Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #1 (Industry: Finance)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 42 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

organization, biggest, bank, colleagues, organizational change, market, company, change, team, expectations, conflicts, project, painting, owners, business, decision, story, option, protagonist, implementation

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

Before we move to anecdotes, let's talk more about some general information. For example, the industry part, which was obviously finance, right? (Yeah) The type of project was the merger and acquisition, right? (Correct.). A previous change leadership experience on your side, in years.

Interviewee A:

So I would say… since 2015, then when I had my first, let's say, leadership role in (the company), as head of risk management,

Interviewer:
okay, I'm guessing this will be the tenure within the organization as well. So we can count it from 2015. Right?

Interviewee A:
Yes. Yes. At the Company, I was since 2014. But since 2015, then or actually (paused for recollection) it was 2016. May 2016. Yeah, May 2016. Yep.

Interviewer:
Yep. We'll adjust that. It's no problem. Team members that were included in the quantitative study was 6, if I remember correctly, correct. Yeah. And what would you say was the biggest challenge during implementation?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, it was definitely keeping the colleagues motivated, keeping them going. So to say, after we announced that this change is coming, that they would not drop either drop there, you know, things and not show any dedication to work anymore, or leave the organization completely. So this was something that was a big worry for the Company, but also for me personally. And then on the other side. It was also, you know, how you (uhmm) how this project (of change) will impact them personally. So how can we ensure that they will not (uhm...) That the we will have the outcome that will, to the least extent affect them negatively, personally. So that was, at least from my perspective, the biggest challenge.

Interviewer:
that's great. Then, if we could kind of observe your organizational change project as a story. What would you say were the key elements and I'm gonna do a quick round of question, you just do a quick answer. So it's like, who was the protagonist

Interviewee A:
so in this case, does it need to be a person?

Interviewer:
It doesn't have to, it's up to you, you know, maybe your protagonist was a team, maybe it was the organization, maybe it was some individual.

Interviewee A:
Yeah, the protagonist that I would see here was the Company, (or more precisely) private, individual business in Country. And because this is the organization that was going through this major change, and I was, as a general manager responsible are at least held responsible, definitely for the whole organization. So that's, that's (uhhm) why I would say that the protagonist here was the whole organization, not only this core team.

Interviewer:
who would you say, was the antagonist? So like, the bad guy of the story?

Interviewee A:
The bad guy of the story, would then be (uhm…) you know, the pressure from the owners of the Company and automate this change, we would need to sell the business or run the business off. Because we were not significant enough on a global level, and the Company decided to focus only on the core markets. So the antagonist in this sense, would be the expected... (uhm…) expectation or the owners and their expectations. I found it in this story, that that was the antagonist, they were trying to impose this change on their organization that nobody wanted to see. But it was coming from… from the owners. It was not the management itself. So nothing, not only the Organization's management in the head office, because they were also only doing what the owners, more specifically the shareholders wanted to see.

Interviewer:
And what would you say was the inciting moment that triggered this change?

Interviewee A:
It's a combination of both (internal and external). But in the end, I would say it was the decision of the owners, because the markets in the market developments, I would say... We could still adjust our business to, you know, so, and in the end of the day, I'm still convinced that if somebody would look back into the decision, that this was not the best option for the organization that, in my view, they could have been done differently.

Interviewer:
What would you say was the biggest conflict? Do you think it's something that you were mentioning earlier with, with these expectations? Or would you say one of the biggest conflicts were within the team, maybe you when the team maybe some members of the team may be someone outside of team?

Interviewee A:
No, it was the conflicts that we saw. So the view from (Country), the possible changes that we saw, you know, to meet the expectations of the owners, options on how to adjust to the market developments, you know, low interest rate environment, etc. And then the decision, you know, to exit the market in the country, I mean, this was instilled is like, you cannot understand... Why would, why is this the option, why was not this consulted are other options evaluated, etc. But it was more like, you know, the Company and the new management wanted to show, you know, their strength, what they can do, what they can impose changes that they can make in their organization, and to meet the shareholders expectations (uhh...) and this is how it was done, if it was done right or wrong in at the end of the day. From the Company group perspective... You know, it's not going to be a big impact. Anyways, it's a small (business) unit, you know, we had the balance sheet of 7 billion euro, whereas the whole Company has a balance sheet of 900 billion or a trillion almost, you know, So it's like 0.7 percent.. If you if you save it, or you lose it, I mean,

it's 0.7%, let's start to lose time on this. And let's just get it done. You know, if you look at it from the very top by just the message that you portray and showing, say, today, investors: "look smaller units, we're carrying them down, where, you know, streamlining the pool organization, focusing on the bigger markets, saving the resources, focusing, refocusing the resources to the to the areas and the markets where we see we need to focus on..." and that's a good message to make, but still...

Interviewer:
What would you say was like the biggest revelation? From your side from this whole experience?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, it was also something that was... (uhh...) with us throughout this change process, you know, and it was also something where I, as general manager had to convey this message to other colleagues, you know, in find the right balance, let's say... Not to be fully on the (other) side, saying: "Oh, this is makes no sense". This is something I'm still, you know, responsible for this realization you need to do and execute what was asked of me, but still to find the right balance and how you communicate it in a sense that you don't say: "Yeah, this needs to be done, because then that's only these points..", but also, not only on the other side, saying :"Yeah, this makes no sense. Let's not do it"... because it needed to be executed, you know, so you needed to keep the colleagues motivated, you need to do just accept the decision, because it cannot be reverted. And then make the best out of this decision that what you can make and keep the team as stable as possible. So that was the goal. Actually, that at least in my head was set the minute I found out about what's coming.

Interviewer:
Let's just do the quick round of these short, you know, kind of quick draw questions. What would you say is the general of this change story?

Interviewee A:
Thriller... Maybe Drama Thriller.

Interviewer:
Yeah, that's great. And what would you say was the main moral of the story?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, with the right team you can move mountains, nothing is impossible.

Interviewer:
What would you say was the most frequently used metaphor, during your interactions with the team on this change project?

Interviewee A:
That, that... that... that... that.. (seeking words) I meant with, you know, nothing being impossible, you know, and they can achieve anything, and we can achieve anything. Together, we will be moving, and making sure that we get the best out of this situation, do what we can. So still focusing, not on the problem, not on this, you know, dark side of what might be coming, but rather on what positive outcomes we can get out of this, that we have a great team as not only in the risk domain, but as a Company, we have a lot of talent here. We have a great products, a great core banking system, you know, many assets that will be extremely valuable to another organization. And let's try to make this success story at the end of the day.

Interviewer:
Could you talk me through an anecdote which will demonstrate how to how did these change recipients behave before you started to change? You know, when they had no previous knowledge of upcoming organizational change?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, so I would say we were, well you know, lubricated machine like me here locomotive, you know, running smoothly, whenever there's a obstacle, you know, the tracks... (uhh..) It, it's removed without any significant issues, if there's turns to take, the turns are made with whatever direction the train needs to move, it became extremely strong, heavy, we could move with the ever increasing speeds carry more burden with us so to say. And it was just a pleasure working this piece of machinery, you know, moving and running so smoothly. So that was how the situation was before announcement,

Interviewer:
W already touched a little bit upon the, the inciting moment and how these things started moving around. What I would ask you to kind of recollect for the purpose of this research, is how did you articulate this awakening moment where the organizational change was formally initiated? What would you say were the key elements of your speech?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, so that was the 13th of March at eight in the morning.... Yes, no, it's a, I remember that day, because they didn't sleep the whole night... Because I, you know, I knew about the fact that we are moving out of the Country market, since months before... We were already deeply involved in the due diligence processes, certainly individuals in the teams were already on boarded to the project, at the full team, get to know, you know? It was only in the out of 23 colleagues in the CRO domain, it was four of us that were already involved. And the rest (of the Company) didn't know, what's, what's coming. And I remember this night, you know, it was midnight, and then 1 AM and 2 AM in the morning, which is still fine... You know, I often go to bed at 2 AM, and then you see 3 AM. And, you know, I still couldn't sleep I said, you know, how can I communicate this, we're potentially closing down the bank, potentially, these colleagues are losing their jobs, you know, I mean, come on, this cannot be the reality... you know, how do you

portray these messages, you know, it can be horrible that it can impact individuals, more than they've ever been impacted?

Interviewee A:
And I mean, I'm in the driving seat here. I mean, come on, this cannot be. I remember that. Then at 3:30 AM I was thinking I need to... And I don't know why this is (the case), I was looking for something to symbolize this change, you know, and to symbolize it in a positive way, you know, that it's a new awakening, so to say. And I said: "Okay, maybe what would be good is to, to buy a painting. Yeah, let's buy a painting." This was a moment at 3:30 In the morning, you know... And portraying the message or dates in the morning, okay... "3:30 AM, let's buy a painting, what should it be?" and then I was looking for I might be something, you know, growing trees or, you know, something new. And there is in Japan, they have the blooming of the blossom, cherry blossom, but there's also the plum blossom, you know, that it's also a symbol of awakening new life, new direction, new opportunities, new chances, it's starting something new, something better, something, something that's going to be positive. And I guess I needed that for myself, psychologically, you know, to go in this direction, so I found an artist in, in Germany. And if you recall, behind me, there's a big painting. It's a golden painting with the painting that I bought three hours before the call on March 21. So more than a year ago now. And actually, it was an online store that she had, and apparently I was the first customer in that store. It was just opened the day before, and I ordered (from them) this painting and some others for my apartment and then she gifted me two more (paintings) and wrote a nice letter. Thanking me and so... (Uhh..) Yeah, anyways, because I was the first customer and so on. But then I didn't go to bed at all this because, you know, it was like 5 o'clock in the morning, right? And I said: "Okay, I'm going to go to bed for three more hours. This makes no sense." So yeah, I started the call. And I said: "Thanks for joining the call as they can imagine starting at eight in the morning getting an invitation a day before today's before saying that it's an urgent meeting or an urgent call the day should be joining." It's, it was something that and that also, yeah, it was the 12th of March sorry, not the 13th of March. So, anyways, that way it was, something like: "You might have noticed already in the past months, you know, that we were coming up with some requests, that might have sound a bit off, but were a bit unusual, you know, getting some documentation, maybe some data itself, and so on. And some of the colleagues were already involved more than the others, but the Company decided, as it was decided also in other countries, our Country is now the one that will be reducing the business or exiting the market. But that we are in discussions with many organizations trying to get the buyer for the full organization, and this is our aim." So it was maybe a half an hour call with q&a session, in the end, and

Interviewer:
During this q&a were there any strong reactions, or was there any direct demonstration of resistance or some negative emotions?

Interviewee A:
I mean, first we had a call with the full bank staff, and then right after it was a call with only CRO domain. So it was very pragmatic questions, actually how, what, with my job security, you know, what does this mean? You know, and then at least we could say, what the intentions are, how this will progress going forward? And what are the next steps? And who will be now involved? What are we working on? Who are the (potential buyers) banks that we are talking to obviously, could we disclose this etc. But at least in this round with the CRO domain colleagues, it was a very open friendly discussion, you know, like you would have, I don't know, you have an accident with a car, and then you just are there to help, you know, so I was there to help to tell them anything that I have, I can tell them if. And I couldn't tell them, I said, like "With what banks, are we in discussions?" I said: "Yeah, this is something I unfortunately cannot disclose at this moment. But I can say that these are both local and international banks. And again, both smaller and larger organizations, and that it's at least half a dozen banks that we are in discussions with and this is not the full list. So we're still contacting other banks, the interested banks are contacting us. So this will still continue in going forward and also expectations going forward". Another set of questions included things like: "what business as usual processes need to continue and where do we need support within the due diligence process".

Interviewer:
And then as this process kind of was moving forwards, what were some signs of growing reluctance with change recipients? Was there any demonstration of strong resistance, a big hurdle or challenging milestone during this project?

Interviewee A:
Now, so for me, it was extremely important that the colleagues can always contact me, you know, right after this call. I said: "Please, everybody that wants to discuss anything at anytime, 24/7 Reach out to me anytime I'm here". And some colleagues did right after the call. And I also said: "If I'm in another call, I'm going to give you a call back the minute I'm there, and we will have this sessions that we had today, every day, for the time being, until we consider it is not necessary". So we had this announcement, individual called afterwards. And then every day, a session, you know, for half an hour, you know, just if somebody, if we have new information to share, if they want to talk, ask questions, in a bigger round, if they want it in the smaller round, whatever is necessary, it will be shared and provided. And support will be given whenever it's needed. And my focus was, you know, to convey the message, which will, which was clear, we are exiting the retail market, but also directing the energy, not into the abyss, you know, but directing it into something that we see as a goal, this is what we want to reach, you know, we want to go and find a buyer that will take on the full organization, with all the employees, with the product with the systems. And that's our core goal. And let's make this happen, you know, and we can make it to happen together, you know, just, if we put our energy together, like we did in the past years, when so many projects that we did, you know, implementation of current accounts, the record speeds of mortgages and the record speed in everything that we've done so far, successfully, we will achieve this as well. So obviously, you know, it was not a big applause. And yes, we will do it. Yeah. Who? Yeah, you know,

everybody was scared, you know, why will? How is this going to impact me? Personally, you know, everybody had these thoughts. And I understood this, you know, and I also said, we are, as we've always been in the same boat, you know, so let's try to take this boat to nice place together.

Interviewer:
Reverting to the metaphor that I've used previously, and the challenges that are kind of unfolding and, you know, unavailable, or maybe unforeseen threats, putting people at risk or at a disposition. What would you say, were the biggest conflicts within the team, or maybe your personal biggest conflicts during this whole year of the change implementation?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, it was actually interesting that within the team, and within the organization, so zero domain, and the organization is the whole, there were not that many conflicts, it's really interesting that we were, in fact, then acting as a team, we knew what we need to do, you know, we had standard 7 billion euro balance sheet. And we knew if we want to have, you know, if you want to make this bank pretty to be sold, to make the bright, pretty, so to say that we need to balance our balance sheet, you know, and the only option was to get rid of 400,000 clients, you know, that was the environment and we knew that this is the expectation. And the question was, how can we do this?

Interviewee A:
But the conflict that I saw was within the Company group, you know, because we in the Country, you know, were pushing to get the buyer find the successor. You know, they take the full organization secure the positions of all the employees, you know, make this success story continuing under a new umbrella brand, it's fine, you know, it's still there, but it is going to be another name on top of the galaxy tower, you know, where I'm currently sitting. And there is another name on the Galaxy tower, but that was the thing, you know, it is the same table, you know, this is the same thing, everything's the same, the fluid, the plants are the same as they were nothing changed it just a new plant up there, you know, but this was the vision, you know, this is where we want to go. But like I said, before, we are presenting 0.7% of the balance sheet, the assets of the Company, you know, there was not this interest, you know, to fight it through, you know, to make it successful to continue the success story. I mean, come on, just run it down, you know, and just, it's fine. Why would you bother? I mean, it was not said like this directly, but the energy was not there. You know, it was not like, the willingness to push this through as much as it was internally. And so that was the biggest conflict that I've actually seen. And then convincing the stakeholders outside of Country was more challenging than convincing those internally to make this successful story.

Interviewer:
Okay, since this interview is kind of nearing to an end, my concluding thoughts: 1) What would you say were kind of the first signs of successful transformation with the team? 2) What would you say was the biggest revelation from this process?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, that was then the 12th of July, when we announced to the organization that we have a buyer and the buyer will be taking over the whole organization. And that mission accomplished. So to say, that's what we strive toward, that's what we achieved, and everybody in this organization will keep their jobs. And the jobs that they will keep will be the same as they have in terms of job title, salary, you know, everything will remain the same, whatever position they have, they will keep it or it will improve, in a sense, but it will not be any degradation or anything of that sort. So clearly, this was the best outcome we could wish for. And then that's looking back, I would even say, we might have needed to take more time, you know, to celebrate this, as a team... You know, we did so but it was like, we were already in a project of legal merge with the purchasing Bank (new owner). So this was then announced, mission accomplished, but now we have a tight deadline, September, we need a legal merge, let's push it through, you know, and we didn't take time to stay and take a step back to say, Now we take a day off, you know, just relax. Now, one day will not do any harm. You know, we're not jeopardize any. I mean, now, looking back, I really I really think that we should have done this, you know, as a executive committee, say, look, organization achieved that. Let's give the full organization a day off, let's do something, if possible outside, you know, it was summer, it was not a Corona was not a big issue. You know, we could have, we could have done more, but it was like, mission accomplished. This is what we need to do we have tight deadlines, put, let's push it, and we were pushing them until the legal merge. And now the colleagues are pushing with the same pace for the technical merge within the new bank. And this is something that in the reflecting now back, I would say is, you know... Not really giving enough opportunity to pay tribute to say, thank you, you know, to show that you cared that the gratitude, you know, what was the what was, what levels of energy were given to the organization to make this happen. But it was just the expectation done, (off to the) next, you know, let's continue, continue with the same pace. So this is something that I would say, looking back, I would do differently.

Interviewer:
Thank you very much for sharing your experience, I think we covered the whole story,

Interviewee A:
Just this one more point to consider... From my narrative, and the messages that I was conveying, it has always been hope and positive direction, you know, this options were not really considered, it was like the, no, we're going to make this happen. This is too good of a bank too good of an organization with so much top talent, and great processes, then systems in place to be ran over... Not even an option.

Interviewer:
Yeah, I think really was kind of the main message that you were kind of projecting, and people were able to pick up.

Interviewee A:

Yeah, it also depends on what kind of a change it is, you know, do as a matter of life and death situation. You know, if you have a system implementation, like you said yesterday, it's... it's a different ballgame, you know, if you don't make the right decision...

Interviewer:
Sure, although there is a lot more resistance in those types of stories, because they "DO" have a choice. And when your job is kind of hanging on the line, you're not so eager to choose, and you're more eager to be a team player to play along to try to contribute it, it gives you a little bit of extra motivation, not necessarily the positive motivation, but it definitely motivates.

Interviewee A:
No, but I that's what I meant, in a sense that perhaps these other change leaders in the sample that you already spoke to, had it tougher than me because I was in a life and death situation in terms of business. So for me, it was easier to lead this change, then if you have to lead the change, if it's, let's say in quotation marks "only" a technical system, you know, that you motivate the colleagues, even though they have less to gain and less to lose... You know, why would we do this, but here we have everything to lose and a lot to gain. So that's what I meant. They had it tougher than I.

Interviewer:
Yeah, I mean, we do our best to try and compare these specific contexts. But obviously, every change is a little bit different. Every human being is a little bit different. That's why we try to kind of move away from, you know, a specific context and try to understand the narrative behind it. And I think we've we've been fairly successful in painting this, this picture of how this change was unfolding. What was the main idea and the overall results that were manifested in the end?

Interviewee A:
Yeah, it was quite a journey.

Interviewer:
Yeah, for sure. I mean, you know, as far as the formal part of the interview, we can definitely consider it finished. I know you have a busy schedule and have to, move on to the to the next call that you have... I think in these anecdotes will be sufficient enough for our analysis and I'm looking forward to going through them once again in more detail.

Interviewee A:
Yeah. Yeah. No, it's all fine, feel free to reach out in case you have any additional questions and thanks a lot. It was a pleasure as always, and talk to you soon. All the best!

Interviewer:
Thank you very much. Have a nice day.

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #2 (Industry: Manufacturing)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 38 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, business, r&d, startup, components, company, story, metaphor, perceived, multifamily, year, software, sales, system, renegades, team, model, personality, distinct, question

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

Interviewee B:

Okay, great. So, basically, how it started, okay. It actually was for me quite personal, I must say, because back in 2015, yes, back in 2015. The two to Company segments merged into one. And then in 2016, the decision was that r&d would be actually slashed to small units. At that point of time, I was heading one half of the r&d in, in... in this segment, and then my, my role would really, really shrink. This was one part. The second part was that I always had the desire to go more into the business development because and then there was opportunity, after the Company actually formed (new) heating segment at that point of time, for something which was called verticals. And there were, there were actually four verticals

identified. One was single family houses, multifamily houses, commercial buildings and distinct energy. Single multifamily houses were much into one after one month, so that three remained, Yeah? And then, multifamily and buildings actually got some help from McKinsey, respectively (uhh) BCG, while for distinct energy, the money bag was empty.

Interviewer:
Ohhh... So I see where this is heading (laughs)

Interviewee B:
Yeah, so then I said: "Okay, I would like to do something else", and I applied for a new position. And, and... actually, miraculously, I was selected. okay. Because my competition where all guys who were leading business for a very long time, and that I was kind of the guy from r&d. So, then then more or less, I made the strategy over the Christmas 2016. And when I was doing analysis, what I saw is first of all, the business was actually losing the turnover the year over year, it went a little bit down through also 2014, when there was a Crimea issue and there were sanctions for Russia, it was also part of the reasons but also in other markets. Like in Germany, we were losing 1 million euro per year...

Interviewer:
Welll that sounds like a significant loss when you put it into perspective...

Interviewee B:
other more worrying thing was that the contribution, or, or... gross gross profit was actually dropping and it went from like 60 to 54... Really significant I would say. So, then, then, I actually actually thinking how the hell... Well what could have, what went wrong? And I figured out that, what was our position, we actually at that point of time had components for for distinct heating and we had substations but in both first of all these worlds were not connected, these were like two different units that never talk to each other. This was one part, and the second part, which was more worrying everything was really rapidly going into Commoditization. Then... Then I opened all of my old business school books, and read them a little bit, and I found very interesting theory, who basically says: "every industry has its own component providers and system providers. The power of the value proposition can be only on components or only on system it cannot be both". And for instance, when you buy a computer now, you buy it because the size, how sleek it, and so on, right? So is the system 10 years ago, you bought a computer based on components, you went through the bill of material to the shop and said yeah, I would like that - but the components actually had a valuable position. So then, then I asked myself how it is now business and said: "Okay, we still kind of have components focus, they still having a valuable position." But that was rapidly diminishing, and the systems were actually coming more to the play. So I said okay, now, we need to go from the components supplier into the world of system, and that means new business model, NEW, NEW competences in sales in r&d and production everywhere. More or less completely novel, new product portfolio. And "system" in this, in this industry was more or less optimization software. So, so when when back in 2017, I actually said: "I would like to make a business in software", people were laughing at me.

People were laughing at me and I got a lot of good advices from management, you know, don't go that way, you will just fail. Yeah. So… So then I said:" Okay, I'll get also a team of people." And when I choose a team, I deliberately choose a team of renegades. All of these guys, which you talked to, these people, if I didn't take them, they would be fired...

Interviewee B:
So I got a team of renegades because I wanted to make a startup within the corporation. So and we really started as a startup is basically several people starting to, to turn the Titanic. And then then we, then we made, we made (uhh...) acquisitions of tech companies, we stole people from our competition and made our own development, something we built ourselves from scratch. And basically, in two years' time, where we had zero lines of code, we came to the product portfolio, which, which was viable. And then the next step was how to transform the sense companies. And we actually is… within the sales companies, we established at the beginning (of our development), kind of angels who are actually pushing the software, now we have buyin, I wouldn't say with the majority of the sales guys, because they simply don't have capability and competence... But a lot of sales guys, more than half, are able to sell software as well. And that also means that a company which was traditionally part of the company, who was manufacturing, SK use, whose NPD process was how to make a final Q release of one SKU, came to a continuous development, from from wholesaler business to a project business. From the "I give you physical assets, you'll give me money" to Software as a Service license maintenance model. We even sell today hardware as a service. Because sometimes we need, we need to upgrade the hardware, which is still good for the customer. So we sell it as a service, just to sell software. And now, what was the outcome? Is we went from 225 million euro to 350 Last year. And in, this is why I think... And then if I look at the Company, none of their business units has a business like that. They're still all on hardware stuff. Anyway, and then there was one more thing, which… which I actually told them in the beginning, but nobody believed me... I said: "Now we are seven, we act as a startup, and it will be fun. But sooner or later and actually, in two years, we became 75 people, sooner or later, we will be so, so big that we will need to put structure and we will need to integrate into the mother company. But if we don't do that, we will be perceived as a kind of outlaws. And sooner or later, somebody will, will crash us like a bug". When I started to do this, many of these people didn't like it. Because we, went back to the product lines and so on. But actually, that gave us an additional boost. Because before we were seven, then suddenly we were actually utilizing 2000 people.

Interviewer:
Okay, so you would say in a way, this was the biggest challenge, the way the team kind of adapted towards returning to the more structured approach the more corporate approach from the startup culture?

Interviewee B:
Well, it's an element from the star model. It actually says the company can be in five stages, it can be sustaining success. It can be in realignment, it can be in a turnaround mode, or it can die. Or it can be also in the startup mode. And you always want to go to sustain success, right? From turnaround and from, from

realignment. But the only way how you can actually make growth is that you push yourself to the startup mode and come back. This is the only way. All the other ways it's incremental stuff, 5-10%, year over year depends on the market growth. And that, that we actually did at that point of time, and then when in this is why I said we will need to come back. No, you cannot, because you cannot... actually, if you are too long in the startup mode, in the intrapreneur environment, you die.

Interviewer:
Yeah, because of the thing that you've mentioned, the assimilation to the mother company, and the way that you are perceived in terms of the attention that you're getting the business result that you're delivering, it makes perfect sense for me...

Interviewee B:
Actually, we have internal example... There was one startup, a Finnish startup, which, which was both kind of a parallel to our activities. And it was never integrated... practically all relevant people left. It's a shell of what it was before. And money losing operation more or less...

Interviewer:
And obviously, you know what you're doing and know the industry well, and, I think it's impressive to have the ambition and courage to be the r&d guy in a world of the sales, business devs community that you've participated in, which would be a change process for you personally as well

Interviewee B:
Actually, to be honest, I was always very much interested in the business but also in the R&D. I really, really hated to, to just count the projects and run the KPIs and so on, and I'm really not the KPI guy. Even when I was in r&d, when people asked me, What's your role in the company? I said: "to make money".

Interviewer:
What did you perceive was the biggest revelation from this change? Because obviously, you've made the results. On the other hand, you mentioned that there's been some turbulence in the team. Was this turbulence a natural thing? You know, people got bored with the project and started something else?

Interviewee B:
No, I think it was, it was, I was expecting this to happen when we went back (to the Mother company). Because some people couldn't really see themselves especially in the pair, okay, in the regular environment. (one of the team members) perceived herself as super, super innovative and so on. Though, in reality, when she was in the role with us... her, her contribution was not really in innovation. Her contribution was only in the diversity. So now many people talk about diversity and inclusion. I mean, she was deliberately put into the team, to break this mindset which because all the rest were engineers, and she is anthropologist.

Interviewer:
Do you think she was kind of the driver of resistance or kind of, you know, questioning too much? Questioning the status quo, disrupting things where they shouldn't have been disrupted?

Interviewee B:
She always questioned herself... If she was good enough for the team.

Interviewer:
What would you like to emphasize as a key learning of the whole process and you know, the way that people have adapted to that, because you've mentioned you have to influence like 2000 people a day, if I remember correctly, was a large scale.

Interviewee B:
Surely, it's, I would say a very old wisdom, you cannot do anything by force.

Interviewer:
Did you use any specific metaphors, which kind of occurred over and over and over during the years? Is there a metaphor that you could use for this story?

Interviewee B:
Sure, I used the story of several companies who didn't do it right? Especially in this model, IBM was a wonderful example or Michelin or similar. Because if you... if you really use this model, you can see how great ideas fell, fell to the floor, because they were not properly nested in the Company. This was one thing, the other thing we actually came to, to a very strong ecosystem understanding So now, now, we are doing partnerships, coopetition agreement, stuff like this... So like, okay, one story, for instance, when… when Apple came with the first phone, they went to Verizon, and said, you will sell this phone? I think it was 399. I said no way, we will not. Go away. We are selling Nokia's for 5099. So so they went to AT and T 18. T said what the heck we heard, I think it was right. So so at&t took took Apple phone into their subscription model. In in six months, 30% of the Verizon subscription went to at&t.

Interviewer:
What's the moral of the story?

Interviewee B:
Who had bigger a bigger value proposition? A component Or? Or? system? Obviously, component? I like the Aspirin metaphor, you know, take one thing goes away three hours later pains back. Yeah, that's a simple metaphor. You don't, you don't heal the root cause. Reduce the pain? Yeah, yeah. And root cause was, in these cases, I think it was more in the personality part. But the hit actually, the backtrack from the goal...

Interviewer:
Okay, that makes perfect sense for me. And to kind of wrap this up this part where we do the storytelling element. A quick, quick question for you. If you had to, you know, on the spot, decide who was the protagonist of the story? And who was the bad guy of the story?

Interviewee B:
Actually protagonist was my team. These people really, really fought for this, what was really breaking the thing was old product management, or product management structure, partly because they were, they were feeling competition. It was partly but more of us because of the personality of certain people, each of them.

Interviewer:
Would you say the personality of these people within the company, which were kind of more alike, or the personality of your team, which was a little bit different?

Interviewee B:
No, it's personality of these people who… who were incapable of thinking big, but only incremental. You can call them the corporate guys (laughs). I would say it's more or less with almost always Lower Mid mid management. So just the ones who are, like, above individual contributors.

Interviewer:
Yeah, makes sense. Makes sense. Being mindful of your time, I'd like to thank you once again, for taking the time to talk through these details. I'm going to do the narrative analysis, all of these elements, do the follow up report with you to kind of take a look at the grander like, meta narrative of these individual change stories, if that's something that's

Interviewee B:
Yeah, that will be very interesting... Because obviously, I will need to repeat this with another business. Similar symptoms as the one before...

Interviewer:
Another intrapreneurial story. Cool. Like I said, I'm gonna prepare to you a more detailed in depth report. Maybe that will be helpful to you. Thanks again and wish you a safe trip.

Interviewee B:
Yeah. Thanks. Bye bye. Cheers

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #3 (Industry: Publishing)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 42 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, laughs, big, company, person, change, managers, introduce, refocus, antagonist, business, organizational change, story, anecdote, Partner, satisfied, lead, build, loud, perceive

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

So, who was what was the biggest challenge during your implementation of this change?

Interviewee C:

Right. So first was this introduction of the management board. Second was, let's say, a year ago that we, for the first time had to fire we had we call that "refocus", but in essence, is this lowering the overhead costs. So people, so it was around 17 people. So these are maybe, maybe the latter, you know, this refocus was a bigger challenge. I think it's two different issues. Introducing, introducing, but look I'm not sure what you're after. So we can we can talk about both, if you need something like that. Basically, what we

tried to see is, you know, how does the organizational change unfold through the eyes of the change leader... So we kind of force you to recollect incidents for certain elements of the organizational change? Yeah, sure. What was the question again? (laughs)

Interviewer:
The question was, what was the biggest challenge during implementation of this change?

Interviewee C:
The biggest challenge, not just during implementation, but also later on... Was, was (uhmm..) that (partner) and me were perceived as that we are moving away from the business that we are not one with the people anymore.

Interviewer:
okay. And if we observed this organizational change project as a story, who would be the protagonist?

Interviewee C:
The protagonist would be just the company, I would say.

Interviewer:
who would be the antagonists then?

Interviewee C:
That's the hard one (both laugh). So the change on its own would be the antagonist.

Interviewer:
Okay. And what inciting moment motivated the protagonist to start the journey?

Interviewee C:
So the company or us what, what... (uhmm) what was the point of the change, was that because of the growth, because of the rapid growth, it was not possible to properly communicate with the entire company anymore, so we didn't have stamina or time or knowledge. For that matter, this is why we then decided that you know, we are going to bring in people or upgrade the people who are in the company, so we can (uhmm) delegate the responsibilities.

Interviewer:
and what would you say was the biggest conflict during this change?

Interviewee C:
The biggest conflict was when we brought the most senior person into the company. So the new guy, because everybody, were afraid of him, because he's quite an alpha male, which means very loud and very

believes in, in his views. People were scared that the culture of the company would change. But we, on the other hand, we're hoping that the culture will change. Right? So it was the purpose. But yeah, this was the issue.

Interviewer:
And what would you say was the genre of this story? If you can, you know, if you could just frame it, this is a certain genre, which one would it be?

Interviewee C:
Um, I don't know... I mean, business in general, it's a drama, but not in a bad sense.

Interviewer:
One of the change leaders actually mentioned, it's like a dark comedy. So anything goes (both laugh)

Interviewee C:
yeah, yeahy, yeah. It can be. It depends how you perceive it.

Interviewer:
Okay. And what would you say was the moral of the story of this drama story?

Interviewee C:
That, that you need to push through... So no matter the obstacles, you need to go forward. And it doesn't even (uhmm...) then this is why maybe it's not the romantic story, because it's not about the outcome. It's not about the happy ending, it's just about the, you know, you have to step the step forward, or go to the next step. And there is another step, and there is another step, it's never ending story. So...

Interviewer:
okay, and was there a certain darkened version of the story? Because from what I'm hearing, there is this element of you turning into bad guys and things like this? Is there a dark inversion in the story that you kind of identified?

Interviewee C:
Dark meaning of negative?

Interviewer:
Yeah, when something good turns into something bad or something bad turning into something good at the end of the story?

Interviewee C:
I'm not sure if that's bad, but… but let's say (uhm..) with us building the company this way, this hierarchical way, it's inevitable to get into corporate thinking. So basically, with solving one problem, we created ourselves another one (laughs) that we had to solve later on, right? Or, we are still solving, let's say. So maybe, maybe just that... you know, that once you're, and we were very scared of that. So we are, we were expecting this. And we were scared of this. We said: "Why were we waiting so long for introducing a management board or, you know, processes in the company? Because we were scared that we're going to be too rigid, you know, we're not going to be able to move fast, which exactly happened later on.. (laughs) But... But I think it's completely natural that you personally don't have it, then you have it, then you break it up. And then you know,

Interviewer:
it's like, from what I'm hearing, it's like a meta overview of the creative process, where you move from the chaos into structure and then into chaos. And then it's structured, it's a never ending thing.

Interviewee C:
So… you just have to do it like that.

Interviewer:
And was there a certain metaphor that you frequently use? Do you think there is a metaphor for this journey or this experience?

Interviewee C:
(ugh...)I don't think so. I, that I don't remember, I think it's going to be soon three years since we introduced the structure. So that's a bit vague...

Interviewer:
From this experience, overall, what would you say is the biggest revelation for yourself personally, during this, this, you know, process of leading change and all of the challenges that arise from it?

Interviewee C:
I mean, my… my only, my only revelation, but I'm not sure if that's a revelation is... everything needs… needs time in business. So I realized, although we are not very patient, and we're trying to push all the time, but only if you combine this with patience, you can get you can get somewhere. So you shouldn't be too nervous when things are not happening as fast as you wish, because they're never happening as fast as you wish. And that's it (laughs). So time… Time heals...

Interviewer:
What I would kindly ask of you next, is to recollect a little bit of what did this situation look like before the change started to unfold? You know, how did these things unfold before the change started?

Interviewee C:
Look, the… The change started already when we were (around) 20 people let's say. And this started as (partner) and me were the only guys who were within the company, who were doing the product. So we had outsource people at that point for products, not in house. And the first thing was when (partner) told me that I remember: "Look, I need you to take over some… some products, because I cannot hold them all, you know, I cannot be a project lead for all of them." And so I did it. Although I had other responsibilities he had as well, but I did it at that point. Then we realized, okay, because we are doing this, we don't cover the production or the print house as well. So, we start to build up team leads, this were not managers, we're just like, the most senior, let's say, from that point, you know, knowledgeable people from the company, who we could trust that they will, you know, make sure that everything's standing right, in coordination with us. That was... that was maybe even longer three and a half years ago, after that, we started to grow rapidly. And when then we moved into the bigger offices. So this this was needed. So this bigger environment was needed in order to start also building people. Because before we were in one room, everybody in one room everybody doing all the stuff, right?

Interviewer:
So like a startup culture thing, right?

Interviewee C:
Yeah, very, very much and everybody doing everything, basically, I was still doing the PDFs, checking (quality), writing to customers, you know, maybe not as much as before, but I would still have conversations with, with employees... I would hire them, I would fire them and (partner) as well for his part, right? So first, we moved, then we upgraded few of our people, which half of them we succeeded mediocrely. So-So and we'd have to… we didn't succeed... And that other half was then: "okay, let's bring some professionals from the outside, who were leaving, for example, big teams". For example, we had customer care, lead, who was not able to manage 50 people. You know, this was really a lot. And even now, like even nowadays, 50 people is a lot to lead. So we, so we brought in a professional, whose goal was, don't grow the team, figure out how you can do it without growing the team (laughs). So first, for the first year, we were still extremely growing the team, but then we started to, you know, the scale, either with technology, you know, with approach either, you know, a lot of things. So, yeah, it took, you know, from this first phase, it took more than a year, you know, into really a big change into then saying: "Okay, now we have people. And now we're going to introduce the weekly meetings, and this weekly meeting is going to be the one who's going to dictate the company". You know, he is, everything is gonna go into one, one hour per week. But this was just an introduction. Right.

Interviewer:
Okay. Yeah, could you please share some insight in how people were expressing their resistance to change was there like a strong reaction? Or was it more like passive aggressive with this?

Interviewee C:
It was more of a, it was more of a passive aggressive, more aiming towards not being satisfied, because they're not working directly with me to me. And that happens, not just that, that happens, every time you introduce change, each time you decide that you're going to restructure a company little bit. I even failed, and I'm still in the failing phase on some levels in the company, where I couldn't put a manager to oversee a certain part of the company. Also, because of the feedback of you know, of people who had to accept the change, because they just didn't accept it. They said: "it's not good enough, we're not going to work like that". And I'm still working directly with them. Which is maybe currently ideal, but in general will not be ideal.

Interviewer:
So it's like a learning curve still ongoing. Right?

Interviewee C:
Yeah. And I think that's going to happen all the time. I don't think we... I don't think the trust exists in a in a level that, if I proved you once that the change is good, that you're going to believe in me every time that I'm saying the change is coming, right. I think every time you need to reestablish why this is good. So you're not seen as A great smart dictator who, you know, knows his way. And we all trust you. So it's always a struggle.

Interviewer:
Could you recall the way that you've communicated this change to the people? How did you announce it? Was it like a formal thing or like an informal thing?

Interviewee C:
I mean, the first team leads that we introduced were pretty poorly announced. Because we are, we are, we were also afraid of the change on two levels. I think. One level was how the main people, the people that we need it, but we thought that we cannot replace at that point, how they will perceive a new leader, and if they're going to be scared off, they're going to just go away, and we're going to have a problem. So you need to understand also, we were bad managers, very bad managers at the beginning, right. So we were afraid of this, of losing people at that point. So we didn't introduce properly the new team leads. The second was we... because we were not experienced enough, we didn't actually believe that this new people coming from outside into the company will actually do their job well, right? So we didn't know whether to trust them or not (laughs). So it was very tricky beginnings. And this is why we very low scale, introduce them in all right. For example, (ugh...), we would still say, I will still say that I'm still responsible for firing or hiring the person, and there will still negotiate with me the salary, which is completely wrong, right, you take away all the responsibility from the person. But yeah (laughs)... but later on, we were doing it, in my view, the way I perceive the world, this is very Gestapo way to do it. But in general, what I see is that people appreciate this type of weight. And what I what I say about Gustavo is we were very direct, so this person is responsible for this, they're going to do this, you're going to be under this person, you need

to respect it with the decisions, you know, very much hard data when they start, and then later on, we figure out the, you know, in between. So we just changed the, the perspective, we would still fail every now and then when we would do the change, we would still be too much hush hush. Because that's, I think it's just the human nature in us. But yeah, at least now we know what's the proper way. And when we fail, at least we say, Ah, I knew that, you know, that was wrong.

Interviewer:
Could you recall who was the loudest in terms of expressing resistance and how did you address this resistance? Was there a certain you know; we'll let's call it like a rebellion lead or something like that?

Interviewee C:
(Whoh..) in this case, in another case, we had we had a very loud employee. The refocus but that's much recently so I remember that now. I mean, later on, when we had this refocus, yes, we had a very strong, I'm not sure why I would need to consider why... Why were there so strong opinions. Look the but usually about the change. And maybe even with this with this management, I can I can connect this to dismantle what was the loudest problem. People were no, we were running the company. Just, we communicated only hearts and flowers, and everything was nice, and everything was great. And "we cannot do it without you. And now you are the strongest link". And so it's like you would when you would teach a child, you would just tell him you're the best, but you would never tell him you're doing this wrong. And the which exactly what we were doing for for three for three years. We were doing that right? Maybe not on the on the higher level, but but to the all the employees, we were doing it like that. So when introducing this management board, we started to build up this right? Even when we were doing the structure you... even if you wouldn't say it out loud, you would show to certain people, you are not good enough to fit this group, right? You are not performing well enough, or we don't see you as a manager or... I don't know... So I would say that was the biggest pain. At that point, we the only let's say a person who would who would push negatively this was a designer, (who) was honestly also a person that we were the least satisfied with. But we didn't know how to handle that person. Right? We didn't know that we should fire him (laughs). But we would just try to manage that. And later on. I think in the next year and a half we anyway fired the person. And I usually I think the loudest are those who you are at least satisfied with. (ugh...) But it's not directly connected. I think it's connected just because you're unsatisfied with you don't communicate properly with them. So something's goes missing in the communication. So then they are not satisfied with you. Okay, and then when you try to introduce the change, they're even more untrusting. Right? So it's

Interviewer:
like a feedback loop. Right?

Interviewee C:
Yeah. So I'm not sure who… who's the first fault is in that case, probably also, the manager is because he didn't decide on time, either to build that person either to fire that person. But yeah, that's that level of...

First is I'm not satisfied with you that it's, I don't trust you. And then it's again, I'm not satisfied with you. So yes, we did have these cases in all the changes, but usually, usually, (laughs) which is funny enough, usually, that's only one person. Okay, oh, if you could know, if you could know, when you when you start to change who that person is going to be... So if you could predict, because it's always going to be one and only one. You could work with that person more and prevent, you know, bad mood in the process. When we brought, we brought HR when we were already 100 people... students, employees, experts, everything right? Before that, everything (partner)and me were doing the same and about the same time. So, soon after we brought the HR and people embraced the HR because they said: "Okay, finally, we have somebody to talk to". We also introduced this, we call general weekly, so group of managers. But the that was kind of embraced, the HR was included in all of these decisions, but then later on when we realize that we are not doing HR the way we imagined and that it's not worth that HR is included in this group of people (uhm...) and again, this was the same problem not satisfied with the person and they don't trust you (and so on). And then then the problems occurred again. So in the entire process of introducing these managers, this was not that we had only one, one trouble, right? First is just initial, okay, the culture will change, then people are satisfied, then things are not going the way as we planned. We change the things or we introduce small changes, but maybe the impact it has, it's even bigger.

Interviewee C:
So the unsatisfaction is even bigger than when introducing a big change, right? Because we did restructure, we didn't do these management meetings. We didn't do them well, for a year. And we didn't achieve what we wanted to achieve. There was no structure. I didn't run the company with visionary style in the sense of, you know, to Apple, Steve Jobs would always come and talk to everyone. And he would say stuff, and then he would disappear and do his own thing, right? So we never had floor meetings, why we never had floor meetings? because I was not comfortable yet, for the first two years, I would say, with… with how the company is structured. Now only, I think only lately, now, it's not really a long time, I am comfortable to say, I have no issues talking to everyone, because I am not weighted with… with the words I say, with the style I'm using. Because I know that I have managers there who are going to explain this, you know, more in depth more in a style that suits particular people in the company, right. And before that, before we build it up this so before the change was entirely implemented. I just could not do that. Because I was too much weighted: "Yeah, but that one's going to meet thing that so you know, maybe he's going to leave or whatever, you know, if they are going to give me (a rough time), things will change". You know, today, I'm saying one thing, and in a week, maybe I'm going to change my decision. And, you know, these were the obstacles that I don't see anymore. Because this is working. Right?

Interviewer:
Do you have an anecdote to share with us regarding this feeling of regression within the organization during this change, where you saw evidence of people returning to their old way of thinking and working?

Interviewee C:
Yeah, I'm going to go straight back to this, but just before how we talked to people when, when, when doing the first change, was, we had to have a discussion one on one with almost each of them. So first, there was you're moving away from us, then when we saw that we literally took a week, or 14 days, let's say as far as I remember, at that point, to talk to everybody to in person, explain them why we are doing this and why this is going to be better. And still to this day, I think when we have big change even during the pandemic, during I don't know, everything? you know, even that refocus when we had, it was not good enough just to have meetings with managers, you know, one meeting the big one, explain them this, but I (also) had to repeat the same stuff over and over (again), over Skype calls that took hours and hours literally saying like a you know, a poem you know, like, by heart everything the same (laughs). I was the fifth person I would say everything on the autopilot already, but it had to be done because otherwise people did not understand this as their, as their story. So the first regression that happened, maybe when we introduced I have one anecdote, which is not mine, but I heard it so many times is an example that's already also, almost mine. So (partner) was leading the illustrators before, before we brought the new Manager here, so the… the most senior manager in the company. (takes a short break to recollect thoughts)

Interviewee C:
He took over, he took over people and started to build middle management actually, you know, team leads. And, of course, this is a hard process, and he went full on. And at some point the person went to (partner) and said, like, you know, she skipped her superior, but went directly to the CEO, basically. And she said: "Look, this is not going to be working, you know, I'm going to burn out, you know, this is this is too much, too much stress too much work too much everything", right? Which in that point, if if this new Manager (hadn't been as) senior as if he was, we would probably fail this endeavor. Because, you know, as a CEO, when you hear "I'm going to burn out immediately", at least how we operate, it's like, (oh no!), you know, we went too far... Like, let's talk, let's figure it out, etc. But, this new Manager, because of his seniority came, came, came to us and said: "Look, guys, you brought me here for a reason. This is not an easy task, you know, from building from juniors to seniors, it's very stressful. And of course, there are going to be, you know, out of their minds, and this is going to happen for the next month, you know, you need to understand that this is the process. And, please, when, if I'm not doing something really, really wrong, don't let people come talk to you directly. But please just send them to me, I'm going to make it smooth. And you know, I'm going to figure it out. Right? It's my responsibility to figure it out." And because we trusted that, that, that point him, right, because he explained very thoroughly how this is being done. We succeeded and actually build up the manager who was not burned out or was not stressed anymore. Just, you know, they had to go over that phase. But yeah, this is how it shows usually, you know, they say: "Yes, I get the structure", but then they just start going over that structure. And it's the same for all processes. Even if you're, it's not a big change, even if you just set up a process for releasing a product, right? We are constantly battling, they're constantly that means that when there is a big issue, it's very, it's fairly easy to fix. And there's a big issue, we sit together, we do the priorities, everything's perfect. You know, everybody understands, we just go with the plan. But always after two, three months, things will derail so much that again, a big issue will occur. And then you again have to sit down. So we still didn't

figure out how to create processes that are running smoothly on the long term. So we are not there yet. I'm not even sure if that's possible. You know, we always have to do it.

Interviewer:
Yeah, like, like a never ending loop. It's just one of those things, you know, the, the growing pains of a scaleup.

Interviewee C:
Yeah, look, we were even we were hiring different people in different stages of the company. So first, as you mentioned, it was like, you know, let just give, give me just the heart (laughs). It's not about even, about the knowledge or about anything, right? just that. And then we started to hire professionals, and after that managers, and after that, professionals again... But in terms of the culture, you're always looking for that heart, you know, I'm I'm always looking for that part. So maybe it's not the first KPI, but even when you are hiring a professional you're looking for that so

Interviewer:
Like a cultural fit right?

Interviewee C:
Yeah, it would all be just... You know, you cannot always hire just managers, people who manage and nothing's gonna be done. And even the company is not always going you know, just up. So in between when it's going down, you know, we really need to teach people to... You know, we have to work not manage! (forget about) management, we're gonna figure it out when the things break. Right, let's, let's go back to the basics.

Interviewer:
Maybe we've touched upon this, but just a little bit more clarification, in terms of reawakening, did you have a sensation that after the regression that you've mentioned, this curve of downward movement kind of shifted its direction and started to move upwards? Did you have a feeling that people were starting to accept change the things were finally moving forward, things were finally you know, getting done?

Interviewee C:
No (laughs). In this particular case. But it's not connected to this change. Because you know, how it is with the business, you cannot go with your plan, as imagined, you know, it always changes. So just as when we set up this change, you know, when when we started going, we had to then do the refocus the (change project done) later, which was, which was maybe a bigger crisis for the company and had to be communicated even (more) thoroughly. So we didn't even finish the first one yet and had the happy ending, yet, we have to go into another change, right? It's like now in Europe, from pandemic to war, right? It's, you don't finish up, right. So, in that case, we went from: first we need to introduce this to managers, then

we need to persuade managers, we did it one by one. So the same process, then it was the cuts. So it was the big pain. We had the antagonist as well, there, you know, we had a person who, I don't know... what was so deeply unsatisfied and distrusting. She's still in the company, somehow we manage that. But I still don't believe that we managed to solve that bad taste in the mouth completely. And we're still and that's already a year ago now. So more than a year, a lot of things change in between, I still don't think that we fixed that. But after that second big change what it came, and with all distrust, what we were lucky was that the business went extremely up after that. So it was kind of the proof of: "look, if we do the right decisions, this is benefit us all so." So not after the first change. But after the second big change, we got that, you know, the product started to work the market worked. The happiness went up. But I have to say that the culture does change. You know, it's not back to what it was before. It's never that. So it's always the change. And it's always even, even when… when you have a good times... Of course, if they're the same people in the in the company, they still remember the bad times, right? Which is not completely bad. Because next time the change comes (laughs), it's going to be somewhat easier to adapt, maybe not for a person, that particular person, because that might bring some bad memories. Implementation will be easier. So yeah, that's the way it is. But look, we are again, in the middle of the big change. Now. The Facebook that we relied so much on stopped working as it was before. So you know, 20% of the company we moved from, let's do the product, into let's do the marketing. So, again, a big change. Of course, there is a lot of confusion, you cannot explain enough stuff. That's only a hunch, you know? (laughs) This, of course, affects the culture as well affects values as well, because when you're going from change to change, there is a portion percentage of people who will get somehow scared about the job safety. And as a startup, you cannot really address that... you can never say you know... look, we have an because the style that we are doing in our business that's very seasonal, creative, whenever you know, something happens. Good. Then we grab it and we scale fast. But when something solid happens bad, we need a couple of months to figure it out. Right? So you're not maybe a service or or I don't know what kind of business school has a four-year plan. We are not that kind of business. So...

Interviewer:
it's more agile, right?

Interviewee C:
We have a feeling where we're going to be in four years, but not so strong feeling, that I will literally stand in front of the camera and say, this is where we're going. No, not really. So you know this, for a portion of people, let's say it's half-half in the company, okay, or half of the people, this is exciting. And let's work for it. And we like, small, big or big wins that happen happens now. And the half of them is, I would really like to see the long term safety here. And it's not just he's just not part of the discussion with us.

Interviewer:
And it just to quickly, kind of check up on what you were mentioning, with the biggest antagonists that you have right now. Based on your experience, so far, in your impression of this individual, do you feel

that a "turned antagonists" can be your best protagonist for future change? Or is it something that is it's more like a liability and something that particular exploring?

Interviewee C:
Look, I think it's both if you I mean, I think there is less chance that antagonists... And here, I think the management decisions comes into play now. I think there's way higher chance that this is a liability. And you should get rid of that as soon as possible. But us not being yet. I would say good enough, managers still don't know you still have a lot of excuses and reasons why you're not doing it. Because you have benefits you because the person who's doing well, because he tried to be objective. And just about the subjectivity also had in December, like a big, I think talk... Because I started to be against... I was very... For me before, my purpose was to be objective in business. And I think that's naive (laughs). I think that that's off... And I think it's wrong. Like, literally, I'm in the phase where I know that in management, how you manage people, you need to be as objective as possible. Okay. But in running the business, I believe that you will never reach objectivity. And you might just as well be as subjective as it suits the business. So just to answer your question, I think you you can create a protagonist from (an) antagonist... It's definitely possible, it's just, how much time are you willing to invest into that? And how much not. So at the end, you know, this is why I'm saying that it's higher chance that you get rid of the antagonist. Because it's, it's faster, it's freeze ups your time, you know, your focus,

Interviewer:
At the end of our interview, I'm wondering if you could talk us through how you identified people accept the change, what were the most visible signs of change being accepted in the organization? Maybe some examples that signal that the transformation was completed to you.

Interviewee C:
Yeah. Not everywhere this happened. But in terms of anecdotes, it's just a recent one, when where I've seen this.. (uhm...) So, when our Manager got into the company as senior as a loud person, as somebody people were scared off, right? scared off not as a person but scared off that he's going to change the culture. You could see now after, after a year and a half -two, how they perceive that person and everybody who, so people who he manages, they love him. See, you know, and you see that, that, that, that love from the jokes, the respect. It's not that they're, they're scared of him and respect him, but they love him and respect him. This means they're able to make jokes out of him. You know, they they see the flaws.

Interviewer:
Yeah, like friendly banter, right?

Interviewee C:
Yes. There's a lot of that, but there's also a lot of respect. So. So this is where, where, for me, it was okay. Obviously, we did this right. But it took time, you know. And, and that anecdote pushed me to continue that work. Because we are not as nearly finished, you know, it's not every everywhere in the company that

we achieve the same revelation or you know, that we are done with the story. So, where we did a bad transformation, we still have probably a year to work on.

Interviewer:
That's interesting, thank you for sharing the story of change within your organization! Being mindful of our time, I wouldn't like to jeopardize our super pleasant conversation on on not a super pleasant topic with additional questions (both laugh)

Interviewee C:
Thanks. Okay. Good luck with your… with you finishing this, right?

Interviewer:
Yeah, it's in the final stages. Oh, well, above the 70% (both laugh)

Interviewee C:
70%, then it's done! (both laugh).

Interviewer:
Thanks again and wish you a pleasant rest of the day!

Interviewee C:
Bye!

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #4 (Industry: Finance)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 39 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

pauses, people, organizational change, change, learning, communicated, company, support, cooperating, step, perceived, management team, formally, big, life, organization, laugh, listens, garden, early

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

If you had to point out one biggest challenge from this organizational change, what would you say that challenge was?

Interviewee D:

To convince the colleagues that all of us have to change, somehow.

Interviewer:
Okay. And if we do a short exercise in perceiving the whole organizational change experience as a story, who would you say was the protagonist of the story?

Interviewee D:
I thought that I was (the protagonist).

Interviewer:
Who was the antagonist of the story?

Interviewee D:
I as well.

Interviewer:
Okay, that's an interesting angle. What would you say was the inciting moment that pushed the protagonist onto the journey? Perhaps some internal or external trigger?

Interviewee D:
It was definitely an external trigger. Because the cultural change was initiated from the mother company, on the group level. And I wanted to find out what should be going on. So I wanted to dig deep, deeper.

Interviewer:
And what would you say was the biggest conflict in the story?

Interviewee D:
In the beginning, the (managing directors) were not included in the process. That was (I think) the biggest conflict.

Interviewer:
And what would you say was the genre of the story?

Interviewee D:
Of the beginning of the whole story now? Or over the years? Science fiction, I would say, because it's a lot of future talk. It's, it's, it's a lot of science fiction, I would say.

Interviewer:
That's an interesting angle. And what would you say was the moral of the story, something that we should take away with us from the story?

Interviewee D:
Oh, if you want to make big changes, you have to start with the first small step.

Interviewer:
Was there a certain darkened version in this story, you know, when a character that was initially good, turning into a bad guy, or something that was perceived as bad initially, then progressed into being perceived as something good?

Interviewee D:
I did not see that... (pondering about the question) That would be a no, I did not observe that.

Interviewer:
What would you say was your most frequently used metaphor?

Interviewee D:
Big tanker versus sailing ships.

Interviewer:
And what would you say was your biggest revelation from this whole journey, this whole organizational change experience?

Interviewee D:
That I'm too critical sometimes.

Interviewer:
Can you please talk me through an anecdote which would demonstrate how change recipients were behaving before the change was initiated? So before they even knew that things were going to be unfolding in the future.

Interviewee D:
It was like everybody working his own little garden and jealously protecting it. So, somehow like that with a little bit sunshine in between, but basically like this...

Interviewer:
and what would you say was the awakening moment?

Interviewee D:
it was not just one moment announcing the change, but it was step by step preparation and also supporting events, where the colleagues were also included and had to experiment and find out things on their own. So, it was... it was a learning... it was a learning path.

Interviewer:
would you say there was a certain way of addressing or expressing this doubt from people when you initially you know, started talking about this change was there a certain you know, expression or a certain dialogue between people resisting were there some themes that were kind of occurring?

Interviewee D:
The issue is, I did not get that feedback. Because usually, and that was the culture at that time, negative feedback was not communicated to the (managing director). So, all I got was very filtered diplomatic info. And basically, the resistance was not against the change. It was some, I would say, toxic emotions within the company as such, feelings like nothing can be changed, no one listens, we are underpaid and exploited in something. it was existing dissatisfaction, which we discovered through different service, we measured organizational energy within the company, we measure the culture the yes, all those energies that prevailed in a company from corrosive to energetic to proactive to whatever. And this was, this was measured, and it was found out there's a lot of, on one hand, a lot of well being and they were very comfortable. And on the other side, they were stressed out. So we had to, in order to change things, we had to address those issues. And if there were doubts that there was... (A general) doubt that anything would change at all, a lot of blah, blah, but nothing will happen. That was the... that was the biggest... the biggest challenge.

Interviewer:
Was there an individual who was challenging you the most? Or who was the biggest challenge to kind of get on board?

Interviewee D:
Those who were identified as a challenge left the company very fast.

Interviewer:
So did they leave by their own choice? Or were they let go?

Interviewee D:
In our Country, you cannot (fire) people, that easily. So they have to leave on their own (in the majority of cases).

Interviewer:
Do you think that if they stayed within the company, they could have been used as an asset maybe turned into a believer from, from a hater?

Interviewee D:
I don't believe in that. Because it's, it was really a complete different worldview, or attitude or lifestyle or expectations towards life from them. So what what the company represents, so it wouldn't have worked.

Interviewer:
Can you talk me through an anecdote which would demonstrate how these change recipients were behaving? I think we kind of partially addressed this, but I'm, I have a feeling we're kind of missing something here. So formally, there was no resistance being spoken to you. But obviously, there were some behavioral cues that you were able to pick up, right?

Interviewee D:
For example, the aim was to start a learning culture. And then the learning formally did not happen on on that level, which was expected. saying there was a lot of courses and online courses provided and learning platforms provided, but the attendance was low. This typeof things...

Interviewer:
So like more passive aggressive, right, instead of being directly conflict?

Interviewee D:
the daily work was always done. Operations, no problem. It's the add on, which was the challenge the leaving the known paths, and trying out something you're experimenting, to look from a different position to try something else. And this is something you cannot you cannot get your your, because some black and white it's difficult to get the hands on to say: "OK, you're not cooperating".

Interviewer:
Was there a certain moment where you saw these attitudes begin to change? What was the moment or this specific incident or specific place in time where you saw, a change in attitude being manifested?

Interviewee D:
Some made this change very fast, and are now full... fully adopting this learning, the new way to learn and are reading and listening and being curious. All of the time, it's a way of life for them. But others are, they don't they don't see it. They say: “We don't have the time. I don't have the energy. Small kids, blah, blah, blah.” It's… it's too much you cannot expect from me even to invest more time

Interviewer:
in how did you address these type of comments. For example, I don't have time I have to take care of other things... How did you approach this?

Interviewee D:
Usually, it's about staying relevant on the labor market. It's not about us. It's not about the team here. It's about how fast things are evolving in five years. Our I don't know accounting department; our legal department will be completely different. And if you do not keep up with changes, there won't be no use for you. Not here, and not anywhere else on the market. So basically, when they say: "Oh, we have to

learn so much with the with the company software, with a collector, it's so complicated. And every week comes something new..." That's this hygiene. If you do not know how to work that, if you do not keep up, you are irrelevant. And it's, it's the same with me. And it's the same with them, it's the same on the company level. If the company cannot keep up with the changes... with the fast changes, it will become irrelevant on the market. And so we will be employees as well, regardless of their gender, regardless of their age, regardless of their educational level. And this is basically... it's... it's not just my speech, whenever I talk to them, (uhm) one on one, it's also when I address them as a group. It's also on the weekly meetings with the management team. And you have to repeat this. And then I have two girls supporting me with internal communications. And it's a lot of and written communication on all kinds of topics, but also the learning. And we have a learning platform, we have to actually we have a local (country) one, we have one from the mother company international in English, and also doing other workshops, and anti-stress, whatever. So really taking care of our employees. So they can take care of themselves and their life. It's to hope that you can work for one employer, from the beginning to the end. That's not going to happen anymore. That's let's proceed. I'ts over. And to finish one, education degree, whatever, and hoping to stay in that profession for the rest of your life... That's also over. Regardless whether you're a lawyer or... or IT guy, for that matter, it's even worse, or managing director, you have to become completely irrelevant. That's how I see it. That's how I make sense of the information I get.

Interviewer:
It's more about pursuing personal benefit from it right? Instead of focusing on organizational outcomes.

Interviewee D:
But also the organization is the same thing. If we do not change as an organization, if we do not adapt, if we do not get things done, then we will become irrelevant. Doesn't matter that we are part of a big international group. Here in (our Country), we are one local entity, which is growing in the past years, of course. And regardless how old you are, you have to try to learn. And I tell everyone who wants to know I'm a living example or living proof. So yeah, and some are cooperating and are very enthusiastic and are grateful. Grateful. And also, in... in within the group HR, we make the changes and competence model not only on paper, but coming to life, identifying talents, and top talent, which is going to promote that was a big issue. How should I explain to my management team that I'm sorry, but you don't have only top talents in your departments, how? And how to communicate that? that the others are not heard?

Interviewer:
Did you have a sense of employees being discouraged or some doubts occurring, where things were moving smoothly at first, and then this progression was slowed down?

Interviewee D:
Not yet. We have (pauses) the... the only... the only... (slowly) discouraged... Now we, we really work very hard to make our our… our colleagues feel welcome, supported. Listened to (them)... we really try to hear what is going on what is bothering them, how can we help them? And it's also I changed my

attitude. And I on the management team, I always asked him: What do you need from me to get this done?" So it's, it's really before that, I only asked how much time do you need to get it done (laughs).

Interviewer:
So maybe we can reframe it in a certain way. What would you say was the hardest discussion that you've had with yourself during this change process? So in a way, maybe you were seeing things as moving positively? And then had some doubts about it? What did you talk about with yourself concerning this?

Interviewee D:
This is why I said that I am very critical. And most critical to myself. Yes, I got discouraged when things were not moving as fast as I expected, or when people who I observed as... that they can do it, did not deliver. (pauses) But I had to take a step back and say: "Okay, this is your responsibility, you have to start communicating again. And again, and again. And it's not, it's not to here and then it's over. You have to continue... you have to continue trying, you have to take responsibility that they not just hear what you say they have to incorporate what you say. And you have to give them a chance to try harder and to make mistakes regardless." And this was the hardest thing for me to accept that it's not perfect, neither am I neither are they. And then again, you have to I said it five times and you have to say it the sixth time again. Because things are not that simple (pauses). And it's it's, it's a bit sad, but then at the end of the process, they say okay, what do you expect from me? And I was convinced they know what I expect from them. So apparently, I did not do my homework very well if they don't know what I expect.

Interviewer:
Would you say, some of the things that you're mentioning now are, in a way a manifestation of this confusion caused by change?

Interviewee D:
Well yeah, because even I don't know anything, everything 100%. So there's always a little bit ambiguity. Only I would handle that ambiguity differently than they do. And that's my frustration. So I have to take a step back and say, Okay, it's them. It's not, it's not you cannot not criticize, you cannot measure them with the way I would handle it, or react or whatever. It's, it's not behavior, because behavior is such is okay. It's, it's, it's the way they come back with solutions, or how they look at the our challenges every day, it's the way they look for answers. And sometimes it's as if they do not see the woods because of the trees. Okay, sometimes.

Interviewer:
So this one kind of kind of early signs, right? This, this misunderstanding of your expectations... Do you think these were early signs of regression, meaning the return to their previous way of working?

Interviewee D:
Well yes, but that's only sometimes is that when I, when I made retrospection, about the last two years, what we accomplished what we did, that was tremendous. That was from before COVID-19, it's unbelievable, huge step forward. But still, we're doing this, we're living this every day, we are in the middle of it, and it's normal. And from this, I think it's where these high expectations and the frustrations come from, because it seems so normal. And this should be this is the status quo, which should be changed. Now, we did a really huge steps forward, we took a leap before COVID-19.

Interviewer:
Would you say you had an ally in this stage, regardless of the corona crisis, or maybe some sometimes before maybe after that? Was there an ally present and who was it?

Interviewee D:
Oh, yes, I think a lot allies in this. First you have managing directors who push, push or who do things together in regards of support communication, whatever. And also, I, we have this communication team who is perceived also very, very positively from the other colleagues, they like them very much, and they have a good understanding and they know how to approach, how to get to the people to the base, but sometimes they get frustrated too. (laughs) so it's not only my thing (both laugh) I think there is support and also from the management team, I expect support. And I think I get it, at least openly or knowingly, they would not resist (change). (pauses) I trust my, this is a very good thing I have in the management team, I have people I really trust

Interviewer:
What would you say was the manifestation of things moving in the desired way? Some signal that this change was successful?

Interviewee D:
People wanting to behave in a certain way, cooperating when I see different department heads, working on one problem together, when I see all all the different departments working on one IT problem, and testing together as a team, and trying to find out the box and is it okay, the… the software or not, this is something we did not do in the past and the group together, basically, it's not, as I explained today, okay, we have walls in the office. But we do not have walls, between the departments. There is no silo. And they are able, when they face a problem, to organize, with them, to meet to discuss to resolve it, without me. And this is huge in comparison to… And it's also taking responsibility then for for that as well. Yes, it's, it's sharing knowledge as well. When… when I asked them, if we could have half an hour, after the weekly management meeting, for topics to share our knowledge. Everybody was in and said yes. And I went out I did not want to see the whole thing. So that it would not be personal or perceived as personal, whatever. So but they were all in and this is something very, very positive. Helping each other supporting each other (coughs). When… when someone is in trouble (and they don't let me know), I (try to) get the information so I can help the person regardless. Yes. And this is all what our values are about sharing

knowledge, cooperating, communicating and learning as well. And through this striving for excellence, and this is something the IT loves very much. We have workshops organized for idea creation for innovation for improvement. So we incorporated that into our daily business. Not only work, work, work, work, work, (but) also ideas, innovations, sharing knowledge, and having a good times as well.

Interviewer:
Two more questions to go, pretty short because I'm trying to be mindful of your time. The first one is, you've mentioned earlier that the way that things were unfolding in your organization: this feedback flow, negative feedback flow was never communicated to managing directors. And I'm curious, has this changed? Or is there no change in this way? Or do people feel more freely to talk to you about things that, you know, aren't working as good, or maybe things that they are not satisfied because of this change?

Interviewee D:
Some are, I'd say, taking the courage to come to me. Or some are taking the opportunity to say something to me when I am in conversation with them. But some still don't. And it's not as it's fifty the people within the organization and not everyone is prepared to talk with me. Some are prepared to talk with the others or... (pauses) but basically, I think they understood that I'm not someone Hi, Hi Hi above and unreachable in my deck is over. That's, that's not happening.

Interviewer:
And my my final question to you is more of a metaphorical thing. Earlier, you mentioned a metaphor where you depicted the people in your organization as being at the beginning of the stage being gardeners, or taking care of their separate gardens. Has this changed? Do you see it still being manifested in the organization?

Interviewee D:
I think it's less because the, because of this home office thing working from home, they became nomads, so to say. (laughs) You take the laptop and you go home. And they still have their their own desks, okay, that's true. But when they are not there, somebody else can sit there and it does not hurt... something like that.

Interviewer:
So someone else can water the garden if they're not there (both laugh)

Interviewee D:
So it's, it's not it's not just having the own garden. But it's more of like civil a sharing community. It's becoming a sharing community. (both laugh)

Interviewer:
That's right. I mean, we're on time I you know, as for the formal part of this interview, we got everything done. We have enough material

Interviewee D:
OK, that's great!

Interviewer:
to formally concluded so you know, I would like to thank you formally once again, and stop recording the conversation. Have a wonderful rest of the day!

Interviewee D:
Bye!

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #4 (Industry: Construction)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 37 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, countries, framework, HR, resistance, successor, succession planning, metaphor, problem, mastery, story, change, employees, benefits, solution, middle east Africa, succession plans, person, create

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

When we observe your overall change experience, what would you say was the biggest challenge during this implementation?

Interviewee E:

Laziness.

Interviewer:
And if your organizational change project could be perceived as a story, and then I have like a couple of these... who would you say was the protagonist?

Interviewee E:
(You mean) someone within the organization?

Interviewer:
It doesn't have to be a person. It can be whatever you want it to be.

Interviewee E:
Okay... (oh) boy... OK, Hercules.

Interviewer:
Okay, so that was the hero, right? The protagonist?

Interviewee E:
Yes.

Interviewer:
Okay. Who would you say was the antagonist of the story?
Interviewee E:
The establishment.

Interviewer:
And what would you say was the inciting moment that kind of triggered the protagonist to go on this change journey? Maybe it's like something internals, maybe something external.

Interviewee E:
Weak succession planning.

Interviewer:
What would you say was the biggest conflict during this journey?

Interviewee E:
Over engineering,

Interviewer:
And what would you say was the genre of this story?

Interviewee E:
Aha!... Oh, boy. A... Well like the movie imitation game. So it's like, crack the crack the code and solve the puzzle.

Interviewer:
Okay, so it's like a mystery, right?

Interviewee E:
Yes.

Interviewer:
Okay. That's great. What would you say was the moral of this story?

Interviewee E:
Collaboration, collaboration, collaborate. Yeah. Collaboration. That's one more. I think what that sums it up for you.

Interviewer:
Was there a certain darkened version in this story where you know, something good, turned out to be bad or maybe something better not to be good?

Interviewee E:
Conflict can be good.

Interviewer:
Was there a certain metaphor that you frequently used to either, you know, talk to your people or maybe describe this whole change journey?

Interviewee E:
The metaphor, I mean, more like... Employee agency, giving agency to employees. Them having a voice not taking over, but then being included.,

Interviewer:
And what would you say was your biggest revelation from this story?

Interviewee E:
Wow, okay... (pauses) I'd say it's an interesting of trying to find revelation for sure. A few more words, but cultural differences between wanting to be a dictator, and wanting a dictator (as your leader) or wanting a hands off leader.

Interviewer:
Could you talk me through an anecdote which will demonstrate how did these change recipients behave before the change started?

Interviewee E:
I think that everyone on the team recognize the need to do something different. So obviously, our project was to create a new talent identification and succession planning framework and process for the company to use. And... We were all on board with that mission. And we were excited to we were a global team, we are excited to work with each other and come up with something better.

Interviewer:
Did you see any evidence of comfort or being at ease (uhm...) not perceiving that there's any change needed?

Interviewee E:
I think everybody knew that change was required. I think we were excited to create the change.

Interviewer:
Was there a certain awakening moment that you can recall?

Interviewee E:
I mean, for me, I had my awakening moment, long before the project. In our individual country, I was responsible for using the old framework with leaders. And almost every leader either didn't really understand it, or used it differently. Or was confused by it. So for me, I was having the awakening moments long before we were called on to replace the framework. For me when I got the call to to to take action, I was like, I'm on board, we should we should absolutely be doing this.

Interviewer:
And did you see any type of resistance in its when the change was initially announced? Did you see any type of resistance manifesting?

Interviewee E:
Not that much. To be honest. We maybe had one team member internally, who resisted a little bit more than others. But we had we had our internal team, we have, we had a sounding board of high level HR people throughout the world. And we had our group HR, our corporate HR committee, the highest level people in the world. And almost always, they were positive about the need for change. And the way we were going about the change the new framework, so there were pockets of resistance, and maybe some individual elements of the new framework we were proposing, they didn't love. But we took that feedback and did it again and figured it out. So mostly is very much supported by almost everybody.

Interviewer:
So how did you communicate this change to recipients? Is there a certain, train of thought that you shared maybe, you know, certain metaphors or certain communication patterns that were aimed that maybe... emphasize benefits or maybe addressing resistance or things like this? Could you walk us through that a little bit?

Interviewee E:
It was definitely more about emphasizing benefits. I think I don't remember making a lot of metaphors, or using a lot of metaphors to tell the story. I feel like when you bring up rational persuasion, I believe that's what we were doing most of the time. I mean, you'll have to tell me if the this is what's in it for you. This is the benefit. This is how it's improving upon the old model. It was very much laying it out in... what we were aiming to lay it out in a clear way, that emphasized why this (new way) is better. Here's the problem with the old model and here's how our new model addresses those problems. You know, just in our business The most effective way I've seen to, to make change or convince people to do things is take a problem that they themselves have identified. And explain your solution to it. If you try to come to somebody and tell them there's a problem, they don't so much care or believe you, but if you can get it out of them in their own words, and then say, here's how I'll fix it, then they're on board, then they get it. So the rational benefits argument was what we used,

Interviewer:
was there a certain communication effort from… from this upper echelon from this, like, you know, corporate HR already announcing change will be rolling out, (Change leader) will be letting you know etc.?

Interviewee E:
Yeah, there. So at the highest level, they, they communicated it internally and to the various heads of HR in different countries. A long time ago, they essentially said this is coming (but) didn't give any details about what the change would be, because we were developing the new framework. But… but people were informed. And then periodically, we would touch base with representatives from different countries to make sure: "Are we on the right track? Are we creating a framework that countries can use? That makes sense? Is that actually an improvement? Or are we just doing this for the sake of doing something different?" But but there was ongoing touch points about this.

Interviewer:
I'm interested in learning more about your experiences on how this this change was rolling out, you know, or this change resistance was being manifested by people. Were there some subtle ways of demonstrating resistance or resentment?

Interviewee E:
Yeah, you can see that every now and then. We had one team member who would try to describe it in the correct way. So I think that, you know, the rest of us were, because we can only pick one global framework, we can only engineer one solution that works for everybody, or works well enough for everybody. What we're company with 90 countries, so it's not going to be 100%. Perfect for everybody. But you know, she was in charge of one of our large regions, Europe, Middle East Africa, and it seems sort of like early on maybe the framework we were going after isn't exactly what she would have developed for her region. And it was like: "Well, if you all are going to do this, that's good. But I don't know if it's going to work for my region". There was some resistance and honestly, it was never entirely clear to me why it wouldn't work or why wouldn't meet their needs... But that was that was stated in different ways. So we, you know, we want we want to involve that person because she's in charge of deploying this and really championing it for a large, large, large, our biggest region probably. So it's important that that person is on board. But at the same time you want to bring that person into the fold, but if they're resisting and they don't, they don't kind of meet you halfway and compromise like, will explain to me what won't work and... may... Maybe we can figure out a better way to do it. There wasn't as much of that give and take as I would have liked. So in the end, we sometimes kind of just had to move on with our, with our best idea.

Interviewer:
And how did you address her comments? Is there a certain, you know, way that you try to approach it?

Interviewee E:
Yeah. So, I mean, I would, I would say a lot of the same things like what I just said to you now, trying to compromise, right? Yeah, like, well, we can't be all things to all people. But your region is very important. So if you... like...: "Why do you say this isn't going to work for you? And what would you do instead? I mean, tell me what you would do. Maybe we could fix some of that stuff". And then, you know, I always I will go and talk to that person outside of the core team meeting to just to get their perspective where we can just sort of talk and maybe understand better. What… what the problem is what, why this why you think this isn't going to fit your needs,

Interviewer:
I'm curious, why do you think she had issues with the solution?

Interviewee E:
It's a good question. I'm trying to remember, because... what was it? (trying to remember) I think it might have been too general, to maybe not detailed enough for her. And you know, I think there, she has a lot of countries within her domain, I think the rest of us probably have fewer, you know, Europe, Middle East Africa, as a many more countries there. And I think she just thought the framework wasn't either detailed enough for her or... yeah... it's hard to remember. Maybe it didn't provide enough guidance on how to classify people or treat people or things like that. What... what's funny is that her, her region, head of HR really likes it. The first inch, her boss loves it. And even like took a minute in our presentation to say how

much he liked it. So he's never been resistant, but she has been the main resistor. And that's manifested itself by her not attending all the meetings, and not participating as much after a certain period of time. Which, honestly, you make a lot of effort to bring her into the fold and listen to all perspectives and incorporate it. And eventually, it's like, well, if you're not going to be here, then we're going to do what we feel is best, because it's got pretty much universal support at all levels, except for except for you and a couple of other people with individual concerns about it. But not concerns we can't overcome.

Interviewer:
Yeah, so there's no showstoppers, right?

Interviewee E:
Yeah, there's really not, which is great. Obviously, we'll see. The only other general feedback we hear multiple times is the changes that managers, succession plans will be overall more visible to more people. Whereas before, since it wasn't, it was just PowerPoint slides. And it was all in individual documents that people didn't have access to. Now, it's going to be in our HR information system, where people can log in and see it like you would your own profile. Not everything is visible, like employees can't see where they are in succession plans. But different managers can see managers can see their own succession plans, they can see who other people have put in their succession plans. And that's the biggest thing that people are resistant to because they feel that. I mean, they wouldn't phrase it this way. I don't think a lot but they don't feel like their organizations are mature enough to say that. So let's say my boss puts a successor in my succession plan, who I don't like or I don't agree with. I used to not be able to see that. Now. If somebody above me put somebody in my plan, I will be able to see it and I'll be essentially responsible for developing that person or at The very least not getting in their way. No, yeah. And now that will be known, whereas that would have been a shadow thing in the past. And many people shared concerns about that. They didn't openly say, we don't want that functionality, we won't do that. But they expressed concerns, and it was a task to overcome that. That concern to convince them that we're trying to be more open, inclusive. We're trying to do better with this. And that's, we don't want to hide things from people anymore. We need to if we're going to truly be a mature organization and do this correctly, this is a step we have to take. And you know, some people wanted it to be different for country CEOs and their executive committee, they're like, well, we can do that for people like (me) and the lower level people. But at the top, you know, we still need to be able to like, hide successors from people. And it's like, why are we treating them differently than other people? What does that say about us as an organization? So different? That was the other main thing of resistance? Otherwise, it was just sort of like: "Hey, what about that we could do this better? Okay, good idea. Let's do that".

Interviewer:
Could you maybe recollect an incident, and maybe talk us through how you addressed the loudest objector or overall complainer? And how did you address this type of comments?

Interviewee E:
So there were a couple ways to do sounding board webinars for like, HR directors from different countries. And it was it was that audience that would speak up, so I'm pretty sure one of them was from India, maybe one from Canada? I think. And these are like, high level HR directors who probably report to the HR VP and that that country. So they're just... I mean... they said, like... like I said, you know... "We don't think we're ready for that". Basically, we don't want you to know... Like, what… what if? What if (I) disagree (with the proposal) that this person should be a successor? Something like that, I mean, I... it's hard for me to understand that or recollect accurately what they literally said. Because to me, it was just like: "Yeah, they want us to hide this from people". And I think I just sort of inherently disagreed. So it's hard for me to recollect exactly what the actual argument was. I don't even I think it scared them. Honestly. It scared them because it's going to lead to... it's going to force (difficult) conversations to be had, that were not going to be had before (the implementation). And they don't want to deal with that. (Generally) We have a problem because these succession plans are not widely known. So we're not really accountable to them. I mean, there's no penalty, there's no problem if someone is in your succession plan one year, and just not the next year, or when you need to fill that position, you just don't hire that person. There's no like that. So few people knew of the succession plan that there's no accountability for it. So... Or it's hidden. So you know, who cares? But... (uhm...) then why are we even doing it? (both laugh)

Interviewer:
Did you notice some signs of regression despite your mostly successful run?

Interviewee E:
Well there was a little bit the regression of like, a) "we've got this good framework, it works. We want it to be open", and then it's like, b) "we nare ot going to be able to do that"... Like you put out here's the best solution. And then people just chip at it. And they're like, so your your best solution turns into an OK, solution. When you know how good it could have been, luckily, we didn't have to do that we were able to overcome people's concerns, I think unless they start complaining later on when it's implemented and force us to change it. But that hasn't happened yet. So maybe that's a new step for down the road. What we'll see, okay, that's possible. I mean, it's totally possible that this openness, will cause too much conflict, and some countries will rebel and force change, but I hope not. And maybe that's something we can overcome, then. But we'll see. Another thing that benefited us with that is that an overarching part of this was that the framework had to be simple. Had to be simple, had to be easy to understand. So I would have to continually remind people when they start You know, we would come up with definitions of, of it's like, we need to classify every employee according to these five categories. Here's the definition definition of each category. And people always want to add more clarifying detail and put more in and more caveat, and I'm like, can't do it. We this has to be simple. Yes, countries are going to have to interpret this little on their own and decide how they want to use it. But that's going to be true no matter what kind of solution we engineer so... that that helped us. And also, I think, so... I just thought of a metaphor with the Lord of the Rings. So for us, this is more of a trying to convince Lord Dennethor that he needs to rouse the armies and get ready to defend his lands seriously. (both laugh)

Interviewee E:
Whereas he's, you know, sitting on his throne and eating his chicken and tomatoes and just sort of sitting there and it's like: "Yeah, we don't need to like, don't call the allies, we're fine... Like... whatever". That's sort of like, a little bit like, our CEOs and our leaders who are just sort of like this. Like: "I, you know, I've got my guy and blah, blah, blah, like we were, you know, we don't really need to change". So I'm like: "look at our succession pipeline, dude, the orcs are running through our borders freely. Like this is a problem. It's good. But getting people to act like that is hard". So that's our main challenge. You try to not add any more work for people, or at least make them believe you're not adding work, make them believe that and then make them believe that this helps them that you're solving a problem for them that they've stated as a problem. So that's what we're trying to do. I mean, overall, we're creating more overall work, because now employees and like, lower level managers are all in all involved, where it used to be just sort of... I would talk to the highest people at the company and do their succession plans. And that was succession planning. Now everybody will have the opportunity to name a successor to their role. So it's much more complete workforce planning now. And it's much more open, and it's much more effective and useful. But it's going to be more work for most of the population, because they had zero to do before starting from present to convince them that it's worth it.

Interviewer:
And being mindful of your time, I'm curious to see, if you've seen some of the, you know, obviously, they're going to be maybe subtler, but signs of knowledge mastery. Do you feel that people involved in your core team of these change agents have shown some ways of knowledge, mastery of this change?

Interviewee E:
I think, yeah, I think a lot of them have, I think because some of them were involved in our presentation to country HR. And, and a couple of them did a really excellent job. Presenting, explaining the framework explaining the benefits, answering questions about it during q&a, a couple of them did a really good job. A couple of them didn't want to be involved as much in the presentation. One of them was kind of the resistor person. And the other one I you know, is shy at presentations and but actually did a good job too, and, and answered questions. So, those people have done great as part of the core team, they will go out and be ambassadors now, and we will rely on them for that. So I think they have because those people, the people who did really well have been involved from the very beginning have attended our weekly meetings, have suggested ideas stayed involved. You know, that’s like… four out of the seven core team have demonstrated mastery? Yes. The others haven't been quite as involved, but I do still think they will.

Interviewer:
So you would say that them manifesting some sort of mastery is like their willingness to cooperate and convey this to the rest of your organization?

Interviewee E:
Well yeah, that's going to be the ultimate test. Yeah. And when it when it goes, now, it's with the countries to implement, we can only do so much as the project team that created this, we can answer all the questions we can give advice. We could even help them present it to their CEOs if they wanted to, as long as we don't get too many of those requests, but it will be on them to communicate this and hold people accountable now. And that's going to be the real test. And we build all kinds of materials and communications and training to support them, email templates, presentations, really trying to give them the infrastructure they need. But ultimately, it'll... it'll be that test, and hopefully (uhm...) through our sounding boards and our meetings with group HR building, buying along the way that that will work.

Interviewer:
And what would you say is the most important thing that you would like to highlight from this knowledge of mastery, maybe like a summary of all of the experiences above?

Interviewee E:
Just that... I'm hoping through all of this, we created ambassadors who can implement this at the country level. You know, for instance, one of these people is based in India, huge country, tons of employees, I'm hoping that he can now do what I did as the project leader... He can be the new project leader for India and get it deployed. That's what I'm hoping that knowledge mastery leads to (across countries).

Interviewer:
That makes sense and with that being said, I think we're done with this formal part. I'm going to stop recording now. And thank you once again for your time and overall engagement with this study.

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #6 (Industry: FMCG)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 35 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

change recipients, team members, graduate program, organizational change, change, change project, big change, organization, talent team meetings

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

What was the biggest challenge during implementation?

Interviewee F:

Mindset of my boss

Interviewer:

And if your organizational change project could be perceived as a story… Who was the protagonist?

Interviewee F:

Talent development team lead by me. So can be me

Interviewer:

Who was the antagonist?

Interviewee F:

The old fashion system

Interviewer:

What inciting moment motivated the protagonist to start the journey (the what if…)?

Interviewee F:

The program as it was designed and run was not having the expected results, was seeing as no impactful and organization wanted to change it

Interviewer:

What was the biggest conflict?

Interviewee F:

Conflict with superior (my boss)

Interviewer:

What would be the genre of this story?

Interviewee F:

Tragicomedy

Interviewer:

What would be the moral of this story?

Interviewee F:

Change can happen despite the person in power

Interviewer:

What was the dark inversion of this story (good gone bad, or bad gone good)?

Interviewee F:

Loss of common sense, due to high pride not being able to see the reality

Interviewer:

What is your most frequently used metaphor?

Interviewee F:

for this situation? If you cannot open the door, find window(s)

Interviewer:

What is your biggest revelation?

Interviewee F:

Personal agendas are more important that organizational impact

Interviewer:

Talk me through an anecdote which demonstrates how change recipients were behaving when they had no knowledge of the upcoming organizational change.

Interviewee F:

Well you could think of a traditional post-transition rich corporation where people have big offices and everyone enjoys their workday as an excuse for being paid to socialize. A lot of these people weren't capable of doing much work at a high level anyway…

Interviewer:

Could you recall how the knowledge of organizational change was initially started?

Interviewee F:

When I joined, there were few Talent development programs graduate entries, and leaders on different level. I was told that all the programs could be changed, improved, to feel free to learn and explore and propose improvements. That is what I did with the one that I learned from the organization that was the weakest one - Graduate program. It was designed centrally, local units were struggling to implement it in the steps that were required and not at all able to reach the targets that they were supposed to (retention, promotion). Following initial screening and interviews with HRMs in the countries, and my TD team, I

started to work on the flexible solution for graduate program as the highest priority. My boss was declaring herself as being very supportive of adaptation and change, therefore I wanted to create the few proposals before involving her more into the process. That was a mistake - the declarative openness to change was not real. She “called out” on me on a Talent team meeting, saying that she heard we are changing the graduate program and to present what we are doing. I presented draft version of few options, and there the difficult situation happened.

Interviewer:

How did you articulate the “awakening” moment where the organizational change was formally initiated?

Interviewee F:

There was a regular team meeting when the superior (she knew about what we do because of internal gossiping systems) asked what we were doing on the topic, what was going on. I started to talk about how we plan to improve it, while her idea was to check if we started activities as they have been designed originally (by her).

Interviewer:

How did change recipients express doubt towards the change project?

Interviewee F:

Aggressively. When ideas were presented how to change the program, and offer few options, the superior went completely crazy. My superior was aggressive - I remain with that. Aggressive in her approach to me and later when we had another meeting to my team member as well.

Interviewer:

Could you recall an anecdote of how you addressed this challenge?

Interviewee F:

Naively, I was enthusiastic that we would be improving

Interviewer:

Talk me through an example of growing reluctance to accept the change.

Interviewee F:

Here it could be the fact that she continued to be aggressive on the meeting with my team members, calling out my team member “how come you give up on our program”. After that, noone wanted to talk anything to change from my team members, as they didnt want to get into that kind of conversation with my superior.

Interviewer:

Who was challenging you the most?

Interviewee F:

My superior.

Interviewer:

How did you manage to achieve “acceptance”?

Interviewee F:

I didn’t. I pulled back shocked by the behavior. I went back to the team and we decided to conduct wider research on the satisfaction with this program in the organization, beyond the initial information we had from our internal stakeholders. We made thorough analyses and written proposal

Interviewer:

What exactly did you communicate to change recipients?

Interviewee F:

At the end, I haven’t communicated the whole scope of change, but focused that what we want to do is smaller adjustments. Than the ego was satisfied and we were supported to go ahead.

Interviewer:

Could you recall how change recipients experimented with available knowledge after accepting change?

Interviewee F:

Honestly, I think they still believed the “old” was… was better. But the “old” way was developed and pushed by that person (my superior)

Interviewer:

What would you say was the moment of “big change” that initiated this positive change in attitudes of change recipients?

Interviewee F:

When I approached it that is “just small adjustments” and not conceptual change which it was.

I was doing things “under the radar”, which was accepted but I never got recognition for good job we have done. Because you know how this organization works - unless you make huge fuss about it, its like you

didn't do anything. So this way of implementing improvements was good for my team (inclusion) and organization (improvements) but costed me career in the company.

Interviewer:

Who did you reach out to first when experimenting after this “big change”?

Interviewee F:

I gained allies in the users of the program - country HRMs

Interviewer: Could you recall an anecdote of how these events went?

Interviewee F:

Strong allies were in the countries - HRMs. But no one wanted to be on the radar of superior. My team wanted to change things, believed that it should be different (as well as HRMs) BUT... superior had lot of power and very aggressive behaviour that froze people.

Interviewer:

What exactly did you communicate to your change recipients after they expressed doubt for the second time?

Interviewee F:

I downplayed the impact of changes even more, so that recipient would not feel threatened.

Interviewer: Could you recall who was the loudest and how you addressed these comments?

Interviewee F:

My peers were on her side and her colleagues in (country) that are in TA. I think the info that we are dramatically planning things to change came from that TA-1 in (country) as I shared my perspective that things could be done differently there.

Interviewer: Talk me through how you handled this second round of growing reluctance among change recipients.

Interviewee F:

We were talking with countries, building up the scenarios that make most sense and keep the most of the previous legacy. So in a way, keep what is good and adopt where needed. They were very useful and helpful, working closely and being very supportive.

Interviewer:

What were the biggest obstacles during this stage?

Interviewee F:

Stupidity and ego.

Interviewer: Could you recall the most difficult conversation you've had to manage during this phase?

Interviewee F:

This phase was easier as I learned what is important to the beast. I learned not to talk too much to my superior and tell her only what she wanted to hear. Not what I really thought about it and what all needs to change. I kept on minimizing the impact on her outstanding program that she developed and because "countries are not able to be as good as she was" we need to allow them to build capabilities to be able to be on the same level (as her) in the future.

Interviewer: Could you recall an anecdote covering the regression of change recipients from the stage of accepting change towards resisting change again.

Interviewee F:

I didn't want to give up because of the team, as they were totally mobilized to do good for the organization. To simplify and to make a difference. I felt I have to find the way to stay with it, even if it's not 100% what we wanted to achieve.

Interviewer: What were the most important insights from this stage in your opinion?

Interviewee F:

I didn't allow it to happen at all. I was limiting the amount of information provided.

Interviewer: Who was the most resilient and how did you handle this challenge?

Interviewee F:

I handled it very badly. My team members were more resilient as they were used to the leadership style in that organization (I was new to the organization).

I never talked to many more senior leaders but my superior. I was shocked by brutality and style, I felt frozen - never happened in my life to feel that way. I was totally surprised that someone of that seniority can behave like that. At the perf evaluation I was evaluated as not fully performing and told (by my superior) that I am collaborative, I am open minded, I have lot of knowledge but I am not using it to create legacy. I thought of course I am not, when I was treated as piece of shit by her. I was ready to press charges against her (mobbing) when the announcement was out that she is replaced by new Talent director.

Not many conflicts, as after those 2 sessions I was not able to find my stability in the relationship with her.

Interviewer: How did you manage to achieve it and what were the early signs of them experiencing reawakening?

Interviewee F:

Not sure that reawakening ever happened. I think there was enough assurance that the main idea or principle that was implemented is still alive.

Interviewer: Who was your strongest ally at this stage?

Interviewee F:

My team.

Interviewer: What were the first signs of successful transformation with change recipients?

Interviewee F:

More flexibility in the graduate program, more people engaged in it

Interviewer: What is the main point you managed to get across?

Interviewee F:

Simplicity and impact

Interviewer: What do you think is the most important thing to highlight here?

Interviewee F:

I learned that before implementing change, I must sense who the change will impact the most and what is their true feelings about it. Not only declarative saying, but how are they personally linked with it and what do they want to achieve. OR what will keep them satisfied.

Interviewer:

OK, I think we got everything, thanks again for taking the time to do this.

Interviewee F:

Sure thing, have a nice day!

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #7 (Industry: FMCG)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 33 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

change recipients, people, organizational change, project, change project, strongest ally, influential manager

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

What was the biggest challenge during implementation?

Interviewee G:

Proving myself to the more senior employees that have to start using this cloud software

Interviewer:

And if your organizational change project could be perceived as a story… Who was the protagonist?

Interviewee G:

Board of directors

Interviewer:

Who was the antagonist?

Interviewee G:

HR

Interviewer:

What inciting moment motivated the protagonist to start the journey (the what if…)?

Interviewee G:

Unfortunately, nothing "sexy" here, just following trends and meeting the requirements of the supervisory board requesting higher profitability and cutting cost

Interviewer:

What was the biggest conflict?

Interviewee G:

Between the HR who was sponsoring the change project and people that have witnessed their friends and colleagues being laid off because of this new software.

Interviewer:

What would be the genre of this story?

Interviewee G:

A documentary

Interviewer:

What would be the moral of this story?

Interviewee G:

Big money doesn't care if you like change or not.

Interviewer:

What was the dark inversion of this story (good gone bad, or bad gone good)?

Interviewee G:

My ethical principles were heavily scrutinized and I started seeing the world through the eyes of big corporations, not interested in anything but the bottom line.

Interviewer:

What is your most frequently used metaphor?

Interviewee G:

We're here to nip the bud.

Interviewer:

What is your biggest revelation?

Interviewee G:

A good way to cut people cost is to implement a new software which will "improve productivity"

Interviewer:

Talk me through an anecdote which demonstrates how change recipients were behaving when they had no knowledge of the upcoming organizational change.

Interviewee G:

Well you could think of a traditional post-transition rich corporation where people have big offices and everyone enjoys their workday as an excuse for being paid to socialize. A lot of these people weren't capable of doing much work at a high level anyway…

Interviewer:

Could you recall how the knowledge of organizational change was initially started?

Interviewee G:

It was kicked-off with a typical corporate email, but we were able to secure a strong budget for promotional efforts. So we set up a company-wide event with professional entertainment to make a big event out of it. I can't recall the actual phrasing though, but it wasn't anything special.

Interviewer:

How did you articulate the "awakening" moment where the organizational change was formally initiated?

Interviewee G:

Well I did my best to convey the message of transformation, how this is the best possible thing and how that is going to ensure that people still keep their jobs, despite the fact that a lot of people actually got fired.

Interviewer:

How did change recipients express doubt towards the change project?

Interviewee G:

They were pretty vocal about it, saying that this was all just a conspiracy to launder money, reduce costs and justify layovers.

Interviewer:

Could you recall an anecdote of how you addressed this challenge?

Interviewee G:

Well I've tried my best in explaining that this is the direction in which this organization was moving in, and assured them that I will make sure that nothing is lacking and that noone will be put in danger. I've even reached out to HR in order to ensure some guarantees that no additional layovers will be done.

Interviewer:

Talk me through an example of growing reluctance to accept the change.

Interviewee G:

Well there was definitely an excess of people who were resistant to change and opposed the software usage. They were participating in testing sessions and frequently complained about various meaningless specifics that were supposed to portray the software as useless. The more people got involved in testing sessions, the stronger this alliance building activities grew.

Interviewer:

Who was challenging you the most?

Interviewee G:

Interestingly, engineers from Production, whose colleagues were dominantly laid off during the first phase of the project. One of their comments was: “There is no amount of perfume that can hide the stench of death coming from people working in HR”.

Interviewer:

How did you manage to achieve “acceptance”?

Interviewee G:

Well we were moving back and forth, it was more of a continuum instead of a positive and definite state. We coerced these resistance members to participate in formal events, and threatened to report them to their superiors, which quickly yielded results.

Interviewer:

What exactly did you communicate to change recipients?

Interviewee G:

My team included managers from different levels and we agreed on how we would like to approach the general audience in terms of communication. We emphasized that this was just the first phase and that there will be extensive education available for people to learn how to use the software. Kotter’s model helped a lot here, as it was the foundation for our implementation plan.

Interviewer:

Could you recall how change recipients experimented with available knowledge after accepting change?

Interviewee G:

Well once they started clicking through the system, they were quickly thinking of ways to furthermore improve the software, since our on-site consultants were coordinating the work with the third party development company. It was more about “what’s wrong with this software” than it was about selling its benefits.

Interviewer:

What would you say was the moment of “big change” that initiated this positive change in attitudes of change recipients?

Interviewee G:

Definitely the formal go live deadline that I intentionally communicated with a buffer, giving the team an extra couple of days to pull the workload and get things done. I guess it showed the team that I was on their side and they wanted to repay the favor.

Interviewer:

Who did you reach out to first when experimenting after this "big change"?

Interviewee G:

Well I went to talk with my biggest opponent, a fairly influential manager from Production in an effort to clear the air. I wanted to showcase respect and try to get her onboard by openly trash talking the software and asking for her expert opinion on furthermore improvement.

Interviewer: Could you recall an anecdote of how these events went?

Interviewee G:

It didn't really go as I planned as emotional reactions were still pretty strong. I had the feeling that the more I pushed, the less I was able to achieve and the more I was feeling exhausted. Now that I think about it, I think I never really managed to get her onboard despite my best efforts, I was probably doing something wrong.

Interviewer:

What exactly did you communicate to your change recipients after they expressed doubt for the second time?

Interviewee G:

I tried my best in showing that this doubt was a normal part of the process and that I was experiencing a similar sensation, simply because there was just too much work to do, and the deadlines were really stiff and hard to manage. Projects like this tend to take a turn for the worse for some inexplicable reason, and I guess it's my job to mitigate this effect and make sure that people who are supposed to use this software don't get burned with it.

Interviewer: Could you recall who was the loudest and how you addressed these comments?

Interviewee G:

After this second doubt phase after our go-live, one of my biggest allies from our inhouse business solutions department started publicly expressing doubt in a fairly aggressive manner, leaving some of my bluffs exposed. This played out pretty bad for me, but I was thinking that I already lost, so I might as well try to pull off something dramatical and try to reconcile this conflict. I think the effect was 50:50, in a

sense that I've gone into a conflict with this manager, then publicly reconciled the conflict, but the scars still remained and the people weren't all that convinced.

Interviewer: Talk me through how you handled this second round of growing reluctance among change recipients.

Interviewee G:

As these influential managers started openly discussing the purpose of this project, I was under the impression that there was quite a lot of work being done on keeping the resistance energized. So I started provoking reactions implying that their energy wasn't well spent and that we could have done better if they had focused on the implementation instead of ranting. I was aware that I couldn't handle this myself and by talking individually to the core team members, so I asked for support form the senior leadership. CFO was a fairly strong ally and a powerful ally, however her perception within the organization wasn't all that good, since she was pinned as the "criminal" behind layovers. In the end I managed to get some support from the Sales director, who proved to be the voice of reason and stabilize the riot.

Interviewer:

What were the biggest obstacles during this stage?

Interviewee G:

I guess the biggest obstacles were the fact that people started doubting all those benefits that I was proclaiming at the beginning, and started focusing on all the faults of the projects. They all shared a common sensation of being threatened and suffering from survivor's guilt or some PTSD, I don't know. There were some strong emotions involved definitely, and me advocating for the project wasn't received as genuine or authentic, but was perceived as being the messenger of death.

Interviewer: Could you recall the most difficult conversation you've had to manage during this phase?

Interviewee G:

Honestly, I can't put my finger on a specific one, since they were pretty similar. I had to endure ad hominem attacks on me and the project, without having the liberty to respond in a fully open and honest way. I guess the part about me being from HR and smelling like death really struck a chord with me and rubbed me the wrong way, especially coming from a person with low emotional intelligence.

Interviewer: Could you recall an anecdote covering the regression of change recipients from the stage of accepting change towards resisting change again.

Interviewee G:

Well that's definitely an extension of this growing resentment and questioning if we've even done anything or if we were just clicking through all of those excel sheets. The biggest regression moment was

when we had to report our progress and we realized that the rest of the organization in other countries was facing similar problems, where this project didn't really make sense on a larger scale. All that work appeared to have been done for nothing, and all those people were laid off without a meaningful reason. Everything quickly turned into a meaningless effort.

Interviewer: What were the most important insights from this stage in your opinion?

Interviewee G:

I guess I wasn't aware of how important it was to manage expectations on a more frequent basis, instead of just rushing through results and "riding the momentum", as Kotter suggests in the model. I guess that momentum was actually just the first spark which needed a bit more tending to, instead of rushing into the project. I guess a bit more ownership could have made this phase more successful, or at least minimize the damage done.

Interviewer: Who was the most resilient and how did you handle this challenge?

Interviewee G:

Quite a lot of people showed tremendous resilience, and I think the biggest surprise was how HR was useless and had enjoyed the perception of "incompetent bad guys that only think about money". There wasn't a lot that I could do honestly, I felt that the whole world was against me, and that there was simply no way that I could win this project. I sincerely thought about quitting as it didn't make any sense for me.

Interviewer: Talk me through the process of reawakening change acceptance within change recipients.

Interviewee G:

To tell you the truth, I think this was only reported for political reasons, and wasn't truly happening when I was working on that project. In fact, retrospectively, I think that this change acceptance is still going on, even though the project has been "finished" for over 9 months now. A political acceptance and formal end of implementation was completed, but I'm thinking it will be accepted when there won't be any other options available.

Interviewer: How did you manage to achieve it and what were the early signs of them experiencing reawakening?

Interviewee G:

There was not formal reawakening, it was just a formal checkpoint where employees had to demonstrate their software use know-how, and that's where the story ended.

Interviewer: Who was your strongest ally at this stage?

Interviewee G:

I guess HR, coincidentally the most despised department in the organization, was my strongest ally since we were relying on formal coercion, which forced the people to start talking about actual results and getting things done. Sadly, but I guess they never got a clear understanding of what the benefits were supposed to be…

Interviewer: Could you recall an anecdote which could illuminate how this final stage of reacceptance was unfolding within the organization?

Interviewee G:

Nothing special, to be honest… Coercion was in full motion and everyone played along, nominally complying, but continuing to report all the negative aspects of the software.

Interviewer: What were the first signs of successful transformation with change recipients?

Interviewee G:

I can't say the transformation was successful, it was more of a facade…

Interviewer: How did you recognize the occurrence of true mastery in accepting change?

Interviewee G:

This true mastery you mention wasn't present, I guess my mastery was more relevant, since I managed to control my emotions and deal with these people who were continuously sabotaging my project. But this is a company that has no true consequences for blockers, as long as you demonstrate "some" work and effort, you're good to go.

Interviewer: What is the main point you managed to get across?

Interviewee G:

I'm just doing my job, and you are punishing me because of the issues you are having with the management team. Your dissatisfaction shouldn't be manifested by blocking my project…

Interviewer: What do you think is the most important thing to highlight here?

Interviewee G:

Allies are super important, however they don't guarantee success. You have to manage to portray yourself as one of them, and not as another pawn that the management has installed to control the mass. Politics, politics.

Interviewer:

OK, I think we got everything, thanks again for taking the time to do this.

Interviewee G:

No problem, my pleasure and let’s keep in touch to... to talk more details about this.

Interviewer:
Sure thing, happy to keep you update. Have a great rest of the day.

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #8 (Industry: IT)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 35 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

change recipients, organizational change, big change, change acceptance, team leaders, Account Directors, CFO, change, everyone, people

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

What was the biggest challenge during implementation?

Interviewee H:

Get the management to see the value of the project and act as ambassadors of change

Interviewer:

And if your organizational change project could be perceived as a story… Who was the protagonist?

Interviewee H:

HR manager (me)

Interviewer:

Who was the antagonist?

Interviewee H:

Few senior employees accustomed to the old HR-less way of working

Interviewer:

What inciting moment motivated the protagonist to start the journey (the what if…)?

Interviewee H:

The biggest motivation was actually internal - it was the belief that the entire company could benefit from decent HR department

Interviewer:

What was the biggest conflict?

Interviewee H:

Fighting against the negative image created by a couple of senior managers

Interviewer:

What would be the genre of this story?

Interviewee H:

From my perspective, it was an adventure with a dash of comedy and pinch of drama

Interviewer:

What would be the moral of this story?

Interviewee H:

Stay true to yourself and the rest will sort itself out

Interviewer:

What was the dark inversion of this story (good gone bad, or bad gone good)?

Interviewee H:

The person who I saw as my biggest ally, turned out to be the heaviest burden on my journey.

Interviewer:

What is your most frequently used metaphor?

Interviewee H:

If the mountain won't come to Muhammad, Muhammad must go to the mountain.

Interviewer:

What is your biggest revelation?

Interviewee H:

I didn't use all the resources that were at my disposal

Interviewer:

Talk me through an anecdote which demonstrates how change recipients were behaving when they had no knowledge of the upcoming organizational change.

Interviewee H:

The company I worked for existed for 27 years without an HR department. Everything people related was handled with a laissez-faire attitude and with none or little consistency. They liked it that way because it didn't feel stiff and corporate.

Interviewer:

Could you recall how the knowledge of organizational change was initially started?

Interviewee H:

Upon my arrival, I quickly became aware that I was basically on my own. Management was showing no interest and my job was to sparkle some in them.

Interviewer:

How did you articulate the "awakening" moment where the organizational change was formally initiated?

Interviewee H:

I decided to use my first weeks to introduce myself and the HR function to everyone in the company. I wanted them to get a glimpse of me as a person, but at the same I wanted them to see what benefits they could get from having a dedicated HR person in their working environment. The "tool" I chose on that quest was one funny (at least I thought it was funny) and informative PowerPoint presentation.

Interviewer:

How did change recipients express doubt towards the change project?

Interviewee H:

One of the biggest doubts people had was that my arrival meant that everything will become more strict, rigid and corporate. Everyone was pretty vocal about that, and didn't regard my feelings particularly. They spoke about me as if I wasn't present in the room and complained about what could be one of the outcomes. Open communication is something that is really (in theory) valued in the agency environment.

Interviewer:

Could you recall an anecdote of how you addressed this challenge?

Interviewee H:

I tried to make it all seem fun and "light". I remember attaching a Toby Flenderson (not so popular HR character from The Office) meme on one of my PowerPoint slides. Also I always emphasized that I also hate corporate environments and that I will never make a big change in the company without consulting its employees first.

Interviewer:

Talk me through an example of growing reluctance to accept the change and who was challenging you the most?

Interviewee H:

Unfortunately, I can't single out just one person… Creative department was most reluctant to accept the change. I'm still not sure was it just because of the personalities of Creative directors (people who are department heads/team leads to all creatives at the company) or was it because of the nature of their job (not so structured or easily definable). As everything in life, truth is probably somewhere in between.

Interviewer:

How did you manage to achieve "acceptance"?

Interviewee H:

I didn't achieve universal acceptance. Some of the team leaders accepted my endeavors and for that reason their team members were mostly receptive as well. How did I manage their acceptance? By showing up when they needed me, demonstrating how their job can be easier because the HR department but also by showing them my personality and "human" side. Some of the team leaders stayed reluctant and did the bare minimum just so no one would call them out for being a bad team player.

Interviewer:

What exactly did you communicate to change recipients?

Interviewee H:

I always asked for feedback. Knowing what made sense to them and what they saw as irrelevant was a really important part in entire change implementation journey of mine.

Interviewer:

Could you recall how change recipients experimented with available knowledge after accepting change?

Interviewee H:

I can't recall one specific event. All Change recipients started to include me in people related questions and ask for my advice where they thought it would come in handy. At first it was hard for them to distinguish what is and what isn't my area of responsibility. It was my duty to guide them through that

process. For example, it is not HRs responsibility to provide feedback to people, but HR can and should help team leaders when they need to give feedback.

Interviewer:

What would you say was the moment of “big change” that initiated this positive change in attitudes of change recipients?

Interviewee H:

I wouldn't say there was one moment of “big change”. As I said in one of the previous questions the positive change was visible in some of the change recipients while others stayed reluctant through the entire process. Those who accepted the change needed some time to start trusting me so it was more of a process and less of a “aha moment” thing.

Interviewer:

Who did you reach out to first when experimenting after this “big change”?

Interviewee H:

My biggest supporters were definitely the company's CFO, Head of Digital and one Account Director.

Interviewer: Could you recall an anecdote of how these events went?

Interviewee H:

There were some issues at this stage as well… Even though my supporters were highly ranked people in the company, the problem was that some of them weren’t really popular with other colleagues. With this knowledge I have after everything is behind me, I would choose my allies more carefully.

Interviewer:

What exactly did you communicate to your change recipients after they expressed doubt for the second time?

Interviewee H:

I always tried to cope with every doubt they had individually. It was my opinion that my change leaders would be more open while talking with me privately. So to answer this question more precisely, I told everyone I was open for criticism but I asked them to be as precise as they can and give me real examples of situations that made them question the change I was trying to make.

Interviewer: Could you recall who was the loudest and how you addressed these comments?

Interviewee H:

The loudest was one of the Account Directors who joined the company almost one year after my arrival. In her opinion, I was very biased and didn't treat everyone equally. She was convinced that I held back some information from her. After I became aware she felt that way, I introduced a 1-on-1 bi-monthly meeting to our schedules to regularly address every relevant topic.

Interviewer: Talk me through how you handled this second round of growing reluctance among change recipients.

Interviewee H:

My goal was to gain (and in some cases regain) trust among change recipients. My new "modus operandi" was to carefully plan the speed of implementing new processes. Slow and steady wins the race. Everyone remembers the tale of turtle and rabbit, right?

Interviewer:

What were the biggest obstacles during this stage?

Interviewee H:

Frankly, the biggest obstacle during this stage was the occurrence of the Covid19 situation that opened up a whole new set of challenges. The entire agency switched from "growth mode" to "survival mode" and it was really difficult for me to pursue my initial agenda.

Interviewer: Could you recall the most difficult conversation you've had to manage during this phase?

Interviewee H:

Instead of going forward, this stage sent me a few steps backwards. One of my main tasks was to determine criteria for lowering wages and letting people go. The most difficult conversations in that period were communicating those changes and later on explaining them to people who weren't directly affected by them (but they had a lot of empathy for their colleagues).

Interviewer: Could you recall an anecdote covering the regression of change recipients from the stage of accepting change towards resisting change again.

Interviewee H:

The episodes that really stuck with me were when people didn't believe in the structured process of introducing COVID measures. This was a huge setback in implementing every HR process in general because people felt like HR was working against them. Great example of how people wanted to "rebel" against said measures was the episode when they wanted to start a petition to rehire a colleague who got fired.

Interviewer: What were the most important insights from this stage in your opinion?

Interviewee H:

The most important insight I gained during this period is that I underestimated the power of emotions at the workplace. I always thought that ratio is stronger in a business environment, but after this experience I will always keep in mind the strength emotions possess.

Interviewer: Who was the most resilient and how did you handle this challenge?

Interviewee H:

The most resilient change recipients were people who were resilient from the start. Eventually I accepted the fact that I can't have everyone on board and eager to change as I would like them to be. Still, I tried to keep them engaged, informed and asked for feedback regularly.

Interviewer: Talk me through the process of reawakening change acceptance within change recipients.

Interviewee H:

Two months after infamous COVID measures, everything was (relatively) back to normal and I was (kinda) back on track. I had numerous meetings with my main stakeholders to prioritize our next moves. In my opinion, co-creation of a new plan was a crucial key for reigniting the fire of change acceptance.

Interviewer: How did you manage to achieve it and what were the early signs of them experiencing reawakening?

Interviewee H:

I firmly believed that the change I was proposing would benefit everyone. I stayed consistent, open and I think a lot of people recognized and respected that.

Interviewer: Who was your strongest ally at this stage?

Interviewee H:

People who were by my side from the beginning of this journey. CFO, Head of Digital, one of the Account Directors. Interesting thing was that I gathered a significant number of supporters in the lower levels of hierarchy as well. That showed me I was on the right track.

Interviewer: What were the first signs of successful transformation with change recipients?

Interviewee H:

I asked every single employee to give their feedback on HR during the 360 evaluation process in the company. Results were much better than I expected. Some teams were still pretty resilient, but the situation wasn't critical. Everyone (event the critics) saw something positive in this org change.

Interviewer: How did you recognize the occurrence of true mastery in accepting change?

Interviewee H:

I left the company before the change was fully accepted. But some of the strongest signs of change acceptance in my last few months was that my loudest "opponents" were slowly getting on board and were even providing me with constructive feedback.

Interviewer: What is the main point you managed to get across?

Interviewee H:

Organizational change is not a (sprint) race, it is a marathon. Good alliance planning and a lot of co-creation are must-haves when you're trying to implement a huge organizational change.

Interviewer: What do you think is the most important thing to highlight here?

Interviewee H:

You can plan all you want, but you must also expect the unexpected. For example, my plans were shaken to the core with COVID19 pandemic (external factor nobody could have predicted).

Interviewer:

Great, with that being said, I think we've got enough material to analyze. Thank you very much for taking the time to go through these details.

Interviewee H:

No problem! Thanks for showing interest in my change project (both laugh).

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #9 (Industry: Pharmaceutics)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 47 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, pharmacy, project, sales, talking, perceived, platform, questions, story, accept, product, core values, working, change, doubt, important, wholesaler, curious, complaints, happened

Interviewer:

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

Interviewer:

What was your biggest challenge of this journey?

Interviewee I:

So biggest challenge of this journey was actually that to... to convince people that their core values, trust and safety will not be compromised.

Interviewer
Okay, the second one we have is... if we perceive this change journey as a story, who would you say was the protagonist of the story?

Interviewee I:
That will be myself.

Interviewer
Okay. Who would be the antagonist?

Interviewee I:
The sales team.

Interviewer
What would you say was the inciting moment of the story? So something that has triggered the protagonist to move on to the change journey?

Interviewee I:
That would be actually knowing that there is a possibility that we improve the quality of the work on the field by implementing this mobile ordering platform. And in that way, on one click, they would finish the sales in, in a pharmacy, for example. And yeah, that would be actually that possibility to improve things. And knowing that is possible to do. It was actually my motive to go into that change.

Interviewer
What would you say was the biggest conflict in this story?

Interviewee I:
Actually, that platform has a GPS inside... And we can see the location of people because they need to synchronize when they are ascending order from the from the pharmacy, and we can see their route during the day. So... all that actually raised a topic in a team that maybe there is something behind the project. Maybe we are not telling the (uhm...) the truth, maybe we want just to control them. So it is primarily a control tool and not aimed at improving their sales and life. And what will happen if we maybe conclude that they're late somewhere, or they are not spending enough time in a pharmacy, or they're going to lose their job, etc. So actually many, many questions like that (were) raised up.

Interviewer
And what would you say was the moral of the story? So like, the key takeaway.

Interviewee I:

That actually... some projects are triggering core values of employees in employees. And that management should be very careful when talking about changes, because people are talking about some technical things, maybe, but behind is actually great fear about their freedom, if they're going to lose freedom, or if they're going to lose safety, maybe, maybe they they're feeling safe on their job positions. But now they're starting to thinking that they're going to lose their job and to get fired because of some things that will be perceived wrongly from the management and that they need to explain why they were on that position. In that time, what happened during the day that we will not understand the complete story, and that we will make some wrong conclusions maybe. So actually think about core values, values was main, more or less say, here in this concrete project in what I'm talking about?

Interviewer
To continue our Quick Draw question section, I would like to ask you to specify the genre of this story?

Interviewee I:
Yeah... I would say it was thriller (both smile) Because starting, you know, something scary happened, and they were afraid of their life, and then they try to run away from that. And at the end, you know, they got familiar with that strange enemy, which was actually trying to help them and at the end... at the end, it was a happy story.

Interviewer
What was the darkened version of this story? So when something that was initially perceived as good turned out to be bad, or maybe something that was initially done, you know, perceived bed turned into something that was good?

Interviewee I:
I think the whole project was, the whole platform was something that was perceived at the beginning as something bad. But at the end, they were familiar with that, and they perceived it as a quality. So now it's an integral part of Organization. This was actually a few years ago, it was the process that that took some time because previous they were taking orders in pharmacy on a paper you know, or that was just agreement in personnel with some some people in pharmacy and then later maybe they forget store there that boots or they've changed the mind or competitors came with a better proposal a better offer. So many lost sales we had and now they just have it all in, in platform on one click they they finish business and in, in one visit in pharmacy.

Interviewer
And the final question of this quick draw round, what was the most frequently used metaphor that you use during this change journey?

Interviewee I:

I had one metaphor, which is my general one, you know, so, when you ask anybody in organization, they will say you, all of them will say you the same, maybe it's a maybe nothing is realistic, but everything is possible. So, this is the general one. And I mentioned this because so many obstacles they mentioned, you know, like okay, wholesalers will never let us go into their digital system. So we can click send electronic order, or what if my battery on tablet is empty, you know, I will not be able to synchronize and then I will not be able to do that or, or something like that. So, in that way, maybe this metaphor is useful for this project, but maybe it's not the best one. The second would be that we are not here to to compete in sprint, we are here to run marathon actually. So, our idea is long term, we will not do anything with some short term actions, but in the long term, we will be somebody who is pioneer in this new technology new project two, we will have competitive advantages on the market we will be different working with with us will be much easier than with with others. So we should think long term, when we are talking about the benefits of of this project.

Interviewer:
That makes perfect sense, I already see some additional similarities with the approach of the narratively intelligent individual that I've previously mentioned.

Interviewee I:
there is one more that that I like to say that actually, when I talk to people, I say: "Okay, you are the people who are writing the history, of course, this is something new, this is something that's never happened, you know, in our industry before we are we are the leaders. So one day when somebody will talk about this, which will be normal in future they will still okay, those are the people who introduce it first. So actually, you are not just doing business here you are writing the history". So I realized they really liked to hear that (both smile) When you talk about somebody who is changing the history, then it's something you know... big and something's wrong and and really important and not just another tool for for sales, you know?

Interviewer
How did these people behave before the change? From what, from what you said, I could kind of pick up on the ideas that they had unlimited freedom, things like this. So maybe you could talk talk us through a little bit more about that?

Interviewee I:
Yeah, they... they had freedom, and they still have it, because it was really not intention to control people on this way. And they were... well maybe some of them were living in a, you know, with pink glasses... you know? yes, that they're actually mostly medical representatives, you know... talking about medical things, and sales is just one part of their job, but not so important. And they have medical background, they are doctors and pharmacists. So when they actually realize that they will have tablets, with a digital platform, and they will take it out in the pharmacy to take an order, it somehow immediately looks like they're not so medical anymore, you know... that their purpose will be different, that they will be somehow

humiliated, because they will not be (perceived as) doctors anymore. And they will be some kind of sales salespeople some kind of commercial representatives with tablets and and actually, their purpose was questioned, you know?

Interviewer
So when they started expressing doubts, how did you address that?

Interviewee I:
Well, for example, if you're talking about freedom and safety, I shared with the team how I felt when I was working in a company many, many years ago, I was working as a medical sales representative on the same position where they were now, and we had the GPS system in power. And it was the system (designed) for the... for the control. We knew that it was the control system, we didn't have something for... for this mobile ordering back then and I shared with them, that every morning I was waking up in stress, and I was in hurry to be on time. Because I had just one picture in my mind and that is that my car with will explode at exactly 8:00 AM If I'm not there in car and already in start going to various locations. So this picture with the car and bomb was everyday in my mind. And it was really stressful for me, because I do not believe that eight o'clock in the morning or nine o'clock is making some kind of difference if you are working properl and you're doing your job... And I'm not a morning person (both laugh). So it was really not the best way of... of controlling my sales efficiency, you know, so I shared that with these people. And I tell them that I'm not a fan of that way of working. And when we are talking about control, we have so many soft methods, you know, we can talk with people, we can see the quality of the work, we do not have to measure it in specific working hours, because you can be in your car at eight o'clock and be talking on the phone for one hour and not doing anything (marked on the GPS). So in that way, I try to show them that I understand how they feel. And I understand their fears. And that this is really not the point, the point was something completely different than I explained. What will be the benefits for them, how they will save time and energy and the nerves, you know, because they will finish time finish work and sales and everything and they will be relaxed, they have not been stressed what will happen after their visit? Was it efficient or not. And what was also very important to be consistent after that. So when once when we start with that way of working, really to show people that what you said, is what you do. So after that's not to go and ask questions, why were you there or just show them that what you said, is really going to be like that. And then they start to, you know, to believe and to relax, and to think about the benefits. Until the moment they were thinking about their freedom and safety and job and maybe losing a job and what happened they couldn't think about benefits of the project. So we need to go through that first phase of, of change, while four values or let's say our focus, but but not transparent. You know, we didn't have situation that they transparent. Say said, Okay, I now I'm afraid what happened with with my job, they were quiet, you know, they, you know, they should worry on the faces, but they didn't express what exactly is bothering them. Because that would be even worse, you know, when when they say okay, but I'm starting, you know, later, I'm not going What if they did? They cannot say that? Actually they can but

Interviewer
I'm curious to see what were the first signs of people starting to accept this, this change?

Interviewee I:
When we started, when we implemented this platform, then we had, of course, early adopters, who were more agile and who had their orders done through this platform, and they were enjoying that paperless administration and they were happy with that, you know? And then we had people who were not so good at accepting change from the first moment, and then we detected who is an early adapter, and then we started talking with with themand we asked them to share the good experience with other people, to maybe teach them how to use the platform. Maybe they are not so you know... technically skilled, so that in that way, this person can help and also share the joy and satisfaction with new features with them, so that they can also feel this optimism. So these people helped us, I think a lot... because she was he was sharing best practice with people. And then we did some incentives as well, and for people who made the most sales through this digital platform, we prepared some awards... Some were financial, some were not financial, but we had a different kind of awards to stimulate them to to compete, you know and to reach some targets and to gain some experience through this incentive. A step by step approach with some incentives.

Interviewer
Were they more oriented towards the purpose of the innovation or it was more towards certain functionalities, like how does this feature work? Or something like how can you use it better? Did you notice some of these topics emerging?

Interviewee I:
Yeah, I think when when they when we finished with this first phase of of questioning with core values and purpose and everything, you know, and when time was passing they started being secured that everything is fine that they are safe that they didn't lose freedom then it's okay and then they started questioning technical part and getting on with application etc.

Interviewer
I'm curious if you've seen some of the evidence towards returning to doubt again from from the initial people accepting it kind of moving along getting on board towards expressing some new doubt has new doubt emerged during this stage?

Interviewee I:
Yes, actually, it would be some kind of technical issues Okay. As because in that application, there are several wholesalers and each wholesaler has its own article number, some codes for customers, etc. So one pharmacy in several wholesalers hat has several quotes, you know, sometimes when a new customer happened in one wholesaler, for example, and there is no code in the system, then order is not realized. So that was the problem. And many other technical issues with new products with new products with the stock in wholesaler, for example, they order something and then it's not on a stock of wholesale actually,

it was something completely new in, in pharmacy business in general, but also for us, and we had so many things that were happening on a daily level Oh, no. And that, then it was the situation, okay, maybe it's not really a good project, the customers will be angry on us, you know, I had problems with this pharmacy and with that pharmacy and, for example, one order was delivered twice, and what will what will we do now with the goods and started complaints and stuff like that?

Interviewer
How did you address these complaints?

Interviewee I:
Yes, well, I think it's much easier to address them than the first stage, when we passed through first stage, then everything else was just you know, matter of organization. So, we tried to be quickly and fast with reaction to get smooth communication with that company that was providing the application, because we had the contact person there. So we arranged several meetings with that person, and then discuss all situations that we had tried to be much. So as much flexible as possible to, to solve all all complaints, actually, that we had from our customers, and to also communicate all that to our sales people. So that they know what we are doing that they have support that we will not let them deal with complaints all alone, that they will get all help and all support from the management from the company from the support of that provider of software. So that we are here to all together overcome all issues that are coming up.

Interviewer
Was there evidence of people going into regression, like returning to the old way of working, even though all of the effort was done?

Interviewee I:
Well not reallly, because of all those incentives and motivational efforts, they stopped percieving that the app is a tool to control their movement, you know... But you (always) have those people who are sometimes resistant and, you know... they sometimes like to complain for no real reason. When something is not working, that tends to make them happier. And that's okay, I knew that. But actually, we we didn't have a big regression or going to all the way of workng or something like that.

Interviewer
Who would you say was the most negative person and how did you manifest your influence to maybe change their mind or convince them that it's better to support the thing?

Interviewee I:
Yeah. Well, there were two people. Medicinal educated workers tend to be difficult... And I think two of them were louder, even loudest, because of what I mentioned already before... They had some processes inside questioning their self, if that is in the sales, it is something they were supposed to do in life because they were studying to help people to treat people to be doctors, you know, and I think two of them were

actually loudest in in complaints. But actually, they were the root in ad sales, you know? So we praised and we appreciated their sales and their results. And we, we said when I'm talking, when I say we, I think management and their supervisor, Sales Director, commercial director and myself, not not only myself, but also few people who are leading the project. Actually, we gave them appreciation, you know, and recognition for the results. So, it was somehow push forward for them to, to accept this change. But I also think that it was very important to give them time, you know, okay, we know that they will complain that they will have some arguments why that is not good. And that it is, you know, sending bad impression to pharmacies that we are degradative people or something like that. But sometimes, I think it's not, not important to argument everything, you know, and to talk about everything, sometimes we should just let time to do things

Interviewer
Sounds like a maturity curve, right? as time goes by you gain experience and maturity, and you manage to accept something that was difficult to accept before.

Interviewee I:
yes. Because if if person has internal process, then then it cannot be finished overnight, you know, and any arguments from our side cannot, cannot really make that faster. So, so we are here to support but some things people need to process.

Interviewer
So it's like you're supporting their internal processing, right?

Interviewee I:
yes, we understand them... you know, it's very important that we say that we understand that their doubts are completely on place, you know... they're... they're completely right. And that, we should think about that, and we should be careful, and we should monitor and we should see what how pharmacies will really react. And then if he get in some situation, you know, which is not so pleasant, then we will sit again and talk about that and how we can explain that to pharmacy, etc. But actually, it was not anything of that was was something risky for the business. Yeah, now, actually pharmacies accepted that. Really nice. It was easier for them also to say, Okay, I want to order from this wholesaler. And to finish, you know, and just one click, and it, it goes electronically to the system of the fourth sailor.

Interviewer
I'm curious to see, what would you say were the signs or evidence or maybe behavioral cues of this total mastery coming from people who initially resisted this change?

Interviewee I:
Well, at the end, nobody was really talking about that anymore... Yeah, it was just a normal everyday thing they were working with. And we had technical support that is functioning we had processes. So if

something happens, they know who to call. The problem is (already) solved. And everything's finished very quickly, and and it somehow became normal and everybody forgot to what was before that, you know, and many, many of people, most of the people are still here in the company. And now when we are talking about this, we ask them: “Do you even remember how you were working before?” And they say: “No, we don't remember it, we were like, in stone age, you know, we cannot even think about working that way. That way again.” So it's also a good story when we are implementing something new. But when we have new changes, then we say, okay, you remember when we were talking about mobile ordering, so you know that you had doubts like this, this, this, this at the end. Now, it's you cannot imagine your day or working without that. And they agree. And then we go to another topic.

Interviewer
Do you have a certain failure story from this change? I'm asking because failure stories tend to have a lot of power in in conveying your humility, how we all fail, we've all learned from previous failures, how it's an inevitable part of life etc.

Interviewee I:
Not so many stories with failures. Fortunately, that's great. Unfortunately, but failure always happen, it's just that the end outcome defines it. We didn't fail with the project because we were learning from it. But maybe with, with some products, you know, sometimes we will launch some products, which are not so successful. Or maybe it needs to time to develop on the market. So maybe we have expectation that one product, when they launch it in three years, you know, it will be top of the mind, and it will be top three in the category. And it will be you know, great market share. But in three years, it's very short timeframe in this industry, actually. So maybe for some products, you need about 10 years to be in top three. So we had failures with some projects, we believed in project in the product, and we launched them, but at the end, the sales was not so great... And our energy and resources that we invested in financial and non financial resources were huge. And it was just not so reasonable. So maybe the final conclusion was that we should invest resources in something which will bring us much more results. So so we quit with some some products. And that can be maybe some example of how we started something we did our best. And we let some time you know, and in few years, we realized it was not really what we expected. And then we cancelled product.

Interviewer
Did you bounce back from this negative experience, do talk amongst each other and say, Listen, we did this wrong, we should do it better, or maybe some other approach in sharing knowledge from failure.

Interviewee I:
Yeah, and it's very important not to give up too early. And also not to give up from some product too late, you know, when people are exhausted or you're invested maybe unreasonable amount of money in the product. So when we had situation like that we were we had meetings with discuss what else we can do. And is it reasonable or not to try to give the product a little bit more time until we give up and when we

have, let's say consensus when we have agreement and everybody's okay with that, that we shouldn't put push it anymore. You know, then we then we say okay, at that point, we we are quitting the and I think it's very good to talk about that. And to learn from that and that people are familiar with that, that it's not an it's not bad to have a mistake or to fail or that it can happen and that if you realize it on time and do some steps and do not make any damage to company that that is completely okay. So I think transparency is very important in this in this case. And actually we are showing people how to behave in situations when things are not going as expected.

Interviewer
I mean, these are great examples and thank you once again for your time Jelena. I think we've got a lot of material from thsi talk, and being mindful of your time I propose we wrap this up.

Interviewee I:
Yeah, as a conclusion, I would just say that I think integrity is very important is in change management, simply because when people go with you through a change process, and after that, they conclude that they can rely on you, and they can believe you... And they have trust in you, making future change projects easier and easier, thanks to previous experience, and they know that you have the integrity and they can really believe your intentions. When there is a new leader with no previous experience, I think it's much much harder for people to accept any change. So integrity and consistency would be my final words to take away.

Interviewer
Thank you very much Jelena, appreciate you taking the time to do this interview. I'll definitely followup with our research findings and we can talk more details on our findings.

Semi-structured interview transcript with Interviewee #10 (Industry: Insurance)

Data collection context: This semi-structured interview was conducted online using Zoom, the video conferencing software. Total duration of the interview was 49 minutes. The Change leader was introduced to the nature of this interview and was assured anonymity as well as complete confidentiality in hopes of gaining access to honest qualitative data. This interview was a followup from the quantitative study completed in 2021, and Change leader was previously involved in the study by suggesting a minimum of five change recipients who were assessing specific change leadership behavior. The change leader was presented with this data prior to this interview, in an effort to encourage a conversation about different perspectives of same organizational change.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, story, company, financial institution, operational, moving, messy, managing, part, perceived, engaged, sales, recognition, change, communicated, process, marketing efforts, employees, protagonist, internal

Hi (participating change leader), thanks again for finding the time and energy to participate in our followup research on change leadership in your organization. This time you get to tell your side of the story, and complement your change recipients' reported perceptions. Just as last time, all GDPR actions still apply, and this interview is being recorded. The only purpose for this meeting being recorded is the transcript which is required for the qualitative analysis, however neither the video nor the audio of this meeting will ever be publicly displayed, nor will your identity or the identity of your organization be disclosed. If you do not agree to this, please let me know and we will stop the recording and our interview.

Other than that, today's protocol is fairly simple. First, we will go through a round of so-called "quick-draw" questions, which is designed as a warm up exercise. I give you a quick question, and then you answer with one or two words max. After we complete this round, we move onto the actual stories, where I will ask you to recollect a certain incident, and to retell it to us in as much detail as you deem appropriate. I may ask you a followup question, but the general idea is to give you enough space to tell us a story without being interrupted. We are not interested in names, and in case some of these names find their way into our transcript, I'm going to redact them and use a generic term to replace them. If you agree with the aforementioned, let's get started.

So, first question: what would you say was the biggest challenge in your story?

Interviewee J:

Well, the biggest challenge in this story was how to how to wake up, wake up the sleeping, the sleeping, princess, call it the princess. And how to how to motivate it, how to build the self esteem of the princess to put up the to put up better cloths to be more more self confidence, and to go, not only that, she doesn't live only in that golden cage, but she moves that she moves, engages with people with the crowd. And at the end of the day, everybody will acknowledge for beauty and for the possibilities. That's great. Thank

you very much for a more detailed elaboration. Who would you say was the protagonist of your story? The protagonists were the managers in the company, the leaders, all of the employees and external, some external stakeholders as the owner of our company.

Interviewer:
And who was the antagonist? So like the enemy, the bad guy.

Interviewee J:
The bad there was, there was none. One, one existing bad guy, perhaps at the end of the day, the former former CEO of the company who was still employed in the company. He was actually the antagonist of the story.

Interviewer:
What would you say was the inciting moment of the story? So what was the trigger that kind of pushed the protagonist into the story?

Interviewee J:
At think the trigger the trigger was the that the protagonist realized that they have that they know that they don't have to wait for specific orders to be received and to be implemented. But that they are allowed freely, freely to implement their ideas. Of course, in line... in line with the story of the company or be the line of desired story of the company. It was... (Well) It didn't come at once because... because... because it's sometimes hard for us to obey orders (and) when you are asked to be self confident (or) to be more independent. It's it takes some time, but I think that was that was the better decisions. Okay, we have a lot of potential and we can express that we can express the potential

Interviewer:
And and what would you say was the biggest conflict in your story?

Interviewee J:
The biggest conflict in the story was or were the relations between between some internal some internal protagonist, the protagonist of the story, they had conflicted interests. And yeah, that had to be sold out.

Interviewer:
And what would you say was the moral of the story, a key lesson, something that people should take away?

Interviewee J:
We can change. And we can change... we can change dramatically.

Interviewer:

Okay, that's great. I have a couple of a couple more of these short (questions). What would you say was the genre of this story?

Interviewee J:
I would say the genre or the story is kind of... you know... a fairy tale, you're there to talk... to the... talk to the children with somebody who is an underdog in a certain context of Sleeping Beauty. And yet, that's the end we we do so far happier stories, still not over. But so far, it looks like a fairy tale, which prospects have happened.

Interviewer:
That's great. Is there a certain dark inversion in your story that you have recognized, meaning that something that was initially perceived as good turned out to be bad? Or maybe something that was initially perceived but turned out to be good?

Interviewee J:
There is one specific element which I perceived, it would be bad, and it turns out extra ordinary good. And yeah, there was short elements of vice versa, sympathetic protagonist, which I thought were good, turned out to be really bad. There were certain stories, of course, of course happened.

Interviewer:
I'm interested in learning just a couple, two more of these short ones. The first one is what is the frequently used metaphor that you use during this change?

Interviewee J:
I have to think which means there is not a seat there is not a single one. What, in this, what in the narrative... it was always explained that we are what we want to become, or you can... We didn't use a single word or phrase... we... we were using word that we want to be accessible for all the people that we want to be more interesting, more cool. And perceived, not something as exclusive but some something which is, which is approachable and suitable for all external stakeholders, kind of kind of that we are different than a typical financial institution. That was the message it was not the med single metaphor. The message was always like that.

Interviewer:
It's okay. Sometimes change leaders have this one metaphor that they always use.

Interviewee J:
It's... it's all let's say mission statement, which is, it's loving, it's cooler than in then. Then in English, we add value to to savings, which the interpretation of it is (incomplete). It's like: "Yes, we are managing assets in order, to generate return". But not only that, and this was perhaps most frequently repeated: "We want to offer our clients more", and this slogan or as a solution: "You deserve more", and which is... You

deserve more, returns more attention, more transparency, more everything we use that engaging other parts of other parts of the company. And this is something I'm most proud of that no, we're not talking only about... about... you know, how much return did the Generate, but we mostly talk about what are our services to our clients. And we moved from a company which didn't have, you know, social media presence... presence to the company within the group, which is most advanced in the digital marketing and the presence or the presence on social media, which is something the team which is which has worked with this is extremely proud of.

Interviewer:
That's really interesting to say, I think it gives us a little bit of light into my my next question, which is, what would you say was the biggest revelation in your story?

Interviewee J:
The biggest Revelation... Revelation in the story was really that, I was amazed how certain people became began to change, they were really sleeping... because they didn't have the opportunity to show what they're capable to do. And there are two or three individuals who are super good, they just have to be, they just have to be given the opportunity and push a little bit and they seize the opportunity. There are some who I think are equally talented or more or less, but they they just couldn't operate differently. They are... Perhaps, to use into this (context), let's say sleeping (and needed to be woken up). Like: "Okay, I'll be told what to do". And that occurs. And the greatest revelation was, yes, how, how engaged certain people are, if they are given the opportunity to thrive, to thrive in in... you know, a topic where they're good at, and that's... that's somehow somehow, you know, contagious than other people that other people are following me, me too. I would like to do this. Well, what about us, and the latest, the latest... the latest, you know, novelty or innovation was that we are now having this financial podcast as to my, to my knowledge, the only financial institution in (Country), and it was idea of a guy who would work experience of half a year, and they self organize themselves. And they presented the idea and not just the market in you know, we just do it was a marketing effort and smoking clearly. So that's the things the things I'm most proud proud of. And this, you know, contagious... (I said): "Okay, if it can be done. Okay, let's do it". And without, you know, telling them what to do

Interviewer:
Which actually brings us into this anecdote part. Could you please talk us through how things were unfolding before the change happened?

Interviewee J:
While the people had mixed feelings about me before that, I was in another position, which was pretty senior I was the CFO of the group. And I guess I was perceived as a threat to them. To a certain extent I was but I was not threat to I was just a threat to how the company was doing business that threat to not threat to, to two people, two people to embrace them said what the perception was relative. And at first thing before the change was happening,...I suffered, tried to connect, to connect to several of them, so that

we got to you, we had to get used to each other. And especially thank God, they have to get used to my... my style of working, which is not micromanage to things.... I'm (laughs)... there are a lot of things that I'm not, but I'm most definitely not micromanager and operational type of a guy (both laugh). And the company was vice versa was very operational. And, yeah, we had to... we had to get used to each other. And once we did, once, once they bought that I really want to do to do something more than this thing started doing for a door unfolding.

Interviewer:
talk us through how this change was communicated? How did you address these negative reactions?

Interviewee J:
The first thing was, it was coincidence... coincidence, that coincidental but nevertheless, it was actually the time when we developed the new strategy. And it was a novel thing, the company that invited all the all the, you know, middle managers to the event, and some other people as well. And I used I used the whole strategy, preparation process to communicate it, what do we what do we want to do, and to engage, to engage people, people into it, so that if they participate, they are more likely to buy to buy the store. So this, this was one, one element, the other one was actually quite interesting. Coincidentally, we were in this process of acquiring another company. And I combined those two processes, already inviting some people from the other from the other cop from the other company to participate in the process in the process itself, and use the whole merger, to call acquisition merger process to formulate the vision of the combined company. And it was a messy process. What we wanted to do, we especially put a lot of emphasis into developing the sales function, and the marketing function (which was) separated before... before that it was... it was in one department that created some tensions between the two (department) heads. But... But once we solved this, actually, then the whole marketing and sales part (was aligned) because individuals realized that they can be more successful (than) on the separate acquisitions. It was... Well it's not a game of power anymore. And we use an external consultant to (help) set this up. And yeah, it was a tremendous amount of work. But I... somehow... somehow the idea was to use this merger to turn the company up completely. If you do it already, then let's put this... let's put this... this combined three elements together, it will be well, even more challenging, but I think at the end of the day, it was worth it because because a lot of a lot of this integration process that technical did the when the team was formed, was no done, even... even on not only on the operational basis, but on the basis of the strategy innovation.

Interviewer:
And you said it was kind of a messy process. I'm really curious to see what did you mean by that? Was it more about the reactions of people? Did they manifest some resistance? Was there any doubt things like this?

Interviewee J:

Yeah, of course, that there were there were some doubts at the beginning. There were even some, let's say, I wouldn't say active, yeah, in one part active, active opposition, and then we separated the base, of course, this cannot be done cannot be done any other way.

Interviewer:
So, just do a quick followup question. Do you believe that people who are naysayers can be turned into your greatest promoters (of change)?

Interviewee J:
They can. But one specific individual was actively opposing... Actively pausing and once was... once you have somebody who is actively actively opposing kids and not prepared to change them, yes, yeah, there were a lot of... there were a lot of, let's say... blockers. But at the end of the day, some of them became became drivers of change. And that's really amazing. But unfortunately, unfortunately, unfortunately, in this one particular case, it wasn't possible, there was another case, where the skill sets and the competencies of the director there is simply not adequate enough. Yeah, and mess... mess in terms of... in terms of, you have certain deadlines. In this process, a lot of work during nights. The usual the usual stuff, which we which you have ditched, you have to manage. But at the end of the day, the people were extremely engaged with an extreme that nevertheless, if they if they didn't, like... they didn't like perhaps this... this... this... this... this... this transformation of the company from a cozy place really to a place which is a little bit more messy... with less rules, but still within the boundaries of the financial institutions, it can be it can be messy, and so we have to we have to train the people in terms of managing the... managing the subordinates... the subordinates, we have to train the people in terms of how giving and receiving feedback. And, yes, that ...that was... that was... that was kind of the process, and some people don't really great, but even the people who mostly mostly in the parts of company, which are very, very operational, they don't like they don't like transformation, because I can understand that, because it's a lot of work that I really can understand them. Nevertheless, they were extremely, extremely motivated, that everything is done right and on time. And I always gave them a lot of praise. And because because they thought that's how we communicated with the another strategy preparation process, and on those meetings to the managers, but we have this because of Corona mostly on mostly on teams, employee meeting server or participated, and I always used those meetings to project the story of trailer slamming. And that's how that's how that's how other that's how all the company, all employees have been informed. I hope that some that managers, the respective managers of the departments did their work as well. They were encouraged to do so somebody better some David, that's a good but it's always it's always like that. Yeah.

Interviewer:
Could you talk us a little bit more about the signs that people were experimenting with this new knowledge? So kind of trying to apply this new thing, this new way of working this new way of the way your organization is valuing performance? And maybe talk us through what was what were kind of the what will what was the aftermath of this experimentation?

Interviewee J:
Those small wins, let's say once we started the social media it It worked out really, really nicely. Then the marketing efforts, actually were really good. And we had some we had some campaigns, which, which actually got outside press as well. And that was the company that came before them. So that was the beginning of okay, we can do it. It's nice, it's good. And then somehow, because this is visible all the company, all the company sees it, then we didn't have, you know, our own salespeople. And once they brought in, they brought in new clients. People began to realize: "Okay, that's it, we'll be working". And those were the sizes. Those are the sizes. That okay, it's moving. And once perhaps the people from the operational part of the business started to use some of the awards, which we were communicating, like engaging with clients. We have to we have, we have to work hard to acquire a new distribution channels, then I then I sense, okay, they are starting to buy the story. When a hurts the same or similar similar sentences being used as we use them in communicating the vision, of course, and it all those small elements, actually, small wins, or how should I put it? I think the story is more and more being bought. Yeah,

Interviewer:
Being mindful of your time I'm wondering if you could share an anecdote of what happened next after this positive outcome? Were there some signs of regression, employees returning to their initial way of working before that?

Interviewee J:
I think now we'll be moving to phase two, (there might) (both laugh). There were no major setbacks until now. Of course... of course, there are still there are still external factors as well. But think the first the first part of the story is now is now finished. I think the integration, everything has been done has been done pretty well. Now, we are moving into second phase, we are implementing some new it core systems. And this is really, really messy here. Undoubtedly, there will be setbacks. And I'm starting to sense in the sense that sometimes just building up in terms of, you know, this is an still analytical part, part of the company, and yeah, how we are going to do it and people want to know beforehand. exact steps, knew it's a path. (I said:) "Yeah, it will be difficult, it's uncertainty. I cannot tell you, if you have enough manpower to do it, but once you are there, you will get it. And now we are managing this. We are managing this, let's say fierce. What will be if this and this happens along the way? I don't know. We'll see. We'll manage it." So I think we are entering this new phase. We reach the peak in the peak in kind of the recognition. The story of being environmentally conscious, we had a nice day project as the cover story of the whole of the whole group of three love. That's that's a great thing. That's a big recognition. Actually, the trigger group was developing strategies. And the first there, the first item, there was Asset Management. Because we had these things we can, the strategic part of the study really sought it out, it was actually a negative thing. Because it's, it's, it's created envy. It never happened in Taylor before. And because the outside goes out of direct opalized, and they don't care about the internal about internal internal stuff. And now, I think things are going to be more difficult. It's never going to be more difficult inside the company. Because we are moving from this, you know, vision, vision and strategic and the merger to this internal nitty gritty,

messy implementation, which will last more than a year, because it's a huge progress. It's a huge project. Now, I think definitely, we are entering inevitably, some, some set setbacks... We'll see.

Interviewer:
I'm curious, did you see some ways of, you know, employees returning to their previous ways of working, kind of by just by default, you know, going into little bit of regression, and moving into the old way of working?

Interviewee J:
Yes, to a certain extent, especially in the this operational part of the operational part of the business. It's something which we have, we have, let's say, potential potential obstacle in the in the, in the future. Because the two persons head into two departments, they are really, really fully dedicated to company, but they are really not the persons driving change within the organization. And now we will be starting to change those processes. And those are the major problems, I think we will be facing the facing in the future. And yeah, this is no, let's say, in the in, we are entering into the part of the story for the second time where where the main character is going to face either no enemy soldiers in a dark in the dark in the dark, so to speak, there will there will there will be challenging times. I'm most definitely. I'm definitely. I'm pretty convinced that they will.

Interviewer:
What would you what would you emphasize is key, you know, kind of evidence of mastery evidence of things going good.

Interviewee J:
Well, at the end of the day, its results on set in on several, several, several, let's say, areas. What is the results? I don't know. Let's talk about the asset managers. The parts I neglected I neglected a little bit I'm it's not in my reporting live but still they need they perhaps need more of my attention. But I simply couldn't, couldn't find enough time to dedicate to To be more engaged with them, and I consciously took the decision that okay, we are good enough. The board member responsible for them he's trying to he's trying to live them a little bit. But we have, because some things to improve steam, it's a continuous process. But they can do more than that, then then do what can then what they have done before, but now there was some recognition, some public awards, how successful they were. And they are no, okay, they are happy. And somehow, somehow, let's say that part is evidence of that things are nevertheless being good, then the sales results, then this outset recognition of the marketing efforts, and the fact that the online sales of funds versus online sales of insurance products, interest premia, it's three to one, okay. And with huge difference in resources, and when I told the team, this, this information, they were really happy. I think those are the science daughters, those are the size of things. Looking good. I'm still waiting for those sides on this operational bank officers of thing, and I can't think of any. So to give them some, give them some boost, some some some recognition. Okay. I recognize them, you know, like place, but it would be nice to find something, you know, that they will find, like more objective, yeah, with it. And

that would be really, that would be really, that would be really great. I wanted 111, let's say in terms of work department that they have done really well. But their head is not skilled of, you know, internal marketing. And I have to find ways how to lead them as well. Because they've done a lot of work, but the self promotion is lacking a little bit. And you know, the sales guys, they are very good at self promoting.

Interviewer:
Yeah, yeah, by default, I mean, this Yeah. But yeah. I mean, we're kind of I think we've got the whole picture. So this is just a couple of comments from me, not regarding your change, but overall, some of the research findings that you maybe maybe you may find interesting. I'm actually a big advocate of internal marketing and the way it changes overall being conveyed to people, maybe in your operational things. Some of these angles might be interesting for you, especially because I get a feeling you're open towards new ideas and not, you know, just automatically dismissing them because it's finance, it's more serious.

Interviewee J:
Now, my, my ultimate goal is to make the make the company illustrates this. This is real document, ultimately, no, I'm not, I'm not buying suit anymore. Just to just to because everybody wants to get your neck. Wearing this end, will No, no, we will be moving to new to new premises, which will be totally different by choice not resemble financial institutions. And it will be a shock to some of the people's the younger part to come. Yeah, it looks fine.

Interviewer:
So basically, the change is going to happen nevertheless, but the indicator of how good you were at managing change is how much people you were able to retain within this new environment, right? Yes,

Interviewee J:
yes. And now we are entering the phase two. So it's because otherwise, you know, there still will be complacency as management companies are extremely profitable. But the profit is not, is backward look. It's not about the future, or future is determined by how much influence they generate. And that's where you move the KPI. And so that's, that's, that's somehow, somehow the story so far. The partner is successful. It's a nice story. We'll see about the second part.

Interviewer:
Well I'm sure you will successfully find a way to get things done! Being mindful of your time, I would like to thank you for participating in this followup interview and for expressing interest in the research. I'll stop recording now and wish you a pleasant rest of the day.

Interviewee J:
No problem, it was my pleasure, we'll stay in touch. Take care!