



# **Effect of internal communications to Line Manager engagement**

Josefina Kujanpää

Examensarbete / Degree Thesis  
Utbildningsprogram / Degree Programme  
202X

DEGREE THESIS	
Arcada	
Degree Programme:	International Business
Identification number:	8457
Author:	Josefina Kujanpää
Title:	Effect of internal communication to Line Manager engagement
Supervisor (Arcada):	Susanna Fabricious
Commissioned by:	
<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Company X is in the middle of an organizational transformation, where the HR division is reformed. This thesis investigates the effect of Company X internal communication to Line Manager engagement during change. This study consists of two parts, the theoretical framework and a qualitative study.</p> <p>The Theoretical Framework of the study discusses Change Management, Internal Communication, Communication Methods, Resistance to Change, Employee Engagement and How to Communicate Effectively During Change. Qualitative research was done and applied in the empirical research phase of the thesis to support the aim of the thesis. In-depth interviews with 15 Line Managers from Company X were conducted as part of the qualitative research.</p> <p>The study results show that lack of time is the most common reason why Line Managers don't read the communication regarding the change, Line Managers need more aligned communication from different parts of HR in order to engage more, they use 3 main communication channels to find information and they are hoping for more training for the new ways of working and their role as a Line Managers.</p>	
Keywords:	
Number of pages:	40
Language:	English
Date of acceptance:	

## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem statement	6
1.2 Aim of the study, research questions and limitations	6
1.3 Research method & Structure of the study	7
<b>THEORY</b>	8
2.1 Change Management	9
2.1.1 Leadership during change	11
2.2 Internal Communication Definition	13
2.2.1 Communication Methods	15
2.3 Resistance to Change in Organizations	16
2.4 Employee Engagement	17
2.5 How to Communicate Effectively During a Change	19
<b>3. METHOD</b>	21
3.1 Choice of method	21
3.2 Respondents	22
3.3 Interview guide	22
3.4 Validity and reliability	25
<b>4. RESULTS</b>	26
4.1 Interviews	26
4.2 Interview themes & questions	26
4.2.1 Satisfaction & engagement	27
4.2.2 HR Line manager newsletter	29
4.2.3 Developing HR communications	30
<b>5. DISCUSSION</b>	31
5.1 Discussion of the results	31
5.1 Discussion of the method	33
<b>6. CONCLUSIONS</b>	34
6.1 Suggestions for further studies	35
<b>References</b>	35

## Figures

Figure 1. Lewin's three step model (Goncalves & Campos, 2018)	11
Figure 2. The Valley of Despair (Goncalves & Campos, 2018)	12
Figure 3. Effective and non-effective communication of change (Goodman & Truss, 2006)	17
Figure 4. The Change Communication Wheel (Goodman & Truss, 2006)	22

## Tables

Tabel 1. Interview guide	10
Tabel 2. Respondents background	22

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder communications can facilitate culture transformation and effective change management. The stage you are at with a given stakeholder will determine what you can hope to achieve next, and this in turn will dictate which consultation channels are appropriate at any given time' (O'Donovan, 2014).

Organizations are always facing pressure to change (Piderit, 2000; Strategic Direction, 2017). The pace and necessity for change in our globalized world has increased, forcing organizations to react, prepare and better equip themselves for constant change (Piderit, 2000; Strategic Direction, 2017; Michels & Murphy, 2021). The capability to swiftly adjust and evolve to market changes can lead to either gaining competitive advantage or becoming obsolete (Strategic Direction, 2017).

As change often meets some level of resistance within organizations, change management and internal communications are vital (Neill, Men & Yue, 2020). Change management and communication includes the employees of the organization to the process of change and supports the employees' capability to adjust to the changes. These processes should not only be an exchange of information, but also influence and give guidance to support employees during the change and build relationships. Resistance is the primary reason why so many business change efforts fail. (Holtz, 2003)

The purpose of this thesis is to study and understand how internal communications affects Line Manager engagement during an organizational change. This thesis is done as a case study on an international corporation undergoing a large organizational change within a business support function. The academic aim of this study is to contribute to literature on the importance of communication amidst organizational change and provide insight on how it is done in a large established corporation. In the literature review, this study will be investigating internal communications in full, how important internal communications are during a change, change resistance during an organizational change, how to influence change and different communication channels used for internal awareness. By connecting

literature and collected primary data, this study aims to shed light on effective communication in organizational change.

Furthermore, the intent is to provide data for the case company on how their internal communications have affected Line Manager engagement to this point of the change, how it could be improved for the future and which communication channels the company should use to reach the Line Managers in the most efficient way.

The inspiration and motivation to study this topic comes from working with internal communications and change management in the case organization, which is referred to in this thesis as Company X. The organizational change is happening in the Human Resources (HR) unit, and it has resulted in all HR processes being re-designed. In order for Company X to achieve its goals in the change process, engagement and motivation in Line Managers and their ability to extend the new ways of working to their teams is required.

## **1.1 Problem statement**

This thesis is motivated by understanding how internal communications have affected Line Manager engagement during the organizational change thus far. What has succeeded and what could be done better in the future to improve the internal communications during the change?

This study will be investigating through qualitative research if the Line Managers within the case company feel that they have received enough information through the right channels to enable them to switch the ways of working in their daily work.

## **1.2 Aim of the study, research questions and limitations**

The aim of this study is to identify, analyze and discuss how internal communications have affected line manager engagement in Company X. In this study, the researcher will investigate how much internal communications in Company X have succeeded to raise engagement and self-guidance in Line Managers during the change, what are the main factors influencing line manager engagement, understand the resistance to change and which communication tools have been the most effective as well as suggest ideas for the future.

**The research questions for this study are:**

1. How have the internal communications affected Line Manager engagement in the case company during the organizational change?
2. Has there been resistance to the change, and if so, why?
3. What communication channels in Company X should be used to reach and communicate effectively to the target group?
4. What could be done better in the future when communicating change and new ways of working?

By investigating and answering these research questions, this study will suggest improved ways for communicating in the future to achieve successful change and engagement in Line Managers. This study aims to increase the commitment of Line Managers in the future by providing the case company with information and data from the research done by interviewing and analyzing the results of the study. Results from the empirical part of the study will help the researcher and Company X identify factors for success and improvement ideas in the future.

### **1.3 Research method & Structure of the study**

This thesis is split into two parts; Firstly, the theoretical framework, which will discuss the main factors in organizational change: Change management, internal communications, change resistance, communication methods, employee engagement and how to communicate effectively during change.

Secondly, this study will include empirical research from data collected with qualitative research methods. This will be done by conducting interviews with Company X line managers. Open-ended questions will be asked in order to obtain the most relevant and trustworthy answers. The interviews will take place after the theoretical framework has been written, allowing the author to collect as much knowledge as possible before formulating the right interview questions in the qualitative research. When analyzing the primary data, this research aims to find the key factors by using keyword recognition. The author feels that by conducting qualitative research, the key factors will be more easily recognizable.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduces the topic and aim of the research for the reader. The theoretical framework studies and discusses the main components in organizational change communication. In chapters 3 and 4, the methodology of this research explains how the interviews were done, and also examines the study's validity and reliability. The results and analyzed data from the research is discussed and explained. In chapters 5 and 6, the results of the research are discussed. This part contains the study's findings, as well as suggestions for further research and a discussion of the study's business usefulness.

## **2 THEORY**

This part of the study covers the theoretical framework which includes Change Management, leadership during change, internal communication, communications methods, resistance to change, employee engagement and how to communicate effectively during change.



## 2.1 Change Management

The definition of change management is moving from a present situation, through a transition and transformation period, to the future more desired state. During the last decades, organizations have had pressure to stay profitable and competitive. This has led to companies creating new tactics, process re-designs, technological components and many more projects requiring adaptation of the human element. Change management has not been seen in history as the important factor it is today. The results from the Pulse of the Profession, PMI, indicate that 67% of senior leaders think that the creation of a receptive culture is a high or somewhat high priority in organizational change. (Goncalves & Campos, 2018)

However, organizational change does not happen on its own, but rather, is a complex process. Kurt Lewin (1951) is probably the world's first researcher to study organizational change. Lewin's work is split into four different themes:

- Field theory
- Group dynamics
- Action Research
- The three step model

Lewin delved into the overall process of change and proposed that an organizational change has three different steps. The first step is unblocking the current situation and unleashing more energy for the change to happen as well as understanding the current state and the vision for the wanted end state. The second step is to use an iterative approach like action research to move to a new position through involvement and participation of the employees. The third step is keeping and balancing the new state. This usually means creating new standards, processes and policies in an organizational change. (Cameron & Green, 2019)

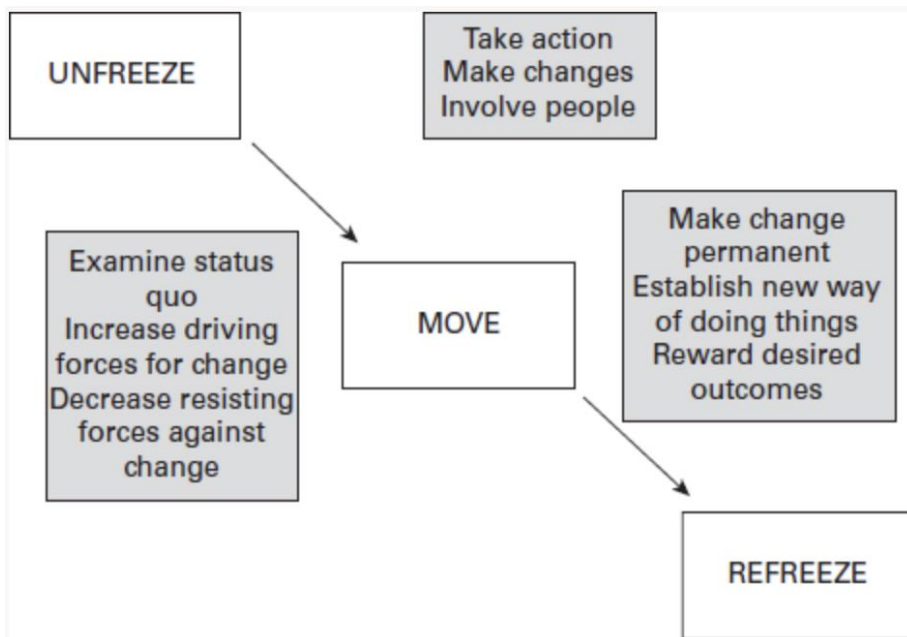
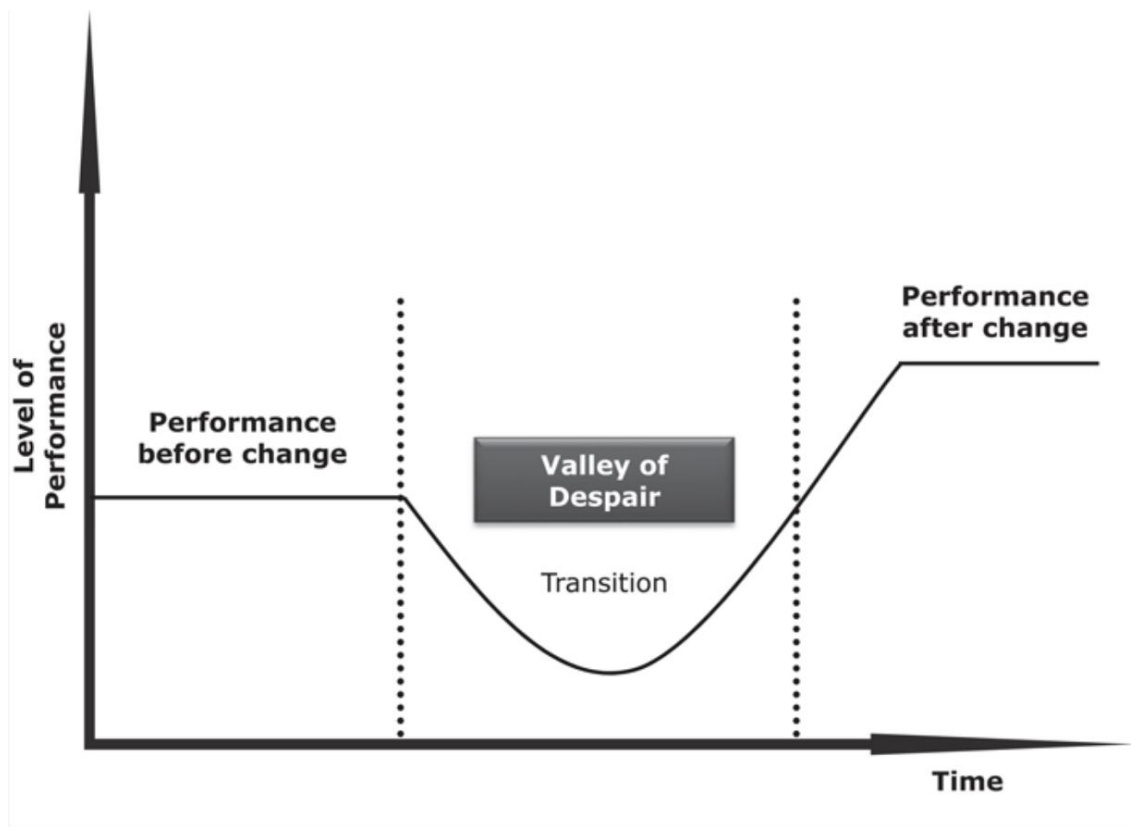


Figure 1 - Lewin's three step model (Goncalves & Campos, 2018)

Many factors that drive better employee participation during change are the same or similar to those that lead to a better culture management. There are several factors that can lead to greater employee participation, such as globalization, information availability, work process changes, employee commitment and payoffs. During change, commitment of employees is critical. When employees feel that they are committed to the change and have the ability to be a part of a successful company, they can experience that they have achieved something important. (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson, 1999) According to Barrett (2002), companies are still struggling to understand that change is impossible without effective employee communication, and without communication there is a risk that change management fails. Nonetheless, the financial and operational parts of the business are given more analytical rigor than employee communications.

There is often a visible reduction in efficiency, which is why readjustment is needed during the change. Below, Figure X shows the transition period which is known as the "valley of despair." (Goncalves & Campos, 2018)



*Figure 2 - The Valley of Despair (Goncalves & Campos, 2018)*

In today's world, it is important to remain and stay relevant by having new ways of assessing the world and new ways of managing the issues with the change around us. To only change is irrelevant, but we need to change in a good and efficient way. There are both good and bad responses to change. To change positively, we need to understand and change in response to reality and not our imagination. We are living in a world that is facing continuous change, and we need to challenge ourselves and our adaptive capacity in order to adjust and succeed. (Beerel, 2009)

### **2.1.1 Leadership during change**

A key to a successful organizational change is not only in changing and adapting a new philosophy of your leadership, but to also make sure you are spreading a positive attitude for your employees, as well as a well-structured approach to change. There are several different enablers for change (Hodges, 2021). Here are some examples:

## **Clarity**

There must be a clear purpose for the members of an organization to understand what the change is all about. A survey, The Moorhouse Barometer of change (2019), noted that 93% of organizations believe that having a clear purpose for the organization clarifies the change and is important in order to succeed. However, one third of responses answered that the purpose for organizational change is not clear for all employees in the organization. In order for a successful organizational change, the members of the organization need to understand their roles, what is actually going to change and how it will affect them and their work. (Hodges,. 2021)

## **Purpose**

As stated in the previous section, it is important for an organization to have clarity on the purpose of the change. This will enable confidence and inspiration among the individuals in the organization and help the employees and teams to deliver value to the change. A purpose for an organization is something that should be meaningful and the members of the organization should be able to contribute to the growth. (Hodges,. 2021)

## **Passion**

In order for leaders to engage and inspire their employees regarding the change. If the leaders can do this successfully, it will result in their employees trusting and engaging with the change. It is crucial for the leaders of an organization going through change to think about if their passion matches their aspiration. (Hodges,. 2021)

## **Commitment**

Stakeholders and employees have a big role in an organizational change. Their commitment to the change is a key to success, even though the leaders drive the change. The best way to build commitment within individuals and teams is to involve them in the shaping of it. Even though the commitment to change requires the employees and teams to commit and engage, it is very important that the leadership is fully committed, or else it could lead to a boomerang effect. During an organizational change, it's important for leaders to stay committed and engaged to support and enable the change. (Hodges,. 2021)

## **Engagement of line managers**

Engagement during change is an important aspect of leadership. Many employees prefer to just let the change roll over them instead of engaging and participating themselves. To prevent that from happening, there has to be continuous engagement from line managers and other stakeholders.

The engagement of middle management is vital because middle managers are the recipients and purveyors of change. - Hodges,. 2021

If the middle management fails in engaging their teams, it can result in employees feeling insecure and anxious about their future in the company, which will in return affect the success of the change process. (Hodges,. 2021)

Today, the leadership skills that have been used for the last decade, are not something that an organization could or should use in the current situation to create growth for an organization. Today, the leaders must be able to create and inspire new ways of working, new processes and lead an organization with happy employees (Cran,. 2015).

## **2.2 Internal Communication Definition**

Internal and employee communications is now an accepted part of any organization. Leaders have realized that good communication is a big part of success for any company. In modern organizations, communication nowadays is a standard feature unlike before. Within the last 20 years, internal communications have transferred from only having a role in industrial relations to now being an indicator for the CEO's leadership expertise. (Fitz & Valskov, n.d.)

“Internal communication includes everything that gets said and shared inside an organization. As a function, its role is to curate, enable and advise on best practice for organizations to communicate effectively, efficiently and in an engaging way.” (Field, 2021)

There is a need for internal communication in an organization to be able to manage activities within employees and teams, especially if the organization is growing in size. Well planned and implemented internal communication enables the employees to better recognize the goals, mission and vision of the organization and support the move to that direction. As stated in the previous section, internal communication as well as the overall change management have grown in importance during previous decades. Internal communication keeps the employees and leaders aware regarding the environment, organization and their jobs as well as the organization's strategies, values and goals. (Men & Bowen, 2016)

Employees are the main stakeholders of an organization because of their involvement in the organization's problems, issues and events. The two most common forms of internal communications are top-down communication and bottom-up communication. There are also several different positions in an organization with different communication needs:

- Frontline workers
- Middle level management
- Senior management
- Line managers
- Executives

Line managers usually have a great deal of responsibility and are trusted to communicate information about the organization. They play a key role in allocating information and communications to the lower-level employees as well as the other way around; they also provide bottom-up communication to higher management. In an international organization, line managers can be expected to interpret higher management messages to a local context. They can also collect feedback and ideas from employees to be taken into corporate strategic decision making. In several different studies, it is shown that employee satisfaction and attitude towards an organization is highly affected by how the line manager treats them. (Men & Stacks 2014?). It is important that line managers understand the vision, goals and expectations of an organization prior to transferring it to the front line employees (Men & Bowen, 2016).

Subsequently, organizations that can provide good change communications to their employees, tend to provide better results than their competition. According to Taylor and Francis (2019), organizations that are succeeding in change management and communication, involve their internal marketing teams already at the beginning of the planning. When an organization provides high-quality communications regarding changes, it will minimize anxiety and insecurity of employees and instead boost their ability to manage change. Approximately 70% of an organization's change effort fails, and one reason for that is poor internal communication (Taylor & Francis, 2019).

### **2.2.1 Communication Methods**

The amount of internal communication methods and channels has increased in the past years due to the rise of new technologies. Organizations utilize various channels ranging from conventional methods, such as face-to-face discussions, to social media. For employees to be satisfied with the organization's internal communications, the appropriate channels must be selected depending on the intended goal and message (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). Furthermore, Verčič and Špoljarić's (2020) study shows that employee preference plays a large role in internal communication satisfaction. As preferences may vary, asking employees how they would like to receive messages and their opinions on the internal communication in general, can generate valuable insights for developing internal communication strategies (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020).

Communication methods relate to both timing and chosen channel. Informal communication channels are important and complement formal communication channels (Goodman & Truss, 2006). Below, Figure X shows the type of media most appropriate for the type of change.

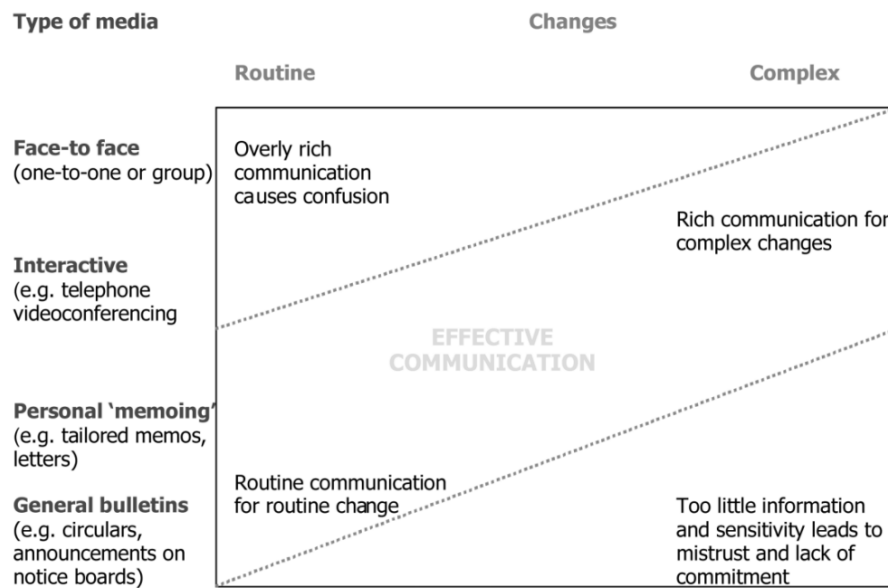


Figure 3 - Effective and non-effective communication of change (Goodman & Truss, 2006)

## 2.3 Resistance to Change in Organizations

As discussed prior, employees have an active role in organizational change. Thus, their level of engagement, attitude and response to change impacts how successful change is (Neill et al, 2020). Change resistance can be defined as the following:

“Resistance at its most obvious is a slow-motion response to meet agreements or even a complete refusal to cooperate with change. In an organization, resistance is opposition or withholding of support for specific plans or ideas. It can be either intentional or unintentional, covert or overt.” (O Connor, 1993: 1)

Interestingly, change resistance is not depicted ‘as the product of rationally coherent strategies and objectives’ (Ford, Ford & D’Amelio, 2008: 363), but rather it is often seen as a hurdle or viewed negatively from a top-down perspective. It can also be a way to invalidate credible worries about change (Piderit, 2000). However, at its best, resistance can offer better ways for managing change and be beneficial input (O Connor, 1993).



To manage change resistance effectively, it is important to understand the reasons for resistance. It is not simply enough to surmount employee resistance to change, but rather get them supportive of change (Piderit, 2000). O Connor (1993: 1) lists common reasons as ‘1. lack of belief that there is a serious need for change, 2. different descriptions of the need for change, 3. no agreement about goals for change, 4. lack of belief that the goal is attainable, and 5. no confidence in the manager of change’. By realizing the underlying reason(s), line managers can discover ways to address employee concerns. Internal communication plays an important role as miscommunication and -understandings can cause resistance (O Connor, 1993).

By offering the chance for employees to share their concerns and give feedback, line managers can take a holistic approach and emphasize open communication, while moving towards a collective agreement. Taking a non-emotional response to resistance decreases resistance (O Connor, 1993). On the other hand, aiming to control the reactions of employees ‘resists resistance’ and makes it challenging to reach a common understanding (O Connor, 1993: 2).

Managing change and change resistance is ultimately stakeholder management and relates to strengthening the relationship between the change agents and change recipients (Ford et al, 2008). Therefore, taking the time to investigate the root cause of resistance is important for mitigating it (O Connor, 1993; Ford, 2008). Engaging in conversations about the causes of resistance can even increase acceptance, as change is adopted as part of a thoughtful process (Ford, 2008). By recognizing and acknowledging the reasons behind resistance, line managers can choose the appropriate communication methods and channels to address the issues.

## **2.4 Employee Engagement**

“Employee engagement, referred in practice to a state in which employees give 100% or more to their jobs, is fiercely growing in popularity among practitioners, organizational leaders, and researchers in the organizational sciences.” (Bryne, 2014)

The question about ‘what is employee engagement’ is hard to find an answer to, since currently there is no common one definition used, even though there has been several studies and a lot of time trying to find one (Bridger, 2018). According to a research done for the UK Government by MacLeod and Clarke (2009), there are over 50 definitions identified for employee engagement. Since there is no commonly agreed definition for employee engagement, it also gives a perfect chance for organizations and companies to come up with one themselves and define what it means to them.

The Job Demands-Resources (J-DR) theory, by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), unfolds the psychological mechanisms in engagement. It has received the most empirical support from other theories (Hodges, 2018). The theory explains that there are two different groups of job components that can affect employee engagement at work: job resources and job demands.

**Job demands:**

- Physical and Psychological costs
- Workload
- Time pressure
- Emotional demand
- Cognitive demand

**Job resources:**

- Achieving work goals
- Stimulate personal growth
- Learning
- Development
- Salary

If the job demands are high, the employees can feel overwhelmed, stressed and like they are not able to meet the goals. Job demands can make the employees feel pressured, and therefore, affect their performance. The opposite for job demands is job resources, which

helps employees to reach their goals, achieve personal growth and development. In general, the JD-R theory suggests that when there are more job demands than job resources, employee engagement and performance reduces. This applies the other way around as well; when job resources outstand job demands, employee engagement rises. This also suggests that when employees are engaged in their jobs, they are also able to create their own resources which only further improves engagement (Hodges, 2018).

Moreover, goal setting has an important role in employee engagement. It can affect the job itself, give meaning to the employees work, energize and motivate the employees and give the employees a possibility to have a meaning in what they do. When employees have the chance to plan their goals together with their managers who support their success, they feel more engaged. (Mone et al, 2018). ‘Engagement happens when people feel safe to take action on their own initiative’ (Macey et al, 2011).

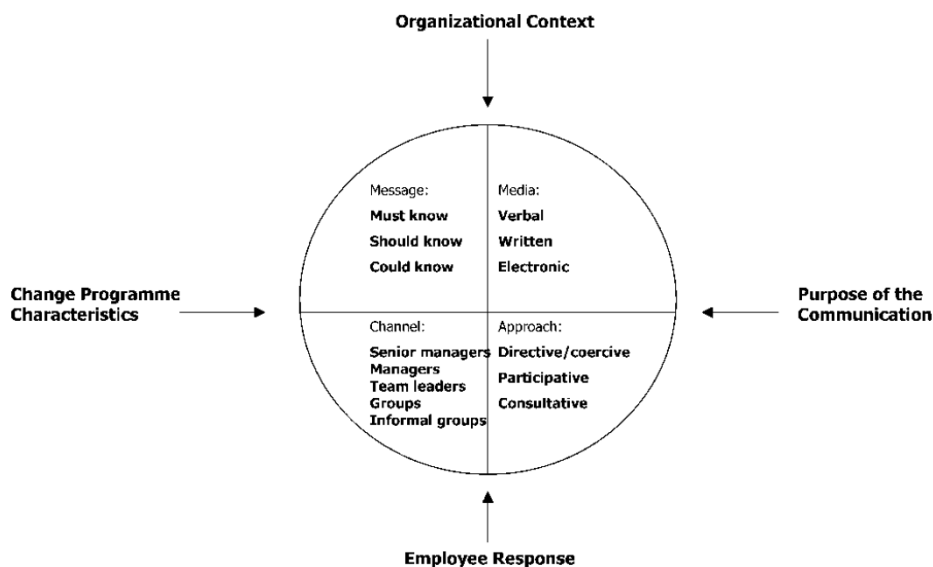
Additionally, the key role of trust in employee engagement should not be overlooked. When people trust someone, they feel like the other half can be counted on. When there is trust in an organization, there is belief in what the employees do and that they can be counted on to protect themselves and their work. Trust grows in its importance during harder times when employees might feel vulnerable and when they are facing insecurity. Since trust is the factor which allows employees to put full commitment and energy to their work, it should be nurtured (Macey, 2011).

The climate of trust is highly driven by the line manager. A low-trusted climate in an organization occurs when employees feel betrayed and/or angry. This can lead to less productivity within the employees, goals not met, poor communication, slow growth due to resistance, delayed decisions and even employees exiting the organization. To build a climate of trust, line managers should focus on open communication, efficient decision making, increased level of collaboration, satisfaction, loyalty and engagement, and coaching and mentoring (Mone, 2018).

## **2.5 How to Communicate Effectively During a Change**

Internal communication is an important component in the success or failure of a change process. Communication method and content are both vital as well as difficult for line managers to grasp (Goodman & Truss, 2006).

Goodman and Truss (2006) have developed the change communication wheel based on their research. The wheel is shown below in Figure X, and it represents four factors that need to be considered to have the most effective communication in change management. The communication strategy may vary depending on the time in the change process, and thus, it needs to be continuously evaluated based on the four external factors (organizational context, purpose of the communication, change programme characteristics and employee response) (Goodman & Truss, 2006).



*Figure 4 - The Change Communication Wheel (Goodman & Truss, 2006)*

Furthermore, the possibilities of feedback loops and readjustment of communication strategies are needed as employees may feel that they are not communicated with even though management has laid out thorough implementation plans (Goodman & Truss, 2006). As Goodman and Truss (2006: 227) state, ‘achieving an effective match between all four quadrants of the wheel, while taking account of the four contextual features, appears to be the main challenge facing those charged with designing change communication strategies’.

According to a study by Henry Mintzberg (1973), leaders spend most of their time using oral communication, but still find this way of communicating uninspiring and boring. According to this study, 64% of line managers spend their time doing oral communication, even though they find it dull and the message of the communication is rarely or not at all heard. (Etzold, 2021)

A study by Horvarth & Partners states that 70% of changes in strategies fail, not due to strategy itself, but the implementation and poor communication. This results in less than 5% of employees of an organization who completely understand the strategy. And why is this? Since a lot of changes in strategies are based on a future vision, they lack tangibility. (Etzold,. 2021)

### **3. METHOD**

This section covers the part of the thesis where the research method and approach of this thesis is discussed. The research goal and methodological approach will be used to guide this section. This section will also describe how the data from the research was gathered and collected.

#### **3.1 Choice of method**

*The aim of this study is to identify, analyze and discuss how internal communications have affected line manager engagement in Company X.*

The study is done with qualitative research, by using semi structured interviews as the research method. The study aims to create a deeper understanding on the Line Managers' attitudes and opinions about the internal communication related to the organizational change, which makes qualitative research more suitable for this study than quantitative research, which would have been more information gathered based on data.

The interviews of the study were held as open questions, to allow the participants more freely express their attitudes and opinions, and they are encouraged to be as honest as possible. The results of these interviews are kept anonymous.

All of the interviews have the same structure. The interviews have a structure of different high level topics and questions about them. If there was a need, there were also follow-up questions, to ensure answers are as clear as possible.

### **3.2 Respondents**

The aim of this study is to understand how the internal communications in Company X has affected Line Manager engagement during change, and this is also why it's important that all the respondents in this study are Line Managers within Company X.

There were 15 interviews held, with Line Managers on different levels as well as in different locations, to ensure understanding also the variation of the effect of communication in different countries which are impacted by the change.

The respondents were chosen by a feedback form used in a monthly newsletter for all Line Managers in Company X, where they have had the chance to sign themselves up for the interviews. Also, they were given the option to contact the researcher personally if they wish that the feedback form will stay anonymous.

Each respondent was informed that the interviews are recorded for the researcher to gather and analyze the data afterwards.

### **3.3 Interview guide**

The interview guide of this study covers the aim of the study, respondents and the interview questions. The questions are split to high level topics, which are supporting the theory of this thesis.

<b>Time used</b>	<b>Target group for the interviews:</b> Line Managers
	<b>Aim of the interviews:</b> To understand what effect of the internal communications has had on line manager engagement during organizational change.
	<b>Type:</b> Semi-structured online interviews, guiding questions where specifying questions can be asked if more understanding is needed.
	<b>Continents:</b> Europe, Asia, USA
<b>5 minutes</b>	<b>Collecting Information</b>
	Demographic data
	Title
	How many years in the company?
	How big is the team under them?
<b>3 minutes</b>	<b>Introduction to the research</b>
	Presenting the interviewer
	Presenting the research aim, structure of the interview and collection of data
	Explain how the data will be used
<b>20-30 minutes</b>	<b>Interview topics + questions</b>
	Satisfaction towards HR Line Manager communications
	How do you feel about HR Line Manager communications in general?
	What works / What doesn't work in HR Line Manager communications?

	Are you aware that HR is transforming?
	Does the communication support you in the HR transformation?
	HR Line Manager newsletter
	How do you use the HR Line Manager newsletter?
	How does the newsletter support you in your role as a Line Manager?
	How often would you like to receive the newsletter?
	Do you think the communications have been engaging enough?
	Developing HR Line Manager communications
	Where do you see any need for improvement?
	Discussion, ideas and preferences for future communication
<b>2 minutes</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
	Thank you very much for the interview, we will be in contact in case we need to specify something!

*Table 1 - Interview guide*

After gathering the data from all the interviews, the full recordings were as audio as well as personal notes from the interviews. The interview results were analyzed as follows:

1. The interviews were translated manually from audio to an Excel sheet in text format.
2. In this study, to analyze the data the researcher was using keywords as help in understanding the common phenomena.



3. All keywords used are linked together, in order to find the similarities in the answers.
4. The interview answers were shortened and structured in an excel to understand the frequency of keywords used.
5. The answers are shortened into sentences in this thesis in Chapter 3.

### **3.4 Validity and reliability**

According to Christensen, et al, (2016), the reliability with qualitative research interviews can be problematic. The reason for this is that the results of interviews are heavily linked to the setting of the interview, time of the interview and interaction between the interviewer and respondent. This means that the same results might not be achieved with a different interviewer, which implies that the reliability of the interviews is linked to the interviewer. There can also be issues of reliability with an interview, because there might be differences on how the transcribers analyze the data from transcriptions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

With an open conception of validity, qualitative research can lead to valid scientific knowledge. In an interview, to ensure more valid answers the interviewer can ask questions like ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘what’ and theorize the respondents answers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

When the interviewer asks the questions, checking and theorizing the answers of the interviews, the research can lead to valid knowledge. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). To boost the credibility of a qualitative study, the data collecting and processing must follow a systematic pattern. Because you want to assess how credible the outcome is, validity is more crucial than reliability in qualitative studies. . (Christensen, et al, 2016)

Overall, this study is valid. The topics and questions that are asked in the interviews are linked to the theories presented in this thesis. If the researcher feels unsure, there are the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions asked for support, to ensure that the researcher has a full

understanding of the answers. The decision of the respondents is carefully selected, and also ensures the diversification between different continents and levels of line managers.

## **4. RESULTS**

In this part of the thesis, the interview questions and answers are described more in detail.

Because Company X uses English as the main language, all of the interviews were done in English and no translations were needed to the interview answers.

As described in the chapter 3, the interviews were held as open ended questions, with 7 questions and support questions in addition if needed. All of the interviews were done with the same structure, with Line Managers from different business areas as well as different locations to cover variation between different factors.

### **4.1 Interviews**

The interviews of this research were done with 3 bigger themes and 7 questions in total with supportive questions if needed. There were 15 interviews with Line Managers from different locations and business areas. There was also variation on how long the Line Managers had been in the company between 5 months to 30 years.

### **4.2 Interview themes & questions**

#### **Background**

Country	Region
Brazil	AMER
Panama	AMER
Canada	AMER
Canada	AMER
Ecuador	AMER
USA	AMER
Russia	EUROPE 1
The Netherlands	EUROPE 2
Spain	EUROPE 2
Italy	EUROPE 2
Spain	EUROPE 2
Switzerland	EUROPE 2
UK	EUROPE 2
Russia	EUROPE 1
Australia	MEAAA
Indonesia	MEAAA
Finland	EUROPE 1

*Table 2. Respondents background*

#### **4.2.1 Satisfaction & engagement**

The first theme of the interviews was to understand the satisfaction towards the line manager communications in Company X . There was 3 questions asked of this topic:

***How do you feel about HR communications towards Line Managers in general? What actions have you taken from the communications?***

This question got a lot of variation in the answers of the Line Managers, depending on the location and time in the company. The question was crucial in understanding the overall satisfaction and engagement from Line Managers. 6 out of 15 stated that lack of time was the main reason for not reading the communications. 13 out of 15 were aware

of the changes happening in HR and had read communications about it. 10 out of 15 had taken some actions from the communications. 6 out of 15 felt that HR is currently using a lot of robotics, which feels uncomfortable and results in weaker engagement. Also unclarity in roles and responsibilities was highlighted.

***What works/doesn't work in HR LM communications? (Informative, Easy to understand, Engaging, Open and Transparent etc.)?***

Overall the interviewees thought that there is enough communication regarding the change and the new ways of working. Global communication works, but there is unclarity between global and local communication and the difference between them. 10 out of 15 mentioned that the HR Portal is a useful tool and they go there if they need to find HR related materials. Training related communications is seen as an important factor that should be increased during the organizational change.

***What is the primary HR communication channel for you as a Line Manager, why and how often do you use it?***

All 15 respondents answered Compass, Email or Microsoft Teams as the primary HR communication channel they use. The respondents use one of them every day, and prefer these channels since they use it for other work related tasks as well.

*"Working with a machine and no people involved feels strange."*

*" Support request in MyHR is fantastic." "MyHR that merges together a lot of content that were scattered before."*

*" I always read the emails regarding the info from HR. Sometimes the mails are too long"*

*" Tools can not substitute people, even when they are excellent, we need also people. Training and guidelines to new employees and more understanding to what is expected from us."*

#### **4.2.2 HR Line manager newsletter**

The 2nd theme of the interviews was to understand how the respondents use the newsletter used for HR Line Managers communications. The newsletter is sent out bi-monthly, and gathers main timely topics.

##### ***How do you use the Line Manager newsletter?***

13 out of 15 of the respondents say that they receive the newsletter and have read it. 9 out of 15 answered that they go through the newsletter, check the topics and choose which ones are relevant for them. Lack of time was the most common reason for not reading the newsletter at all.

##### ***How does the newsletter support you in your role as a line manager?***

The respondents do feel like the newsletter is supporting them. However, the respondents feel that a personal touch is missing, and the newsletter works more as news than support.

### ***How often would you like to get the newsletter?***

11 out of 15 respondents answered that they would like to receive the newsletter rather monthly with less topics than bi-monthly with too many topics. 2 responded they are happy with the current bi-monthly newsletter and 2 could not answer.

*" I prefer more often but less topics in one. Currently it's a big one and there's no time to read the full newsletter."*

*"As a new employee in the company I would like to receive the year calendar. Annual clock could be matched with the newsletter."*

*" I think every month would be ok. If we have a new change happening, we can't wait until the newsletter comes later if we need to know immediately."*

*" I have a quick read through from the full newsletter. Then I filter what is relevant for me."*

### **4.2.3 Developing HR communications**

The 3rd theme was to understand what could be done better and ideas from the Line Managers for the future.

***How would you like to develop HR communications towards Line Managers? Where do you see room for improvement?***

Overall amount of communications from HR is enough. The current communications are seen as awareness and news, however more training for Line Managers was mentioned several times during the interviews. The interviewees would like to understand better what is coming and not only the current and timely news. Also, as mentioned in the previous theme, the respondents would like to receive the newsletter monthly with less topics than the current bi-monthly newsletter. The respondents would also like to understand better how to manage scattered teams and sensitive conversations now when HR is moving towards a more robotic approach.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of the interviews. The findings are compared to the theoretical framework of this thesis.

### 5.1 Discussion of the results

**Lack of time is the main reason for Line Managers to not read the HR communications**

*Many employees prefer to just let the change roll over them instead of engaging and participating themselves. To prevent that from happening, there has to be continuous engagement from line managers and other stakeholders. (Hodges,. 2021)*

One of the main findings from the study is that the Line Managers in Company X feel like they don't have the time to read the news, and if they do they pick the topics they see important for them. They did find the communication beneficial, but only a few of the interviewees found it engaging and inspiring. The interviewees also gave good ideas for the future. As mentioned by Hodges (2021) it is usual that employees don't necessarily engage and participate in an organizational change, and that's why it is important for Company X to engage and excite Line Managers more to participate in the change.

## **More aligned communications needed from HR towards Line Managers**

*It is important that line managers understand the vision, goals and expectations of an organization prior to transferring it to the front line employees (Men & Bowen, 2016). When an organization provides high-quality communications regarding changes, it will minimize anxiety and insecurity of employees and instead boost their ability to manage change. Approximately 70% of an organization's change effort fails, and one reason for that is poor internal communication (Taylor & Francis, 2019).*

Line Managers want clarity. Currently, there are three different communication lines from HR, Global HR, Business HR and Local HR. There is not an alignment between the different lines, so it is hard for the Line Managers to keep on track what is coming and from where. It is important for HR to align together, to ensure the communication towards Line Managers is clear and using the same tone of voice, which could possibly also increase the engagement and attitude towards the change. As discussed in the theory of the study, Men & Bowen (2016) stated that in order for the Line Managers to transfer the goals and expectations of the organization to the front line employees, it is crucial that they understand the vision, goals and expectations related to the change.

## **Teams, Email and Intra are preferred as the communication channels**

*Communication methods relate to both timing and chosen channel. Informal communication channels are important and complement formal communication channels (Goodman & Truss, 2006).*

In Company X, the Line Manager prefers Microsoft Teams, Email and Internal Intranet for HR communication. In the interviews, all of the respondents answered at least one of these channels. In Company X, Microsoft Teams and Internal Intranet are used for informal communication, when email is used for more formal communication. As Goodman & Truss (2006) claim, informal channels complement the formal channels. In general, Line Managers in Company X are happy with the used channels, and would prefer more urgent and important communication which regards action by email, and



more informative communication through the other channels mentioned. In Company X, there are quite many different channels, and it should be defined which channels are used and in what cases.

### **More training for Line Managers of their role in the change, new tools & processes**

*The Job Demands-Resources (J-DR) theory, by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), unfolds the psychological mechanisms in engagement. It has received the most empirical support from other theories (Hodges, 2018). The theory explains that there are two different groups of job components that can affect employee engagement at work: job resources and job demands.*

As Bakker and Demerouti (2007) argue, there are two components of employee engagement at work, job resources and job demands. Job resources help the employees to reach their goals and be satisfied with their work. This theory suggests that when there is more demand than resources, it results in less engagement and performance and vice versa, when there are enough job resources it can lead to engagement of the employees.

One important part of job resources is learning. In Company X, the Line Managers feel like they would need more training of their role in the change as well as the new tools and ways of working. When the Line Managers feel that they understand the overall change and new processes, they feel more comfortable to also funnel the communication for their employees, and support them better.

## **5.1 Discussion of the method**

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative method by using semi structured interviews. The aim of this study is to identify, analyze and discuss how internal communications have affected line manager engagement in Company X.

This method was used to understand more in depth the attitudes and opinions of the respondents, as well as allow them to express more freely their thoughts in a safe environment. The respondents also had the chance to ask any questions and uncertainties themselves. During and after the interview, it was clear that the respondents appreciated that the study was done as interviews. They felt heard and able to express their worries. Many think that now when HR in Company X is moving more towards using tools and automation in the services, a human touch is lacking.

The method was successful in the study, and the researcher was able to gather the data and answers to the interview questions. However, during the interviews there was a need to remind the respondents that the interviews are focusing on the organizational change and the communications related to that, and not all communications in Company X. This could have been clarified even more in the communication of the study.

Thus, there should not be any effect of this to the reliability and validity of the study, since this was always clarified in the beginning of the interviews, and the respondents were guided to give the answers related to the organizational change, not all communications in Company X.

.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

*The aim of this study is to identify, analyze and discuss how internal communications have affected line manager engagement in Company X.*

This study was done to an international company, which is going through an organizational change in HR. The company has changed the strategy, tools and working processes for HR during the last year and a half and is developing new more automated

and time saving ways of working. To support this transformation, Company X is heavily focusing on change management, communication and training for Line Managers and employees to support the change better.

The main findings of the study is that lack of time is the main reason for Line Managers to not read the communications related to the change, Line Managers need more aligned communication from HR, there are 3 preferred communication channels and more training is needed regarding the processes and tools. However, overall the Line Managers are satisfied with the communication and they feel included in the change.

Company X could align better the communication from HR, to ensure the similar message and clarity for the end users. By aligning and defining the communication channel strategy, it will enable the employees to participate more, save their time and they wouldn't feel overwhelmed with the communication. The communication channels should be kept as they are, but it could be made visible for the employees which channels are used in which cases. Also, when developing new ways of working, the employees could be included in the process very early on, and provide them hands-on training instead of only communication.

## **6.1 Suggestions for further studies**

Further research could investigate more by including a wider variety in the locations and level of managers, which possibly could have an impact on the results.

## **References**

Deborah J. Barrett, 2002, p 2019, *Change communication: using strategic employee communication to facilitate major change*, Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Volume 7 (4)

Shel Holtz, 2003, p. 165-166, *Corporate Conversations: A Guide to Crafting Effective and Appropriate Internal Communications*, Amacom

Gabrielle O'Donovan, 2014, p.69, Solvency II: Stakeholder Communications and Change, Taylor & Francis Group

Goodman, J. and Truss, C., 2004. The medium and the message: communicating effectively during a major change initiative. *Journal of change management*, 4(3), pp.217-228.

Michels, D. & Murphy, K. 2021, 'How Good is Your Company at Change?', *Harvard Business Review*, Available from: <https://hbr.org/2021/07/how-good-is-your-company-at-change>. [Accessed on 9 October 2021].

Neill, M.S., Men, L.R. and Yue, C.A., 2019. How communication climate and organizational identification impact change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*.

O Connor, Carol 1993, "Managing resistance to change", *Management Development Review*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 25.

Piderit, S.K. 2000, "Rethinking resistance and recognizing ambivalence: A multidimensional view of attitudes toward an organizational change", *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 783-794.

Stanley Deetz, Sarah J. Tracy and Jennifer Lyn Simpson, 1999, p.94-95, *Leading Organizations through Transition: Communication and Cultural Change*, SAGE Publications

Strategic Direction, 2017. The only constant is change: Knowledge management as the key to successful organizational change. vol. 33, no. 6, pp. 35-37.

Goncalves, V. and Campos, C. (2018) *The Human Change Management Body of Knowledge (HCMBOK®)*. 3rd edn. CRC Press.

Cameron, E. and Green, M. (2019) *Making Sense of Change Management*. 5th edn. Kogan Page. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1589596/making-sense-of-change-management-pdf> (Accessed: 9 October 2021).

Beerel, A. (2009) *Leadership and Change Management*. 1st edn. SAGE Publications. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/861119/leadership-and-change-management-pdf> (Accessed: 9 October 2021).

FitzPatrick, L. and Valskov, K. *Internal Communications*. 1st edn. Kogan Page. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1015195/internal-communications-pdf> (Accessed: 9 October 2021).

Ford, J.D., Ford, L.W. and D'Amelio, A., 2008. Resistance to change: The rest of the story. *Academy of management Review*, 33(2), pp.362-377.

Men, R. L. and Bowen, S. (2016) *Excellence in Internal Communication Management*. [edition missing]. Business Expert Press.

Field, J. (2021) *Influential Internal Communication*. 1st edn. Kogan Page.

Verčič, A.T. and Špoljarić, A., 2020. Managing internal communication: How the choice of channels affects internal communication satisfaction. *Public relations review*, 46(3), p.101926.

Bridger, E. (2018) *Employee Engagement*. 2nd edn. Kogan Page. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1589702/employee-engagement-pdf> (Accessed: 10 October 2021).

Hodges, J. (2018) *Employee Engagement for Organizational Change*. 1st edn. Taylor and Francis.

Macey, W. *et al.* (2011) *Employee Engagement*. 1st edn. Wiley. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1010310/employee-engagement-pdf> (Accessed: 10 October 2021).

Mone, E. *et al.* (2018) *Employee Engagement Through Effective Performance Management*. 2nd edn. Taylor and Francis. .

Hodges, J. (2021) *Managing and Leading People through Organizational Change*. 2nd edn. Kogan Page. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/2568738/managing-and-leading-people-through-organizational-change-pdf> (Accessed: 17 October 2021).

Cran, C. (2015) *The Art of Change Leadership*. 1st edn. Wiley. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/991208/the-art-of-change-leadership-pdf> (Accessed: 17 October 2021)

