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TITLE:
Change readiness: Trust in change agents and its influence on the five change beliefs

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Executive Summary

This dissertation has examined the topics of change readiness and trust in change agents. The purpose of the dissertation was to examine how the five change beliefs and trust in change agents work together to create readiness for organizational change in a company, through addressing the research question; *how can trust in change agents increase recipient readiness to change by influencing the five change beliefs?*

The aims of the dissertation were divided into one theoretical and one practical aspect, set out to further develop the research conducted on the five change beliefs identified by Armenakis and colleagues (1993, 1999, 2002) by incorporating trust in change agents, and provide advice for management and future research based on the findings from analysis of primary and secondary data. The primary data was obtained through a survey developed by Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols (2016), which was sent to a construction company. As this dissertation is a case study, the main goal is not to generalize the findings, but to conduct a preliminary study which can be the basis for further research. Interpretive research paradigm was used to complement the aims, as the primary data is both based on and affected by personal viewpoints. Through thematic analysis important themes and trends were uncovered, where it was found that (1) communication can influence discrepancy, appropriateness, and principal support, (2) participation can influence efficacy, and (3) perceived fairness can influence principal support and valence. Support was found for the model presented in chapter two, which suggests that recipients' trust in change agents can positively influence the five change beliefs, which will result in increased readiness for change. Further, the achieved change readiness will positively affect the chances for organizational success.

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1.   Introduction

1.1   Research background

As a result of increased globalization, dynamic environments, and demand from internal and external sources, organizations experience increased need for changes in strategy, structure, process, and culture (Azra, Etikariena, Haryoko, 2018; Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder 1993; Rafferty, Jimmieson & Armenakis, 2013; Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Melberg, 2014; Bernerth, 2004; By, 2005). Even though change is an important aspect for organizational success in a continuously evolving environment, many change initiatives fail (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; By, 2005). Previous evidence show that only one-third of all change initiatives are considered a success, i.e. result in their intended aims (Choi & Ruona, 2011; Vakola, 2013; Rafferty et al., 2013; Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Knowing how to implement changes that are appropriate and will be embraced by organizational members is essential for survival and prosperity (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Several authors emphasize that recipient responses to change is an important part of any change initiative (Cole, Harris & Bernerth 2006; By, 2007; Herold, Fedor & Caldwell, 2007; Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Vakola, 2013), where the recipient is a member of the organization at any level, who is affected by the change initiative. Similarly, the person who leads and/or promotes the change is referred to as the change agent (Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols, 2016). For the purpose of this dissertation, change agent is defined as a member of the organization at any level, who provides change agency, i.e who leads and/or promotes the change.

Implementing successful organizational change can be challenging, and the phenomenon is widely studied (Holt & Vardaman, 2013). There are consistent findings among scholars that readiness for change is an important factor for influencing successful organizational changes (Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Armenakis et al., 1993; Metwally, Ruiz, Metwally & Gartzia, 2019). The numerous definitions of change readiness are largely derived from Armenakis and his colleagues' work (Rafferty et al., 2013). Therefore, the definition by Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993:681) will be used for the purpose of this dissertation; "readiness is the cognitive precursor to the behaviours of either resistance to, or support for, a change effort." Readiness is "a mindset that exists among employees during the implementation of organizational changes. It comprises beliefs, attitudes and intentions of change target

members regarding the need for and capability of implementing organizational change" (Armenakis & Fredenberger, 1997:144). When studying readiness for change as opposed to resistance to change, a more positive approach is used to frame change and the challenges faced (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Vakola (2014) emphasize that through the investigation of individual readiness to change one can learn effective implementation of change initiatives. Therefore, readiness to change is a crucial factor to take into account, because it involves the organizational members' initial readiness for - support or resistance to - change initiatives.

Through their extensive research on organizational readiness for change, Armenakis and his colleagues identified five key change beliefs that serve as a factor for influencing recipient readiness to change (1993, 1999, 2002), and scholars agree that they are important antecedents of change readiness (Antoni, 2004; Bernerth, 2004; Brown, 2009; Rafferty & Minbashian, 2019; Self & Schraeder, 2009). A belief is defined as "an opinion or a conviction about the truth of something that may not be readily obvious or subject to systematic verification" (Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts & Walker, 2007a:483). The five change beliefs are discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support, and valence.

Within the field of change management, some researchers consider trust in management to be a necessary factor for reducing resistance to change (Vakola, 2014). For the purpose of this dissertation trust is defined as "the employee's willingness to be vulnerable to the leader's actions, on the basis of a positive expectation of the leader's intentions" (Phong, Hui & Son, 2018:708). Mutual trust is argued to be an essential feature of organizational change (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003), and perceiving management as trustworthy is likely to lead to higher levels of individual readiness for change (Vakola, 2014). A change agent is defined as the person who provides change agency. Thus, the change agent does not necessarily represent the organization's management, as the role of agent can be played by formal as well as informal leaders (Cawsey et al., 2016), and not all formal leaders take on the role of a change agent. Trust in management will from this point be referred to as trust in change agents.

1.2 Purpose of the dissertation

Both readiness for change (Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Armenakis et al., 1993; Weiner, Amick & Lee, 2008; Metwally et al., 2019; Stevens, 2013) and trust in change agents (Morgan &

Zeffane, 2003; van der Werff, Legood, Weibel & de Cremer, 2019) are argued to be important factors for organizational success. However, when considering the research on change readiness, few recognized theories have incorporated trust in change agents (Vakola, 2014; Brown, 2009; Rafferty, Jimmieson & Armenakis, 2013; Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011), where trust is mostly mentioned as an important aspect for increasing change readiness, with little focus on *how* trust in change agents can influence the five change beliefs. Brown (2009) argues that recipients will typically be more supportive and optimistic towards change initiatives if they trust the change agents. Therefore, incorporating trust in the readiness to change theory may provide valuable information for organizations.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how the five change beliefs and trust in change agents work together to create readiness for organizational change in a company, through addressing the research question;
How can trust in change agents increase recipient readiness to change by influencing the five change beliefs?

The dissertation will further develop the research conducted on the five change beliefs by examining trust in change agents as a factor for increasing change readiness. Further, a company's readiness for change will be measured and managerial advice and recommendations for further research will be given based on the findings from the primary and secondary data. The company in which the primary data is obtained from is a Norwegian construction company within the oil, gass, and process industry, who wish to remain anonymous. Their workforce consists of more than 300 employees.

1.2.1   Aims and objectives

The aim of this dissertation has both a theoretical and a practical aspect. This research can be seen as a preliminary study on the topic of change readiness and trust in change agents because of the limitations regarding the sample size, time, and scope.

1. Theoretical aim: To further develop the research conducted on the five change beliefs by examining trust in change agents as a factor for increasing readiness to change, which will be addressed in chapter two as the dissertation's secondary data. A model is proposed suggesting the importance of incorporating trust in change agents into the readiness framework.

2. Practical aim: In cooperation with the construction company, the aim is to measure the company's change readiness and to provide management with practical advice on how to obtain and maintain the desired level of change readiness. The survey "Rate the Organization's Readiness for Change" developed by Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols (2016) is used to collect primary data and reveal their level of change readiness. The managerial advice, together with recommendations for further research, will be presented in chapter six based on the findings and discussions in chapter four.

The research objectives are:

1. Describe the research methodology used to obtain and analyze the primary and secondary data in accordance to the research question, presented in chapter three.
2. Analyze and discuss the findings from the primary data in light of the themes identified through thematic analysis of the secondary data in accordance to the suggested model, presented in chapter four.
3. Answering the research question by providing conclusions of the findings from primary and secondary data, presented in chapter five.
4. Provide advice for scholars for future research on trust and change readiness, and provide management with advice on how to obtain and maintain the desired level of change readiness, presented in chapter six.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The review of literature will focus on the theoretical aim set out as a preliminary study to further develop the research conducted on the five change beliefs and incorporate trust in change agents as a factor for influencing change readiness, where change agent is defined as an organizational member who performs change agency - one who leads and promotes the change. This chapter will first examine the change readiness literature, focusing on the five key change beliefs developed by Armenakis and colleagues (1993, 1999, 2002). The focus on readiness to change, as opposed to resistance to change, provides a positive view on change. It has been argued that when the focus is on resistance to change, the change agents can create resistance by expecting that it will happen. In contrast, a focus on change readiness creates a dynamic and proactive view on change and the challenges faced, by letting the change agents take the role of coaches and champions for change (Choi & Ruona, 2011). As a contribution to the existing literature on change readiness, trust in change agents will be included as it is argued by Morgan and Zeffane (2003) that few models of organizational change encompass the role of trust in the process of change. Within the trust literature, three themes are identified - communication, participation, and perceived fairness. Lastly, a model connecting the themes of trust in change agents and five change beliefs will be proposed, see Figure 1.

2.2 Change Readiness

Weiner, Amick and Lee (2008) explains that any modification in organizational composition, structure or behavior is referred to as organizational change. Theory on organizational readiness for change refers to intentional or planned organizational change (Cawsey et al, 2016). This means that the change initiative is set in place to make a significant alteration to one or more organizational components in order to increase organizational effectiveness (Cawsey et al., 2016; Weiner et al., 2008; Melberg, 2014). Even though readiness has been defined in slightly different ways by different scholars, there is an agreement that "individual readiness for organizational change involves an individual's evaluation about the individual and organizational capacity for making a successful change, the need for a change, and the benefits the organization and its members may gain from a change" (Choi & Ruona, 2011:51).

Individual readiness for organizational change is similar to the "unfreezing" step introduced in Lewin's three-stage model of change (Choi & Ruona, 2011; Metwally et al., 2019; Wiener et al., 2008; Armenakis et al., 1993; Bouckenooghe, 2010). Most theories on change management is more concerned with the unfreezing-stage than the actual implementation of the change initiative, because after all, it is the readiness of the recipients that will affect the overall success (Jacobsen, 2018). The unfreezing concept refers to the process by which the existing mindset is "unfreezed" and beliefs and attitudes are altered in a way that creates motivation to change (Weiner et al., 2008). As a result of the process, the organizational members perceive change as necessary and likely to be successful (Choi & Ruona, 2011; Metwally et al., 2019; Weiner et al., 2008). The unfreezing step is perceived as a success when individuals becomes ready for a change initiative (Choi & Ruona, 2011).

Organizational change roles

At the core of organizational change is the individual members' behaviors, and therefore, organizations only change through their members. When a change is initiated, reactions will be triggered by those affected, i.e the recipients. Whether the reaction is enthusiastic, indifferent, or resistant will affect the overall success of the planned change initiative (Jacobsen, 2018). This means that change agents must be attentive to the role each individual play during the process of change, and create a change environment where recipients accept that change is happening, feel committed, can handle uncertainty, and keep doing their job despite major alterations (Melberg, 2014; Cawsey et al., 2016).

There are several people involved in an organizational change, and one person might play multiple roles. The roles that are present in an organizational change are the change implementers, change initiators, change facilitators, change recipients, and change agents (also called change leaders), described in Table 1 (Cawsey et al., 2016). Recipients of organizational change are actively interpreting and responding to changes that are happening in their environments, and when change agents fail to recognize the role of each individual it may lead to unsuccessful change efforts (Choi & Ruona, 2011), as the change recipient reactions to a change initiative is one of the biggest challenges faced by the change agent (Jacobsen, 2018). The main focus in this dissertation will be on the change recipient and change agent.

Change role	Definition
Change Initiator	The change initiator is the one who encourages the change, by identifying the need for change in order to realize a vision for a better future.
Change Implementer	The change implementer is the one who will make the change happen, which has been encouraged by the initiator. They will create the path for moving forward, and eventually make the change work.
Change Facilitator	The change facilitator will be the one who assists the initiator, implementer, and recipient. By identifying the process and related issues, the facilitator can help resolve these through support and guidance for the organization.
Change Recipient	The change recipient is referred to as the person on the receiving end of change - at any level in the organization. How the recipients react to the changes, whether its resistance or support, will depend on the perceptions of the change, its rationale and impact.
Change Agent	The change agent refers to the person who provides change agency by leading and/or promoting the change. As a change agent, the person might play one, or all of the implementer, initiator, or facilitator roles.

Table 1: Organizational change roles (adapted from Cawsey et al. 2016:25-29)

2.2.1 Change Beliefs

Creating readiness in an organization is boiled down to changing individual beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors across a set of employees (Armenakis et al., 1993). The five change beliefs are discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support, and valence (Armenakis et al., 2007a; Armenakis & Harris, 2009), defined in Table 2. In order to create support for sustainable organizational change, Antoni (2004:198) stated that "one has to change the beliefs of the organizational members, which shape their behavior". Therefore, the change agent plays an important role in shaping these beliefs to create commitment, support, and ultimately, readiness for change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). The theoretical foundation supporting the significance of the change beliefs can be found in research on organizational science dating back to 1940's and 1950's (Armenakis et al, 2007b; Bernerth, 2004). Recently, Rafferty and Minbashian (2019) conducted a multilevel review of the change readiness literature and found consistent support that the five change beliefs were important antecedents of change readiness.

Belief	Definition
Discrepancy	A deviation from the current state and the desired future state representing a need for change (Armenakis et al., 2007a; Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Rafferty & Minbashian, 2019), and a proposed change without this recognition will be seen as valueless (Brown, 2009).
Appropriateness	The proposed change initiative that is set in place to address a discrepancy is the appropriate one for the situation (Brown, 2009; Armenakis et al., 2007a).
Efficacy	The belief that individuals have confidence in their ability to implement the change initiative (Armenakis et al., 2007a).
Principal support	The formal leaders (e.g. change agents, organizational leaders, immediate managers) support the organizational change and are committed to its success (Armenakis et al., 2007b).
Valence	The change recipient perceive the change as beneficial to them (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

Table 2: The five change beliefs

2.3 Trust in change agents

In organizational settings, trust has been shown to be a key factor for success both at individual and organizational levels (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; van der Werff et al., 2019). Over the years, trust has been defined in a variety of ways based on the idea that the actions toward an individual who is vulnerable will be favorable rather than harmful (Perry & Mankin, 2004). For the purpose of this dissertation, trust in change agents is defined as "the employee's willingness to be vulnerable to the leader's actions, on the basis of a positive expectation of the leader's intentions" (Phong, Hui & Son, 2018:708). Furthermore, as trust is a wide concept where one can point out many aspects that may influence readiness to change, three important themes were identified through investigation of literature as the focus of the dissertation; communication, participation, and perceived fairness.

Open communication is a widely accepted factor for building trust in change agents (Huang & Van de Vliert, 2006; Perry & Mankin, 2004; Saunders & Thornhill, 2003; van den Bos, Wilke & Lind, 1998; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Gilbert & Tang, 1998). As trust is a relationship that forms over time, change agents have to engage in trust building processes to create a positive climate where employees can communicate openly (Huang & Van de Vliert, 2006). The importance of good two-way communication is emphasised by Saunders and Thornhill (2003), arguing that change agents have an important role in promoting justice and enabling trust during change. Another important aspect for building trust is participation and involvement, which is likely to improve perceptions of honesty and integrity (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). Participation in the planning and implementation of a

change initiative can create a sense of agency, contribution, and control over the change, which in turn can improve interpersonal trust (Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011).

Morgan and Zeffane (2003) argues that employee trust in change agents is generally affected by how the agents are perceived to act when they make change decisions that affect the employees, e.g. whether the process of change is perceived as fair. Similarly, it is argued that perceptions of the agent's actions - competency, integrity, care and concern for others - is the basis for trust (Phong, Hui & Son, 2018; Perry & Mankin, 2004; Mishra & Morrissey, 1990). It is suggested that agents who are seen as credible and competent are also likely to be seen as trustworthy (Perry & Mankin, 2004). Phong et al. (2018:708) argues that "trust manifests as the degree of confidence that one individual has in another's competence and that he or she will always act in a fair, ethical, and predictable manner." Further, people's reactions to outcomes received from authorities is positively affected by perceived fairness (van den Bos et al., 1998).

2.4   Defining the model

Based on the theoretical aim set out to further develop the research conducted on the five change beliefs by examining trust in change agents as a factor for increasing readiness to change, a model is proposed (Figure 1) that connects Armenakis and colleague's five change beliefs and trust in change agents based on strong relations identified through investigation and analysis of the two topics. The model suggest the importance of incorporating trust into the readiness framework, i.e. the five change beliefs, and the argument that trust in change agents can be seen as fundamental for increasing readiness to change. For the purpose of the model, organizational success is included and defined as achieving the intended aims of a change initiative. The model suggest that recipients' trust in change agents can positively influence the five change beliefs, which will result in increased readiness for change. Further, the achieved change readiness will positively affect the chances for organizational success. Due to the limitations of time, scope, and data collection of the dissertation, one or two beliefs have been identified that stands out as related to and positively affected by each trust theme. However, it is important to note that this does not exclude any belief to relate to another theme.
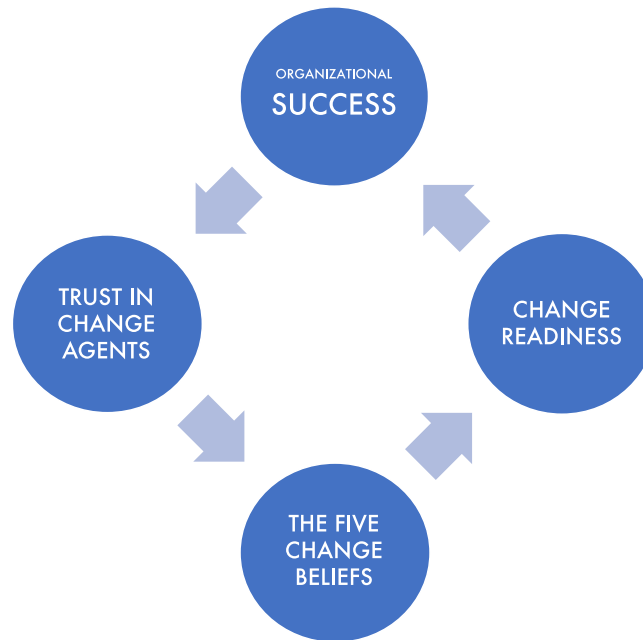
Figure 1: Trust, beliefs, readiness, and success

2.4.1 Trust in change agents and the five change beliefs

2.4.1.1 Communication

One of the most important reasons why recipients support changes is the acknowledgement that the change is needed, and that the chosen solution is the appropriate one to address a discrepancy (Jacobsen, 2018; Armenakis et al., 2007a). A measurable deviation from the current state and the desired future state can help legitimize the need for change, and change agents have to explain why the change is needed for the employees to be willing to give up routines that have been working in the past (Brown, 2009; Armenakis et al., 2007b). Literature suggest that leaders tend to be perceived as trustworthy when they show a general openness towards their employees (Lines, Selart, Espedal & Johansen, 2005). When recipients are given a adequate and genuine reason for a change, they are more likely to accept the decisions, even unfavourable ones (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003). Thus, effective communication may play a central role in enhancing trust in the context of organizational change, as change agents who explain their decisions thoroughly are seen as more trustworthy (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003; Lines et al, 2005).

Willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of change agents is related to the amount of trust the recipients have in their leaders or organization, believing the rationale for such decisions

presented by change agents (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia & Irmer, 2007). When a change initiative is introduced, uncertainty is likely to occur and recipients are therefore likely to look to agents and co-workers for cues on how to react (Bernerth, 2004). Through principal support, the change agents can significantly influence how recipients react to changes by showing that they are committed to the change initiative (Cawsey et al., 2016). When levels of uncertainty is high, there is an increased need for information which can be filled by communication from change agents (Lines et al., 2005). If the trustworthiness of change agents is low, recipients are more likely to be critical of the information they receive in the context of organizational change (Allen et al., 2007). Vakola (2014) argues that trust and communication climate are related to individual readiness to change, where confidence in change agents' abilities and receiving necessary information can lead to higher levels of readiness.

2.4.1.2 *Participation*

The perceived uncertainty that is created by organizational change can be related to the organization's capability of implementing the change successfully (Lines et al., 2005). Thus, organizational readiness to change is likely to be higher when recipients do not only want to implement the proposed change initiative, but also feel confident in their ability to do so (Weiner, 2009), i.e. efficacy. Similarly, the outcome of the change initiative is likely to be less than expected if recipients feel that they are not capable of executing the new behaviours that are required (Armenakis et al., 2007a). An important task for the change agent is therefore to assure recipients that "we can do this" (Bernerth, 2004). It can be argued that active participation is the most effective strategy for communicating the five change beliefs (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). When people take active participation in changes that are happening in the workplace they will gain experience from change situations and uncertainties, increasing their efficacy (Melberg, 2014), and ultimately increasing trust in change agents (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003).

Higher levels of participation tends to show higher readiness and acceptance of change among recipients, as a two-way discussion helps answer questions that occur in a transformation effort (Oreg et al., 2011; Kotter, 1996). Saunders & Thornhill (2003) argue that those who perceive interactions with the change agents as two-way are more likely to feel trusting during organizational change. Lines et al (2005) argues that by granting decision influence to recipients through the use of participation, the managers are signaling that the recipients can

be trusted to make decisions with the organization's best interests in mind. When the recipients experience that they are trusted by the change agents, the trust is likely to be reciprocated, and ultimately, the change agents who grant decision influence will be perceived as more trustworthy.

2.4.1.3 *Perceived fairness*

Perceived fairness by the recipients during organizational change includes both the perceptions of change agents' actions, and perceptions of the process of change. If the organization has a history of failed change attempts, there may be skepticism amongst recipients about whether the current change will succeed (Brown, 2009). Members of an organization will in these situations turn their attention to change agents to see if they show principal support and are serious about the proposed change (Self & Schraeder, 2008). The degree of trust in change agents from recipients will vary with the perceptions of the change agents' actions. Hence, during organizational change, recipients who perceive change agents as trustworthy would believe that they act with integrity, consistency and concern for others (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). Kotter (1996:98) stated that "words are cheap, but actions are not," emphasizing that recipients will be more impressed by the agents' actions and behaviors versus them speaking about the change initiative. Thus, it can be argued that when change agents have established trustworthiness through open communication and thoroughly communicated the need for and appropriateness of a change initiative, by showing consistency and integrity through their actions they can further increase their trustworthiness.

Whether recipients feel trusting or mistrustful can also be influenced by perceptions about the process of change, more specifically, the outcomes and treatment of those affected. When recipients consider the procedures as fair, higher levels of trust in the change process and in the change agents are likely to occur (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003). Fairness is important because the recipients will evaluate experiences and relationships based on the form of social interactions within the organization. In order to feel trusting towards change agents, the procedures, judgements, and social processes must be perceived as fair (Lines et. al., 2005). Even if change agents are successful in expressing the appropriateness of the change, the change recipients will evaluate the potential personal gains and losses of organizational benefits that may follow with the change initiative, and wonder "what is in it for me?", which represents valence (Brown, 2009; Armenakis & Harris, 2002). If the recipients are anticipating personal losses of benefits as a result of an organizational change, they are likely

to question the legitimacy of the change and intentions of change agents, which may shift the entire employment relationship (Korsgaard, Brodt & Whitener, 2002). Therefore, it can be argued that when recipients perceive the change procedure as fair, the recipients feel a higher level of trust in change agents and therefore trust that their needs are taken into account. Smollan (2013:725) emphasizes that "the level of trust becomes a critical factor in influencing how the employees think, feel and act with respect to the current change."

2.5   Chapter summary

This chapter have further developed the research conducted on the five change beliefs, in accordance with the theoretical aim, by examining how trust in change agents can influence change readiness. Change readiness is an important factor to consider before undertaking organizational change, because the readiness of the recipients will affect the overall success of a change initiative. The three themes of communication, participation and perceived fairness were identified and presented as factors that can affect the five change beliefs and readiness to change. The model connecting the topics of trust in change agents and change readiness suggests that trust in change agents will positively affect the five change beliefs, which will increase readiness to change and enhance the chances for success, where achieved success will lead to further increased trust in change agents.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research question of the dissertation is: *How can trust in change agents increase recipient readiness to change by influencing the five change beliefs?* In order to answer this question, interpretive research paradigm is used. This chapter will deliver on the first research objective set out to describe the method program used to obtain and analyze the primary and secondary data in accordance to the research question. The primary data is collected through the survey "Rate the Organization's Readiness for Change" which is developed by Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols (2016). The survey is used to calculate the company's change readiness score and to understand what affects the company's change readiness. The survey questions are coded and analyzed based on thematic analysis of the literature in chapter two, where the themes were uncovered; the five beliefs, communication, participation, and perceived fairness.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is the common beliefs regarding the data collection, analysis, and use, related to a phenomenon (Dudovskiy, 2019d). The choice of research paradigm should clarify the aims of the research, and there exist different paradigms within research philosophy, as shown in Table 3. For the purpose of this dissertation, interpretive research is conducted as the nature of the research question is based on perceptions and beliefs. Interpretivism is primarily concerned with understanding human behavior (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), and interpretive researchers believe that there exists multiple, equally valid, interpretations of reality that are dependent on the time and context in which they are made (Biggam, 2015). Interpretive studies generate data that tends to be trustworthy and honest, and therefore may be associated with a high level of validity. However, a main disadvantage with interpretive studies is that primary data cannot be generalized because of its impact of personal viewpoints and values (Dudovskiy, 2019a). The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how the five change beliefs and trust in change agents work together to create readiness for organizational change in a company, by examining the primary data to uncover collective perceptions of a company's change readiness. As this is a case study, the main goal is not to generalize the findings, but to conduct a preliminary study which can be the basis for further research.

Paradigm	Axiology	Popular data collection techniques
Positivism	Research is undertaken in a value-free way, the researcher is independent from the data and maintains an objective stance	Highly structured, large samples, measurement, quantitative can also use qualitative
Realism	Research is value laden; the researcher is biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringings. These effect research findings	Methods chosen must fit the subject matter, quantitative or qualitative
Interpretivism	Research is value bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective	Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative
Pragmatism	Values play a large role in interpreting results, the researcher adopting both objective and subjective points of view	Mixed or multiple method designs, quantitative and qualitative

Table 3: Research paradigms (Dudovskiy, 2019c)

Phenomenology is one of the variations within interpretivism (Dudovskiy, 2019b), which focuses on individual perceptions of events (Biggam, 2015). Phenomenological research is interested in subjective experiences and is concerned with describing as well as explaining events (Biggam, 2015). Within phenomenology, direct perceptions and feelings are considered to be more reliable than what is explained or interpreted through communication (Dudovskiy, 2019b). Thus, social reality has a meaning for people and therefore their actions are meaningful, and social scientist should try to gain access to people's 'common-sense thinking' in order to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view (Bell et al., 2019).

3.3   Data collection method

To obtain the necessary data, the survey "Rate the Organization's Readiness for Change" was applied consisting of 36 questions with different scores ranging from -2 to +2, which measures the company's level of change readiness. The answer options were "yes", "no", and "I don't know", where only the "yes" option yielded points as shown in Appendix 1. The questions that represent a negative factor gives negative score to the "yes" answers, for example question four; "What is the mood of the organization: negative and cynical?" where "yes" indicates a -2 score. The total readiness score can range from -10 to +35, where 10 and above indicates that the company is ready for change (Cawsey et al., 2016:110). The survey is categorized within six readiness dimensions; previous change experiences (questions 1-5), executive support (6-9), credible leadership and change champions (10-15), openness to

change (16-29), rewards for change (30-32), and measures for change and accountability (33-36).

The survey questions are centered around the respondents' individual perceptions regarding organizational factors that ultimately affects the organization's level of change readiness. By interpreting the answers, the goal was to gain an understanding of the constructs held by people in the context of organizational change (Biggam, 2015), whereas the practical aim of the dissertation was to analyse and interpret the results to generate managerial advice that is representative for the company. Thus, in line with interpretivism, these interpretations may be affected by context and personal viewpoints. Anonymity was provided to the respondents in order to increase the likelihood of honesty, thus increasing the likelihood of a representative result for the case company.

The survey was translated to Norwegian, see Appendix 2, and digitized using the online tool SurveyXact. When faced with terms that were difficult to translate, the question and the associated translation were sent to English-speaking acquaintances to make sure nothing was lost in translation. When the translation was completed, the survey was sent to a couple of students from other fields of study to make sure all the questions were understandable. A link to the survey was then sent to the contact person in the company, who further distributed it to the respondents. The overall data collection lasted approximately two weeks, where one reminder had to be sent to the respondents. In addition to the "yes" and "no" options, "I don't know" was added. The reason for this was to avoid the risk of forcing respondents to express opinions that they do not really hold. On the other hand, this may result in respondents choosing this option without being bothered to think about the issue (Bell et al., 2019).

The initial plan for the dissertation was to conduct interviews in addition to the survey, to further examine the main trends and get a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the company's readiness score. Because of the current pandemic situation of Covid-19, companies did not have the capacity to provide this due to temporary layoffs. Therefore, an open-ended question was added where respondents could voluntarily express their opinions about factors that affected the company's perceived readiness to change. This approach would most likely not provided the same information as an in-depth interview would have. However, an open-ended question gives the advantage of the respondents answering in their own terms and it allows for unusual responses to be derived. But, one must also keep in mind that coding a

large amount of answers can be time consuming, as well as requiring greater effort from respondents (Bell et al., 2019).

3.3.1 Sample

The population in this study is a Norwegian construction company, whereas the sample size is ten members from two different departments with varying backgrounds and positions, which were selected by the contact person in the company. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling, which is a non-random sampling technique and is implemented because of its convenience. Biggam (2015:134) argues "convenience sampling tends to be used as a form of exploratory research, giving ideas and insight that may lead to other, more detailed and representative research." Thus, as this dissertation can be seen as a preliminary study, convenience sampling is a perfectly acceptable approach (Biggam, 2015).

3.3.1.1 Limitations regarding sample size

Due to the current situation of Covid-19, the company that was first contacted and agreed to participate had to withdraw from the agreement. Several companies were then contacted. The company that agreed to participate were also affected by the pandemic and could only offer a small number of participants. Considering the current situation, the sample size was accepted. As a direct consequence of the small sample size, it will not provide high value to categorize the respondents by gender (as there is only one female respondent), age, tenure, and so on. Ideally, had the sample size included a larger pool of participants with differing responsibilities, demographics, and tasks, more detailed descriptions/analysis of different groups within the company could have been conducted to uncover internal differences. Further, due to the small sample size, each response will have a large impact on the final result.

3.4   Data analysis method

The survey data was exported to Microsoft Excel in order to calculate the company's readiness score. Further, the data was arranged in a table and the response rates were calculated in percentage for each question, see Table 7 in section 4.1, and lastly each question was coded and arranged within specific themes, see Table 4.

3.4.1 Thematic analysis

According to Clarke and Braun (2017:297), thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data". Thus, it was used for the purpose of this dissertation to identify and interpret the key features of the secondary data, guided by the research aims (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The coding strategy consisted of several steps to determine the meaning of the collected data and code it into themes. First of all, the secondary data was analyzed separately by the two researchers to uncover the main themes and trends within trust theory, as the five beliefs are already common within change readiness literature. The findings were then discussed and compared, where the main differences were controlled for by an additional step of coding. When themes were agreed upon, each survey-question was analyzed and categorized into each of the main themes, see Table 4. The themes that were identified and used for the coding of the primary data were communication, participation, and perceived fairness, where an additional step of coding helped categorize each of the five change beliefs into one of the themes, see Table 5. Questions that did not fit into any theme were placed into a category labelled "neither" and excluded from the tables.

Trust	Questions
Communication	5, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, 25, 26, 27
Participation	1, 2, 3, 4, 28, 29, 32
Fairness	1, 2, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 32

Table 4: Coded survey questions to trust

Trust	Belief
Communication	Discrepancy, appropriateness, principal support
Participation	Efficacy
Fairness	Valence, principal support

Table 5: Categorized change beliefs to trust themes

The open-ended question in the survey was; "Finally, you can leave a comment on the following: Do you think the company is generally ready for changes, and has the culture, systems, and procedures that support this? Explain." The answers were analyzed by extracting statements and thereby categorizing them within the different themes. Six of the nine respondents chose to answer the open-ended question, which produced 20 statements in total. As explained, due to the pandemic situation, the open-ended question was added as a response to not being able to conduct interviews. During the research process, the aims and objectives

of the dissertation had to be further developed due to the limitations resulted from Covid-19. The open-ended question was written before the changes were made to the research aims, resulting in the question no longer being relevant and therefore excluded from further analysis.

3.4.2 Trustworthiness

Within the research paradigm used in this dissertation, interpretivism, the procedure of validating qualitative data is trustworthiness (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Trustworthiness is used to ensure the quality of a study through the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used. Thus, protocols and procedures should be established in each study, in order to be considered worthy by readers (Connelly, 2016). Five alternative criteria are proposed for assessing a qualitative study, explained in Table 6; credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Bell et al., 2019).

Criteria	Description
Credibility	The plausibility or credibility of the account that a researcher arrives at is going to determine its acceptability to other.
Dependability	Involves adoption of an 'auditing' approach which ensures that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process in an accessible manner.
Confirmability	The researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith; it should be apparent that he or she has not overtly or manifestly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it.
Transferability	Produce a rich, detailed description of the context studied.
Authenticity	To fairly represent different viewpoints within a social setting.

Table 6: Primary criteria for assessing a qualitative study (adapted from Bell et al., 2019:363-365)

To strengthen the *credibility* of the research, the analysis and coding of the data was done in several steps to ensure that the right themes and meanings were collected. Themes were identified in accordance with the theoretical aim of the dissertation. To meet the criteria for *dependability*, the information regarding research procedure was reported in an accessible manner, where each step of data collection and data analysis was described in detail. To establish *confirmability* the data was first analyzed separately by the researchers, before it was compared and analyzed jointly multiple times, to obtain multiple viewpoints and control for bias. Thick, detailed description of the study's context was used to enable researchers to make judgements about *transferability*. The criteria of *authenticity* was addressed through detailed

description to get a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon studied, in accordance to the practical aim.

3.5   Ethical considerations

In the starting phase of this dissertation, when it was decided that a survey was going to be used, a 'notification form' was sent to NSD (Norsk senter for forskningsdata) regarding the processing of personal data. As the survey did not collect personal information or IP-addresses, no approval was needed. The company was contacted through email, where the request for participation was presented. The email explained the purpose of the dissertation, the aims and objectives, and the benefits associated with participation. It initially included a request to send the survey to all of the employees in the company, but due to Covid-19, the company only had the capacity to provide ten participants. Because of the small number of participants, the company was granted anonymity as a condition for participation. After agreement of participation, the link to the online survey was sent to the contact-person, where the first page of the survey contained information about terms of participation and individual consent.

3.6   Chapter summary

In accordance to research objective number one, this chapter has described the research methodology used to obtain and analyze the primary and secondary data. Interpretive research paradigm is used due to the nature of the research question, where thematic analysis was used to identify the themes for further coding and analysis. The data was validated through the criteria of trustworthiness.

4.   Research findings and discussion

4.1   Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how the five change beliefs and trust in change agents work together to create readiness for organizational change in a company, through addressing the research question; *how can trust in change agents increase recipient readiness to change by influencing the five change beliefs?* This chapter will contribute to the theoretical and practical research aims by addressing the second research objective set out to analyze and discuss the findings from the primary data in light of the themes of trust (communication, participation, and perceived fairness) in accordance to the model presented in section 2.4., see Figure 1 below. Some of the survey questions use the terms "senior leaders" and "senior managers", but as definitions for change agent and recipient includes employees of different levels, it is not possible to know whether all the "leaders" are agents and all the "non-leaders" are recipients. For the purpose of further discussion, "senior leaders" and "senior managers" will be referred to as change agents, defined as the ones who promotes and/or leads the change.
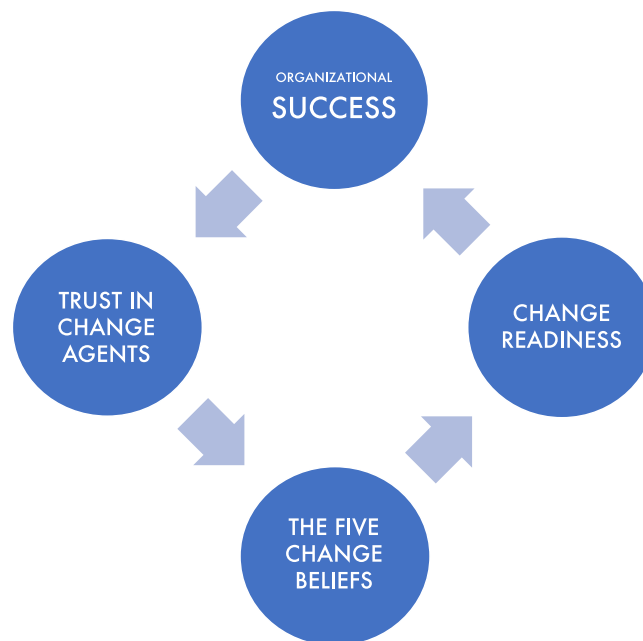
Figure 1: Trust, beliefs, readiness, and success

The total readiness score from the survey ranges from -10 to +35, where a company is assumed to be ready with a score from +10 and up. The company's readiness score of 15 implies that they are ready for change, but with room for improvement as it is close to the

minimum score of being considered as ready. The results from the survey are shown in Table 7 summarizing the "yes", "no", and "I don't know" responses. The individual scores to each question can be found in Appendix 1. The questions that were coded within the trust themes and will be used for further discussion is presented in Table 4 below. In the following sections, each question that is presented or discussed is put in braces, e.g. [10].

Trust	Questions
Communication	5, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, 25, 26, 27
Participation	1, 2, 3, 4, 28, 29, 32
Fairness	1, 2, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 32

Table 4: Coded survey questions to trust

Questions	Yes	No	I don't know
Previous Change Experiences			
1: Has the organization had generally positive experiences with change?	56 %	11 %	33 %
2: Has the organization had recent failure experiences with change?	33 %	44 %	22 %
3: What is the mood of the organization: upbeat and positive?	44 %	33 %	22 %
4: What is the mood of the organization: negative and cynical?	22 %	67 %	11 %
5: Does the organization appear to be resting on its laurels?	0 %	78 %	22 %
Executive Support			
6: Are senior managers directly involved in sponsoring the change?	78 %	22 %	0 %
7: Is there a clear picture of the future?	33 %	67 %	0 %
8: Is executive success dependent on the change occuring?	100 %	0 %	0 %
9: Has management ever demonstrated a lack of support?	44 %	22 %	33 %
Credible Leadership and Change Champions			
10: Are senior leaders in the organization trusted?	78 %	11 %	11 %
11: Are senior leaders able to credibly show others how to acheive their collective goals?	44 %	22 %	33 %
12: Is the organization able to attract and retain capable and respected change champions?	44 %	22 %	33 %
13: Are middle managers able to effectively link senior managers with the rest of the organization?	56 %	11 %	33 %
14: Are senior leaders likely to view the proposed change as generally appropriate for the organization?	67 %	0 %	33 %
15: Will the proposed change be viewed as needed by the senior leaders?	78 %	0 %	22 %
Openness to Change			
16: Does the organization have scanning mechanisms to monitor the environment?	11 %	33 %	56 %
17: Is there a culture of scanning and paying attention to those scans?	11 %	44 %	44 %
18: Does the organization have the ability to focus on root causes and recognize interdependencies both inside and outside the organization's boundaries?	22 %	44 %	33 %
19: Does "turf" protection exist in the organization?	44 %	22 %	33 %
20: Are the senior managers hidebound or locked into the use of past strategies, approaches, and solutions?	44 %	56 %	0 %
21: Are employees able to constructively voice their concerns or support?	78 %	0 %	22 %
22: Is conflict dealt with openly, with a focus on resolution?	67 %	0 %	33 %
23: Is conflict suppressed and smoothed over?	11 %	56 %	33 %
24: Does the organization have a culture that is innovative and encourages innovative activities?	44 %	22 %	33 %
25: Does the organization have communications channels that work effectively in all directions?	33 %	67 %	0 %
26: Will the proposed change be viewed as generally appropriate for the organization by those not in senior leadership roles?	33 %	0 %	67 %
27: Will the proposed change be viewed as needed by those not in senior leadership roles?	33 %	11 %	56 %
28: Do those who will be affected believe they have the energy needed to undertake the change?	33 %	11 %	56 %
29: Do those who will be affected believe there will be access to sufficient resources to support the change?	22 %	56 %	22 %
Rewards for Change			
30: Does the reward system value innovation and change?	0 %	67 %	33 %
31: Does the reward system focus exclusively on short-term results?	11 %	33 %	56 %
32: Are people censured for attempting change and failing?	0 %	67 %	33 %
Measures for Change and Accountability			
33: Are there good measures available for assessing the need for change and tracking progress?	33 %	22 %	44 %
34: Does the organization attend to the data that it collects?	67 %	0 %	33 %
35: Does the organization measure and evaluate customer satisfaction?	100 %	0 %	0 %
36: Is the organization able to carefully steward resources and successfully meed predetermined deadlines?	67 %	22 %	11 %

Table 7: Results from the survey

4.2   Theme 1: Communication

4.2.1   Research findings

From the coding sessions, communication stood out as an important theme in the survey, as well as in the theoretical review. Results show that 78% of respondents trust their management [10], and there is absolute agreement among respondents that change is needed, and executive success is dependent on the change occurring [5, 8]. However, the results show that 67% of the respondents agree that the company does not have communication channels that work effectively in all directions [25] and that a clear image of the organization's future is lacking [7]. The need and/or appropriateness of the change is viewed differently between employees with and without leadership roles. Among employees without leadership roles the proposed change may not be viewed as needed, nor as generally appropriate, where more than 50% answered 'I don't know' [26, 27]. On the other hand, more than 60% of respondents agree that leaders are capable of seeing the need and appropriateness of the change [14, 15], and 78% believe that leaders are involved in sponsoring the change [6]. However, when asked about the leaders' abilities to credibly show others how to achieve their collective goals [11], the results show no agreement among respondents as the answers are close to evenly divided between the options. The question regarding whether there are good measures available for assessing the need for change [33] also show conflicting results, where 33% of the respondents answer 'yes', 44% answer 'I don't know', and 22% answer 'no'. 89% of respondents answered 'no' or 'I don't know' regarding whether the organization have scanning mechanisms to monitor the environment [16].

4.2.2   Discussion

Through investigation of the literature, communication was identified as an important factor for influencing the discrepancy, appropriateness, and principal support beliefs. Research of literature has found that employees will be more willing to support change efforts if they believe that the proposed change is needed and will improve the organization's situation (Brown, 2009). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that there is a discrepancy to further be able to take the most appropriate act to solve the problem (Brown, 2009; Armenakis et al., 2007b; Armenakis & Harris, 2009). By not having a clear picture of the company's future [7], it can be argued that the need for change will not be understood by the recipients, and that a lack of communication about the need for change can result in recipients not showing support

for the proposed change initiative [27, 15]. The results show that the need for change is seen by employees with leadership roles and there are conflicting opinions about whether employees without leadership roles sees the need. If the need for change is clear to leaders and change agents [14, 15], but not to the recipients of lower levels, it is arguably because the communication channels do not work effectively in all directions.

Without efficient and open communication channels [25] and lack of scanning mechanisms to monitor the environment [16], the need for organizational change will not be clear to the recipients, and therefore the proposed change initiatives will not be seen as appropriate. This finding is consistent with literature on readiness to change, where it is emphasized that there are possible pitfalls of communicating a change initiative. Being inconsistent with the communication channels can make the desired message fade, or not being precise enough where it won't make sense to the recipients (Kotter, 1996). There is evidence showing that the respondents see change as generally important for organizational success, but they are not able to view a specific proposed change as appropriate [26]. These results may portray that change initiatives increase uncertainty for recipients, which can be reduced through adequate information and open communication between recipients and change agents. When communication is open and effective, the trustworthiness of change agents is likely to be higher as the agents can promote the initiatives in a way that they are understood and accepted. Therefore, it can be argued that increasing trust through open communication can strengthen the discrepancy and appropriateness beliefs, as recipients will have confidence in agents' competence and decision making.

The inefficient communication can be reflected in the principal support shown by change agents. The results show that senior managers are directly involved in sponsoring the change, but there is disagreement regarding whether they are able to credibly show others how to achieve their collective goals [11]. It can therefore be argued that even though change agents are seen to be directly involved in the change initiative [6], the information that is communicated to the recipients does not address the discrepancy or appropriateness of the change. This lack of effective communication may reduce the perceived principal support, as it may be understood by recipients as lack of commitment that is resulting in inappropriate decisions. It may be suggested that the communication climate in the organization is reducing the trustworthiness of change agents, and thereby the recipients do not consider the received information to be credible.

4.3   Theme 2: Participation

4.3.1   Findings

Participation stood out as an important theme for influencing trust in change agents in chapter two, but the survey used to obtain primary data does not directly address participation. These findings are therefore based on interpretations and discussions of the survey questions. The results show that there is some unclarity regarding recipients' energy and availability of resources during change, where 56% of the respondents do not know whether those affected by the change will have the energy needed to undertake the change [28], and 56% do not believe that there will be sufficient resources to support the change [29]. None of the respondents experience that people will be censured for attempting change and failing [32], and 33% reported that the organization recently have experienced failure with change [2]. Lastly, only 56% of the respondents report that the organization's experiences with change have been generally positive [1], where the mood of the organization was not shown to be overly positive, where only 44% responded it was upbeat and positive, yet 67% responded the mood as not being negative and cynical [3, 4].

4.3.2   Discussion

As opposed to open communication which emphasize on the direct communication of the proposed change initiative, participation will communicate the beliefs indirectly through self-discovery (Armenakis et al., 1993). From the literature review in chapter two, efficacy was found to be strongly related to trust in change agents through participation. The survey found evidence that there is uncertainty regarding the recipients' motivation to undertake changes [28]. When recipients gain experience from change situations through participation, their efficacy can increase as the recipients will learn that they are capable of undertaking change and will be more motivated to participate in future change initiatives. Evidence for this is also found in the literature, where Weiner (2009) argues that when confidence in own abilities is high, motivation will be higher as well. The results from the survey show that recipients will not be censured for attempting a change and failing, and when recipients are allowed trial and error without being criticized [32] it may encourage further participation. However, if the recipient experience success with participation during a change, the evidence of success will ultimately strengthen their efficacy. The survey showed that the company's experiences with

change have been somewhat positive [1, 2], which should, according to the findings, increase trustworthiness in change agents and the recipients' efficacy

The mood of the organization is neither upbeat and positive nor negative and cynical, according to the findings [3, 4]. Without having the opportunity to investigate through more extensive data such as interviews, it may be suggested that this is a result of low participation where most of the employees are occupied with doing their own tasks and not being involved in the community. It may be suggested that the participation will improve the mood of the organization and increase recipients' efficacy. When recipients are allowed participation in the change process, change agents are signaling that the recipients can be trusted to act with the organization's best interest in mind (Lines et al., 2005). As trust is mutual, recipients' self-confidence can increase when change agents show that they feel trusting towards the recipients' abilities to make the right decisions, which will in turn result in increased trust in the change agents. When trust in change agents is high, it can be argued that the change agents will be more credible when they communicate the proposed change and recipients will believe that they have the capacity to implement change. Support for this argument is found in the literature, where it is argued that interactions between recipients and change agents that are perceived as two-way are likely to increase trust during organizational change (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003).

4.4   Theme 3: Perceived fairness

4.4.1   Findings

It is argued that trust in change agents is largely affected by the sense of perceived fairness; the perceived fairness of agent's actions, and the perceived fairness of the process of change. When interpreting the survey questions in relation to perceived fairness of agents' actions, the findings show that there is some disagreement among respondents. The findings of question 11, 14, and 15 have already been reported in section 4.2.1, but are also relevant here. When asked if the management has ever demonstrated a lack of support [9], 44% of the respondents answered 'yes'. The results show that the respondents' opinions about whether the senior managers are locked into the use of past strategies, approaches, and solutions [20], are evenly divided between 'yes' and 'no'.

The perceived fairness of the process of change was found to be related to question 1, 2, 21, 22, 23, and 32. The findings of question 1, 2, and 32 are reported in section 4.3.1. 78% of the respondents feel positive about their ability to constructively voice their concerns or support [21]. Further, findings show that conflict is dealt with openly, with a focus on resolution [22], and it is not suppressed or smoothed over [23].

4.4.2 Discussion

Perceptions of change agents' actions were shown to have a strong effect on principal support in the theoretical review. Thus, when change agents are perceived as trustworthy as a result of fair actions, it is suggested that the perceived principal support will increase. Literature argues that readiness for change is likely to be higher if formal leaders and respected co-workers support the change effort (Bernerth, 2004). It may be suggested that the different opinions among recipients whether agents demonstrate support during change or not may result from recipients belonging to various departments in the organization that have different agents and leaders, and where information may be communicated differently. Thus, the findings of the survey show that almost half of the respondents have experienced that management have demonstrated a lack of support during a change [9], where one third expressed that they were unsure about management's support. As discussed previously, the change agent is a member of the organization at any level who provides change agency. Although some managers undertake change agency, not all of them do. Thus, it can be suggested that the perceived lack of support could be the result of managers having the role of recipient, and not change agent. Even though the managers are recipients in the same way as other organizational members, the employees will still look to managers to see whether they show principal support. If support for change from leaders and agents are perceived as low, the agents' trustworthiness can be affected negatively causing lower support and readiness from recipients. Thus, this argument supports the theory of principal support which states that change agents can significantly influence how recipients react to change by showing principal support, and when the agents show that they are committed to the change initiative positive responses to change will be generated (Cawsey et. al., 2016).

From the literature review, it is argued that trust in change agents will be affected by how change agents' actions is perceived by the recipients. If recipients experience that the change agents support the change initiatives and can see that they act in consistency with what they communicate, the agents will be perceived as trustworthy and supportive of the change

initiative. The findings show that there is disagreement among respondents about whether leaders are unwilling or incapable of changing due to being locked into the use of past strategies [20]. These results are conflicting with the results that says leaders will view the change as needed and generally appropriate [14, 15], as one would argue that leaders who view the change as needed/appropriate are also willing and capable to change. Further, it was found that leaders were not able to credibly show others how to achieve their collective goals [11]. Hence, if change agents communicate to the recipients that change is needed and that the proposed change is the right one for the organization, but fail to demonstrate principal support and failing to show others how the collective goals are achieved, this may result in lack of support from recipients. Kotter (1996) emphasized that recipients will be more impressed by the agents' actions and behaviors versus them just speaking about the change initiative. Thus, it may be argued that the recipients will lose trust in change agents when they don't follow through with their actions and fail to demonstrate principal support.

In the literature review, the perceived fairness of the process of change was found to be in strong relation to the valence belief. The findings from the survey show that recipients are able to openly voice concern or support and potential conflicts are handled with openness [21, 22, 23], where recipients feel trusting towards change agents [10]. This finding is consistent with research on trust, both the importance of open communication and perceived fairness of the process of change. Thus, organizational change is viewed as a high trust situation, where recipients expect integrity, consistency, and concern from change agents. The recipient will evaluate the process of change and its potential gains and losses of organizational benefits. If potential losses are expected, the recipients are likely to question both the process of change and the actions of change agents. When there is room for two-way interactions and it is expected that conflicts are handled with openness focusing on solutions rather than undermining the root of the problem [21, 22, 23], it can be argued that the process of change will be perceived as fair by the recipients. If the recipient's expected personal gains or losses can be constructively and openly discussed to eliminate any uncertainty, positive ripple effects are likely to occur such as increasing valence.

When recipients are allowed to voice their concerns, the process of change is perceived as fair regardless of whether they actually choose to use their voice or not, which will increase the recipients' trust in change agents (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003; Lines et al., 2005; van den Bos et al., 1998). It can be argued that when recipients are uncertain of whether the change

agents are trustworthy or not, the recipients will look to co-workers for cues on how to react. If the recipients experience that co-workers and agents speak openly about issues and problems, it will strengthen the perception of a fair change process. Further, it can be argued that when it is seen by others that a member of the organization attempts a change effort and fail [32], but is not being censured for it, the perception of a fair change process and trustworthy change agents is further strengthened. Thus, when change agents have proven their trustworthiness through a fair change process, the recipients will expect that agents act with care and concern towards the recipients. As a result, the recipient will trust that their needs will be taken into account.

4.5   Chapter summary

This chapter have addressed the second research objective by analyzing and discussing the findings from the primary data in light of the secondary data. Each of the three themes within trust were discussed in separate sections where the related beliefs were addressed. Within the theme of communication, it was found that trust in change agents can increase the discrepancy, appropriateness, and principal support beliefs. Participation was found to have an effect on efficacy through increased trustworthiness of change agents. Lastly, perceived fairness was shown to affect both principal support and valence when fair actions results in higher trust in change agents.

5. Conclusion

Organizational change is considered to be essential for any organization, especially because of the increased globalization, dynamic environments, and demand from internal and external sources. Even though organizational change is important for survival and prosperity, many change initiatives fail to meet their intended aims (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Vakola, 2013; Rafferty et al., 2013). Given the importance of change readiness as a factor for influencing successful changes, a clearer understanding of the relationship between trust in change agents and recipients' readiness for change can provide valuable insights for organizations. Hence, the purpose of this dissertation was to examine how the five change beliefs and trust in change agents work together to create readiness for organizational change in a company through addressing the research question; *how can trust in change agents increase recipient readiness to change by influencing the five change beliefs?*
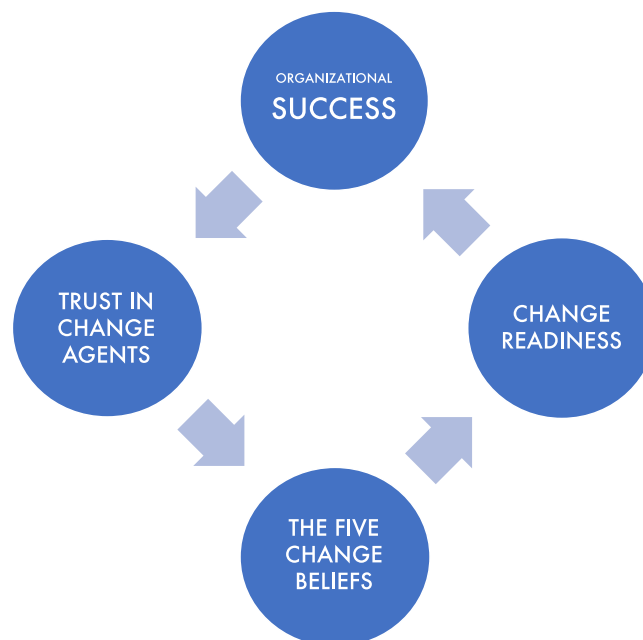
Figure 1: Trust, beliefs, readiness, and success

The aims of the dissertation were divided into one theoretical and one practical aspect. The theoretical aim was set out to further develop the research conducted on the five change beliefs by incorporating trust in change agents, where a model was proposed (see Figure 1). The themes of trust, communication, participation, and perceived fairness were found through investigation and thematic analysis of the literature, and the five key beliefs - discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support, and valence - were chosen because of its

importance in the change readiness literature. The analysis of primary data was based on these themes, where each survey question was individually analyzed in order to fit into one or more of these categories. The practical aim was to measure the company's change readiness score and provide management with practical advice on how to obtain and maintain the desired level of change readiness. Both sets of advice are presented in chapter six. The primary data was obtained through the survey "Rate the Organization's Readiness for Change" (Cawsey et al., 2016). By examining the primary data, support was found for the model presented in chapter two (Figure 1) which suggested that trust in change agents can result in increased readiness for change by influencing the five beliefs. The survey implies that the company is ready for change, with a readiness score of 15. However, as the score is on the lower part of the readiness scale, there is room for improvement in order to make the organization more ready for change. The findings from the primary data reveal that there is trust in change agents and that the respondents are aware that change is a necessary factor for executive success.

To answer the research question, support was found in the primary and secondary data for the argumentation that being attentive of open communication, participation, and perceived fairness during the process of change will increase recipients' trust in change agents, which again will result in increasing recipients' readiness for change, which is likely to positively affect the chances for successful changes. Communication was found to be an important factor for increasing the discrepancy, appropriateness, and principal support beliefs. Without effective communication channels the need and appropriateness of the change will not be fully acknowledged by recipients. The findings revealed that poor communication channels also affect how the principal support is perceived by the recipients, as the reduced trustworthiness will impact the credibility of the information that is communicated during organizational change. Further, the theme of participation was investigated where the results show that recipients' efficacy will be affected by participation in the change process. When recipients have experienced success through participation their change competence will increase, thus increasing their efficacy. Participation was also found to foster mutual trust between agent and recipient. Lastly, perceived fairness was discussed, revealing that both the change agents' actions and the process of change can affect the principal support and valence beliefs. Findings show that change agents can affect how recipients respond to change, and if change agents demonstrate lack of support the trustworthiness can be affected negatively, resulting in lower support from recipients. Being able to openly voice support or concern

makes the recipients perceive the process of change as fair. When the process of change is perceived as fair, the trustworthiness of change agents is higher resulting in increased valence as the recipients will trust that their needs are taken into account.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The research question of this dissertation was; *how can trust in change agents increase recipient readiness to change by influencing the five change beliefs?* Hence, to answer this question the dissertation contains both a theoretical and a practical aim. This chapter will draw on primary and secondary research to deliver on the practical aim, set out to provide managerial advice as a tool-kit for the company to use in order to obtain and maintain the desired level of change readiness, as well as providing advice for scholars for future research on change readiness.

6.2 Recommendations for scholars

Due to time and scope limitations, this dissertation can be seen as a preliminary study on the topic of change readiness and trust in change agents. This section will provide advice for scholars and future master students as recommendations to further develop the research on trust in change agents combined with the five change beliefs.

1. Conduct in-depth interviews in addition to the readiness survey, to further examine the main trends found through investigation of the primary data - e.g. poor communication - in order to get a deeper understanding of the cause (see section 3.3 for further information).

2. Change agent was defined as a member of the organization at any level who provides change agency, but organizational levels were not discussed as literature about trust is based on trust in management. Future research could examine whether change agents from different organizational levels will affect trust in change agents differently.

3. In order to further examine trust in change agents as an antecedent for change readiness, future research could include other topics within trust literature, in addition to communication, participation, and perceived fairness.

6.3   Recommendations for practitioners

By using the survey "Rate the Organization's Readiness for Change" the company was found to be ready for change with a readiness score of 15. As this score is on the lower part of the scale, and close to the minimum score of 10, it can be implied that there is room for improvement. Through analysis and discussion of the primary and secondary data, the findings from chapter four could explain the reason behind the score. Advice for practitioners that could help improve and maintain a company's readiness score will be presented in the following section.

1. **Foster open communication.** Communication was found to be an important factor for influencing trust in change agents and readiness to change. However, the results showed that the company does not have communication channels that work effectively in all directions. By fostering open communication between recipients and change agents one can improve both trust in change agents and recipient readiness for change (see section 4.2.2 for further information).

2. **Increase participation during organizational change.** It was suggested that low participation could be the reason for the unsatisfactory mood of the organization. Hence, increasing participation during the process of change can increase the recipients' confidence in own abilities, and therefore increase their trust in change agents and their change readiness (see section 4.3.2 for further information).

3. It was argued that the sense of perceived fairness could affect trust in change agents through two themes; (a) the perceived fairness of agent's actions and (b) the perceived fairness of the process of change.

   a. **Make sure that formal leaders and change agents actively show that they support changes and act in consistency with what they communicate.** The results showed that there were some different opinions among recipients whether management demonstrate support during change. Thus, in order to increase recipient readiness and trustworthiness of change agents, the change agents must actively show recipients that they support the change (see section 4.4.2 paragraph 1 and 2 for further information)

   b. **Allow organizational members to openly voice their concerns or support.** By allowing recipients to openly voice their concerns and by fostering two-way interactions, the process will be perceived as fair, because the company is

proactive towards potential conflicts. Thus, when the process is perceived as fair, the belief of valence will be increased as trustworthiness of change agents is higher (see section 4.4.2 paragraph 3 and 4 for further information).

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Appendix 1: Rate the Organization's Readiness for Change

Previous Change Experiences

Q1: Has the organization had generally positive experiences with change?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q2: Has the organization had recent failure experiences with change?

- o Yes (-1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q3: What is the mood of the organization: upbeat and positive?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q4: What is the mood of the organization: negative and cynical?

- o Yes (-2)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q5: Does the organization appear to be resting on its laurels?

- o Yes (-1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Executive Support

Q6: Are senior managers directly involved in sponsoring the change?

- o Yes (+2)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q7: Is there a clear picture of the future?

- o   Yes (+1)
- o   No (0)
- o   I don't know (0)

Q8: Is executive success dependent on the change occuring?

- o   Yes (+1)
- o   No (0)
- o   I don't know (0)

Q9: Has management ever demonstrated a lack of support?

- o   Yes (-1)
- o   No (0)
- o   I don't know (0)

Credible Leadership and Change Champions

Q10: Are senior leaders in the organization trusted?

- o   Yes (+1)
- o   No (0)
- o   I don't know (0)

Q11: Are senior leaders able to credibly show others how to acheive their collective goals?

- o   Yes (+1)
- o   No (0)
- o   I don't know (0)

Q12: Is the organization able to attract and retain capable and respected change champions?

- o   Yes (+2)
- o   No (0)
- o   I don't know (0)

Q13: Are middle managers able to effectively link senior managers with the rest of the organization?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q14: Are senior leaders likely to view the proposed change as generally appropriate for the organization?

- o Yes (+2)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q15: Will the proposed change be viewed as needed by the senior leaders?

- o Yes (+2)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Openness to Change

Q16: Does the organization have scanning mechanisms to monitor the environment?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q17: Is there a culture of scanning and paying attention to those scans?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q18: Does the organization have the ability to focus on root causes and recognize interdependencies both inside and outside the organization's boundaries?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q19: Does "turf" protection exist in the organization?

- o Yes (-1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q20: Are the senior managers hidebound or locked into the use of past strategies, approaches, and solutions?

- o Yes (-1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q21: Are employees able to constructively voice their concerns or support?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q22: Is conflict dealt with openly, with a focus on resolution?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q23: Is conflict suppressed and smoothed over?

- o Yes (-1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q24: Does the organization have a culture that is innovative and encourages innovative activities?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q25: Does the organization have communications channels that work effectively in all directions?

- o Yes (+1)
- o No (0)
- o I don't know (0)

Q26: Will the proposed change be viewed as generally appropriate for the organization by those not in senior leadership roles?

- ○ Yes (+2)
- ○ No (0)
- ○ I don't know (0)

Q27: Will the proposed change be viewed as needed by those not in senior leadership roles?

- ○ Yes (+2)
- ○ No (0)
- ○ I don't know (0)

Q28: Do those who will be affected believe they have the energy needed to undertake the change?

- ○ Yes (+2)
- ○ No (0)
- ○ I don't know (0)

Q29: Do those who will be affected believe there will be access to sufficient resources to support the change?

- ○ Yes (+2)
- ○ No (0)
- ○ I don't know (0)

Rewards for Change

Q30: Does the reward system value innovation and change?

- ○ Yes (+1)
- ○ No (0)
- ○ I don't know (0)

Q31: Does the reward system focus exclusively on short-term results?

- ○ Yes (-1)
- ○ No (0)
- ○ I don't know (0)

Q32: Are people censured for attempting change and failing?

- ○ Yes (-1)
- ○ No (0)

o   I don't know (0)

Measures for Change and Accountability

Q33: Are there good measures available for assessing the need for change and tracking progress?

o   Yes (+1)
o   No (0)
o   I don't know (0)

Q34: Does the organization attend to the data that it collects?

o   Yes (+1)
o   No (0)
o   I don't know (0)

Q35: Does the organization measure and evaluate customer satisfaction?

o   Yes (+1)
o   No (0)
o   I don't know (0)

Q36: Is the organization able to carefully steward resources and successfully meed predetermined deadlines?

o   Yes (+1)
o   No (0)
o   I don't know (0)

Appendix 2: Survey translated to Norwegian

Tidligere erfaringer med endring

Q1: Har bedriften hatt generelt positive erfaringer med endring?

- o   Ja (1)
- o   Nei (0)
- o   Vet ikke (0)

Q2: Har bedriften nylig hatt dårlige erfaringer med endring?

- o   Ja (-1)
- o   Nei (0)
- o   Vet ikke (0)

Q3: Vil du beskrive stemningen i bedriften som positiv og optimistisk?

- o   Ja (1)
- o   Nei (0)
- o   Vet ikke (0)

Q4: Vil du beskrive stemningen i bedriften som negativ og pessimistisk?

- o   Ja (-2)
- o   Nei (0)
- o   Vet ikke (0)

Q5: Synes du bedriften ser ut til å være fornøyd med dagens tilstand og derfor anse ytterligere innsats som unødvendig?

- o   Ja (-1)
- o   Nei (0)
- o   Vet ikke (0)

Lederstøtte

Q6: Er ledelsen direkte involvert i å fremme endringer?

- o   Ja (+2)
- o   Nei (0)
- o   Vet ikke (0)

Q7: Opplever du at det er et tydelig bilde av bedriftens fremtid?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q8: Er utøvende suksess avhengig av at endringer skjer?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q9: Har ledelsen noen gang vist mangel på støtte til endring?

- o Ja (-1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Troverdig ledelse og endringsforkjempere

Q10: Har du tillit til ledelsen?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q11: Er ledelsen i stand til å vise andre hvordan de skal oppnå deres felles mål på en troverdig måte?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q12: Er bedriften i stand til å rekruttere og beholde dyktige og respekterte endringsagenter? (ansatte som aktivt støtter endringer)

- o Ja (+2)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q13: Er mellomledere/gruppeledere i stand til å koble lederne sammen med resten av organisasjonen?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q14: Er det sannsynlig at ledelsen ser den foreslåtte endringen som passende for bedriften?

- o Ja (+2)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q15: Vil den foreslåtte endringen bli ansett som nødvendig av ledelsen?

- o Ja (+2)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Åpenhet for endring

Q16: Har bedriften rutiner for overvåking av omgivelsene, med tanke på endringer som skjer?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q17: Er det en kultur i bedriften som støtter opp mot og tar hensyn til rutinene for overvåking av omgivelser?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q18: Har bedriften evne til å fokusere på de grunnleggende årsakene til endringer som oppstår og gjenkjenne gjensidige avhengigheter i bedriftens interne og eksterne omgivelser?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q19: Har bedriften mekanismer for å beskytte sine forretningsområder?

- o Ja (-1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q20: Opplever du at ledelsen er uvillig eller ikke i stand til å endre seg på grunn av at de er låst til bruken av tidligere strategier, tilnærminger og løsninger?

- o Ja (-1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q21: Har ansatte mulighet til å kunne konstruktivt ytre sin bekymring eller støtte?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q22: Blir konflikter behandlet med åpenhet, med fokus på løsning?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q23: Blir konflikter undertrykt og bagatellisert?

- o Ja (-1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q24: Har organisasjonen en kultur som er nyskapende og oppmuntrer til innovative aktiviteter?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q25: Har organisasjonen kommunikasjonskanaler som fungerer effektivt i alle retninger?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q26: Vil den foreslåtte endringen bli sett på som generelt passende for organisasjonen av de som ikke har personalansvar?

- o Ja (+2)
- o Nei (0)

o   Vet ikke (0)

Q27: Vil den foreslåtte endringen bli sett på som nødvendig av de som ikke har personalansvar?

o   Ja (+2)
o   Nei (0)
o   Vet ikke (0)

Q28: Tror de som vil bli berørt av endring at de har energien/motivasjonen som trengs for å gjennomføre endringen?

o   Ja (+2)
o   Nei (0)
o   Vet ikke (0)

Q29: Tror de som vil bli berørt av endringen at det vil være tilgang på tilstrekkelige ressurser til å støtte endringen?

o   Ja (+2)
o   Nei (0)
o   Vet ikke (0)

Belønning for endring

Q30: Blir innovasjon og endring verdsatt i belønningssystemet?

o   Ja (+1)
o   Nei (0)
o   Vet ikke (0)

Q31: Fokuserer belønningssystemet utelukkende på kortsiktige resultater?

o   Ja (-1)
o   Nei (0)
o   Vet ikke (0)

Q32: Blir ansatte bebreidet/kritisert når de feiler et endringsforsøk?

o   Ja (-1)
o   Nei (0)
o   Vet ikke (0)

Mål på endring og ansvarlighet

Q33: Er det gode tiltak tilgjengelig for å vurdere behov for endring og følge med på fremgang?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q34: Benytter bedriften seg av dataene som blir samlet inn?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q35: Måler og vurderer organisasjonen kundetilfredshet?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)

Q36: Er bedriften i stand til å forvalte ressurser nøye og lykkes med å overholde forhåndsbestemte frister?

- o Ja (+1)
- o Nei (0)
- o Vet ikke (0)