality

In their work on the social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann (1991 [1966]) explain that reality is socially constructed and can be defined as "*a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot 'wish them away')*" (Ibid.: 13). Within this belief lies an understanding of society's dual character in terms of "*objective facticity and subjective meaning*" (Ibid.: 30). Building upon the views of Berger and Luckmann, Arbnor and Bjerke explain it such that there is an objective reality but that the way we perceive and understand it is subjective (2009: 5).

Viewing society as a *subjective reality* entails adhering to a subjective epistemology wherein people acknowledge reality individually, relative to their own needs and social experiences, and a predominantly relativistic ontology where individuals subsequently shape reality on the basis of subjective understanding. Thus, Berger and Luckmann argue, individuals internalise the reality in which they act and then express this internalisation through communication (1991 [1966]: 147-182). As an example, whether an individual understands a change as an efficiency improvement or a ruthless cut-back determines how he communicates about it and thereby how he shapes the change reality intersubjectively.

However, Berger and Luckmann further argue that society can also be viewed as an *objective reality*. This happens when an activity becomes a continually recurring habit, which is always referred to and understood in the same way, enabling the emergence of institutions (Ibid.: 70-71). When this reality is then passed on to new generations it becomes the unquestionable, set way in which we do certain things rather than merely a recurring habit (Ibid.: 77).

Adopting this view in the paper, we position ourselves within a less radical section of social constructivism in which we recognise both an objective reality and a subjective reality. In that way, we recognise that while individuals need to ascribe subjective societal meaning to policemen, doctors, or nurses for them to be more than merely a physical group of people in distinct uniforms, the police and hospital service are, as institutions, rooted in an objective social reality. An individual might personally not agree with the general role or authority of the police or the hospital service, but this subjective opinion affects neither the power nor the legitimacy with which the institutions act in our Danish society every day. They have become objective and unquestionable structures or institutions with clearly defined roles passed on through generations.

In this way, we argue that power, institutions, and legitimacy constitute the objective reality, presenting itself as the most typical reality, which Berger and Luckmann term *the reality of everyday life*. This is the ordered, intersubjective reality which is then passed on to, and subjectively experienced by, other individuals (Ibid.: 33-35).

5.1.2 The actors view

For individuals to be able to create or alter reality, they must concurrently be acknowledged as active creators rather than passive recipients. In their *actors view*, Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) build upon the arguments of Berger and Luckmann to describe how individuals can be seen as "*active, reflective and creative*" (14) human beings who possess intentionality. In their view, intentionality "*refers to the structure that gives* purpose *to experience*" (Ibid.: 4) and it is thus intentionality that turns individuals into active creators of objects in their environment. In the end, the objectified reality is a result of actors' intentional actions when creating and recreating the subjective reality.

The authors build their actors view upon a principle that, in its basic dialectic assumptions, seems heavily influenced by the notorious concept of the hermeneutical circle or spiral (Holm, 2018b: 103-105). Arbnor and Bjerke call it the "Arbnor Uncertainty Principle" and state that: "*The more precisely you determine isolated characteristics of a human being and her activities, quantitatively and statistically, the less you understand of her as a whole. And the better you understand her as a whole, the more uncertain the quantitative/statistic aspects become*" (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 3). With this view they suggest that to understand social reality as a whole, we must understand the specific processes forming it – and to understand the specific processes, we must understand social reality as a whole. Putting too much emphasis on one aspect clouds the other aspect.

The view carries implications for our approach in this paper as we consequently need to look at the specific change context to understand the overall change and vice versa while taking care not to focus too much on either aspect as they consistently and continually affect and shape each other. For this reason, Arbnor and Bjerke's construction process is especially applicable to our study. A further elaboration on these implications is therefore provided in section 6.3 where we present the construction process in continuation of our methodological reflections.

6 Methodology and analytical framework

In this section, we will clarify the overall methodology and analytical framework of the paper. We do so by firstly presenting our methodological approach and appertaining reflections before expounding our process of determining, collecting, and ordering our extensive empirical data that forms the basis of our entire analysis. Finally, we describe the analytical framework that we have chosen to structure our analysis by and explain why this is the case.

6.1 Empirical research methods

The scientific approach mentioned in the above section 5 forms the basis of our chosen empirical research methods. Here, we make use of a multiple-case design as well as qualitative research interviews to collect our primary empirical data, which will continuously serve as evidence for the paper's analysis and discussion.

6.1.1 Multiple-case design

The reason for limiting our scope to the two case institutions of the Danish police and hospital service should be found in their uniform purpose to preserve the safety and well-being of the Danish citizens in the midst of having to comply with continuous changes enforced by the Danish government that demand efficiency improvement. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of how middle managers attempt to create and manage these changes within the perceived cross-pressure, the paper, therefore, takes its point of departure in these two case studies.

According to Yin's (2003) definition, a case study "*is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*" (13). Thus, applying case studies to this paper enables elucidation of both contemporary and continuous changes constructed within the perceived cross-pressure in the Danish police and hospital service, where the boundaries and practices of the middle manager remain generally undefined.

Furthermore, Yin distinguishes between two types of case study designs: a *single-case design* and a *multiple-case design* (Ibid.: 39). Here, Yin argues for the use of a multiple-case design, also referred to as comparative studies, over a single-case design, as the analytical benefits from having two (or more) cases are substantial (Ibid.: 46, 53).

This he asserts, firstly, in the possibility of obtaining direct replication. When applying multiple case studies, the researcher is able to analyse the data within and across cases, which according to Yin enables the researcher to detect similarities, also referred to as *literal* replication, and to discover differences, characterised as *theoretical* replication (Ibid.: 53). We are thus able to demonstrate similarities and differences in the way change is created and managed within and across the Danish police and hospital service by applying a multiple-case design to our study. This additionally enables our research question of how the two institutions can learn from each other. As a result, the analytic conclusions arising from these two cases will be more powerful than those drawn from a single case.

Secondly, Yin emphasises that the contexts of the two cases will most likely differ to some extent. If under these varied circumstances, the researcher can still arrive at common conclusions from both cases, he will have immensely expanded the external generalisability of his findings, which again would be restricted when choosing a single case (Ibid.: 53). Thereby, the choice of comparing the Danish police and hospital service allows for an even more explicit observation of how change is continuously constructed within the social dynamics of the perceived cross-pressure that dominates management in the Danish public sector.

To sum up, we argue that our choice of comparing the Danish police and hospital service improves our study, as it benefits from both the replication logic as well as external generalisability in order to accommodate the quality criteria of reliability, validity, and generalisability. The extent to which our multiple case study design meets these criteria is further addressed in section 6.2.6.

6.1.2 Qualitative research interview

Within our two case institutions, we conducted qualitative research interviews to gain an understanding of how middle managers and employees collectively create and manage change within the institution. The use of qualitative research interviews is substantiated in the actors view as well as our multiple case study design.

First, we argue that the actors view points directly towards the qualitative interview as a research method for data collection since "*the qualitative interview is a key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world. It provides a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions*" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018:10). Thus, by conducting qualitative interviews we are able to gain direct access to

the subjective understandings of employees and middle managers, which according to the actors view affect how change is created and managed intersubjectively.

Secondly, the qualitative research interview is also the most commonly used method for collecting data within case studies (Kvale, 1997: 105). Kvale argues that by using qualitative interviews in case studies, the researcher gains an understanding of the research phenomenon exactly as it unfolds in the present time (Ibid.). Therefore, when using the qualitative interview in our case studies, we gain knowledge about how change is created and managed contemporarily by middle managers and employees within the contextual cross-pressure that exists in the Danish police and hospital service.

Finally, we argue for the use of qualitative research interviews, rather than alternatively quantitative research methods, as change manifests itself in social and linguistic construction of subjective realities, which cannot be quantified. This is backed up by the previously cited "Arbnor Uncertainty Principle" that insists on qualitative measures when explaining social contexts, as statistical measurement leads to a gradually decreased understanding of ourselves as authentic totalities (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 2). If we lose the qualitative feeling of totality and the meaningful context in which we create ourselves as free actors, then we lose some of what is human, according to the actors view (Ibid.).

6.2 Research design – the seven stages of an interview inquiry

In this paper, we have chosen to structure our qualitative research through Kvale and Brinkmann's seven stages of an interview inquiry: thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting (2018: 40-41). In the following, we outline how these are applied to collect, analyse, and interpret our empirical data deriving from the qualitative interviews conducted within the Danish police and hospital service.

6.2.1 Thematising

When designing a qualitative interview, it is necessary to identify the topic and purpose of the investigation in order to make reflective decisions on which methods to use for the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 42). Here, the paper's introduction and problem area convey our initial understanding of the conditions that challenge the area of change creation and management within the Danish police and hospital service.

Through several news articles, concerning control and regulation of Danish public institutions, and our conducted background interviews with the Danish National Police HR department, we have recognised that the main managerial challenges of the Danish police and hospital service are to be found within the perceived cross-pressure of public management. As a consequence of the pre-knowledge derived from these sources, the purpose of our interviews is to gain an understanding of the subjective experiences and opinions on change and leadership that prevail in the police and hospital service in order to identify how the institutional members create and manage change within the perceived cross-pressure.

6.2.2 Designing

As mentioned above, we apply multiple case studies and qualitative research interviews as our two main research designs. Here, we specify the qualitative interviews as what Kvale & Brinkmann (2018) define as "*semi-structured life-world interviews*" (14). This type of interview is further characterised as an "*exploratory*" (Ibid.: 42) interview as the semi-structured life-world interview only entails little pre-planned structure in order to discover new and unexpected dimensions about the research topic (Ibid.: 14). This contributes to an extension and alteration of the researcher's knowledge about the studied phenomenon; however, it may also bring the researcher in the dilemma of either improving the interview guide by incorporating the new dimensions in the remainder of interviews, and thereby not having comparable groups, or to refrain from using the new insights in the remaining interviews (Ibid.: 48).

Since we recognise that the need for comparable groups is paramount to our comparative study, we have sought to accommodate such a dilemma by engaging in a purposeful sampling plan. According to Tracy (2013), good qualitative researchers must engage in purposeful sampling, which means that "*they purposefully choose data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes*" (134).

As our chosen topic of change communication and leadership within two rather secretive and confidential institutions call for a method that can provide us access to a hidden and extensive population, we have contacted people within our peripheral network who work in the Danish police and hospital service. Here, we asked for their assistance in establishing contact with further relevant informants from their institutional networks. Recognising that our mutual acquaintances may lead the informants to hold back personal information, we have tried to accommodate such an issue by

explicitly promising confidentiality and committing to not disclose any detail to these acquaintances. As such, our research sampling takes on the qualities of what Tracy calls a *snowball sample* plan. When using a snowball sampling plan, the researchers begin by identifying several participants who fit the study's criteria and then ask these people to suggest a colleague, a friend, or a family member (Ibid.: 136).

The selection of a representative sampling group is determined by our background interviews and research questions, as well as the theoretical knowledge acquired from our leadership course. Here, the ambiguous view on leadership presented by Alvesson & Spicer (2011b) teaches us to deviate from conventional leadership studies that have an over-reliance on interviews with managers and an under-reliance on interviews with a broader category of those involved in leadership, namely the subordinates, colleagues, and superiors (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 19). We, therefore, choose to fix our sampling group to both middle managers and employees, since our knowledge of leadership confirms how the interactions between these, and the context in which they operate dynamically, affect the creation and management of change.

To establish a representative sampling group, we have identified where middle managers and employees are placed in the hierarchical structure of the Danish police and hospital service, respectively, to facilitate a comparison between the two. We accomplished this mainly through our background interviews, which have been put down in writing as summaries rather than actual transcriptions to accommodate the strict confidentiality-wishes of the two informants (Appendices 3, 6).

In the table below, we illustrate the distribution of roles within our sample group where the hierarchy is shown from top-to-bottom.

Job title	**Hospital service**		**Police**	
Middle manager	Ledende overlæge	*Executive Doctor*	Vicepolitiinspektør	*Deputy Assistant Commissioner*
	Oversygeplejerske	*Head Nurse*		
	Assisterende afdelings-sygeplejerske	*Associate Nurse Unit manager*	Politikommissær	*Police Superintendent*
Employee	Overlæge	*Doctor*	Politiassistent	*Police Constable*
	Sygeplejerske	*Nurse*	Politibetjent	*Police Officer*

Since we are aware that we apply English job titles to a Danish context in this paper, which might cause a degree of vagueness, we, therefore, include the original Danish job titles in the above table to make our translation transparent to the reader. We also acknowledge that, given the fact that the institutions are different in their daily operations and organisational structure, where the hospital service is split in two divisions; medical and nursing, contrary to the police being one division, a 1:1 comparison between the levels of the two institutions cannot be made.

Considering the number of informants, we knew that in order to identify the different and similar ways in which creation and management of change occur within the institutions, we needed participants who were willing to share their own subjective experiences and opinions on change as well as their relations with subordinates and superiors. Additionally, we knew that a large number of subjects would be required in order to reveal general patterns of change communication and leadership across the two institutions and to establish the reliability of these findings.

By our 18th interview, we were able to identify clear similarities and differences between the two institutions, and we, therefore, decided that we had reached the point of data saturation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 49). The 18 interviews are split into 9 within the police and 9 within the hospital service. Each group of 9 interviews is then further divided into 5 interviews with middle managers and 4 with employees in order to ensure the reproducibility of the findings within managerial and non-managerial levels.

The conducted interviews appear from the table below. Due to the confidential nature of our chosen institutions, which are further elaborated in the following stage of interviewing, we only list job titles, abbreviations used for references in the paper, and the associated hierarchical level.

Hospital service		
Job title	*Abbreviation in paper*	*Hierarchical level*
Executive Doctor	ED1	Middle manager
Executive Doctor	ED2	Middle manager
Head Nurse	HN1	Middle manager
Associate Nurse Unit manager	ANUM1	Middle manager
Associate Nurse Unit manager	ANUM2	Middle manager
Doctor	D1	Employee
Doctor	D2	Employee
Nurse	N1	Employee

Nurse	N2	Employee
Police		
Job title	*Abbreviation in paper*	*Hierarchical level*
Deputy Assistant Commissioner	DAC1	Middle manager
Deputy Assistant Commissioner	DAC2	Middle manager
Police Superintendent	PS1	Middle manager
Police Superintendent	PS2	Middle manger
Police Superintendent	PS3	Middle manager
Police Constable	PC1	Employee
Police Constable	PC2	Employee
Police Constable	PC3	Employee
Police Officer	PO1	Employee

6.2.3 Interviewing

We have conducted our interviews based on interview guides written in Danish and subsequently translated into English (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 41). Prior to our interviews, we made sure to introduce our informants to the overall purpose of our investigation through an interview pitch adjusted to the middle managers and employees within each institution. The interview pitch was presented in connection with the initial contact to our participants where we made sure to clarify the ethical guidelines, informing that all interviews would be sound recorded with the guarantee of full anonymity in regard to name, department, and geographical area, and that they would be kept fully confidential. These ethical guidelines were repeated at the briefing of the interviews, to ensure that we obtained the informants' informed consent to report our findings.

Subsequently, we presented our interview questions which were initially fixed to an interview guide, but with room for deviation. All of our four interview guides, which are directed at police employees (Appendices 7-8), police middle managers (Appendices 13-14), hospital service employees (Appendices 20-21), and hospital service middle managers (Appendices 26-27), respectively, follow a funnel-shaped sequence as we move from general to specific questions:

The overall systematisation of these questions appears from each of our four attached interview guides (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 67-68). However, we initially approached our interviews inductively to determine the main challenges as they appear to our informants, and we therefore tried to refrain from preconceived ideas build on theoretical concepts. Instead, it was our intention to allow the subjective experiences and opinions of our informants to guide the direction of the interviews even if this meant deviating from our pre-fabricated interview guides. Yet, as we still wanted to touch upon certain specific topics during all interviews to facility comparability, this posed heavy demands for our ability to incorporate these questions in the conversation in a semi-structured manner.

Additionally, we chose to run a pilot interview prior to our interviews to test our interview guides. Here, the pilot interview helped monitor the comprehension of our interview questions as well as sort out which questions are relevant, and which are redundant. Moreover, the pilot revealed that since we enquire about both political standpoints and rather confidential situations between middle managers and employees, we must stay sensitive to the nuances and complexities of the many personal experiences and opinions shared by our informants.

6.2.4 Transcribing

All of our 18 interviews are registered by means of a sound recorder. They are furthermore transcribed in order to facilitate a structure that enables further analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 108; Appendices 9-12, 15-19, 22-25, 28-32). Here, we have chosen to transcribe all material from the

interviews to ensure a linkage between statements and context, as each of the individual opinions of employees and middle managers contributes to a holistic understanding of change and leadership within and across the institutions. Thus, the interviews are structured for analysis solely by transcription with no use of computer programmes for textual analysis.

Since we have chosen to conduct our interviews in Danish, this is the language in which all transcriptions are written. We have, therefore, translated the specific parts of each interview that are directly quoted in this paper, which we recognise create an element of uncertainty for non-Danish readers.

Finally, as we conducted the interviews, we faced some minor technical difficulties, which resulted in 15-30 minutes of lost information in total from two of our 18 interviews (Appendices 24, 29). This unforeseen incident did however not interfere with our ability to still draw up and reproduce similar and different patterns between the two institutions.

6.2.5 Analysing

Through analysis, we have developed an understanding of the interviews where the informants' own perceptions were brought into the light, and where new perspectives from our own theoretical understanding were applied to the study phenomenon.

As our interviews were conducted inductively, we analyse our transcribed interviews through *meaning condensation* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 123-125) since this mode of analysis allows examination of similarities and differences within and across the police and hospital service that can lead us closer to a clarification of how change is created and managed in our case institutions. In the following subsections, we account for our five-step process of meaning condensation.

Total impression - from chaos to themes

First, we have established an overview of our data by reading through all of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 124). This is done to develop a general impression of our data as a whole, looking for preliminary themes associated with the informants' experiences and opinions of change and leadership. As we browsed through all of the 18 transcripts, we were able to detect some clear differences and similarities that emerged between the two institutions, which are depicted in the below chart:

Similarities	Differences
Objective: Safety preserving and preventive	Professional detachment of managers
Scarcity of resources	Mangers having direct citizen interaction
Increasing number of non-specialists	Managers participating in operational tasks
A team culture	Approach to leadership/management
Work as an identity	The Leadership Pipeline
Perceived distinct culture	Focus on employee involvement
Culture change among young colleagues	Strategic communication in informal contexts
Life-long job possession	Management education
Filtered communication upwards	Organisational structure and hierarchy
Managers push upwards	Boundaries between managers/non-managers
No job regrets	Retention of managers
Practitioner position prior to manager position	Interference of politicians/top management
Recent efficiency demands	Job opportunities in the private sector
Awareness of media coverage	The translating manager
Managers engaging in personnel management	Managers engaging in critical management
Managers engaging in business management	
Managing in a perceived cross pressure	

Identifying and sorting meaning units – from themes to codes

Secondly, the natural 'meaning units', as they are expressed by our informants, were identified and sorted in relation to our research question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 124). The meaning units of our informants that relate to the above themes of differences and similarities were decontextualized from the transcripts and marked with a code in order to facilitate cross-case synthesis. This was done manually by marking the text fragmentations of our transcribed interviews that constitute relevant meaning units for our research question.

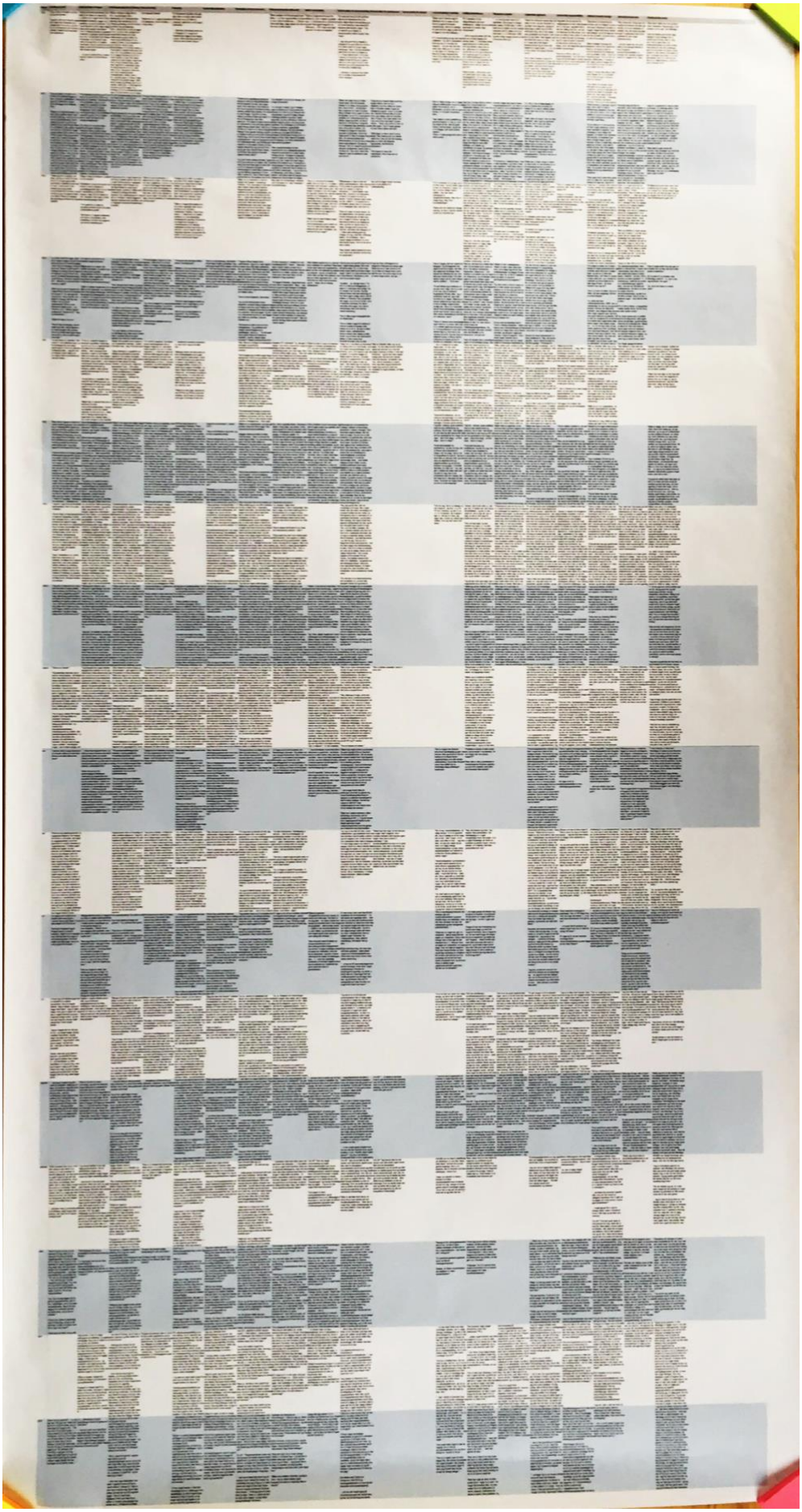
Here, we benefit from working inductively, as we moved from specific knowledge to general codes, contrary to the deductive method that takes for granted that general ideas already exist prior to deducing from hypotheses (Ibid.: 118). As a result of identifying and sorting meaning units from our 18 transcribed interviews, we end up with the following codes:

Codes		
Identity or work	Culture/culture change	Role in society
Professional/practical distance	Hierarchy	Leadership education
Perception of cross-pressure	Metaconversations (informal)	Initiative conversation
Conversation for understanding	Conversation for performance	Conversation for closure
Leader/employee retention	Political interference	Resource paradox
Leadership approach	Leadership responsibilities	Attitude towards change
Internal/external communication	Public/private sector	

Condensation – from code to meaning

The third step of the analysis implies systematic abstraction of meaning units within each of the code groups established in the second step of the analysis. At this stage, empirical data is reduced to a decontextualized selection of meaning units sorted as thematic code groups across the individual informants (Ibid.: 124).

By doing this, our data no longer appears as 20-30 pages of transcripts but is organised and reduced to a few code groups containing meaning units with the capacity to reveal aspects of change and leadership experienced by employees and middle managers in the institutions. These meaning units were inserted in a data sheet, see picture below, in their righteous quotation form to fit the above code groups. This was done to provide an overview that can facilitate a comparative analysis within and across the studied institutions.



From this sheet, the meaning units, as they are expressed by the informants, appear in the horizontal columns, which has then been adjusted to the code groups that appear in the vertical columns (Appendix 33).

As we moved from the third step towards the fourth step of our interview analysis, we were able to relate essential patterns of our meaning units to our own existing theoretical knowledge.

Synthesizing – from condensation to descriptions and concepts

The fourth step consists of interrogating the meaning units in terms of the specific purpose of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 124). During the third step, we adjusted the disconnected meaning units, in the form of quotations, to the code groups that relate to our research question. These quotations were used in the development of theoretical descriptions and concepts about the research phenomena, which was facilitated by our chosen analytical framework, the construction process of Arbnor & Bjerke (2009: 15-21).

On the basis of the construction process, we were able to relate the most salient content of our meaning units to the theoretical concepts of the framework. Thus, by applying the construction process as our main analytical framework to our empirically grounded meaning units, we were able to develop analytical arguments for the studied phenomena of how change is created and managed in the perceived cross-pressure of public management.

Reporting – from descriptions and concepts to findings

Finally, in the fifth step, the essential non-redundant themes of the interviews were tied together into a descriptive statement and reported as findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 124). The reporting of our findings, grounded in our empirical data, is found in the paper's analysis, which employs the construction process as its main analytical framework. Thus, a further elaboration of the construction process is provided in section 6.3.

6.2.6 Verifying

By verification, the generalisability, reliability and validity of our interview findings are determined (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 140).

Generalisability

The question of whether the findings of our research can be generalised is already addressed in the section on our multiple-case design, see section 6.1.1. Here, we assess that conducting qualitative interviews within and across multiple cases argues for external generalisability, as we move beyond a single context and thereby expand the discovery of common similarities and differences on how change is created and managed in the perceived cross-pressure of public institutions.

Our study, therefore, relies on analytical generalisation, rather than statistical generalisation, as our findings from the qualitative interviews conducted in the Danish police and hospital service can be used to reveal what might also occur in other situations of Danish public institutions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 147).

Reliability and validity

Reliability refers to how consistent the results are, and validity means whether an interview study investigates what is intended (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 41). Here, we argue for the reliability of our research findings in relation to our thorough interview design as well as our purposeful sampling plan, where our extensive sampling population of middle managers and employees as well as their comparable hierarchical levels accommodate a reproducibility of the findings found in the police and hospital service.

Additionally, we believe our research results to be valid in terms of what is intended to be investigated, as we through the different stages of our research design have argued for how this paper follows the underlying theoretical foundations of social constructivism. An insight into the subjective understandings and opinions of employees and middle managers leads us towards the elucidation of how intersubjective realities affect the creation and management of change in the Danish police and hospital service. Furthermore, since we intend to examine leadership as perceived by Alvesson and Spicer (2011b), we argue that we can only obtain validity by interviewing both employees and middle managers.

6.2.7 Reporting

The reporting concludes on the above stages, which combined result in the findings of our study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2018: 41.). The findings of our data thus constitute the paper's primary empirical material, which has been obtained from the Danish police and hospital service. Next step

is to interpret the material, using the construction process by Arbnor & Bjerke (2009) as our main analytical framework.

6.3 The construction process as an analytical framework

To structure our analysis and interpretation of the extensive information retrieved through our data collection, we apply Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) construction process as our main analytical framework.

This process uses the actors view as a point of departure, enabling a thorough diagnosis of the empirical data with the aim of understanding and interpreting actors and situations "*through deeper insight, so that "tools/ processes" can be developed that can increase self-understanding among actors and help them in their future actions*" (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 11). In other words, through the use of the social constructivist construction process, we recognise the informants as intentional actors taking an active part in reality and change creation and we can then ultimately discuss and establish tentative strategic recommendations for these actions in a future perspective.

Arbnor and Bjerke's construction process contains four primary processes through which reality is constructed. The processes of *internalisation* and *subjectification* happen within the individual and form the foundations for the intersubjective and collective processes of *externalisation* and *objectification*. As an individual takes over the everyday reality passed on by others, he internalises this reality and becomes part of society by primary and secondary socialisation. Through this internalisation, humans become a societal result. The process in which the individual creates his own experiences and makes distinct interpretations is called subjectification and is determined by intentionality. In this, humans are a subjective reality. When the individual communicates these subjective experiences outwardly, an externalisation takes place in which reality can be created or altered. Therefore, society is a human result. For the externalised reality to obtain objective attributes, an objectification process must take place wherein institutionalisation may happen through typification, and legitimisation must be firmly established. Hereby, society becomes an objective reality (Ibid.: 15-21). These four processes will be further elaborated in sections 8 and 9 when they make sense in relation to our data.

As previously mentioned, Arbnor and Bjerke focus on the dialectic relations at work in their actors view, which further influence the construction process. The abovementioned processes constituting the overall construction process is thus inherently contradictory, meaning that one process can only

be revealed or understood through knowledge of how the other processes present themselves and vice versa. Accordingly, a process will continuously and simultaneously affect the other processes just as they affect the one process. However, to improve readability, we present and apply the four processes individually in the paper, keeping their dialectic relations in mind (Ibid.: 8-9).

We deviate slightly from Arbnor and Bjerke's presentation of the processes, though, as we take a point of departure in internalisation and subjectification in our analysis. We do so in the belief that these subjective and internal processes form the basis of intersubjective change creation and management, which happen in externalisation and objectification.

6.3.1 Application in paper

We apply Arbnor and Bjerke's construction process as our overall analytical framework due to its essential focus on how we perceive and create social reality and, equally important, how we change social reality through the inherent dialectic aspects of this perception and creation. The basic social constructivist assumptions, on which the process is built, also enable the application of other frameworks and theoretical concepts to expand this focus with additional specific theoretical considerations.

Applying the construction process as our analytical framework consequently carries twofold implications for our analysis: First, adhering to our communicative background, we naturally dive into the intersubjective processes of externalisation and objectification and elaborate on the practices within these in an attempt to uncover how change is created and managed through communication in our chosen institutions. Secondly, using the construction process as our point of departure simultaneously allows us to focus not only on the intersubjective processes of communication, which the majority of our primary theories address, but also on their preceding context by way of the *subjective* processes prescribing these intersubjective actions. Thus, we perceive communication to be a product of the current context as well as prior experiences. It is our belief that we hereby ensure a more complete and comprehensive understanding of change creation as we pay attention to both the acting individuals and the influence of the ever-developing context in which they act. Furthermore, this dual focus enables the succeeding application of leadership theory paying respect to the interplay between leaders, followers, and context to discuss how breakdowns in the process of change creation can be remedied.

For further elaboration on how the analytical framework is expanded and developed by the use of additional theoretical concepts and frameworks, see section 7 below.

7 Literature review

In this section, we will introduce the primary concepts and frameworks used in the paper as well as the underlying theoretical standpoints they are based on. We will furthermore address how we with a holistic approach link them to each other and dynamically apply them to uncover our problem area, as well as why we believe them to be relevant. The sections are structured in the chronological order by which the concepts and frameworks appear in the paper.

7.1 Communication as constitutive of organisations

To answer the ontological question of what an organisation is, communications scholars have in recent years been developing the concept of *communication as constitutive of organisations* (hereafter CCO). Holistically, CCO-thinking approaches the act of organising by focusing on communication as more than merely a tool for something else and instead as the actual process whereby reality – and thus organisations – is constituted. Organisations are not perceived as fixed-state but are instead continuously produced and co-produced through the communication of their members (Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud & Taylor, 2013: 173-174).

Since the statement that organisations are communicatively constituted is rather generic, three schools have emerged within explicit CCO-thinking: McPhee's Four-Flows Model, the Montréal School, and the Luhmannian Systems Approach (Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014: 286). They differ in their understanding of exactly how communication comes to constitute organisations and how to examine it (Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud & Taylor, 2013: 187). However, organising is recognised by all three schools as both happening here-and-now and as something transcending this moment in time. McPhee believes human action to have organising capabilities here-and-now, while tangible structures are the lasting outcome. The Montréal School, on the other hand, sees conversation as the current performance and view texts, material artefacts etc. as outliving the here-and-now. Finally, the Luhmannian Approach recognises only communications acts and lasting systems (Ibid.).

7.1.1 Application in paper

The CCO-perspective forms the basis of our organisational understanding and it is furthermore the underlying premise of the communicative frameworks presented in sections 7.2 and 7.3. Thus, we do not directly apply the schools of CCO in our analysis but instead focus on the implications of frameworks that build upon this view. In this perspective, communication becomes performative; when individuals communicate about phenomena they explicitly acknowledge them and thereby talk them into existence. Creating and altering reality and organisations through communication thus implies that communication is the vital driver for change and therefore also for the changes set in motion in the Danish public sector. Such understanding supports our predominant, analytical focus on Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) processes of externalisation and objectification as these take place in verbal communication among individuals (19-21).

Finally, it should be recognised that the approach to organising and creating through communication taken in this paper most closely resembles that of the Montréal school, since we identify conversations as the constituting element of organisations and we recognise texts, among other things, as a transcending factor.

7.2 Conversations of change

Ford and Ford (1995) address organising intentional change by developing a framework that acknowledges change as occurring within communication instead of using communication as a tool. In this view, it is through continuous social interactions that the social structures and actions of the organisation are produced and reproduced to form a reality. Consequently, intendedly and recursively addressing change through communication can help shape a new set of social structures wherein the change is embedded. In other words, Ford and Ford explain that change is not just talked about but rather talked into existence, which one or more change agent(s) can deliberately set out to do (542-543).

To explain how communication can be performative, the authors draw on the works of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969; 1979) regarding *speech acts*: "*actions in language*" (Ford & Ford, 1995: 544). By using these, the communicator establishes a changed social reality, which did not exist before the communication, instead of merely describing what is already there. The speech acts are classified into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Ibid.: 544-545).

In their framework, Ford and Ford propose that four different types of conversations – distinct in their use of different speech acts and the communicator's intent – drive the change process (Ibid.: 544). These conversations are understood as verbal speech acts between two or more people, which may last a few seconds or even several months and may include different people over time in an interconnected network of microconversations (Ibid.: 545-546, 560).

With a linear progression, *initiative conversations* constitute the first phase and serve as the call for change with a use of speech acts focusing on claims, requests, and promises of change made by the change agent. The *conversations for understanding* are next wherein claims are made, beliefs are expressed, and the ideas for change are tested to increase understanding and form a shared context; optimally creating involvement and a common language among those engaged in the change by specifying the change process' conditions of satisfaction. Third, comes the *conversations for performance*, which are characterised by a network of requests for action and promises along with a focus on producing change results and achieving the conditions of satisfaction. Last is the *conversations for closure* with affective claims and declarations meant to explicitly put an end to the change process and acknowledge that new possibilities and futures exist after the change (Ibid.: 546-552).

Each of these conversations can lead directly to one of the three others when a shift in intention or purpose happens either through natural progress or breakdowns in the change process (Ibid.: 552-556). Organising change is thus not a linear process, argue Ford and Ford. Rather, change agents must be prepared to shift dynamically between the conversations as the circumstances warrant and must also guard against at least five identified breakdowns while organising change: when the call for initiative is not met, when the necessary shared understanding cannot be created, when people assume understanding directly equals action, when performance is lacking, and when closure is not addressed (Ibid.: 556-560).

7.2.1 Application in paper

We apply Ford and Ford's theory to outline and analyse how middle managers of the police and hospital service are organising and implementing changes through communication. We do so by focusing on middle managers' different change efforts in relation to the continuous efficiency demands from politicians and with respect to the employee reactions to these efforts. We thus draw on the conversations of change framework and its explicit change-focus to deepen the analytical

perspective in our chosen analytical framework, Arbnor and Bjerke's construction process, so that focus is shifted towards creating changes to and in an objectified reality.

Structurally, the adoption of Ford and Ford's concepts will most prominently influence the phase of externalisation within the construction process, which "*leads to the continuous reinterpretation and change of meanings*" (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 19), as the mutual focus on actors intentionally and verbally communicating naturally links these to each other. In this, Ford and Ford's (1995) CCO-perception of communication as performative helps us explain how individuals actively come to "*create the surrounding reality*" (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 15) merely by externalising or speaking. Furthermore, both Ford and Ford, as well as Arbnor and Bjerke, take their starting point in Berger and Luckmann's fundamental claim that communicative interactions "*produce and reproduce the social structures and actions people know as reality*" (Berger & Luckmann *as cited in* Ford & Ford, 1995: 542). This enables us to emphasise our communicative focus as we analyse the externalisations of middle managers and employees in the police and hospital service as specific change conversations based on the communicator's intent and speech acts.

Finally, applying Ford and Ford's approach to producing change provides us with an overall dynamic understanding and definition of change as a phenomenon, see section 4.2.

7.3 Organising through metaconversations

In their study of how organisations can both be one and many, pluralistic and unitary, the CCO scholars Robichaud, Giroux, and Taylor (2004) propose an explanatory framework based on the assumption that an organisation is not a single-state phenomenon, but rather a dynamic emergence as a result of interactive member exchanges (618). They view it as "*a language-based social entity composed of multiple communities of practice or cognitive domains*" (Ibid.: 624).

The three scholars present the idea that individuals organise themselves and create an organisational narrative through continuous and interconnected conversations building on the recursive property of language. They describe how a *metanarrative* emerges wherein organisational members establish what is normal and important and what is not, thus providing organisational context and meaning. This metanarrative is continuously created and developed within the organisation on the basis of the recursive property of language, which is contributory in shaping *metaconversations* "*in which a collective identity is constituted that is larger than that of the smaller communities of practice making up the organisation*" (Ibid.: 618). In other words, members organise and understand – and thus create

– their organisational reality through conversations building on and encompassing previous conversations. When an individual refers to a previous conversation and its participants, he makes himself a spokesperson for this interaction by embedding it in the current utterance, thus *blackboxing* the previous exchange as it becomes the subject of the current one, which then turns into a metaconversation. Through this, the participants repeatedly engage in sensemaking processes as metaconversation build on metaconversation through continuous recursions, constituting and developing the metanarrative (Ibid.: 621-623).

Thus, it is in the different metaconversations that the unitary and pluralistic views face each other, and it is thereby through the organising of the many that the one organisation as a singular actor may appear, argue Robichaud et al. (Ibid.: 618). In the end, if something is not addressed in metaconversations about and between organisational members, it cannot shape the organisational metanarrative or context.

7.3.1 Application in paper

As Robichaud et al.'s explanatory framework sheds light on how organising happens recursively and is revealed in conversations, we use it to expand Ford and Ford's framework of change conversations. By doing so, we clarify how "*changes emerge through the diversity and interconnectedness of many microconversations*" (Ford & Ford, 1995: 560), thus developing the organisation's metanarrative – in Robichaud et al.'s terms – or reproducing its social structures and context – in Ford and Ford's terms.

To do so, it is important to recognise that Ford and Ford's microconversations – which collectively and respectively constitute the initiative, understanding, performance, and closure conversations – correspond to the concept of metaconversations. Thus, metaconversations may occur within the four phases and simultaneously tie them together in progress or breakdown due to their recursive nature. We, therefore, include the metaconversational framework as it directly focuses on, and takes apart, the recursivity of language, which we believe Ford and Ford's paper could benefit from giving more notice. We thus make use of Robichaud et al.'s findings to explain how something comes to be real through conversations and consequently to shed light on how the conversations of change travel down through the organisation by way of change agents.

Finally, Robichaud et al.'s exploration of how an organisation can both be one and many allows us to recognise the police and hospital service, respectively, as being simultaneously one institution and

many institutional individuals, enabling dynamic shifts in our analytical focus from one to the other and warranting our qualitative methodological approach. We believe that this contradictory acknowledgement is particularly relevant when working with public institutions, as they are generally known to be some of the most complex organisations with numerous salient stakeholders and voices. Furthermore, the recognition of organisations as both singular and plural backs the construction process' dialectic focus on the entirety (here, the institution) in relation to the specific (here, the individuals).

7.4 Leadership as ambiguity

Leadership is an elusive concept that has intrigued scholars and practitioners for years. Over time, research on leadership has focused on different elements of the concept, such as specific aspects of a leader, the context in which leadership takes place, or even on the interplay between these. However, more recently, a growing body of studies have begun to recognise the so-called ambiguity of leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon wherein the understanding and construction of leadership aspects are subjective (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 8). A recent contribution to this is the book "*Metaphors We Lead By*" (2011b) edited by Alvesson and Spicer in which they initially juxtapose the ambiguous approach to leadership with previous understandings of the concept.

Specifically, Alvesson and Spicer list and criticise five broad approaches that have dominated the leadership literature over the years: leadership traits and characteristics, leadership behavioural styles, contingency approaches to leadership, transformational leadership, and post-heroic leadership (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 13-18). According to the authors, these theories tend to define leadership or leaders as containing numerous specific aspects, which describes the concept as either everything or nothing, thereby failing to recognise its limitations (Ibid.: 8-9). Additionally, by emphasising aspects such as morality and authenticity, these leadership approaches generally tend to present leadership and leaders as something good and positive, which, argue Alvesson and Spicer, is uncritical and simplistic and leads us to "*deny ambiguities, incoherencies and shifts*" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011c: 3) in our leaders (Ibid.: 2; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 19). As a result, we have previously seen a tendency for scholars to focus their research and attention narrowly on individuals they categorise as leaders, neglecting how interactions between leaders and followers, as well as the context in which this is happening, may dynamically affect and shape leadership (Ibid.: 18). Finally, Alvesson and Spicer explain that leadership research has not only been lacking in recognising the

more practical aspects of leadership but has also tried to "*impose outside, objective, third-party definitions of what is inherently subjective*" (Ibid.: 19) as a consequence of the naïve idea that leadership can be understood objectively and thus can be measured.

To accommodate this criticism, Alvesson and Spicer introduce their approach to leadership as an ambiguous, subjectively created phenomenon. In this, they do not focus on leaders and followers separately, but argue that "*leadership needs to be treated as a complex social construction where meanings and interpretations of what is said and done sit at centre stage*" (Ibid.: 22). In other words, we must recognise that the concept of leadership is subjectively understood and constructed in a complex manner by the individual and that different people in different contexts, therefore, attribute it different meanings. Subsequently, leadership can be used in various ways, and "good" or "appropriate" leadership can be many different things. Taking this into consideration, leadership becomes a contradictory and blurred concept, about which no objective, universal truth can be obtained (Ibid.: 10, 21-22). Consequently, Alvesson and Spicer (2011c) broadly define *leadership* as "*attempts to give meaning to different activities using a vocabulary of leadership*" (6) which involves "*asymmetrical relationships, influencing processes and situations*" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 30), arguing that we should approach leadership theoretically, but continuously allow for local meanings to have impact (Ibid.).

More specifically, however, the two authors grant that leadership is prescribed by the presence of not just those who lead but more importantly also those who are led and their willingness to be led (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011c: 2). It is exactly in the dynamic interrelations between the *leader* and the *follower* – and the subjective *context* in which they act – that ambiguity plays a vital role, and we should, therefore, look holistically at these ambiguities and dynamics to understand leadership rather than approach them individually (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 28-29).

7.4.1 Application in paper

Acknowledging that the understanding of leadership is created subjectively, and that "good" leadership is thus an individual estimation made by those engaging in the interactional dynamics of leadership, enables a theoretical understanding of the highly ambiguous cross-pressure in public management. Due to differing contexts, the notion of a good middle manager may be one thing to top management and politicians while it may be quite another thing to employees, as the two groups pose different demands and wishes in their everyday lives. Alvesson and Spicer (2011a) explain that

people are often "*trapped between different cultures that proscribe vastly different norms of good leadership. They might be caught between the values and norms held by senior managers and those promoted by their subordinates*" (28).

Furthermore, perceiving leadership as an ambiguous concept building on meaning and understanding allows us to approach it from a communicative position wherein "*leadership is an increasingly important language in many organizations*" (Ibid.: 29-30), and to do so in a context of change where "good" leadership may arguably be connected to the creation of a change in different ways by different actors. Therefore, we apply Alvesson and Spicer's perception of leadership in our discussion to weigh potential solutions for how to improve the current management and communication of change in the police and hospital service.

We find warrant for such discussion in our perception of leadership as inspired by Alvesson and Spicer who state that "*leadership is constructed in a certain way in the language that we use to talk about it*" (2011d: 45). Ford and Ford support this perception of leadership, or management, and communication as intertwined phenomena when they suggest that "*management occurs in conversation*" (1995: 562). In other words, if leadership primarily involves "*management of meaning*" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 12) wherein "*the shaping of the ideas, values, perceptions and feelings is central*" (Ibid.), and if ideas, values, perceptions, and feelings, among other things, are shaped and thereby come to collectively exist through communication (Ford & Ford, 1995: 542; Robichaud et al., 2004: 618), then we can argue that leadership happens in performative communication. This, then, enables us to discuss how breakdowns in change communication may be remedied by looking at them strategically through a leadership perspective.

Finally, adhering to the dynamic definition of Alvesson and Spicer (2011b), we are able to determine what we in this paper recognise as leadership and management, respectively, see section 4.1.

7.5 Metaphors for leadership

In order to capture the ambiguous, complex, and dynamic nature of leadership and improve the practical understanding of the concept, Alvesson and Spicer – along with a distinct group of leadership scholars – research, identify, and draw up several *metaphors for leadership* (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011b).

They explain that metaphors are used to transfer certain aspects from one meaning context into another to enlighten specific features of the latter. A good metaphor then relies on a balancing act of similarities and differences between the two meaning contexts in order to create understanding. Thereby, metaphors help us relate and organise a complex reality by enabling a certain amount of subjective interpretation (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011d: 34-38).

In their book, six dominant metaphors are established, each building on a key theme of leadership (Alvesson, 2011; Huzzard & Spoelstra, 2011; Sveningsson & Blom, 2011; Spicer, 2011; Muhr, 2011; Kärreman, 2011). Metaphors should not be statically applied to leaders, but are, according to Fairhurst's (2011) contribution, a means to acknowledge how leaders shift fluidly between positions of leadership according to the complex combination of leader, follower, and context; albeit some with more ease than others (181). Thus, leadership may involve several compatible metaphors, or it may involve only a single metaphor depending on the leader's identity, his natural ease with one or more metaphors, and the work and follower context (Ibid.: 188). In the end, approaching leadership through metaphors is not only done to understand leaders, but it also appears as an explicit and strategic tool *by* leaders in their communication (Ibid.: 185).

7.5.1 Application in paper

While using metaphors to explain leadership (or leaders) is not a novel proposition, Alvesson, Spicer et al. take a more practical and empirically-funded approach in their writings, which corresponds with our inductive research approach. While we recognise that a metaphor perspective may be over-simplifying leadership, we believe that the general approach of Alvesson, Spicer et al. is relevant to our paper nonetheless due to its analytical focus and form. We argue that the approach is especially prevalent in a change context, as such a context is normally characterised by pronounced complexity, dynamics, and ambiguity.

We, therefore, turn to leadership metaphors as a potential strategic tool applicable for leading changes as we apply them in our discussion of how to improve change creation to explicitly talk about the different approaches to leadership in the police and hospital service. In this, we use leadership metaphors to, in a comprehensible manner, articulate and discuss discrepancies in how middle managers and employees perceive leadership in the two institutions and the future implications of this. We do so by identifying new metaphors based on our analysis and data, where some middle managers describe their leadership directly through metaphors. Thus, it becomes especially important

that Alvesson, Spicer et al. recognise how metaphors are not only *about* leaders but can also be used *by* leaders to further their leadership practices and understanding, emphasising the link between leadership and communication. Furthermore, this approach to understanding leadership also stresses the importance of being able to actually talk about leadership, which proves to be an important point in our comparative study.

8 Subjective reality as a premise for change

In the following, we use Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) construction process to compare the internal processes of internalisation and subjectification that precede the objectified understanding of change in the two institutions. Here, we detect similarities and differences in the subjective reality of the institutions' individual actors, which collectively constitute specific premises for change.

8.1 Internalisation

Internalisation is the process by which individuals accept a world that others already live in (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 21). In other words, the individual becomes part of society by internalising the reality of others through what Arbnor and Bjerke determine as processes of primary and secondary socialisation (Ibid.). Here, our empirical data sheds light on several aspects that are prevalent in the individual informants' internalisation of the two institutions.

8.1.1 Work as an identity

The very first process that affects the developing individual and his understanding of the reality, in which he lives, is the *primary socialisation*. In this process, the individual internalises reality through the primary relationships in his childhood – most often his immediate family and friends – whose experiences of the world automatically affect his own identification with the world (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 21).

As we in this study solely concentrate on public middle managers and employees as acting members of specific institutions, our data does not focus on their primary socialisation. Yet, we recognise that the primary phase of middle managers' and employees' understanding of the world most likely will

affect their secondary socialisation, in which they develop a more in-depth understanding of the institutions.

This becomes evident when the majority of our informants in both the police and hospital service emphasise that they have wanted to be a policeman, doctor, or nurse ever since their childhood: "*[F]or most policemen it is something they have wanted to be ever since childhood*" (DAC2, 2019: 9; *see also* PC1, 2019: 21; PS2, 2019: 7), "*So, I knew I wanted to be a nurse since I was 8, because both my grandmother and my aunt were nurses*" (HN1, 2019: 8; *see also* N2, 2019: 5). The somewhat obsolete expression of referring to the role of a policeman, doctor, or nurse as a mission in life is substantiated by several studies about public service-mentality, which proves how public employees are highly motivated to perform their duties well in favour of preserving the safety and well-being of citizens (Østergaard, 2018: 35). Many feels as if they are brought into the world to contribute to the health and safety of citizens in our society, which explains why individuals tend to identify themselves with this role.

In the end, the public middle managers and employees of both institutions agree that they perceive their work as more than merely a job; instead, the job of a doctor, nurse, or policeman becomes part of who they are – part of their identity – as they identify themselves with their operational responsibilities: "*The work you do becomes an identity, especially because you get to know your patients so well, and you also give them so much of yourself within the wards*" (ANUM2, 2019: 2; *see also* N2, 2019: 4; D1, 2019: 2; PC3, 2019: 13; DAC1, 2019: 3).

Consequently, when the informants identify with the role of a doctor, nurse, or policeman, who carries the responsibility for preserving the well-being and safety of the Danish citizens, their primary socialisation becomes evident. Arguably, employees and middle managers may therefore vehemently resist implementing changes forced upon them because the changes affect not just their work but their identity as well.

8.1.2 Socialisation into specific sub-areas

As socialisation is a continuous process, it does not end with the primary phase but continues throughout an individual's life as *secondary socialisation* (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 21). According to Arbnor & Bjerke, our secondary socialisation constitutes the world we internalise through specific institutional sub-areas (Ibid.).

We, therefore, turn to the role-specific knowledge and the professional language used in the police and hospital service to establish the secondary socialisation that prevails over the subjective understandings of public middle managers and employees.

Political conditions of the public sector

In our interviews, the middle managers and employees of both institutions reveal certain role-specific knowledge and professional language in relation to their understanding of public institutions. Here, they show awareness of political conditions that control the work of public institutions, which supports the argument that a secondary socialisation takes place as individuals become members of the police or hospital service, respectively.

The majority of both middle managers and employees in the police and hospital service express how they have learned to live with the fact that their professional and operational work is restricted to a certain set of politically imposed conditions, which to a large extent remain inalterable: "*Well, that is just the way it is. It is those who are placed higher in the system that determine how it should be*" (PC1, 2019: 18; *see also* PC3, 2019: 8; PS3, 2019: 4; D2, 2019:17; ANUM1, 2019: 2). Here it is especially interesting how middle managers in the police utilise the rooted framework conditions to make excuses for their managing role, which suggest a confirmation of how middle managers are strictly limited to act within a cross-pressure: "*You are the middle manager, so you just do what is said*" (PS2, 2019: 2; *see also* PS3, 2019: 7).

It is thereby apparent that the political conditions enforced upon public institutions become part of the individuals' secondary socialisation when they enter the public institutions. Here the conditions prevail in what resembles a political doctrine wherein the middle managers and employees of both institutions become subject to a number of power games in which the rules of democracy and valued-based politics dictate their everyday work.

We can hereby infer that similar sub-areas of knowledge about the institution and its underlying work conditions are internalised through the secondary socialisation of middle managers and employees in the police and hospital service. However, we identify a significant difference in relation to the institutions' socialisation of management.

Socialisation of management

On the basis of our data, we claim that all middle managers in the police internalise a new sub-area of management knowledge as they must enrol in the police basic education of management in order

to obtain the middle manager positions of police superintendent and deputy assistant commissioner. The basic education for managers in the police is characterised by the governing management principle of the "Leadership Pipeline" (Dahl & Mollysøholm, 2012) that educates the potential managers in how to comply with the regulating structures of the different management levels in the police: "*[W]e use the so-called Leadership Pipeline in the Danish police which is more or less institutionalised – at least it is something we return to time after time since it includes a number of good things*" (DAC2, 2019: 6). Thus, it is through the Leadership Pipeline that the middle managers of the police adopt a new sub-area of managerial terminology such as the difference between the strategic, operational, and tactical leadership styles that correlate with the different management levels in the police: "*We have three levels in the police, just like in the army: strategic, operational, and tactical level*" (DAC2, 2019: 4). Furthermore, some middle managers reveal their theoretical management knowledge when directly referring to academic theoreticians during our interviews (DAC1, 2019: 5; DAC2, 2019: 21).

Contrary to the prevailing sub-area of management, which middle managers learn to act by through secondary socialisation in the police, our data reveals that the hospital service does not have a similar defined language for the sub-area of management. Rather, the possibility to move up the ladder in the hospital service and take upon oneself the responsibility of an executive doctor, head nurse, or associate nurse unit manager is rendered possible through vacancies where many become appointed as middle managers ad interim. The enrolment for education, therefore, becomes of secondary importance: "*If you want to become an executive doctor, there must be a vacancy. And then you need to have some further training, but it is not everyone who takes it […] If we take a look at the people I know, they have been appointed to middle manager positions and then taken their education afterwards*" (D1, 2019: 16). This is further substantiated in an associate nurse unit manager's explanation of how middle managers are simply too short on time to complete a management education next to their operational duties (ANUM1, 2019: 9).

In the end, the sub-area of management being exchanged between middle managers of the hospital service and of the police demonstrates a significant difference between the institutions' secondary socialisation. It is evident that members of the hospital service do not enforce a well-defined sub-area of management knowledge compared to the police, as the managerial requests to middle managers in the hospital service are indistinct in comparison to the expectations and demands of middle managers in the police, which are clearly defined by the Leadership Pipeline.

8.2 Subjectification

While our interviews reveal the above differing aspects of the internalisation process among individuals in the police and hospital service, we can also detect subjective understandings and interpretations of the internalised reality. According to Arbnor and Bjerke (2009), this is the result of a *subjectification* process, which is an internal process caused by individuals developing themselves as subjects on the basis of their primary and secondary socialisation, which they describe as the "*process by which we create our own experience*" (15). In this process, the purpose which an individual ascribes his previous experiences determines how he shapes and interprets current experiences, which make them subjective (Ibid.: 17-19). In other words, as individuals, we create our own experience because objects conform to our subjective way of understanding.

It is interesting, and potentially helpful in understanding the abstract implications of the subjectification process, to note that it seems to build on the same understanding as Weick's sensemaking concept of *enactment*, where individuals actively and unconsciously order their surrounding reality. Weick describes how the individual tries to create order in his surrounding chaos by breaking it down into smaller items and events for closer attention that are then connected to each other by the individual's understanding of each. Hereby, the reality that may, in the end, be observed by the individual is actually created unconsciously by himself beforehand (Weick, 1979: 147-149). A relevant example in relation to our paper is public employees seeing a change coming from politicians as something negative because they only focus on the negative and obtrusive elements of a change due to previous negative experiences with change. They expect changes to affect them in a certain way, and so they do, creating another negative experience.

We do, however, believe that some subjectification processes are more relevant in relation to change than others. In the following sections, we, therefore, analyse our informants' apparent subjectification processes in relation to four distinct areas that set the premise, by most measures, for how new efficiency changes are initially perceived and reacted to. Since all subjectification processes of each informant in relation to these areas cannot be presented, as they are unconscious, never-ending mental processes, we analyse the most apparent ones as they are implicitly presented in our interviews.

We argue that the following four areas are especially interesting due to the inter-institutional and intra-institutional similarities and differences evident in the subjectification processes, suggesting varying premises for change creation in the two institutions.

8.2.1 Efficiency changes

Even though all institutional members, be it of the police or hospital service, experience the same changes in their respective institution, there seems to be a clear difference in how the employees and middle managers interpret and understand changes on an overall basis.

Among employees in both institutions, there is an apparent tendency to initially perceive change as something bad and obtrusive. Our employee informants focus mainly on negative aspects of the changes they must implement; some stress that it disturbs their workflow and interrupts their normal procedures, which make them less efficient rather than more efficient (PO1, 2019: 5; PC1, 2019: 10; PC2, 2019: 16; PC3, 2019: 9; N2, 2019: 7; D1, 2019: 14; D2, 2019: 10). A middle manager in the hospital service describes how her nurses "*see [the change] as "just" another economizing exercise and they are concerned that it is a slippery slope in relation to the patients*" (ED1, 2019: 13), suggesting that the employees have been exposed to economizing acts previously, leading them to see all similar, new changes as such.

These subjectifications reveal the risk that while the employees might comply with a change, they do so with the expectation that it will not improve their work and they, therefore, do not put in the effort to realise the actual benefits of the change which then does not have the intended efficiency effect. In Weick's (1979) terms, the individual's ordering of his environment becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (159-160).

The middle managers, however, are in both institutions more inclined to identify changes as both good and bad. We experience a more varied perception of change among our middle manager informants where especially informants from the police emphasise that the changes from politicians and top management may not be the best solution sometimes, but that they can be very productive at other times (PS1, 2019: 11; DAC1, 2019: 16; DAC2, 2019: 13; ANUM1, 2019: 13; HN1, 2019: 15; ED1, 2019: 18). A police superintendent explains that "*it is a politically run organisation, which means that there will be changes; some of them are positive and others are negative*" (PS3, 2019: 25). Hereby, it seems that the middle managers do not focus solely on positive or negative aspects of new changes because they recognise that previous changes have had both good and bad implications for the respective institutions.

8.2.2 Political interference

While major efficiency changes arguably cast the biggest political impression on the police and hospital service, there are other and smaller instances of political interference in the everyday work life of employees and middle managers, which they must react to.

Again, the employee informants from the police reveal rather similar subjectifications concerning the general political interference in their everyday work life. Generally, they on a recurring basis experience that politicians affect their work, e.g. by directly asking for statistical insight or reacting on specific cases. Overall, they emphasise how politicians tend to pose efficiency demands that are not feasible in the practical operations, suggesting that when requests or suggestions are made by politicians, they are almost automatically seen as unrealistic and cumbersome right from the start, despite being acknowledged as a public sector condition, because the employees understand them on the basis of previous interruptions and aggravations (PO1, 2019: 8-9; PC1, 2019: 5, 11; PC2, 2019: 3; PC3, 2019: 12).

The tendency of politicians to request statistics and impose themselves on specific cases seems to be an annoyance for middle managers in the police as well, however, our informants uncover an aspect in their subjectification process which does not seem to be present among employees. When talking about political interference, they mention that the politicians are doing their best and that they are, at the end of the day, the head of the institution, suggesting that a more overall reflection on the premises of working in the public sector partly mitigates their annoyance at interruptions (PS1, 2019: 11; PS2, 2019: 8; PS3 2019: 25; DAC1, 2019: 12). A deputy assistant commissioner states that "*the government is always the driver behind what we do. And then nothing else basically matters*" (DAC2, 2019: 18). Hereby, it seems that the secondary socialisation of management through the Leadership Pipeline impacts their ordering of reality, as they do not only focus on the negative aspects of new situations brought about by political interference.

Such a difference in subjectification between the two hierarchical levels is not as dominant in the hospital service where both employees and middle managers appear to predominantly perceive political interference as annoying and counterproductive because they believe that politicians do not know the operational level that they meddle with. This, among other things, results in documentation demands that slow down the work routines according to our informants (D1, 2019: 12; D2, 2019: 8, 14; ANUM1, 2019: 17; HN1, 2019: 12; ED1, 2019: 19; ED2, 2019: 17). A nurse explains: "*But often the problem is that the changes come from the top and down to common practices that the ones*

demanding the changes are not familiar with" (N1, 2019: 15). The informants' accounts from the hospital service thus suggest that both levels may try to make sense of new interferences from a negative starting point.

Finally, that employee and middle manager perceptions are more alike in the hospital service may be explained by the fact that the middle managers also handle some operational tasks in their everyday work whereon the changes have a direct effect; thus, they have previously experienced the negative impact of political interference directly and therefore share the employees' operational frustrations. Furthermore, they do not reveal subjectifications that reflect an understanding of political interference as necessary, as argued is the case among police middle managers, since they have a less structured and almost voluntary secondary socialisation into the manager role, see section 8.1.2.

8.2.3 Work resources

A more basic presumption among both employees and middle managers in the two institutions that may affect how they understand and react to new changes coming from political or top management level is their apparent adherence to the existence of a resource paradox in the institutions.

Across employee and middle manager levels, the majority of our informants tell that they are struggling to finish their daily tasks on time mainly because they are too few employees on operational levels with practical educations, and secondarily because this number has been declining as well (PO1, 2019: 10; PC2, 2019: 7; PS1, 2019: 8; D2, 2019: 3; ANUM1, 2019: 11). This is exemplified in a comment by an assistant nurse unit manager: "*[W]e need a lot more nurses. And right now, we manage to get through our tasks if we are fully staffed [but] there is no room for even one employee to fall sick*" (ANUM1, 2019: 11). At the same time, though, they also reveal the belief that they are being charged with more and more tasks, creating a resource paradox where more is demanded by fewer people. Consequently, a police constable mentions that it is difficult to preserve the citizens' safety and explains: "*[Y]ou do not really see policemen that much on the streets. We have less and less ready hands on deck, less and less police hands, while there are more and more tasks. […] There are a lot of police tasks, but we are simply understaffed*" (PC1, 2019: 4; *see also* PC3, 2019: 15; PS2, 2019: 8; PS3, 2019: 13; ANUM1, 2019: 11; ED1, 2019: 13).

Believing that they are already short on hands and therefore are pressed to complete even their current tasks with satisfying outcomes might result in both employees and middle managers ordering their reality by looking distinctively at the negative and time-consuming aspects of new changes

demanding more of them. Consequently, they may dismiss them before they are implemented because they perceive them as further stress-increasing factors.

8.2.4 Management responsibilities

A final factor with potential importance for how change is understood and received is the perception of management responsibilities. We build this argument on the premise that what the individual understands as, and expects of, a middle manager can affect either how he as a manager chooses to communicate and create change, or how he as an employee reacts to the manager's communication of change. Thus, previous experience with and expectations of management may affect how change communication and actions are currently ordered and thereby perceived.

Among our employee informants in the police, we see a tendency to emphasise especially administrative tasks and secondarily personnel management when asked about management responsibilities, suggesting that they expect their middle managers to be more absent than present in the daily tasks (PC1, 2019: 18; PC2, 2019: 22). A police constable explains that he does not want to be a middle manager "*[b]ecause I would rather do cases, I would rather talk to normal people*" (PC3, 2019: 17), which further stresses that a middle manager in the police is understood as detached from the operational tasks.

The middle managers, on the other hand, emphasise their responsibilities in relation to strategic communication and interaction with employees. Only secondarily do they talk about responsibilities to the institution as a whole and administrative responsibilities (PS1, 2019: 3; PS2, 2019: 3; PS3, 2019: 21; DAC1, 2019: 2; DAC2, 2019: 6). Thus, to them it is more legitimate to interact with and influence their employees' work than it is to their employees, making it apparent that they may have a different focus when ordering their environment. This might explain misunderstandings and unexpected reactions when change is communicated because the two levels initially do not expect the same from middle managers.

It appears more unclear what is expected from middle managers of both levels in general in the hospital service. Among our informants, we do however see a general tendency to highlight responsibilities in relation to administration, personnel management, and logistic coordination where the middle managers also emphasise their focus on maintaining operational knowledge and thereby managing at eye level with employees (N1, 2019: 6; N2, 2019: 14; D1, 2019: 6, 15; ANUM1, 2019: 22; ANUM2, 2019: 2; HN1, 2019: 3, 20; ED2, 2019: 20). A head nurse tells: "*I always sit with my*

door open because it is a management principle of mine that everyone is always welcome" (HN1, 2019: 5), yet, this emphasis is conversely not apparent among the employees.

Thus, the understanding of management responsibilities seems to be less defined than in the police, and the employees and middle managers of the hospital service, therefore, do not have such set expectations for what right and wrong actions of middle managers are. This suggests that employees may tend to accept different approaches and actions more easily when change is created because both an administrative and personnel management approach is legitimate in the hospital service.

8.3 Sub-conclusion

In our analysis of the internal processes that form the basis for change creation in the police and hospital service, we have argued that members of both institutions form a strong identification with their objective in the public sector early in life through their primary socialisation. This may lead to them being more resistant to changes due to their perception of their work as an identity.

Subsequently, they all undergo secondary socialisation when entering the social sub-areas of the police or hospital service, respectively. However, we identify a further strong secondary socialisation in especially the police when selected employees are introduced to the clearly-defined sub-area of management through a mandatory education building on principles of the Leadership Pipeline. This sub-area of socialisation is less defined in the hospital service where the demand for official management education is not as pronounced and may more easily be overlooked. Thus, we see different bases for the subjectification processes of middle managers in the hospital service and in the police.

Accordingly, our analysis reveals differences between the subjective understanding of political interference and management responsibilities among middle managers in the two institutions: the police middle managers reveal mitigating reflections on political conditions and perceive their responsibilities to centre around strategic communication, while the middle managers in the hospital service believe political interference to be counterproductive and focus on management at operational eye-level. Conversely, the employees of the two institutions are more alike in relation to these areas as both groups perceive political interference as something negative, while general administrative tasks are expected of the managers. However, in both institutions, the middle managers appear varyingly more positively inclined towards change than the employees, while a consistent understanding of strained work resources carries across all groups.

It is interesting to note, though, that the individual subjectifications tend to largely look alike among members of the same hierarchical group in an institution despite not having been externalised yet, suggesting that internalisation through secondary socialisation is a strongly present factor in both institutions, as it forms the basis for somewhat uniform subjectifications.

We thus argue that it is the differences in socialisation and the above-mentioned four areas of inter-institutional and intra-institutional similarities and differences in individual experiences of reality that initially form the varying premises for change acceptance or rejection in the two institutions.

9 Managing changes in and to an objective reality

We have now determined how the internal processes of internalisation and subjectification, formed by employees and middle managers individually, fit our empirical data to reveal different premises for change. Subsequently, we will in the following use our data to analyse how the creation and management of change take place in the police and hospital service on the basis of these premises by applying Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) external processes of externalisation and objectification.

9.1 Externalisation

Externalisation is the process through which we make our subjective experiences externally available to others through a common language (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 15). In that way, we enable others to react to our previous, subjective experiences and thoughts as soon as we choose to communicate our subjectification (Ibid.: 19).

Since our informants, among other things, explain how change is presented and communicated externally among employees and middle managers, we furthermore choose to apply Ford and Ford's (1995) performative concepts of initiative conversations and conversations for understanding to demonstrate how the externalisation of individuals contribute to the structuring of social reality (546-549). Expanding our analysis through this framework is enabled by our claim that Arbnor and Bjerke put great emphasis on the spoken language in their explanation of the externalisation process.

In the following, we firstly analyse how middle managers in the police and hospital service carry out initiative change conversations through externalisation, before we secondly dive into the resulting conversations for understanding taking place among employees and middle managers. It is, however,

important to recognise that the boundaries between these types of conversations are not perfectly drawn in reality, resulting in the two conversations naturally overlapping each other.

9.1.1 Initiating change through communication

The communication of subjectifications can, among other things, be translated into changes being externalised by middle managers in the police and hospital service, as they make their subjective opinions and understandings of the change known to their employees. This introductory communication of change can be characterised as what Ford and Ford (1995) term the *initiative conversation*, which serves as the call for change with the use of speech acts such as assertions, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations of change made by the change agent (546). The *change agent* is here understood as an agent who "*deliberately and consciously sets out to establish conditions and circumstances that are different from what they are now*" (Ibid.: 543).

Value-based politics

Through our data, we recognise that a "pre-call" or proposal for action to change may happen through the politician's populist communication that reaches the institutions through the media. This complies with Ford and Ford as they underline how "*there is no singular beginning point to an intentional change"* (Ibid.: 548).

However, due to our definition of intentional change, see section 4.2, we argue that this communication does not constitute the actual call for change by way of initiative conversations in the institutions, as we continually experience a change of governments. Consequently, the proposal to initiate change merely becomes part of value-based politics with the purpose to further politicians' public identity rather than an actual call for change. Supporting this argument, only a few of our informants keep themselves regularly updated on the media coverage of political agendas, while all of them explain how they continuously experience change being initiated and communicated down through the institutions (PC1, 2019: 12; PS3, 2019: 12; N2, 2019: 7; D1, 2019: 8-9). This corresponds to Ford and Ford's (1995) assertion of how an intentional change emerges from conversations in the institution following a claim, a declaration, and associated requests and promises (548).

The call for change

According to our informants, the more widespread changes of the police and hospital service, such as the Police Structural Reform of 2007 or the Healthcare Platform of 2016-2017, are externalised

through initiative conversations of the Danish government and top management to the middle managers of the institutions, who then build on these conversations to pass on the change initiative to their subordinates. The intentional change is thus facilitated by the intentional communication expressed by politicians and top management, which in both institutions takes the form of directives: "*You receive an extra authorisation, pure politically […] and then you are told; "Solve it; we do not care how you do it, just do it. You have this money to spend, and we need some of these numbers to be brought down. So, you simply have to devise a plan for it"*" (PS2, 2019: 11-12; *see also* ANUM1, 2019: 16). The intentional change is thus talked into existence in what also resembles conversations for performance as soon as the government and top management pose a demand for efficiency, which requires immediate action or refusal to act by the middle managers as change agents (Ford & Ford, 1995: 544). Thus, it appears that initiative conversations of the politicians and top management overlap with conversations for performance when initiated by the institutional top.

In their response to intentional change, middle managers of both institutions show clear signs of obeying the immediate efficiency demands, rather than refusing to act, due to compliance with the political conditions of the public sector: "*[W]e get an e-mail which states; "You must change the procedure and do like so, since we need to see the test results". And that is just how it is… Of course, it is annoying having to submit more blood samples, but we must adhere to the existing guidelines*" (ANUM1, 2019: 16; *see also* DAC2, 2019: 16; PS3, 2019: 9). Only when the change demand is directly inefficient for the specific departments, it seems that the middle managers dare to defy immediate action to change: "*[I]t is the same reprimand every time;* "*okay, now they want us to run faster, and we are already running as fast as we possibly can", and this they demand in some areas where it makes no sense whatsoever, operationally*" (PS3, 2019: 12; *see also* DAC1, 2019: 6). This, a head nurse concretises in a concurrent change arrangement that demands all hospitals implement a so-called "PAL" – a doctor responsible for patients with specific needs, such as cancer patients – which does not make sense to implement within their specific surgical department: "*So we had to communicate upwards in order to say; "You have to relinquish, you have to enter a dialogue with us in which we can discuss what makes most sense out in the separate departments, since this demands a lot of secretary resources in order to get this implemented, and that makes no sense for the patients*" (HN1, 2019: 11).

Consequently, when changes are perceived as inefficient for the local context, the middle managers of the police express how they can engage in efforts to push upwards to alter details of the imposed change: "*Over the years, the opportunity has presented itself to debate a bill if it didn't make sense*

to implement. That is an opportunity we all have through the Leadership Pipeline" (DAC2, 2019: 8). Evidently, the fact that the middle managers' liberty of action is concretely prescribed by the Leadership Pipeline actually enables them to push upwards through the said pipeline and not just downwards.

Accordingly, it seems that the lack of such strictly defined management structure in the hospital service instead lures middle managers into cheating their way to influence conditions of satisfaction for change: "*[A]nd sometimes you become an old hand and think to yourself; "Oh, I know damn well that the managers above don't listen ["] so I sneak a level higher instead to get direct feedback. As long as I remember to get it in writing, I don't get into trouble*" (HN1, 2019: 19). This could be explained by the fact that they apparently do not have a say when it comes to influencing new changes, which we see in relation to the Healthcare Platform: "*I mean, there are some things which we cannot change, and the Healthcare Platform is here now, so we have to make it work*" (ED1, 2019: 18; *see also* ANUM2, 2019: 11).

We hereby see how the management structure of the Leadership Pipeline serves as a direct mechanism for middle managers in the police to enter the initiative conversation of change with the purpose of understanding and influencing the so-called *conditions of satisfaction* for the change, which according to Ford and Ford are the a priori specifications defining the intended endpoint of a change (1995.: 548). On the contrary, the middle managers of the hospital service believe that their opinions are being taken for granted because they do not have a clearly defined authorisation for influencing these conditions. Thus, it seems that middle managers of the police have a greater incentive for pushing communication upwards when the call for change is made and influencing the intended endpoint of changes contrary to middle managers of the hospital service.

Change externalisation by middle managers

In the two institutions, the daily morning conference or morning briefing, respectively, constitutes the standardised setting for initiating the conversation of change between middle managers and employees. When the middle managers of both institutions externalise the intentional change to their subordinates, they automatically copy the politicians' and top management's use of directives: "*It is typically at the morning conference, that the [changes] are being presented*" (D1, 2019: 7); "*[a]nd it is also typically here our superior would say: "Well, now I have received [a demand], and we need to close five beds in the ward, since we have used up our annual budget*"" (Ibid.: 2; *see also* PO1, 2019: 6). Often, follow up e-mails are also distributed within both institutions to ensure that all

institutional members are informed about the change (D1, 2019: 2; PO1, 2019: 6). Yet, due to busyness surrounding the operational tasks, morning meetings and follow up e-mails do not always guarantee that all employees are informed of a change (PC2, 2019: 10; D1, 2019: 8).

Additionally, a police constable criticises the way the initiative conversation of change neglects to reveal the original cause of the change, resulting in the employees never being fully exposed to the intention that precedes the change initiative: "*I think there is something about the fact that they use so much time to devise a plan for the change, […] the problem is just that it never fully reaches the employee*" (PC2, 2019: 10). As a result of the employees not necessarily being fully informed nor exposed to the underlying purpose of the change, we already see implications of employee resistance towards change in the initiative conversation for change externalised by middle managers in both institutions.

In this regard, it becomes relevant to draw on Robichaud et al.'s (2004) study of *metaconversations*, wherein they propose that a recursive property of language exists in conversations, as conversations embed and build upon other conversations by referring back to them (Ibid.: 621). This is reflected in the external change conversations of middle managers since they build their communication to subordinates on the previous conversations held by top management and politicians, which then becomes the subject of their current conversation, as exemplified in the above. As such, the initiative conversations of middle managers exist with respect to the previous initiative conversations held by politicians and top management, whereby middle managers turn the change reality explicated by the institutional top into what Robichaud et al. term a *black box*. Such a black box emerges when change agents speak for an absent constituent and hereby turn what has previously been said into a taken-for-granted reality (Ibid.: 622-623).

When black-boxing, the middle managers thus implicitly expect their employees to accept the reality presented to them. This may result in a negative effect on the creation of understanding if the employees refuse to do so and instead request more information regarding previous change communication. In a subsequent attempt to remedy the lack of thorough information about why the intentional change is being produced in the first place, middle managers try to generate further understanding for the change through what Ford and Ford interpret as conversations for understanding (1995: 548).

9.1.2 Creating an understanding of change

Following initiative conversations, the middle managers seek to make the change process comprehensible to their employees in order to move the matter forward. According to Ford and Ford, creating an understanding of change happens through *conversations for understanding* characterised by assertions and expressives through which "*claims are made, evidence and testimony given, hypotheses examined, beliefs and feelings explored, and contentions maintained*" (1995: 548).

Essentially, this dialogue provides an opportunity for the middle managers to develop a common language among the employees and create a shared understanding for the change, which according to Ford and Ford optimally happens by specifying the conditions of satisfaction for the change and creating involvement and support on the part of those engaged in the change (Ibid.: 548-549).

In the following, we present our analysis of the attempts at creating an understanding of changes on the basis of three core areas identified in our data: involvement of employees, clarification of the change aim, and the perceived position of the middle manager level in respect to the employee level.

Involvement of employees

In both institutions, we see a tendency for middle managers to initially meet and discuss the understanding of the factors associated with the initiative call for change ordered by top management and the government. Such a discussion takes place at managers' meetings with the purpose of figuring out how the change can be actualised within the given time frame and through the available resources, as well as how the middle managers should communicate this to their subordinates: "*So, we start by sitting down together, asking; "how does it make sense for us?" Because there is actually some [of the changes] we must implement, which does not make very much sense, and here it is our job to articulate a narrative about the implementation of the change so that it makes sense for us as well as for the individual employees…*" (HN1, 2019: 10; *see also* ANUM1, 2019: 1; ED1, 2019: 15; ED2, 2019: 3; PS1, 2019: 10; PS3, 2019: 23; DAC2, 2019: 7).

At these meetings we see a solid effort of the middle managers in the hospital service to involve their employees in the change process as they in hierarchical order invite employees to participate in a dialogue to create an understanding of the initiative call for change: "*And then we have a liaison committee […] where there are trade union representatives, working environment representatives, and other selected employees, who are chosen by their colleagues to sit in a committee wherein the executive doctor and I inform about new initiatives and implementation of changes*" (HN1, 2019: 10;

see also ANUM1, 2019: 1). This portrays how the hospital service includes different employee groups in the change process to inform about change with the purpose of obtaining feedback and eliciting support (Ford & Ford, 1995: 553). An example given by a nurse confirms that there is a potential for involvement of employees, here in relation to the recent update of the Healthcare Platform: "*[The original plan] was enormously criticised, as people did not feel they got anything out of it, however this time, they actually altered the procedure in such a way that a lot of the training now takes place out in the clinics instead […] It is not often we experience that things are changed because we say so, but in this case we did*" (N1, 2019: 10). Thus, middle managers in the hospital service seem to clearly recognise the importance of involving and listening to their lower staff in the change process as they are the ones implementing and operationalising the change in their everyday work: "*[T]he nurses must be heard because they can easily experience something out in the wards where they think to themselves: "why don't we do this in a better way?" […] So they get co-determination and co-influence*" (ANUM1, 2019: 1).

Conversely, the police middle managers request to involve their employees more in the change process, even though this is naturally obstructed by the Leadership Pipeline: "*And what a shame it is, that you do not include [the employees] in it, when making such a big change, since we could have gained so much from that*" (PS2, 2019: 12). The lack of sincere employee involvement in the police is confirmed by several employees, as they express how middle managers merely involve the employees for the sake of appearances: "*You must have a few more gold stars on your shoulder before you are taken seriously and can have your say in relation to changes. It is merely just for the sake of appearances that the employees are asked to participate*" (PO1, 2019: 7; *see also* PC1, 2019: 8; PC2, 2019: 19). Thus, the request of middle managers in the police to involve employees more in the change process clearly becomes an objection to the Leadership Pipeline that prevents employees from being involved in the change process due to its vertical power structure.

Specifying the aim of the change

Despite the fact that middle managers of the hospital service accommodate a higher involvement of employees in the change process compared to their counterparts in the police, it is evident how the involvement of employees become contradictory in the hospital service due to an insufficient specification of the conditions of change satisfaction. The middle managers of the hospital service simply imitate the conditions of satisfaction stated by top management and politicians, which is evident from an example given by an associate nurse unit manager, as she specifies the aim of the

change as the general political conditions that govern all efficiency demands ordered by top management or politicians: "*[W]e should always be able to explain why we need to change a certain procedure; "because of cost savings, or because it is more efficient…"*" (ANUM1, 2019: 16).

Thus, the stated conditions of satisfaction for change contradict the involvement and participation of employees as the middle managers retain the political conditions of the public sector, which unquestionably allows for efficiency demands to overrule the suggestions or concerns expressed by employees.

Consequently, we see clear instances where employees express a lack of clear conditions of satisfaction for the change from middle managers: "*[A]t any rate they failed to inform us sufficiently – they had sent some sort of e-mail, or I don't know – but we were not informed properly about it, and they just hoped that we would act upon it*" (N1, 2019: 4-5). Instead, the employees feel that changes are being imposed on them rather than specified to them and thus in their experience the extensive changes become "must-do" tasks rather than "should-do" tasks: "*[S]ometimes we have these "must-do" tasks that neither management nor I can do anything about since we are governed by them nonetheless. E.g. the Healthcare Platform is something you can discuss, but it is here now, and then we must conform*" (N2, 2019: 7).

Thus, this reveals how middle managers in the hospital service may skip the conversations for understanding and shift the communication directly into performance conversations, despite the fact that no clear conditions of satisfaction for the change are provided to the employees (Ford & Ford, 1995: 553). As a result, the employees stress how "*the understanding of how things are communicated in the system is quite hard to comprehend*" (D1, 2019: 7). This clearly suggests a breakdown in the change conversation similar to the one presented by Ford and Ford (1995), where middle managers fail to create a shared understanding as they merely lean on the conditions, by which they are governed, rather than producing clear conditions of satisfaction for the change (557).

In the police, however, we see a very different approach to specifying the aim of change. Here, it is evident how the middle managers utilise the instrument of translation, which originates from their secondary socialisation of role-specific language based on their management education. Accordingly, they describe how they must manage the challenge of translating strategic, intangible conditions of satisfaction for change into explicit practical conditions for the individual employees: "*[A]s a leader we must be ready to communicate the strategies we receive from top management down to our staff. That is something that we, police superintendents, use quite a lot of energy and resources on – to*

translate these to our staff. Especially because you can talk strategy and operations all the way down the pipeline, but then I need to translate that into something practical" (PS3, 2019: 3; *see also* DAC1, 2019: 7; DAC2, 2019: 16).

Thus, middle managers put great emphasis on communicating change initiatives as something that can persuade the employees into thinking that the implementation of a change will be more useful than destructive: "*[I]f I can communicate that it isn't a change but something that we are already doing then that's even better. I mean that's obvious because a change in itself has negative connotations. The positive wording would be "a development", but at the end of the day that's completely the same, more or less*" (PS3, 2019: 23). However, despite their belief in own capability to translate the changes into persuasive benefits for the employees, they fail to provide the aim of the change, or the "bigger picture" of the change, that the employees clearly are longing for: "*[T]hey do not share [the future prospects] with the employees. But that is what the employees want to hear! They go on all day confused, thinking to themselves; why the hell are we supposed to do this?*" (PC2, 2019: 10).

Thus, it seems that the middle managers of the police fail to clearly specify the operational aim of the change to their employees, as they keep too much focus on making the changes happen. A police constable provides some reflection on this point of view: "*It is a fundamental thing that they say we need to [change] fast. And then nothing else. And the only way to ensure that it happens quickly is to enforce time limits that apply to all cases…*" (PC3, 2019: 16). It consequently seems that middle managers of the police also tend to skip Ford and Ford's (2004) conversations for understanding and immediately proceed to conversations for performance in requests for actions, as we argue also is the case with their counterparts in the hospital service.

Employees versus middle managers

While we argue that there appears a tendency of general and vague assertions of the conditions of satisfaction in the hospital service, the majority of the middle managers conversely try to make amends by revealing their true subjectification of change. They do so by expressing how they are equally frustrated with the continuous efficiency demands and thus sympathise with their employees: "*[I]t is extremely important to communicate and be as open as possible from day one so that my staff don't think [the change] was my idea in the first place*" (ED2, 2019: 7). Evidently, middle managers of the hospital service make a virtue of creating some transparency in their change communication by externalising their subjective frustrations regarding changes to their staff.

Such frustrations about efficiency demands appear even stronger in the expressives of employees: "*There is such a thing called "error-lists" that our secretaries must fill in where you think to yourself; "Oh God… Sometimes they just demand documentation for the sake of documentation, and not because it makes sense". And we see this several places – not just here, but probably also in the police – and you can't help but think; come on!*" (D2, 2019: 12).

This mutual frustration shared by middle managers and employees is most likely substantiated in the fact that middle managers in the hospital service generally carry an equal responsibility of operationalising and implementing changes in their everyday work with patients, besides their administrative and management responsibilities, as mentioned in section 8.2.2. In addition, the middle managers' low negotiation power in relation to changes demanded by top management and politicians argued for in section 9.1.1 serves as another source to the frustrations being externalised by middle managers in the hospital service.

In the end, as both middle managers and employees perceive the continuous changes imposed by top management and the government as meaningless, we see a recursive metaconversation emerging "*in which a collective identity is constituted*" (Robichaud et al., 2004: 618). This metaconversation traces back to the primary socialisation of institutional members in the hospital service, through which employees and middle managers share a collective identity oriented towards the objective of preserving the well-being of citizens, see section 8.1.1. Here, Robichaud et al. establish a number of premises for metaconversations to occur, in which they review how "*language supports collaborative activity, typically when associated with some common field of practice*" (Ibid.: 619). In this connection, they argue how an individual must "*display its capability within its practices*" (Ibid.: 620) to become an authentic member of a community. Thus, as top management and the government are unable to relate to the common preoccupation of doctors and nurses, through which they preserve the well-being of citizens, they become excluded from the conversation as the *opponents* whereas middle managers and employees include themselves as *helpers* (Ibid.).

In our data, we see that similar metaconversations regarding the understanding of changes and their implications emerge in the police. Yet, a clear distinction dominates the narrative of opponents and helpers as middle managers apparently are perceived as opponents rather than advocates of preserving the safety of citizens. This is clearly visible in the statements of two police constables, conveying that when the middle managers focus too much on managing, they place themselves as direct opponents to the operational task and therefore become detached from the citizens: "*Sometimes everything just*

revolves around management…" (PC1, 2019: 18), "*They don't even have any contact with the citizens*" (PC3, 2019: 17).

An explanation for such a perception of the middle managers as detached from employees and therefore not siding with them may be found in the middle managers' strategic and theoretical perception of their own role in the institution. Here, we claim that, since translation becomes a distinctive approach to leadership, which the middle managers are obligated to perform through the Leadership Pipeline, they must hide any individual subjectification of change in favour of expressed loyalty towards top management and politicians: "*If it has been decided at the top that [the changes] are necessary, then they are necessary. Then I am very loyal, and I try to see the positive side, as I still need to interpret and translate it*" (DAC2, 2019: 16). When doing so, their externalised opinions of loyalty distance them from the employees' more negative and wondering position to changes, as exemplified by a police constable: "*You get kinda tired with all of these new things because it is difficult to see what good will come from it. [S]ometimes it is just difficult to see what will come from the changes. Can't they just let it rest?*" (PC1, 2019: 10). It is thereby evident that the metaconversations dealing with change frustrations and negativity seem to develop and expand only among employees (PO1, 2019: 11; PC3, 2019: 12).

Thus, the middle managers of the police end up being perceived as opponents, just like top management and politicians, as they directly distance themselves from preserving the safety of citizens when favouring change implementation.

In conclusion, the middle managers' lack of ability to create a shared understanding for changes among employees in both institutions, due to either lacking employee involvement or vaguely stated change aims, results in collective metaconversations revealing the employees' overarching negative conception of change, which middle managers are either excluded from as opponents or included in as helpers.

9.2 Objectification

When the individual subjectifications of employees and middle managers have been externalised, we note how the institutional members collectively discuss and agree upon different externalisations, which may lead to these becoming a set part of objective reality. Arbnor and Bjerke describe this process as *objectification*, wherein the subjective thoughts are reinterpreted and challenged in interactions so that they may near an objective state. Thus, objectification is the process whereby a

change becomes an embedded part of our everyday life, something "that just is", which we pass on to others as the way we do things, act, or think. For this process to be fulfilled, Arbnor and Bjerke argue that three phases must be completed: typification, institutionalisation, and legitimisation (2009: 19-21).

We will go through these three phases in the following sections to analyse how recurring efficiency changes become part of the objective, institutional reality in the police and hospital service and to determine which reality is then passed on to other individuals.

9.2.1 Typification

As a consequence of institutional members failing to achieve a sufficient understanding of change, we see a number of typifications emerging as our informants develop common reference points through interactions. According to Arbnor and Bjerke, *typification* happens when we develop set labels for actors and actions through our externalisations with others. We, therefore, expect others to understand these actors and actions in the same way we do when using the same label (2009: 19). Typification is thus a collectively agreed-upon ordering of reality that can be explained in Robichaud et al.'s (2004) terms as emerging through consecutive metaconversations in which the actors gradually agree on specific labels and their meaning by building on previous discussions of relevant topics. Fully developed typifications can, therefore, be seen as part of the institutional *metanarrative* as they contribute to the establishment of what is normal and expected (Ibid.: 618).

It is furthermore our belief that typification largely corresponds to Ford and Ford's development of a common language in the conversations for understanding (1995: 548). Thus, when they argue that a common language should be obtained for the conversations to develop from understanding to performance, we believe it corresponds with Arbnor and Bjerke's statement that typification is a necessary prerequisite and first step of institutionalisation (2009: 19). Middle managers in the two institutions should, therefore, theoretically aim to create typifications or a common language among themselves and employees, that reflect positively on changes and their conditions, in order to help the successful implementation and concurrent institutionalisation of changes. However, controlling how other individuals talk about events is not easily done in practice when the middle managers cannot be present for all metaconversations taking place in the institutions.

In the end, the typifications apparent in the police and hospital service will naturally reflect the previously identified subjectifications, see section 8.2, due to not only the dialectic nature of the

construction process but also the fact that what is important to the individual members is likely to be discussed between them and thereby influence collective typifications.

Reflections on continuous change

As previously argued in this paper, efficiency changes have been part of the public sector ever since the introduction of NPM, giving the institutional members time and reason to discuss these changes as political conditions in gradually expanding metaconversations wherein the effects on one change carry to the implementation of the next. As a result, varying change discourses are apparent among employees and middle managers, respectively, in the two institutions.

In the police, the middle managers seem to have externalised their individual subjectifications to obtain the collectively held understanding that changes must be looked at in their specific context to judge whether they make sense or not, reflecting the influence of their mandatory management education. Accordingly, the common discourse among the middle managers seems to be that change is not just bad but can be a productive lever for an institution because it is a new and unknown factor, which is exemplified by a police superintendent: "*[W]hen in an organisation, said organisation will not develop if it does not receive externally imposed input or is not being forced by proposals*" (PS1, 2019: 11; *see also* PS2, 2019: 14-15; PS3, 2019: 9; DAC2, 2019: 13).

The majority of the middle managers also reveal an emergent typification of changes as being circular. A deputy assistant commissioner explains this developing typification when he states that "*basically, everything goes around in circles, right? [T]hen you try to centralise, then you decentralise…*" (DAC1, 2019: 12), while a police superintendent describes that "*it is circular. So, the things that we may have abandoned 15 years ago, they are coming back again*" (PS1, 2019: 11; *see also* DAC2, 2019: 17). The implication of such typified change understanding can be that, since the middle managers actually expect changes to come full circle, they will not be as negatively disposed to changes that affect what was previously changed compared to individuals that have not come to the same realisation will be.

While the police middle managers seem to have the least negative attitude towards changes among our informants, their employees do not appear to share this reflective mindset. Overall, our data reveal that they are developing a negative typification of change as something generally bad; a condition of their work in the public sector (PC3, 2019: 8; PO1, 2019: 5; PC1, 2019: 10; PC2, 2019: 12). A police commissioner explains it so that the negative connotation of the word becomes strikingly apparent: "*[Change] is just a condition. It is a condition, so, bad luck. Find another work [if you cannot come*

to terms with it]" (PC3, 2019: 8). The employees hereby disclose their general perception of change as an imposed, inevitable, and highly undesirable element of their work life, which is enclosed in the typification of change as a condition.

The negative attitude of the employees appears directly traceable to their informal metaconversations taking place during the work days, which all of our informants agree on: "*[We talk about change] all the time […] if there is one thing policemen are skilled at, it is complaining. […] So, there really, really is a lot of talk when something is happening*" (PO1, 2019: 11; *see also* PC1, 2019: 15; PC2, 2019: 15; PC3, 2019: 12). Hereby, the changes are talked into reality among the employees which furthers the change integration into the metanarrative. However, the negative connotations with which this is done may alter the metanarrative in a way undesirable to middle managers if it becomes the norm to reject changes on the basis of negative typifications (Robichaud et al., 2004).

An explanation for such accumulating negativity may be the lack of a bigger picture among employees regarding change as a circular phenomenon since none of our employee informants addresses this aspect. However, it is very possible that this is only the symptom of another underlying root cause: that changes to a work strongly intertwined with the individual employee's identity – as argued in section 8.1.1 – affect him to a greater extent than it would affect an employee who does not altruistically identify with his work. This may be so because it implies "them" – as previously related to in section 9.1.2 – trying to change the very identity of the employee, "us", on the premise that they know how to optimise it. Thus, the existence of opponents and helpers are drawn up (Ibid.: 620). This naturally affects how the employees react to new changes as they appear to be negatively biased from the very beginning, creating a hostile and challenging change environment.

In the hospital service, on the other hand, we once again do not find such a clear distinction between employees and middle managers when it comes to typifications of change. While the middle manager informants agree that informal conversations often take place, they do not appear to have developed as clear labels for change through these conversations as the typifications present in the police. However, their approach to change is also characterised by negative attitudes with only some positive reflections, and the most obvious discourse is that they cannot avoid handling changes in their work life and therefore have to make the best of them (ANUM1, 2019: 15; ANUM2, 2019: 11; ED1, 2019: 18; ED2, 2019: 9). While it may initially seem that this discourse resembles the negative "condition"-typification of the police employees, the middle managers in the hospital service evidently ascribe a somewhat more positive connotation to their discourse. This is apparent in a quotation from an

assistant nurse unit manager in relation to the Healthcare Platform, among others: "*We have to stay positive because it is here and always will be – and that will not be altered so we simply just have to make the best of it. And, well, I think that has always been our attitude*" (ANUM1, 2019: 14). She backs this up by stating that they simply cannot expect to keep doing what they have always done (Ibid.: 15-16).

Even though the hospital service middle managers hereby show some reflections on continuous changes as an inevitable factor of the public sector, such reflections are not as pronounced as appear to be among their counterparts in the police. This supports our argument that the lack of a well-planned secondary socialisation into the management area in the hospital service affects how the middle managers perform their institutional role, see section 8.1.2. As they have not internalised management insight and language such as the police middle managers have, their discourses have not yet developed into clear typifications and their perception of change does not reflect the same degree of societal understanding. This may further explain why their discourse also resembles that of their employees to a greater degree than what is evident in the police.

Among the employees in the hospital service, change appears to be met with a predominantly negative bias partly because "*so many things have happened by now and we have put up with so much*" (N2, 2019: 7). Thus, a negative discourse emerges wherein change is something the employees have to put up with time and time again, as their workflow is interrupted, and they must adjust to new ways (N1, 2019: 9; N2, 2019: 6; D1, 2019: 14). A doctor exemplifies this when talking about the Healthcare Platform: "*[M]any departments have functioning work processes and it seems completely ludicrous that because we have had to implement a new system, we also have to alter a lot of work processes*" (D2, 2019: 10). However, as there does not seem to be a recurring label with which the majority of the employee informants refer to change, the discourse has not yet settled into a final typification.

Interestingly, though, a middle manager mentions that her employees view the efficiency demands as an "*economizing act*" (ED1, 2019: 13), suggesting a possible typification among them that is not shared by the manager herself. This typification is not brought up by any employee informants, though. Such a discrepancy can either be explained as a margin of error in our collected data or, more interestingly, by arguing that the middle manager is subjectively interpreting the words of her employees and thereby categorising their perceptions of efficiency changes as "economizing acts" of her own accord. If this is true, it implies that middle managers' perception of employee attitudes towards change may not necessarily correspond with the actual discourse.

That the common language has yet to settle into a dominant change typification among employees in the hospital service hints that the ongoing changes have not been talked into reality to the same extent as is the case among employees in the police. This can potentially entail that the middle managers face a less hostile environment when trying to initiate change through communication, even though the negative discourse clearly proves that the employees do not accept changes merely because they are demanded by politicians. However, since the discourses and potentially emerging typifications among employees and middle managers share similarities – which can be explained by middle managers regularly engaging in operational tasks with employees and thereby in subsequent metaconversations – it can be argued that a common understanding of changes may more easily be created by the middle managers in the hospital service than in the police, since they are more at eye level with their employees.

Generally, it can be argued that the discourse or typification each group forms of change influences how they talk about change and subsequently how they receive such communication, creating different change contexts for middle managers and employees in the two institutions.

Following this, it is interesting to note that both groups of middle managers appear to engage in conversations for understanding by putting themselves in the place of their employees, among other things, alluding to something like; "I agree this is not optimal, but we have to do it". The police middle managers arguably use this communicative method as a strategic tool to accommodate understanding and thereby drive the change forward, since they do not share the negative typification of their employees. This is insinuated by a police superintendent: "*[W]hen you stand up as a police director and have to tell 200 people about a rather big change, it is a really, really bad idea to accidentally describe what they do daily as something anybody and everybody can do. […] Because that affects the guy who usually does this task and affects his professional identity…*" (PS2, 2019: 12; *see also* DAC2, 2019: 14). On the other hand, middle managers in the hospital service are more likely to be sincere in this communication, as they to a great extent share change discourses with their employees, as exemplified in section 9.1.2.

In the end, we can on the basis of these apparent typifications regarding continuous change infer that middle managers of the police are the only member group that externalise a reflective approach to change as a phenomenon. Thus, through this more positive understanding, they are distanced from the other institutional member groups that all exercise varyingly negative typifications and discourses

of continuous change, despite middle managers in the hospital service being more reflective of change than the employee groups.

Politicians as drivers for change

Another factor that may greatly influence the creation of change is the perception of politicians as drivers for change, which appears to be an often-discussed topic in both institutions where several clear typifications can be identified.

The middle managers in the police all agree that they find themselves in a cross-pressure in their current role as a result of politicians posing demands, but that the extent and burden of this depend on the individual manager and his choices. Hereby, they all agree to "cross-pressure" as a relevant and influential typification that enables a specific understanding of their management role as being "*caught between a rock and a hard place*" (PS2, 2019: 15). Or in other words, sitting in a position where they face change as efficiency demands from mainly politicians, on the one hand, while also taking care of the needs of their employees, on the other hand (PS1, 2019: 12; PS3, 2019: 13-14; DAC1, 2019: 3, 14; DAC2, 2019: 7). Adding to this, articles posted on the Danish police's official web page continuously refer to a "cross-pressure" in relation to middle managers, emphasising that it is a general typification in the police that shapes the understanding of the specific management role (Dansk Politi, 2014: 42; Scharling, 2017).

One could assume that this common understanding would enable a level of acceptance among employees, but this does not seem to be the case as none of our employee informants refers to the cross-pressure as a mitigating factor for middle managers abiding top-down demands.

In addition, several typifications are apparent within each group when referring to politicians and their role in driving changes. The majority of middle managers state that politicians too often focus on "*specific operational cases*" or refer to them as "*the long screwdriver*" (PS1, 2019: 14; PS2: 2019: 6; PS3, 2019: 3-5; DAC1, 2019: 9). Embedded in these typifications is the understanding of politicians as individuals who will utilise the Leadership Pipeline to reach from the top of the institution to the lower levels, whenever they see fit, and involve themselves in investigation cases or meddle with operational processes that they perhaps should not, given their top-positions: "*Then we talk about the long screwdriver; we actually say that. We tell them: "now you are meddling in the engine room and you shouldn't. You must guide the ship, then I will take care that the engine runs smoothly"*" (PS2, 2019: 6).

Conversely, several police employees point out that the institution is very "top managed", meaning that it is a very hierarchical institution with many layers wherein the top layer rules almost indisputably, resulting in there being an "insanely *long distance to the top*" (PO1, 2019: 12; *see also* PC1, 2019: 9; PC3, 2019: 5-6) from the operational level. Furthermore, they all use the typifications of politicians as people focusing narrowly on "*spreadsheets*" or numbers in "*excel*" (PO1, 2010: 8; PC1, 2019: 7; PC2, 2019: 6, 8; PC3, 2019: 12). This carries the implication that politicians look at numbers and statistics rather than what is going on in the real world of employees, thus detaching themselves from the operational level: "*Well, you cannot calculate in a spreadsheet how the police should work and that is exactly what is happening right now*" (PC1, 2019: 7).

As mentioned in section 9.1.2, Robichaud et al. argue that one of the premises for organising through communication is creating a narrative identity and that "*the constitution of an "us-ness" has a correlate – a "them-ness"*", explaining why the employees here seem to oppose politicians' ideas with the reality of their own community of practice as politicians become the outsiders; "them" (2004: 620).

Thus, it seems that the collectively agreed-upon understanding of politicians embedded in the typifications among police middle managers and employees, respectively, vary; from the politicians being perceived as an annoyance or irritation to them being perceived as outright unrealistic and out of touch with real life. This may further complicate the change task of middle managers if they do not accommodate or even understand the typification among employees.

In the hospital service, the middle managers also seem to agree with the general implications of what it means to be in a cross-pressure and also refer to several of these implications during the interviews, as exemplified by a head nurse: "*Well, just as you should be able to handle critique from below, you should also be able to handle critique from above*" (HN1, 2019: 12; *see also* ANUM1, 2019: 18; ANUM2, 2019: 10; ED1, 2019: 19; ED2, 2019: 13-14). Yet, "cross-pressure" is not a term any of the informants use automatically, supporting our argument that they appear to generally reflect less on their public management roles than their counterparts in the police.

They do however display clear indications of the fact that individual subjectifications concerning politicians, in general, have been externalised and discussed as they emphasise how they sometimes "have to" or "need to" site with the institutional top when engaging in conversations for understanding with their employees (ANUM1, 2019: 2; ANUM2, 2019: 10, 12; HN1, 2019: 12; ED1, 2019: 18). Consequently, they feel that "*there are some things where you need to be loyal to the*

decisions coming from above. And so, we are" (ANUM2, 2019: 10). Even as this discourse has yet to evolve into a set typification, it reveals that the middle managers stay loyal to the politicians not because they actively want to, but due to what they perceive as a "have to" situation. Relating this potential typification to our previous argument in section 9.1.1 that the middle managers externalise frustrations with not being able to push upwards and have a say in changes, it points towards a management level who are more closely tied to their employees than the hierarchical level of politicians and top management.

Accordingly, among the employees in the hospital service, there seems to be an emerging typification of "must-do tasks" that often relates to efficiency demands directly posed by politicians; that is, tasks or changes that they cannot oppose or alter but simply have to carry out because politicians have decided so, no matter how realistic or unrealistic (D1, 2019: 11; D2, 219: 17). A nurse explains: "*[S]ometimes we have these "must-do" tasks that neither management nor I can do anything about since we are governed by them nonetheless*" (N2, 2019: 7). Herein, both the employees' and middle managers' collective understanding of the politicians as change drivers is clearly reflected, which supports the argument that the two hierarchical levels partially develop their discourses and typifications in inter-group metaconversations due to them sharing some operational tasks.

However, just as their counterparts in the police, the hospital service employees also expose a discourse describing a hierarchical institution with heavy top pressure where influence does not come easy: "*[The executive doctor] cannot do anything about [a change]. It is not that she doesn't want to – if she could, I believe she would do something… And maybe that is exactly what has changed; the belief that you can influence your own working life*" (D1, 2019: 14; *see also* N1, 2019:8; D2, 2019: 14).

Whether this discourse is present in all types of organisations, this paper will not answer, but it nonetheless emphasises that the employees of the two institutions feel strongly decoupled from their institutional leaders, the politicians. Again, Robichaud et al.'s argument that an "us-ness" is naturally opposed by a "them-ness" emphasises the distance from bottom to the top of the institution (2004: 620).

The good, the bad, and the adequate manager

A typification clearly evident in the police is related to collectively understanding the role of the middle manager, which is not noticeable in the hospital service.

Considering our analytical findings so far, we argue that the lack of a clear typification or discourse in relation to the middle manager role in the hospital service occurs due to the position of the middle managers. Their focus on managing at eye-level with the employees and partaking in operational tasks with them, see section 9.1.2, seems to have enabled their inclusion into the "us" group of employees, thus blurring the barrier between the two levels. As a result, we believe that the employees do not talk about their middle managers as another, distinctive group, which would have been the case if a clearer boundary between "us" and "them" existed. Furthermore, as the middle managers have no official management education, they do not appear to have a developed language to articulate and explicitly talk about their responsibilities and individual approaches.

However, among the police middle managers, there is a strong typification of their role and responsibility in the institution. They all thus refer to themselves as someone "*translating*" something; in other words, they rephrase strategic management talk into tactical and operational tasks – and in given contexts also restate operational requests upwards (PS1, 2019: 7; PS2, 2019: 3; PS3, 2019: 3; DAC1, 2019: 2; DAC2, 2019: 16). Interestingly, this typification seems to emphasise the cross-pressure conditions of public middle managers, as it gives weight to the "in-betweenness" of the role as someone aiming to make two other parties understand each other's communication. A police superintendent fuels this observation when he states: "*[Y]ou can talk strategy and operations all the way down the pipeline, but then I need to translate that into something practical like, "what does that mean for me? Does it mean that we will be working on this or this case?". It is easy to say […] that "we want to go in this direction now" and then I sit there and have to translate that to policemen who might say that in their professional opinion this one specific case is [more important] than whatever they are being pointed towards"* (PS3, 2019: 3).

Such focus on translating may explain the middle managers' subsequent attention to how they ideally present changes to quickly gain an understanding among their employees, as mentioned earlier in this section 9.2, as the core element of their change communication is translating something new to someone else. Thus, a "good" manager must, by virtue of the translator typification, be someone who understands how to translate change requests to his employees.

The employees, on the other hand, have not yet developed a common label for their understanding of middle managers. It is however abundantly clear that their discourse of "good" and "bad" managers does not build on a perception of managerial skills but, rather, implicitly on how the managers accommodate the cross-pressure. Thus, a police constable states that "*all the good managers, they*

leave and then we are left with those who just bend the neck" (PC1, 2019: 10) while a police officer explains that her manager becomes "*the company's man*" (PO1, 2019: 14) as soon as she tries to take up a problem with him. Several of them also specifically note how their managers are told by the Leadership Pipeline to distance themselves from the employees, which furthermore reveals their distaste of such managers (PC1, 2019: 11; PC2, 2019: 6). To them, it seems, a "good" manager is conversely someone who does not dance to the politicians' tune but takes a stand when necessary.

Consequently, the police middle managers may carefully plan how to best communicate a new change to their employees to create understanding and involvement, but if the employees are biased so that they perceive most middle managers left in the institution to be "bad" – or just not "good" – managers, they may immediately conclude that what is said by their middle managers is merely the direct words of unrealistic, detached politicians.

Implications of typifications

Since our analysis of the typifications emerging in the two institutions reveals several of such that seem to be predominantly negative in relation to changes and the politicians driving them, it may bode ill for the middle managers' change efforts in general. Despite how the phenomena of change and political drivers are hereby being talked into reality by the employees – which should theoretically benefit the middle managers as change agents since the employees thus aid in realising changes – they do so predominantly with frustration and hostility. If the employees in both institutions are prone to negative biases concerning changes in general and believe that political demands are either unrealistic or simply must-do tasks, the logical deduction is that they will tend to initially either reject or resist changes because "changes are bad", "they never work anyway", or "this does not make operational sense".

Furthermore, reaching a common understanding of specific changes may prove difficult especially in the police where changes and how they are managed appear differently to employees and middle managers through their respective typifications. An explanation for this may be that middle managers drift too close to the management level and too far away from the operational level in their everyday management and thus become "bad" managers in the eyes of their employees. If they are, by default, perceived as "bad" managers abiding every political whim, simply because they have not yet left the institution, it becomes tricky to move to conversations for performance and it should therefore potentially be done with explicit consideration to the gap in change perception between the hierarchical levels.

One of the major challenges with change creation in the police thus appears to be that informal metaconversations among employees form into set negative typifications whereby employees talk the changes into reality so that they become real to them as negative events.

Consequently, it would be natural to conclude that change creation happens more smoothly in the hospital service since the typification and discourse gap between the two hierarchical levels seems to be less pronounced in the institution. This may conversely prove to be the very challenge of the institution, though: that when the middle managers partake in talking changes and their political drivers negatively into reality, they position themselves too much at level with their employees. Therefore, the employees believe that their middle managers do not push upwards and consequently lose faith in their own ability to influence their work at the political level. Finally, when the middle managers must inevitably appear loyal to politicians in their change communication by way of initiative conversations and conversations for understanding, they run the risk of appearing hypocritical by suddenly siding with the management level and thus becoming opponents to the employees. This will be further elaborated in section 9.2.3.

9.2.2 Institutionalisation

As our data reveals predominantly negative typifications that are likely to affect change creation, it becomes especially interesting to investigate whether changes ultimately become part of the institution.

In theory, we as individuals become capable of handling others' and our own actions as accepted objective acts through typification; we come to expect certain things and take for granted that things happen in a certain way because that is how it is. Hereby, argue Arbnor and Bjerke (2009), actions and actors undergo *institutionalisation* to become set structures that we may pass on to the next generation (19-20). Berger and Luckmann (1991 [1966]) argue that: "*'There we go again' now becomes 'This is how these things are done'*" (76-77) when routines become institutions *that is* in the perception of new generations. Furthermore, since institutionalisation happens through continuous communication and interaction, we argue that the successful institutionalisation of a change in the police or hospital service can be explained by Robichaud et al.'s (2004) perspective of recursive communication as a recreation of the metanarrative, thus changing what is normal and expected (618).

Implementation and routinisation of change

However, for intentional changes to become an expected part of the everyday structures, they must first be put into action. This happens, according to Ford and Ford, by means of *conversations for performance* where the change agents' focus shift from understanding to producing the intended change results (1995: 558-551).

When requesting action and promising better results and more effective workflows for their employees, middle managers in the police and hospital service utilise political conditions to alter existing structures to accommodate changes, e.g. by enforcing statistical documentation or carrying out department mergers. While changes are hereby directly implemented into the employees' reality of everyday life by virtue of the political conditions, it does not necessarily mean that the employees meekly accept that "this is how these things are done" now, though. Thus, when explaining how politicians have introduced new, short-term statistical demands among operational policemen, a police constable frustratedly relates: "*And then with only few hours' notice, [my colleagues] have to answer a lot of questions! That is how the politicians work; they find out they are going to some group meeting and then they quickly want answers to something, so they call the police – who then spend a lot of hours answering all sorts of questions for the Danish Parliament and its politicians. And it has to happen right away*" (PC1, 2019: 5).

Thus, we identify an ostensible difference between merely implementing and routinising a change, on one hand, and accepting and thereby fully institutionalising it, on the other hand. The fact that employees are rarely allowed to participate in deciding conditions of satisfaction for the politically demanded changes, as argued in section 9.1.2, may very well contribute to this discrepancy.

Thus, it appears that some, often perceived as exceptionally unrealistic, changes may be implemented into daily routines by the middle managers without employees – and sometimes even without middle managers themselves – subsequently taking them for granted, because they initially view changes as something bad and therefore refuse to fully accept them. In other words, it seems that the typifications of employees, in particular, emerging in the institutions sometimes keep changes from progressing from structural routinisation, "here we go again", into collective acceptance and full institutionalisation, "this is how these things are done". For instance, a police officer recounts how a change has been implemented at her police station, yet it only obtains acceptance among new employees and not among those who have experienced a different reality previous to this change: "*[M]y colleagues here at the station who have been here for several years, they thought [being forced*

to carry bulletproof vests] was extremely annoying… Again, it is a change. But those of us who were still studying, we didn't really have anything to compare it to; it was just how we did things" (PO1, 2019: 6). Moreover, a glaringly obvious example in the hospital service of changes only being implemented but not accepted is the recent implementation of the Healthcare Platform, despite it being heavily criticised internally and externally. Exasperated, a doctor explains: "*[I]t is still a heavy, completely impossible system to work in, right? It is a system that we live with, but not one that we live happily with. At least I don't because I think it is completely incomprehensible what I am doing [and] every kind of registration is difficult…*" (D1, 2019: 12).

The refusal to accept changes among employees may be explained through Ford and Ford's (1995) findings as middle managers jumping to conversations for performance too soon, neglecting to obtain a collectively agreed upon understanding that overcomes the negative typifications.

However, middle managers may not perceive understanding and acceptance as strictly necessary factors to carry out their changes due to the existing political conditions of the police and hospital service as public institutions. As an already fully developed and objective institution constituting the Danish welfare society, the public sector can in Robichaud et al.'s (2004) terms be seen as having its own overarching narrative genre in which directly-elected politicians, who are not likely to be familiar with operational processes, are allowed and even expected to inflict changes directly on public institutions (623). Therefore, changes can be routinised as set structures on management level by politicians despite the negative typifications and change resistance in the institutions, while this negativity nevertheless seems to obstruct fully accepted institutionalisation in some situations. Thus, the cross-pressure, in which middle managers act, is effectually enforced between the conditions that require managers to help institutionalise changes and the employee resistance to such.

Long-term institutionalisation

Yet, when the political conditions of the public sector call for the use of conversations for performance and subsequent change implementation and routinisation before collective acceptance has been obtained, it conversely seems to cause acceptance and ensuing institutionalisation in the long run for most changes.

This is indicated by our informants in the hospital service. Here, we see how the sub-departments implicitly learn to accept the extensive change of the Healthcare Platform when it becomes part of their everyday work routine despite the Healthcare Platform still not being universally liked in the institution: "*[T]he anaesthesia part of the Healthcare Platform actually works quite well. And it has*

made our work easier and many aspects are really well-functioning. You can easily point out things you would have done differently yourself [...] but our little section of the Healthcare Platform is successful" (N1, 2019: 7; *see also* N2, 2019: 8). Accordingly, the Structural Reform of the police in 2007 has generally been subject to heavy criticism internally over the years, but now, after working within the new structures for more than 10 years, a police constable resonates that "*all that with the police reform in 2007, that* was *necessary because it was an old structure with those tiny units that couldn't even manage tasks on their own anyway. [...] Well, centralising does have its advantages*" (PC3, 2019: 8; *see also* Justitsministeriet, 2008).

In this, it becomes evident that the direct implementation and subsequent routinisation of the changes have by all accounts helped the employees accept them over time and furthermore perceive them as necessary. This progress appears especially prevalent in the hospital service, which can potentially be ascribed to their negative change language being less developed than in the police, leading to quicker change acceptance once routinised.

Consequently, we argue that acting out the changes support their full institutionalisation among employees; for which claim we find backing in Weick's 1979 writings on enactment wherein he explains: "*People in organizations need to act to find out what they have done*" (152). Furthermore, considering that the middle managers in both institutions rarely take the time to explain "the bigger picture" in detail for their employees when presenting change, as argued in section 9.1.2, it seems reasonable that the employees may only start to understand the changes when performing them in their everyday life. Then, the changes become "how these things are done".

In our opinion, the fact that some changes actually seem to be institutionalised directly due to what Ford and Ford (1995) call conversations for performance, rather than conversations for understanding, may explain our previous finding here in section 9 that understanding among employees is not adequately facilitated by middle managers in both institutions. Ford and Ford argue that progress in change continuously serves as feedback to change agents regarding their communication, and their argument is supported by Weick's (1979) description of an individual playing charades, which he believes can be seen as acting out a rebus, wherein he states that "*the person enacting a rebus needs to play out his version of the charade to see what he really is conveying to interested observers*" (152; *see also* Ford & Ford, 1995: 549). According to this point of view, the middle managers only know how their change efforts affect their employees after engaging in them and they will, therefore, perceive change results as direct effects of their efforts.

Thus, when most changes seem to become institutionalised in the end without much focus on conversations for understanding due to the political conditions, the middle managers may consequently interpret that these conversations are not a necessity and that other, ongoing changes will likewise gain acceptance among employees in time without alterations to the change communication.

9.2.3 Legitimisation

Since we in the above section argue that some changes are not fully institutionalised due to lacking acceptance among employees, it becomes relevant to factor in the legitimacy of changes in general, as a fully legitimate change must arguably be accepted more easily. Accordingly, for something to be fully objectified, *legitimisation* is a necessary last step, argue Arbnor and Bjerke. In their perception, legitimising institutionalisations works as a form of social control when new individuals must take over the institutions and the phase should, therefore, be seen as an attempt to "*weave legitimisation into the institutions themselves in order to explain and to justify them*" to other people (2009: 20).

Exercising this social control can happen in three ways: through *linguistic legitimisation* wherein words already contain "objective" information about norms; through *proverbial legitimisation* wherein proverbs are used as matter-of-fact explanations; and through *theoretical legitimisation* wherein "quasi-scientific" explanations are given for legitimisation (Ibid.). In the following, we have identified a number of key factors that directly influence one or more of these legitimacy aspects.

In this last objectification step, Arbnor and Bjerke's framework is set apart from that of Ford and Ford as it explicitly focuses on not just *what* a change is, but the articulation of *why* a change happens and subsequently *why* it is the correct thing to do.

Change context of middle managers

In general, the middle managers in the police and hospital service display a conception of the answers to the above-stated why-questions through their typifications, see section 9.2.1, revealing the understanding that being a "public middle manager" contains dealing with continuous changes. Furthermore, the secondary socialisation of management, apparent especially in the police and to some extent also in the hospital service, can provide them with an overall understanding of the political conditions in relation to our Danish welfare society and it can thereby function as theoretical legitimisation. Thus, it appears that politically induced change becomes legitimate to the middle

managers through linguistics and social theories; politicians demand change because they can and they should.

At the same time, though, we have previously found that some of the typifications of middle managers in the hospital service directly resemble those of their employees because they are talked into reality through overlapping metaconversations. This suggests that the continuous changes are not as legitimate to these middle managers as to their counterparts in the police since middle managers of the hospital service directly experience the consequences of the changes when performing operational tasks. Thus, when a change is not operationally practical, the institutional legitimacy of politicians as change drivers may suffer in the eyes of the middle managers, in particular in the hospital service.

Absence of closure and operational feasibility

While the employees in both the police and hospital service may have internalised the political conditions of the public sector, see section 8.1, the legitimacy of recurring changes and efficiency demands does not appear as pronounced to them, as implied by our findings in the prior sections.

An explanation for this reduced legitimacy may be found by applying Ford and Ford's (1995) change framework. According to this, the change process should ideally finish with *conversations for closure* since closure "*is essential to change. It implies "a sense of harmonious completion," wherein tension with past events is reduced or removed and balance and equilibrium are restored*" (551). This, however, rarely seems to be the case in the two institutions as our data only reveals one direct mention of such conversations taking place (PS2, 2019: 14). Engaging in conversations for closure may prove tricky for middle managers, though, because it not only involves stating that a change goal has been achieved, but also letting go of ineffective changes, which is very rarely within the authority of the middle managers due to previous political promises (Ford & Ford, 1995: 551).

In any case, Ford and Ford (1995) describe neglecting to engage in conversations for closure as a breakdown in change that can leave employees feeling like their contributions have been overlooked (559). This is the case when a police constable complains that "*[the decision-makers] try to involve us in groups and those kinds of things. [...] But when it comes to it and they have to enhance efficiency, they don't use it because they have just used their own [suggestions] anyways*" (PC1, 2019: 8; *see also* PO1, 2019: 7). Furthermore, when employees state that changes pile upon changes in their work life, it suggests that previous changes have not been properly closed down and the employees, therefore, feel that they are still engaging in these on top of the new changes being demanded of them (PC1, 2019: 10; N2, 2019: 12). This corresponds with Ford and Ford's (1995) claim that while the

absence of conversations for closure in a specific change process may not damage that specific change directly, the effects will be felt on future changes (551).

In the end, the implicit proverbial legitimisation of changes piling atop of each other appears to be negatively affected as well. This happens when the employees start to reflect on what they do and thereby no longer merely accept "because they can" as the only justification for politicians making changes that are believed pointless at an operational level. Moreover, the legitimacy of the politicians in their role as change drivers seem to further influence the overall change legitimacy as perceived by the employees. We have previously found that both institutions are believed to be top managed, see section 9.2.1, resulting in politicians either being regarded as unfamiliar with the operational level they change or as outright unrealistic. As such, the demands for change and efficiency they pose do not carry much legitimacy to employees as shown by the negative typifications, revealing a lacking understanding of *why* these changes are the correct things to do.

In other words, the continuously demanded changes lack legitimacy in the eyes of the employees because they appear to pile atop of each other, but also because they do not make sense on the operational level where the focus is on the core task.

Hypocritical middle managers

We believe that another factor contributing to the relatively low change legitimacy among employees is the perceived legitimacy of middle managers; if they do not have the legitimacy to support their actions and communication, they cannot contribute to weaving it into the potential institutions that they pass on to employees. We find support for this in a police constable's claim: "*[I] really think it becomes ridiculous. I mean, to hear the managers up there sometimes in meetings and they are saying like, "from now on it will be like this and this" and I am just thinking: "you are so stupid to listen to…"*" (PO1, 2019: 16) and in the reflections of a head nurse: "*I mean, I might very well be employed in this department, but if I do not have legitimacy as a manager, I can forget all about managing*" (HN1, 2019: 16). This appears especially prevalent in the police where the perception of a "good" manager varies between the employee and middle manager groups, see section 9.2.1.

In this context, one way of ensuring legitimacy and balancing it with efficiency as an institution or a manager can, according to Brunsson (2003), be to make strategic use of *hypocrisy* (210-211). Hypocrisy results when "*[p]eople may talk or decide about a certain action but act in the opposite way [...] it may be true that some people believe that what is said is right, others believe that what is decided is right, and others believe that what is actually done is right"* (Ibid.: 202). However, a

strategy of hypocrisy may backfire if stakeholders cannot be convinced that the promised objectives are sincere, and actions are subsequently taken to achieve them (Ibid.: 215). Here, the middle managers' handling of the complex cross-pressure, in which they are situated, evidently carries a great impact as they must comply with contradictory wishes and demands.

Consequently, when employees of the police perceive their managers as drifting far from the operational tasks and merely succumbing to political change demands without pushing upwards, it damages the managers' legitimacy because they do not live up to the implied promise of their own "translator"-typification of having the responsibility to translate not only from A to B but also from B to A. Additionally, promising to involve employees in planning and devising changes but allegedly only doing so for show makes the middle managers appear insincere and thus hypocritical in their promises because the discrepancy between words and actions becomes too great. It almost goes without saying that perceived hypocritical managers in the police do not hold much legitimacy among their employees, making their change communication equally illegitimate.

Evidently, the dilemma of perceived hypocritical middle managers is also present in the hospital service. On the one hand, the middle managers of the hospital service emphasise how they are a part of the operational level because they perform operational tasks (ANUM1, 2019: 8; ED1, 2019: 4; ED2, 2019: 20). This is supported by Robichaud et al.'s (2004) statement that: "*To be recognized as an authentic member of such a [institutional] community, one must display its practices"* (620), suggesting that the middle managers become a more legitimate part of the employee community when performing operational tasks alongside them. However, drawing on Brunsson's (2003) hypocrisy approach, such community acceptance may conversely cause the middle managers to appear even more hypocritical when they operate in the cross-pressure and actively detach from the community to site with politicians in change creation despite the excuse that they "have to". If their words usually convey dissatisfaction with the political changes but their actions directly further such changes, their words lose meaning. Thus, the linguistic legitimacy suffers as the employees do not accept the middle managers' interpretation of what their position entails, while the theoretical legitimacy is nonetheless somewhat retained in the employees' typification of "must-do tasks".

Lack of change legitimacy

In the end, it appears that the politically induced continuous changes do not become entirely legitimate as institutions to the employees in the police and hospital service in their specific contexts. Thus, there may be limited social control over the employees' reality of everyday life and the new

generations taking over this. Considering the dialectic attributes of institutionalisation and legitimisation as mutually influential processes, this explains why some changes may be implemented and routinised but not fully institutionalised among employees, as their lacking legitimacy, due to negative typifications, leads to failed acceptance and ultimately to change rejection. However, the strong, overall legitimacy of the public sector as an institution ensures that most changes are institutionalised in the end despite specific contexts of lacking legitimacy.

9.2.4 Passing on everyday reality

When changes have been objectified and therefore are part of the institutional structure in the future, they become part of the objective reality as it presents itself in everyday experiences; what Berger and Luckmann (1991 [1966]) term the *reality of everyday life* (33-35) and Arbnor and Bjerke (2009), inspired by Husserl, call *everyday reality* (22). It is important to emphasise, though, that these political changes only concern details and structures within the everyday reality and not the objective reality in its entirety as its existence is never doubted (Ibid.). Thus, middle managers do not change, and employees do not doubt, the Danish social structure as an institution, but they rather change or doubt details of the everyday reality. It is then both the institutionalised political conditions of the public sector and the changes to its underlying details – and subsequently their typifications and varying legitimacy – that are passed on to new generations of the police and hospital service as part of everyday reality.

In the end, this entails that politically ordered changes in the institutions often become institutionalised due to the existent political conditions while being the target of negative typifications and lacking legitimacy among, especially, employees. These changes are then passed on to new generations of policemen, nurses, and doctors as set structures of everyday reality, yet they are accompanied by negatively expanding metaconversations building mainly on the employee typifications and interpretations of lacking legitimacy. Therefore, what is apparently passed on to the next generation of employees is a negative employee attitude to changes due to lacking legitimacy and harmful typifications. This may even be reflected somewhat at the middle manager level, especially in the hospital service. In the end, it creates a lack of social control as the seemingly strong secondary socialisation of the two institutions may ensure internalisation of these viewpoints.

However, the continuous referral to the unchangeable overall political conditions of the public sector by employees and middle managers somewhat mitigates their negativity as the conditions establish

clear theoretical legitimacy for the changes and change drivers. Thus, no matter how negatively a given change is perceived, its implementation will always be theoretically legitimate.

In addition to this, Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) explain how "*[a]n objectified finite province of meaning can completely paralyse our subjectification, leading us to develop normal pathological acts – that is, acts that are so normal in our society that they are active obstacles to a renewal that might be necessary and desirable*" (20). We believe that the legitimisation of change resistance in the institutions are developing into such pathological acts, as the current change communication appears to result in the emergence of a negative spiral. Herein, employees believe it legitimate to question political changes due to their previous change experiences in which the middle managers have failed to create sufficient understanding and thereby pre-empt negative typifications and questions of legitimacy. The fact that it is normal to question changes may result in growing negativity when new changes are presented, as the middle managers of both institutions appear progressively more hypocritical when they side with politicians despite their personal opinions and the perceived infeasibility of the demands, justifying their actions as something they merely have to do. Thus, the cross-pressure gap in which the middle managers operate increases, which may lead to the finalisation of additional negative typifications and so on.

Such a vicious spiral is evidently emerging in both institutions despite the acceptance of change demands as a condition of public sector work; variances in typifications; and distinct differences in middle manager-employee relationships, suggesting that neither group of middle managers are currently creating and managing changes optimally.

9.3 Sub-conclusion

To analyse how changes are created in and to an objective reality in the public sector institutions, we have focused on externalisation and objectification in the police and hospital service. Externalising change efforts can be seen as happening firstly in initiative conversations that emerge at the very top of the institutions. Here, it seems that middle managers in the police enjoy greater opportunity to influence changes due to the Leadership Pipeline than their counterparts in the hospital service. However, it appears that middle managers of both institutions tend to engage in these initiative conversations and subsequently in some managers' meetings before directly obeying the change demand immediately and engaging in new initiative conversations with their employees. Hereby, they

act as change agents and blackbox the words of the politicians in metaconversations wherein the changes are talked into reality.

Yet, despite the fact that middle managers engage in prior initiative conversations, they do however not seem to be successful in creating a positive, shared understanding of the changes as the employees of both institutions feel that they do not have the opportunity to influence the change conditions of satisfaction as set by the politicians. Furthermore, the employees in the police state that they are being involved in the change creation only because they have to be and not with a sincere aim of getting their input. Although their counterparts in the hospital service appear to be more involved in the change process, the hospital service middle managers tend to be more negative than in the police and externalise their negative subjectifications concerning the politically induced changes. Through this process, the middle managers in the hospital service are perceived as helpers of the core service task by the employees, while the police middle managers are regarded as opponents.

As a result of this, several typifications of varying negativity appear to be emerging within all four member-groups concerning change and politicians as change drivers. While the employees of both institutions are evidently the most negative, perceiving changes as annoying tasks that simply must be done and politicians as unrealistic and out of touch with the operational level, the typifications of middle managers vary more. Consequently, the police middle managers display an understanding of the political viewpoint, yet directly address the cross-pressure in which they manage. The hospital service middle managers tend to share negative discourse and typifications with their employees, suggesting that their engagement in operational tasks results in overlapping metaconversations wherein the changes are talked similarly into reality.

Despite these predominantly negative typifications, it seems that most changes are institutionalised in the long term as the employees start to truly accept them when acting them out. This is possible since the changes can be directly implemented and institutionalised merely because the political conditions of the public sector enable it. However, as these also enable middle managers to move quickly from conversations for understanding to conversations for performance, the conditions may also contribute to some changes never progressing from routinisation to full institutionalisation and acceptance, since employees seemingly do not overcome their negative biases.

While most changes may be institutionalised in the end, the legitimacy for these changes is rarely obtained, though. The political conditions may provide theoretical legitimacy, but especially the employees appear to perceive the continuous changes as illegitimate due to several factors: middle

managers neglect to ensure proper closure of each change; politicians' efficiency demands are highly unrealistic and unfeasible in relation to the core service task and therefore illegitimate; and middle managers are perceived and typified as hypocritical in their cross-pressure management when they either become too detached from the operational level or when the gap between their words and actions becomes too large.

In the end, the breakdowns of an inadequate shared understanding, negative typifications, and a lacking legitimisation in change creation and management evidently lead to a negative change attitude among employees being passed on as everyday reality to the next generation in both institutions. This happens despite an overall acceptance of political conditions also being passed on in addition to the institutionalised changes. Due to strong secondary socialisation, this reality is likely to be internalised by new employees. Thereby, change resistance is becoming a pathological act hindering institutional development as especially employee negativity develops in a vicious spiral, suggesting that the middle managers of both institutions are not managing changes optimally in their different contexts.

10 Remedying change breakdowns through leadership

In the last two sections, we have analysed the processes of change creation and management in the police and hospital service, leading to the conclusion that neither institution is currently handling said processes ideally since negative employee attitudes towards changes seem to be part of everyday reality. We argue that this outcome is the result of the following recurring breakdowns in the change process: a negative conception of change seems to come to life in expanding metaconversations among employees – and sometimes middle managers – in their process of understanding specific changes, which leads to the emergence of negative typifications that enforce a perception of the individual changes and their appertaining change agents as illegitimate, as both linguistic and proverbial legitimisation suffer.

These findings prompt the question of how the middle managers may attempt to remedy the identified breakdowns in change communication and creation to ensure more successful change management in the future by creating better understanding, by lessening negative typifications, and by improving change legitimacy.

In this regard, our understanding of management and leadership as dynamically intertwined phenomena, see section 4.1, becomes relevant as we must, on the basis of our findings, acknowledge

that the public middle managers do not only engage strictly in management processes but also in leadership actions, e.g. when participating in change communication and attempting to create change understanding and thereby influence the change process. Alvesson and Spicer (2011a) state that the "*hard work of helping people to understand the purpose of an instruction, and creating meaning around it, frequently transgresses any clear distinction between management and leadership*" (12) and go on to emphasise that leadership entails communicatively managing meaning and influencing processes, which is exactly what the middle managers of the police and hospital service attempt to do during the change creation (Ibid.; 12, 30). Hereby, it is particularly in the change communication that the middle managers' leadership practices emerge.

Thus, the question becomes if and how middle managers can improve change creation by remedying breakdowns through a leadership lens. In the following subsections, we will, therefore, discuss this question.

10.1 Should focus be on improving middle managers' change practices?

Since our findings evidently show that the actions and communicative choices of the middle managers in the two institutions, directly and indirectly, affect the change rejection or acceptance among employees, an obvious suggestion for remedying breakdowns is to look at the middle managers specifically and individually. Expanding this premise, we argue that focus could be put directly on improving the change efforts of middle managers by working reflectively with their communication in order to further their ability to create understanding for the individual changes and consequently engage in more effective leadership practices.

Such argument is directly supported by Ford and Ford (1995), as they claim that "*[m]anagerial effectiveness in producing change may be improved by training managers to distinguish the four conversations for change and to practice their use*" (565). To them, one of the challenges for managers engaging in change conversations is that they do not understand the implications of speech being performative and therefore do not use their communication in the strategic manner that such understanding enables. Thus, training managers in the explicit and strategic use of change conversations should allegedly ease the change process and improve the chances of successfully changing the end-state (Ibid.).

Applying this suggestion to our findings, the middle managers in the police and hospital service will need training in especially the two conversations of understanding and closure, as the current

approach to these can be seen as the cause of several breakdowns (Ibid.: 557, 559). To further a positive change understanding and prevent negative typifications, the middle managers should potentially focus more on the conversations for understanding and their by-products, such as conditions of satisfaction and employee involvement, instead of moving quickly to change implementation in conversations for performance. At the same time, they may start to explicitly engage in conversations for closure in order to improve the legitimacy of future changes and make the employees feel more valued in the change process.

Furthermore, as a part of their communicative reflections, the middle managers could consider what Robichaud et al. (2004) call the narrative identities developing in the ongoing metaconversations of their employees (620). In other words, they should pay notice to the "us" and "them" discourse wherein the politicians are clearly positioned as the opponent, "them", and consider, firstly, whether they actively enforce or discourage this discourse in their own communication and, secondly, how this choice affects their label in the narrative. Being part of the "us" or being part of the "them" carries vastly distinct differences for how meaning should be managed in respect to the employees, as is currently evident in the differences between the two institutions, where police middle managers tend to be a more pronounced part of "them" while middle managers in the hospital service often become part of the "us" through their communication. Such considerations and explicit communicative choices will potentially affect the perceived legitimacy of not only the middle managers but also the institutional top management and politicians.

In the end, it seems that when middle managers reflect on their individual engagement in leadership as communicative management of meaning and subsequently improve their efforts on the basis of these reflections it may thus result in a more successful change process.

10.1.1 Leadership glorification as a premise

However, while the above suggestion implies that middle managers can directly improve change implementation by progressing their change communication and leadership practices, we identify two potential problems in relation to this solution.

Firstly, although the solution does carry very practical implications for the middle managers' everyday reality, it is nonetheless theoretical in its core nature. This is not problematic as such, but it may prove difficult to initiate in especially the hospital service, where middle managers, in general, have very little to no leadership education and are therefore unfamiliar with the theoretical aspect of

the practice. As such, introducing a relatively abstract theoretical framework as the basis for managing future change may not prove a very fruitful solution. At the same time, though, it would be difficult to propose the above solution without any linkage between theory and improvement of communication practices; because how can you improve if there is no standard to improve by?

Secondly, the ideology implicitly underlying the premise of our suggestion can be seen as faulty. If we believe that the middle managers can, as individuals, directly break or make the change process either by neglecting to engage in or by explicitly adhering to leadership practices, we also state that "good" leaders and well-executed leadership are an essential aspect of successfully creating change. Thus, leadership appears as a fundamentally good thing, and more leadership directly equals better institutional results. Such belief that leadership is fundamentally necessary to carry out change is termed "*leaderism*" by O'Reilly and Reed (2010), who present this glorification of leadership and leaders as opposed to management and managers. They identify an extensive desire among individuals to perceive leaders and their leadership as efficient and impactful factors in relation to institutional outcomes, which agrees with the self-image of self-acclaimed leaders but not necessarily so with empirical evidence to the contrary (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 29). Accordingly, the solution to develop the change process only through good leaders, who can execute leadership skilfully, does not correspond with Alvesson and Spicer's (2011b) empirically backed perception of leadership as ambiguous, to which we have adhered thus far.

Furthermore, following a leaderism-like ideology is inconsistent with the fact that the current leadership and change efforts of the middle managers actually seem to be counterproductive as they progress negative typifications and increase perceived illegitimacy; if current leadership efforts have negative effects on the change process, then leadership does not seem to be an inherently good and necessary component of change. Why, then, should it, by all means, be given further emphasis?

Instead, leadership and the individuals engaging in it appear potentially problematic, as argued by Alvesson and Spicer (2011a: 20), which finally leads to an alternative suggestion of how to remedy the current change breakdowns. This follows in the next section.

10.2 Should middle managers cease to engage in leadership as change agents?

If we acknowledge leadership as a problematic concept that does not automatically equal better institutional outcomes, it enables us to recognise that further attempts at leadership are not necessarily the key to improved change processes, since the current leadership efforts of the middle managers appear counterproductive rather than productive in relation to the individual changes. Following this argument, it becomes relevant to question whether the middle managers should engage in leadership in the change context at all?

When the middle managers currently engage in change communication, they either place themselves close to the management level, merely black-boxing and repeating the words of politicians, or close to the employee level, simply repeating the negative attitude of their employees. Thus, their approach to meaning management and interaction with subordinates rarely seem to add something new to the process, which negatively affects their legitimacy when they act upon the demands from above and further harms the legitimacy of individual changes.

We consequently argue that it may improve the change processes if middle managers focus only on management by way of administrative tasks and monitoring of output on a day-to-day basis, and rarely – or hardly ever – engage in communication as agents in the change process. In this case, changes will be initiated at the institutional top level and directly carried out at the bottom level, which does not leave space for middle managers to affect the change understanding negatively or influence the legitimacy of individual changes.

Such a claim is primarily warranted by the narrative of the public sector as an institution. This overall institution constitutes part of the everyday reality in its entirety, which, as previously argued, is never doubted, questioned, or corrected (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009: 22). The political conditions of the public sector, therefore, ascribe politicians the scope of action to think up changes and set them in motion, subsequently providing a form of theoretical legitimacy to the changes as they are communicated directly from politicians and top management to the employees through primarily one-way communication. It is thus the special position of politicians as not only the institutional top but also the popularly elected, legislative power of the Danish society that ensures the legitimacy of political efficiency demands without communicative input from middle managers.

Two further factors resulting from these institutional structures, as identified in our analysis, are especially prevalent in this context. First, the conditions of satisfaction for efficiency changes are most often established at the political level, which makes the involvement of employees in this aspect unnecessary and thereby also renders the middle managers' communicative "*shaping of the ideas, values, perceptions and feelings*" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 12) superfluous. Secondly, the fact that the institutionalisation of changes often happens directly through implementation and routinisation, regardless of lacking employee acceptance, implies that such shaping by middle managers is not needed in order to reach a changed end-state. If leadership involves "*influencing processes and situations*" (Ibid.: 30), then leadership, as performed by middle managers, is apparently not needed to complete the changes within public institutions.

Factoring in the above supporting arguments, it seems that the middle managers of the police and hospital service should not engage in leadership in a change context but only in day-to-day management practises, as the political conditions ensure the institutionalisation of changes with some theoretical legitimacy, while politicians set the conditions for satisfaction at the beginning-state of a change.

10.2.1 People desire leadership to provide purpose

The idea that middle managers should not lead because it is not necessary is built on the assumption that the employees will change their practices because they are directly told to by the institutional top communicating *to* and not *with* them. This, however, does not seem to correspond with our empirical data where several informants reflect that change may initially be perceived as something bad simply because it implies breaking up habits and doing things, that currently work, differently (PO1, 2019: 6; PC3, 2019: 10; DAC1, 2019: 16; DAC2, 2019: 21; N1, 2019: 9; D2, 2019: 11; ANUM1, 2019: 15-16). Thus, the assumption of obedient employees appears ideal or even naïve in its understanding of the cognitive processes of individuals. If new is generally bad, then the employees cannot be expected to immediately change their ways to accommodate the wishes of politicians.

Furthermore, while the change demands hold theoretical legitimacy due to the institutional structures of political conditions, these structures at the same time warrant a vast gap between change initiators and change conductors. When changes are initiated by politicians, they are done so not from an institutional point of view, which would be the case in other sectors, but from a larger, societal point of view. On the other hand, the employees work in a strictly institutional context, which the politicians

are allegedly too detached from to understand. Thus, the legitimacy of the individual changes falters if politicians are perceived as too far from the operational service task to understand it, while the employees are too far from the overall political agenda to gain an overarching understanding.

It hereby becomes evident that eliminating middle managers, who continuously shuffle between the two levels, will potentially increase the perceived illegitimacy of changes rather than improve legitimacy because the political intention and agenda are never attempted explained to the employees and vice versa. Apparently, the biggest challenges to change legitimacy is not whether the middle managers drift up or down in the cross-pressure between top management and employees, but rather how large the distance between employees and the institutional top has grown. Since the middle managers are by default the management level closest to the operational level, it can safely be assumed that they will hold the most realistic perception of the operational tasks among the managers and are therefore best equipped to explain their purpose both upwards and downwards. This indicates that the middle managers should not be asked to *not* perform leadership since they do have a role to fill in relation to creating change meaning for their employees. This is supported by Alvesson and Spicer (2011c) in their claim: "*People accept leadership not just because they are faced with serious penalties. Rather, they desire leadership because it offers them a sense of meaning, morale and very often a sense of direction. In other words, leadership gives people a sense of purpose in the workplace*" (22). Thus, leadership practices of middle managers appear inevitable in the process of facilitating a shared meaning of changes among employees.

Contemplating the above, it seems that several factors must be considered to improve the change processes in the police and hospital service: the political conditions provide certain structures in which the change processes take place, the employees actively separate themselves from the institutional top, and the middle managers' engagement in leadership is thus not irrelevant. We, therefore, try to accommodate this threefold perspective in the following suggestion on how to improve the change process by remedying current breakdowns.

10.3 Should breakdowns be remedied through an ambiguity-centred approach?

From the above discussion, we infer that understanding leadership requires much more than merely looking at what the manager does and does not do and how his change communication can be improved; rather Alvesson & Spicer (2011a) argue for an ambiguity-centred approach to leadership

that recognises leadership as something subjectively understood and constructed in a complex social manner, where different people in different contexts attribute it different meanings (22). Thus, according to Alvesson & Spicer, "*it is important that we consider not just what the manager does, but how this is shaped by the entire context in which they seek to lead*" (Ibid.: 13). To uncover the ambiguous context in which leadership emerge, Alvesson & Spicer propose that we trace the interactions between *leaders*, *followers* and *context* in order to develop a far more nuanced and sceptical stance to how leadership works in the police and hospital service (Ibid.: 11).

Consequently, we argue that we should not discuss the *middle manager's* role in remedying change breakdowns but rather how the change breakdowns can be remedied when taking both leaders, followers, and context into consideration. We, therefore, need to look at: middle managers and how they perceive own leadership practices; their subordinates and their different interpretations of leadership; and finally, the context in which they operate, where different cultures and circumstances determine what is thought to be appropriate of leadership (Ibid.: 22-23).

We will therefore in the following subsections uncover what the implications of such an approach are in relation to our findings and discuss how this perception may help remedy the identified breakdowns.

10.3.1 Conditions of efficiency set the stage for public leadership

As public institutions are governed by society's current rule of NPM, it is clear that both the police and hospital service must adhere to conditions of efficiency, which demand middle managers and employees to consistently document results that in any way indicate the overall quality of the institution's core service task. These conditions, that governs all Danish public institutions, set the stage for public leadership as they strongly constrain middle managers in terms of what they can or cannot do.

The extent to which the conditions of efficiency limit middle managers' field of leadership is especially observable in a change context. Here, our analysis shows that no matter the type of change imposed upon the institutions by government and top management, it is the conditions of efficiency that overrule the suggestions and concerns of employees in relation to the core service task. Thus, the conditions of efficiency can be seen as the general context that, in Alvesson & Spicer's (2011a) terminology, "*shapes the kinds of leaders who are thought to be appropriate*" (27). Thus, in the eyes of politicians and top management, the appropriate leader is someone who, from a generic viewpoint,

promotes efficiency to avoid malpractice in operational cases, whereas the qualified leader according to employees is someone who devotes his full attention to the core service task. Consequently, middle managers of public institutions end up being "*trapped between different cultures that proscribe vastly different norms of good leadership*" (Ibid.: 28), as Alvesson and Spicer rightly claim.

In the acknowledgement of how public middle managers must manoeuvre in the cross-pressure between efficiency demands and operational claims, the Danish Leadership Commission published a number of recommendations in June 2018 to help middle managers with this dilemma. These recommendations constitute seven broad messages that seek to enhance the quality of public leadership by: bringing the citizen back in the centre, trusting the middle managers in their leadership competencies, providing better incentive for professional leadership through chiefs of administration, creating better collaborations between unions, developing a strong leadership mentality, setting up the right teams, and ensuring better conditions for ongoing leadership education (Ledelseskommissionen, 2018: 5-13). However, as relevant as they may seem, they merely read as a plethora of platitudes since they do not elaborate on the local change context that different managers of different public institutions and sub-departments find themselves within. Hence, middle managers fall right back into the same trap of manoeuvring between the generic and the specific context; and this time the trap confirms them in the fact that no general context can establish one clear path for leading change in public institutions.

The trap is verified by a doctor, as she tells how managers and colleagues in her department experience that "*lots of the changes are placed in some overall frame, and that can work for many, but not for all*" (D2, 2019: 9). She concretises this in the extensive change of the Healthcare Platform, which she describes as "*a good system for the many, but not for the separate*" (Ibid.). This correlates with the findings of our analysis that reflect how changes demanding efficiency often become too broad and obscure for both middle managers and employees of the police and hospital service to comprehend and thus create negative typifications of changes that deals with efficiency.

As a result, the middle managers of both institutions take upon themselves leadership approaches formed by their respective contexts, which in the end impacts the way they communicate and deliver the efficiency changes to their subordinates.

Here, our analysis unveils how the change context of the police and hospital service differs from each other due to specific cultural conditions. These are, among other things, apparent in the prevailing sub-areas of knowledge within the institutions' respective secondary socialisation, as well as the

degree of influence upon changes suggesting different access to power within the institutions, which in one way or other results in different negative typifications of efficiency changes.

10.3.2 Leaders perceiving themselves as 'translators' or 'practitioners'

In the police, it is clear how middle managers in their change communication take upon a role as a translator of the efficiency demands, see section 9.2.1. The role of a translator comes natural to the majority of middle managers in the police, mainly because it is predefined by the hierarchical structure set by the Leadership Pipeline. Yet, the middle managers express how the translation of efficiency demands becomes particularly difficult, and thus up to the middle managers themselves to convert, when the efficiency demand is directly inefficient for the specific department in which the core service task is based. Consequently, the translation of efficiency demands by middle managers becomes a strategic attempt to "*change the way people think about what is desirable, possible and necessary*" (Zaleznik *as cited in* Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 11) more so than an agreement with subordinates of what makes most sense practically in relation to the core service task.

Thus, our analysis demonstrates how the current approach to leadership in the police focuses on translating efficiency demands from A, the politicians and top management, to B, their subordinates, but not necessarily the other way around. That the translation of middle managers in the police becomes a one-way communication task, rather than a two-way task, is seen in several remarks of the middle managers when asked to describe their main leadership responsibility: "*At any rate, the role I have is to be the mediator […] That's the basis of what I have to do; sender and receiver*" (DAC2, 2019: 13, 24; *see also* PS3, 2019: 3; DAC1, 2019: 2). Evidently, communication seems to become static, rather than dynamic, as it reaches the employees. This is further substantiated in a statement by a police superintendent, as he clearly portrays his role as leading his subordinates in the direction demanded from the institutional top: "*[I] get a direction from above where I'm told, "you must go in this direction". And then it's my job to make sure that the employees follow*" (PS2, 2019: 3).

The fact that communication concerning efficiency demands becomes one-directional in the police complies with our analysis of the external processes, which shows how middle managers of the police admit to the fact that there is a lack of sincere employee involvement, as the employees are mainly invited into the conversation of change for the sake of appearance rather than the sake of influence. Additionally, this suggest how the middle managers of the police in some cases might prioritise the

translating task above the people: "*[I] do not have any personally shares in it as such […] It is a role that exists besides me, where I have the responsibility for getting it translated, so that we can solve the dilemma or get the job done in a better way from the very beginning*" (DAC2, 2019: 16).

On the contrary, the middle managers in the hospital service place themselves in the role of practitioners, as they perceive their leadership responsibility as involving direct engagement in the community of practising the core service task (ANUM1, 2019: 5; ED1, 2019: 4; ED2, 2019: 18). The fact that middle managers of the hospital service naturally take upon a role as a practitioner, which places them at eye level with their employees, is in our analysis explained by the fact that no mandatory education, setting out clearly defined guidelines and structure for leadership, exists within the hospital service. Thus, their leadership responsibility appears to be more flexible and uncertain, as they express how they must often substitute for a co-middle manager: "*[B]asically we are co-responsible for all of the department staff. So, if I am not here, then it is the responsibility of the executive doctor, and if the executive doctor is not here, then it is my responsibility*" (HN1, 2019: 6; *see also* ANUM1, 2019: 19).

Additionally, they describe how their leadership approach automatically becomes personal as they put a lot of energy into the department they lead and the associated staff members: "*You want the department to succeed […] So you have to use a lot of energy personally, and it also requires that you are close to [your staff] and not just floating over the waters, so to speak. You have to come down to the engine room once in a while*" (ED2, 2019: 18). This suggests a more people-oriented approach to leadership compared to the police.

In the end, the two different approaches to leadership resemble what Alvesson & Spicer (2011d) draw up as leadership *metaphors* (34). Metaphors help us transfer certain aspects from one meaning context to another (Ibid.). When we incorporate a realistic perspective of leadership metaphors, we become able to recognise how they say something about ideas and meanings that are used in the difficult day-to-day work of middle managers in the police and hospital service (Ibid.: 33). Here, the apparent leadership metaphors of a "translator" in the police versus a "practitioner" in the hospital service end up becoming each other's opposites.

The translator metaphor is reflected in the fact that we see middle managers of the police becoming almost "*too sure of their capacity as leaders*" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 24) in that they believe themselves to be capable of translating strategic efficiency demands from top management into persuasive conditions for their subordinates: "*I need to know exactly which buttons to push, to make*

sure that they understand it" (PS3, 2019:10). Furthermore, they explain how they purposely keep themselves close to politicians and top management in order to provide a sufficient translation of the efficiency demands to their subordinates: "*[B]ut I should also be close to the ones up there, so that I'm certain, that I also understand it correctly"* (Ibid.).

They do, however, also express how it sometimes becomes unclear how they should lead in different situations, as they acknowledge some benefits of paying more attention to the practical work of their employees: "*An employee might also have the expectation that his leader should be more involved in the practical work tasks, but that is what we've hired our professional coordinators for…*" (Ibid.: 20).

Thus, despite the fact that they are aware that some employees anticipate their leaders to be closer to their practical work, they stick to the translator role, since the Leadership Pipeline demands that they do not lead as practitioners (DAC2, 2019: 21). They associate leadership with leading changes more than leading with concern for the practical, core service task: "*In my world, leadership is linked to change*" (PS3, 2019: 21).

As a result, the middle managers of the police become leaders who engage more in translating efficiency demands *to* their subordinates than carrying out the core service task *with* their subordinates.

Conversely, a practitioner metaphor is applicable to the middle managers of the hospital service, as they "*prefer to see themselves as professionals, as members of an occupation*" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 24) more than a leader who leads based on theoretical guidelines: "*[Y]ou can either be very theoretical, or you can be more of a practitioner. I'm more of a practitioner because I think it's fine to have some theoretical tools, but most of the time I think that being in it personally means a lot, and also that you listen to people*" (ED1, 2019: 9). Thereby, it seems that middle managers of the hospital service believe more in practising leadership by relating to the practical work of their subordinates, instead of "*buying into a language that would actually destroy a lot of credibility among peers*" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011a: 24): "*I do not believe that acquiring a Master's makes you a good leader […] When acquiring a Master's you learn a certain leadership language – which in ugly terms is referred to as the 'Economists' language'*" (ED2, 2019: 2).

As a result, the middle managers of the hospital service become leaders who practise the core service task together *with* their subordinates, instead of leaders who ensure translation of the efficiency demands *to* their subordinates.

The existence of two such distinctively different metaphors for leadership in the police and hospital service depicts how leaders themselves can be an important source of ambiguity in the leadership process and likewise an obstacle for change redemption. This becomes evident as our findings confirm that different approaches to leadership emerge within each of the institutions' specific context despite their equal compliance with contextual conditions of efficiency. This is further substantiated in the answer of a police superintendent, as we ask him to describe his approach to leadership in relation to the perceived cross-pressure of the Danish public sector: "*I don't think my approach to leadership is a result of the cross-pressure […] I think it's the opposite way around; the cross-pressure becomes a result of the way we choose to lead. Because, if I chose to lead in a similar manner both ways, well, then there wouldn't be a cross-pressure*" (PS3, 2019: 15). This highly relevant reasoning consequently presents the cross-pressure as dependent on the way middle managers choose to lead, and thereby not necessarily as something that constrains the leadership practice of middle managers. As a consequence, it is through the local context that middle managers relate to their reality and thus shape their leadership approach.

Here, we see middle managers of the police shaping their leadership approach upon a context with a set, hierarchical structure of leadership and access to influencing efficiency demands, whereas middle managers of the hospital service shape their leadership approach upon a context with a flat leadership structure and less power towards influencing efficiency demands. Thus, we can conclude that the two different leadership approaches of the institutions are a consequence of the somewhat contradictory and very specific local contexts. This indicates how different approaches to leadership are likely to occur within public institutions on the basis of the specific local context that leaders find themselves within.

However, even though it seems that the middle managers of both the police and hospital service adjust their leadership approach to their own specific context, they are still partly to blame for the change breakdowns that emanate in the lack of a shared understanding and legitimisation of change among employees. The explanation for this could be that the institutions assume leadership to affect followers in a one-directional way and thus not in a dynamic way. This applies to both institutions, as we see the translator metaphor in the police failing to comprehend the changes in the practical terms of their employees, as well as the practitioner metaphor in the hospital service failing to facilitate a translation of the changes to their employees. Thus, this suggests that middle managers of both institutions should seek to understand their followers' interpretations of leadership better in order to make the employees understand change from their point of view.

10.3.3 Followers perceiving their leaders as 'helpers' or 'opponents'

Alvesson & Spicer (2011c) asserts that "*for leadership to be carried out, there needs to be followers and a willingness to be led*" (2). This applies to the middle managers in the police and hospital service; if they do not have followers, they are not leaders, and they can consequently not implement the efficiency demands ordered by the institutional top since it is their subordinates who execute efficiency demands in their practical work.

However, our analysis shows how employees of both institutions consistently attribute a negative sense of meaning to changes that demand efficiency, as these demands become too detached from what makes sense in relation to the core service task. In the view of the employees, it makes much more sense to practise their work with the citizens, rather than to sit by a computer and register the seconds and minutes that they spend on a specific surgery, inquiry, or patrol. Thus, the context that shapes their attitude towards change is solely constituted by the core service task, which they practise in their direct contact with citizens. Consequently, in order for a change to be perceived as something positive for employees, it would have to make sense in relation to the core service task, which also explains the perceived illegitimacy of current changes, see section 9.2.1.

However, from the above subsection, we can infer that middle managers of the institutions either position themselves too far from the core service task, as a translator, or too close to the core service task, as a practitioner, when they communicate the changes to their subordinates. As a result, no positive meaning of changes is created despite the middle managers' attempt to communicate these.

Instead, the employees end up perceiving their managers as either opponents or helpers of the core service task on the basis of their change communication. This is evident from our analysis in section 9.1.2 that shows how middle managers in the police are perceived by their subordinates as people who bend their neck to the higher powers, rather than safeguarding the ideas and concerns of their employees. They are therefore perceived as opponents to the core service task and thus excluded from the collective identity of preserving the safety of citizens. On the contrary, the middle managers of the hospital service are perceived by their subordinates as individuals who share a common profession with them, and thus are able to relate to ideas and concerns in relation to the core service task. They are therefore included as helpers in the collective identity of preserving the health of patients.

Hereby, we see implications of how the middle managers who position themselves close to the core service task are perceived as helpers, whereas the middle managers who distance themselves from

the core service task are perceived as opponents. These perceptions emerge because the core service task constitutes the employees' specific context; they do not have further socialisation providing political insight, but they conversely have direct daily contact with the Danish citizens. This is exemplified in both institutions: "*Well, what is most important is the citizens of our population*" (PC3, 2019: 5), "*What gives me energy are the patients. Contact with patients keeps me going*" (D1, 2019: 16). Therefore, anything that does not make sense in relation to the core service task, does not make sense to the employees. Consequently, it seems that, in order to create a positive understanding of efficiency changes among employees, the middle managers would need to be perceived as helpers to the core service task by closely relating to it and pushing upwards when changes impair it.

Nevertheless, as efficiency demands originate from the overall societal context of politicians, wherein development plans and reforms determine the future state of the institutions, middle managers would still need to translate such visionary plans down to their subordinates in order for them to understand the relevance of changes in relation to future prospects of the core service task.

10.3.4 Combining political conditions, public middle managers, and employees

Considering section 10.3 thus far, it seems that adhering to Alvesson and Spicer's (2011b) perception of leadership and its three factors of ambiguity, carries great implications for understanding the change process and consequently for remedying the breakdowns in it.

Thus, we believe that we may be able to reconcile frustrations of institutional actors by, firstly, being attentive to the specific context of political conditions forming a cross-pressure for public middle managers in which changes are created and, secondly, uncovering all perceptions of, and demands to, the leadership of change in the institutions. In this, it is important that the institutional members actively negotiate the inherent uncertainties of leadership and change, as they greatly further the emergence of change negativity among employees. Hereby, the negativity and change legitimacy may be improved over time through continuous negotiation and articulation of what makes sense in the specific context.

When applying Alvesson and Spicer's (2011b) perception of leadership as ambiguous, we do not attempt to remedy changes based on what the middle managers currently do or do not do. Instead, the focus should be on the comprehension emerging in the acknowledgement that the leader is affected by his followers and that they are all affected by the context, in which they act collectively and individually. Thus, we argue for an explicit verbalisation and understanding of the subjectivity

constantly in play. The leader must, therefore, consider the reactions of his followers when acting, as well as what they might demand given their specific context; what will make him a "good" leader in their perspective? And what will conversely make him a "good" leader in the perspective of the politicians and top management?

Therefore, he must at all times be sensitive to the feedback he receives from the words and actions of his followers and must adapt his ways to this. Hereby, the middle manager legitimacy should improve over time, which may implicitly affect the negative change understanding and subsequently the current typifications.

Consequently, when we combine the three sources of context, leaders, and followers, it suggests that a productive approach to public leadership would be a combination of the translator, the practitioner, and the helper. An institution where leadership borrows from all three should potentially experience less negative understanding and subsequent negative typifications, as the middle manager explicitly articulate his own position in relation to his employees and open up for discussions. We believe this would also reflect positively on the legitimacy of the middle manager, as he remains continuously attentive to feedback on his leadership both from above and below levels.

However, such suggestions consequently seem to result in a lot of new communication only for the sake of communicating.

10.3.5 Never-ending ambiguity negotiations

When adhering to a combination of the three ingredients that seem to reflect every single ambiguous flavour of leadership, be it meanings, values, conflicts, norms, contradictions, cultures etc., it would potentially become a never-ending negotiation, as individuals try to rid themselves of every ambiguous aspect and establish common ground. Thus, we believe that jointly negotiating the ambiguities that exist between leaders, followers, and the context in the police and hospital service may not necessarily lead to improvement of change circumstances "just like that", but on the contrary give rise to an even bigger leadership task to be fulfilled. Herein, public middle managers would then have to accommodate every single ambiguous meaning or dilemma that might be reflected within the institution. Consequently, they would never really know when to lead a change or not, as the overarching context residing in NPM will continue to insist on efficiency that directly opposes the operational wishes of employees. Thus, the negotiation between context and followers would probably never come to terms with each other, and it would, therefore, be an impossible task for the

leader to accommodate since leaders, through the ambiguity-centred approach, allegedly also serve as a contributing problematic factor to change creation.

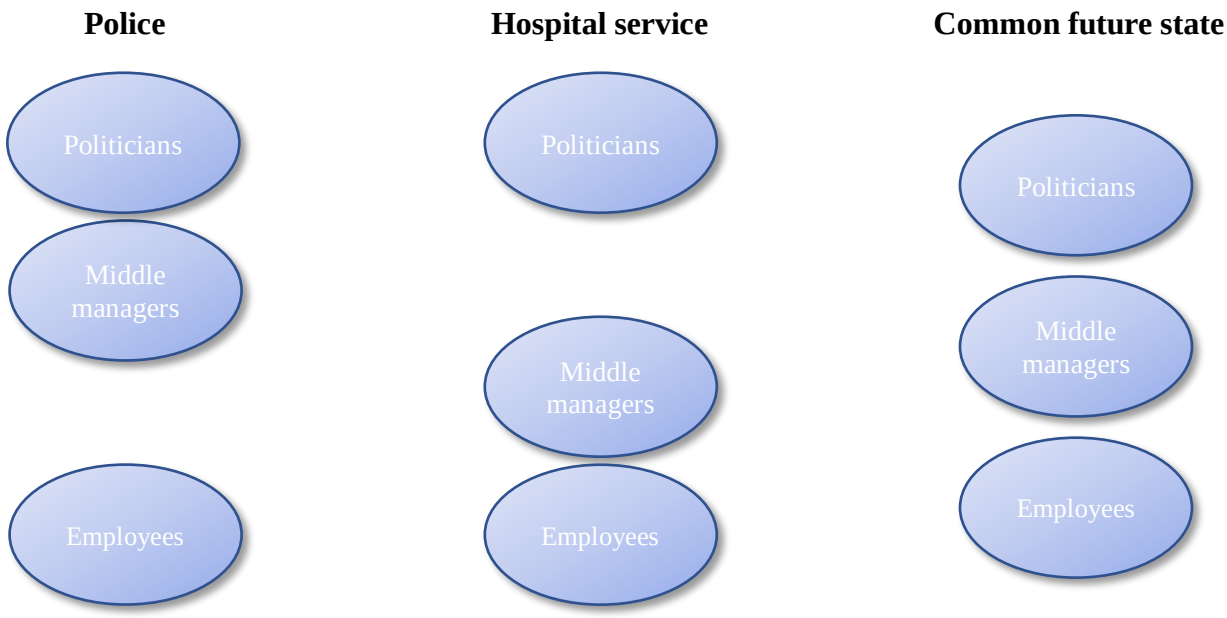
So, the question, which yet remains unanswered, is how to practically apply Alvesson and Spicer's (2011b) broad concept, without prompting counterproductive implications, as it does not provide a concrete framework for how to obtain direct improvements of the change process?

11 Strategic recommendations for future change communication and leadership

After comparatively analysing and discussing the change communication and leadership in the Danish police and hospital service in sections 8, and 9, 10, we now present our strategic recommendations for future change communication and leadership in the two institutions that might remedy the current breakdowns of inadequate change understanding, emergence of negative typifications, and lacking change legitimacy.

Before continuing, it should be noted that we do not perceive the following as universal, best-practice recommendations that are directly transferable to other institutions and contexts, but rather as theoretically and empirically founded strategic suggestions for more successful change creation. Hereby, we acknowledge that we suggest how to "fix", what we perceive as, breakdowns in an area so large that we cannot possibly improve everything merely on the basis of this paper. However, we argue that our extensive comparative study enables us to provide suggestions nonetheless.

Based on our findings in this paper, we believe that there is a great incentive for the two institutions to learn from each other's practices in relation to inter-institutional similarities and differences. In order to present our recommendations, we have drawn up a model in which we position the employee level, the middle manager level, and the top management/politician level in respect to each other. The model presents a vertical institutional hierarchy wherein the position of a specific bubble directly depicts the position of its institutional level with respect to the other levels.



As illustrated by our model, we present two overall suggestions for how to improve change creation and management: First, the top management/politicians and the employees should be brought closer together, and second, the middle managers should be positioned in the middle of the two other levels with no clear preference for one or the other.

While we acknowledge that there may be numerous theoretical suggestions for how to achieve these alterations and thereby reduce the cross-pressure in which the middle managers act, we also recognise that, given the current empirical boundary between strategy and operation, any solutions presented must also be pragmatically considered in relation to the conditions of the public sector.

11.1 Moving politicians and employees closer to each other

We argue that bringing the top and bottom level of the institutions closer together by improving mutual understanding has twofold positive implications. Firstly, it involves altering the context of the individual changes so that they may appear less unrealistic and out of scope with operational practices since politicians' understanding is moved closer to the operational level. Secondly, it implicitly addresses the employees as followers, as a subsequent effect should gradually appear in relation to positive improvement of their change understanding and typification, since they move closer to the politicians when the strategic demands take a point of departure in the local service context of employees.

We, therefore, provide this recommendation in recognition that the public context and its subsequent implications, e.g. cross-pressure leadership resulting in negativity among employees, are revealed as huge factors in both institutions during our comparative analysis. These implications constitute the biggest continuous similarity between them; albeit a similarity that negatively affects change creation. This speaks in favour of addressing and changing details of such everyday reality context similarly across both institutions as far as possible.

11.1.1 Anchoring efficiency changes in the local context

In practice, we suggest that for one institutional level to obtain a better understanding of the opposite level and its core practices, a "common goal"-approach should be initiated where the focus is on the final service task delivered to the citizens. This involves explicit agreement across all institutional levels on how to prioritise in everyday work; efficiency in preference to core service or vice versa? It would be obvious to suggest the initiation of recurring cross-level meetings with employees, middle managers, top management, and politicians in each institution to achieve this objective; however, we find such solution unrealistic due to the current lack of resources, especially at the lower level of the institutions. Additionally, a theoretically viable solution is to propose that change as efficiency demands will no longer be initiated at the top level and imposed on the institutions; yet, this suggestion disregards the fact that ongoing initiatives are needed to move institutions forward, and that it entails changing the overarching political conditions of public institutions.

Instead, we suggest a gradual transition into the common goal-approach that starts with a distinct first step: to, as far as possible, successively anchor efficiency demands in a more local context in form of the specific situations wherein welfare work is carried out. In this way, such demands are not only controlled by value-based politics but also operational needs and constraints through a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. In actual practice, we suggest that the more extensive efficiency demands should initially be communicated with some reservation, so that each department in an institution may engage in a middle manager/employee conversation regarding whether such demand makes sense in their specific context. During the morning briefings and conferences that already take place in the institutions, the middle manager may directly ask his employees: "I have received such demands; do they make sense to your operations?" and then challenge the employees' answers. When a conclusion has been reached, the middle manager is explicitly allowed and encouraged to communicate it upwards and potentially suggest alterations to the demand to make it feasible in the department.

As we have learned from the existence of the Leadership Pipeline, the above liberty of action for middle managers to move up and down in their institutional level should be communicated in texts, so it cannot be questioned.

In this way, politicians and top management receive a realistic and contemporary update on how operational practices are faring and which demands make sense, while the employee involvement drastically increases.

11.1.2 Creating a practical and professional understanding

To further the movement of institutional top and bottom into closer proximity through an understanding of a common goal, the political level must not deviate from this objective even when changes in government occur. This means that public efficiency and the demands for such should be less of a battlefield for political ideologies and more of a long-term commitment to operationally delivering the core services of each public institution.

While this is a very idealistic thought, we believe that a continued focus on operational feasibility may be achieved by bringing more practitioners into the political parties across the entire political continuum. A more equal distribution of practitioners and academics will naturally ensure a broader focus and more in-depth understanding of both operational and political outcomes. Although this may not be a change that we can actively dictate, it does, however, seem to be slowly happening by itself when politicians such as Mattias Tesfaye, who has craftsman training, loudly advocate for such societal change (Bjerring, 2015).

However, it is not adequate to focus solely on moving the political level ‘down’ towards the operational level by furthering understanding; the opposite should also be the case so that employees gain more acceptance of the political and societal conditions in which change demands are posed. This could be achieved by offering employees bi-yearly seminars focusing on actively explaining and involving employees in what it entails to work at the institutional top in order to further understanding but, equally important, also to increase interest. Ideally, political representatives should be present to engage in dialogues with the participants. Accommodating the scarcity of resources, such seminars should furthermore span no more than one-to-two days at a time.

11.2 Placing middle managers in the middle of the cross-pressure

While improving change context through increased understanding is important, we cannot neglect the role of police and hospital service middle managers in the change creation. Ensuring that the middle managers are placed directly between the levels above and below them in terms of understanding and allegiance will, in our point of view, potentially improve their legitimacy as leaders and thereby also the change legitimacy. In other words, the middle managers in both institutions must accommodate the strategic and operational level by pushing both upwards and downwards. In this position, they may furthermore exert influence on the employee metaconversations and typifications by actively being a part of them while attempting to create a better understanding of the political agenda.

This recommendation emanates from the most distinct difference identified between the two institutions, which appears to have a great influence on the creation of changes: the approach to leadership and to educating managers. In our opinion, it is in this aspect that the two institutions can truly benefit from exchanging practices, since our analysis reveals that none of the middle managers are currently very effective in their general change communication and leadership, despite the vastly different approaches to management in the institutions.

11.2.1 Training middle managers as practitioner translators

It is our claim that the root cause for the diverse approaches to management and leadership and the different positioning of the middle manager level in the two institutions is found in their education of middle managers. We argue that the middle managers should position themselves somewhere in-between the two current extremities, adopting the ways of 'practitioner translators' that are capable of performing translation both from strategy to operation and vice versa due to a thorough understanding of both levels.

We, therefore, suggest that the middle managers of the hospital service receive more formal education in the ways of management. However, as we believe it unrealistic to suggest a quick implementation of a long, mandatory education – and since such has not resulted in better change results in the police – we advocate for more focus on the management workshops currently offered. More seminars should be developed and with longer duration to enable a more in-depth understanding of management and the public conditions in which it is performed in the institution. Additionally, it should be strongly emphasised in the institution that such workshops are important to participate in. While the middle

managers of the hospital service should not discard their operational focus and understanding as a result of more formal education, they need a language to talk *about* leadership and management and *as* leaders and managers, which the middle managers in the police already have.

The police, on the other hand, should not let go of its formal and mandatory education that allows for strategic understanding, but rather continuously emphasise that the role as translator entails translating both downwards and upwards. Furthermore, the focus should shift to also include the operational level – from which the middle managers come – to ensure that the middle managers engage in some operational tasks on a recurrent basis. Thereby, we argue that they will retain a deeper understanding of, and identification with, the lower institutional level, as is currently the case in the hospital service, while simultaneously still receiving new knowledge and strategic understanding through their education.

11.2.2 Managing the cross-pressure through two-way conversations

As a result of our above suggestion, the middle managers of both institutions should develop an understanding for both the strategic and operational level, enabling them to actively engage in conversations that tie together the top and bottom level of the institutions. In other words, this dual focus on both strategy and operation should empower the middle managers to carry out the conversations suggested in section 11.1.1 that happens both top-down and bottom-up, thereby assisting in bringing the levels closer together through the strategic use of meaning management. Thus, we suggest that middle managers actively accommodate the cross-pressure by continuously moving back and forth within it when performing two-way translations.

In practice, the middle managers should directly focus on addressing issues that might impair the cooperation of top and bottom level. This could be done during current morning meetings where they – taking on the role of a helper with focus on the core service task – might ask the employees questions such as: "Where do you need resources currently? What do you need? Which of your wishes are most pressing or realistic?". They subsequently bring this information to management meetings either orally or in short, qualitative reports. At these meetings, they should be able to talk the case of the employees and try to match it with the long-term aspect behind the political demands trickling down through the institution to avoid drifting too much towards the employee level.

Finally, it should be noted that this alteration and development of the middle manager role is dependent on the top and bottom levels of the institutions expanding their mutual understanding of

each other, as the cross-pressure distance will otherwise surely prove too immense to overcome purely through communicative translation.

12 Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to answer how the Danish police and hospital service can learn from each other's approach to creating and managing efficiency changes through communication and leadership in the perceived cross-pressure of public middle managers. We have done so primarily on the basis of extensive, qualitative data collection. Furthermore, our research should be read in the light of the Danish public sector's NPM focus, which positions its middle managers in a cross-pressure between political demands for efficiency and employees' operational requests, when they create and manage change.

To answer our research question, we analyse how efficiency changes are currently communicated and managed in the two institutions, and here we firstly address the subjective premises for change in each institution by adhering to Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) construction process. Common for both institutions, the members appear to perceive their public work as more of an actual identity than a job, which may inherently hinder changes. However, there is a striking difference in institutional approach to management, as the police middle managers receive a mandatory education into the language and knowledge of management, which is far less pronounced in the hospital service. Finally, the employees and middle managers, respectively, in the institutions display varyingly negative understandings of change and its appertaining factors where only the middle managers of the police seem more reflected and neutral in relation to change.

As a result of the differing premises, we argue that changes are managed differently in the police and hospital service, additionally drawing on frameworks by Ford and Ford (1995) and Robichaud et al. (2004). The changes may be initiated by politicians, but the middle managers' ensuing approaches to creating understanding among employees differ strikingly as the police middle managers enjoy the greatest upwards influence. While the middle managers of the hospital service place themselves as helpers at eye-level with their employees by sharing their negative change perception, the involvement of the employees in the police appears to be just for show, which places the middle managers in a perceived opponent-group with the politicians. As a result, negative typifications appear by way of specific labels concerning change agents and actions in the institutions, particularly

among the employees; less so among the middle managers in the hospital service; and even less among police middle managers. Therefore, while the changes may generally become part of institutional structures, they do not become legitimate to the employees and even some middle managers, as changes are perceived as unrealistic and both middle manager groups are perceived as hypocritical despite their differences. Consequently, it becomes the norm in both institutions to question and even oppose changes.

All in all, our analysis reveals three breakdowns in the change communication and management: inadequate change understanding, negative typifications, and a lacking change legitimisation. Interestingly, these are prevalent in both the police and hospital service despite their differing premises for change and their middle managers communicating with an almost opposite focus in their change creation.

Consequently, the efforts of the middle managers appear almost counterproductive, prompting our discussion of how to improve the change process in the two institutions through a leadership lens, which is premised by our understanding of leadership as emerging in communication.

While it may not prove fruitful to focus directly on middle managers' leadership, nor to tell them not to engage in it, we believe that a focus on the interplay between the context, leader, and follower – as inspired by Alvesson and Spicer (2011b) – reveals the biggest learning point; the one prominent similarity and difference between the institutions. These entails, on the one hand, how the public sector context and its appertaining cross-pressure management emerge as an unquestionable condition in both institutions, but, on the other hand, how it can apparently be handled differently by middle managers when engaging in change creation. Thus, the police middle managers can be described as strategic and political translators and their counterparts in the hospital service as operational practitioners forced to be political. However, the employees appear to instead request a helper of their core service task.

In the end, our findings suggest that the police and hospital service may learn from how the other institution's members locally handle the overarching political change context and its appertaining cross-pressure through different approaches to management which forms the middle managers' leadership and communication. They may do so by changing practical ways. Therefore, we provide two tentative recommendations: firstly, to bring the political and operational level closer to each other by improving mutual understanding and anchoring the efficiency demands in the local context. Secondly, to ensure that the middle managers favour neither level in their act as translators

downwards and upwards with a practical focus on the core service tasks, enabled by planned management education and shared operational tasks.

13 Implications of the thesis

The governing body of NPM has with its restricted focus on efficiency forced the Danish public institutions to change operational routines and replace time spent on the core service task with processes that control the public services in favour of cost reduction, standardisation, and higher productivity. However, the implications of our thesis illustrate how such a product-oriented control of public services leaves predominantly negative conceptions of efficiency changes, as it appears highly illegitimate for institutional members of both the police and hospital service to favour the *inspection* rather than the *delivery* of services.

We, therefore, recommend that for efficiency demands to be perceived as positive and legitimate in the institutions, they should be anchored in the local context of the core service task, and furthermore be facilitated by middle managers acting as practitioner translators to accommodate both political and operational requests. These tentative recommendations carry the potential of having a great impact on other Danish public institutions, as they are derived from extensive qualitative data research that demonstrates common similarities and differences in change communication and leadership within and across two crucial public institutions. However, recognising that these qualitatively based recommendations are not directly applicable in other specific contexts, we suggest that they may form the basis for further research with a broader, deductive public sector scope. Furthermore, for these recommendations to be viable in a public sector where complexities and regulations build on each other year after year, it would require courage and a shift in the mindset of current public middle managers, who are placed at the very centre of leading the institutional change forward. Instead of politicians forcing the Danish public services through processes of documentation and control, society must place its trust in the public middle managers and let them decide, through their confidential knowledge of political and operational agendas, what is most valuable for the core service task in its specific local context.

By devoting further research and attention into these particular recommendations for future change communication and leadership in the Danish public institutions, we believe there can be found a locally more efficient way of leading changes in public institutions, if we re-establish focus on

society's core public services through the local context in which they reside, and if we believe in our public managers' competence to establish a common ground between political and operational desires. Finally, we argue that the call for more focus on the core service task and the public middle managers' responsibility in relation hereto is both necessary and highly relevant to strengthen the cohesion of society's politically run institutions and to regain the motivation of hard-working professionals in their everyday work of preserving the safety and well-being of Danish citizens.

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