Essays on Middle Management Responses to Change Initiatives

by

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To Eli Cathrin in gratitude and love!

Preface and Acknowledgements

The explanation for beginning a Ph.D. when having reached a considerable age and having had the pleasure and challenge of being a manager (senior middle manager and executive) for more than twenty years may be summarized into two different factors.

The first and perhaps the most prominent motive for making a considerable change in a well developed career in the insurance business has to do with my own experiences as a senior manager. After having administered and managed a broad range of change initiatives, I became perfectly aware of the limited power and ability senior managers have with regards to implementing change. First of all, it was the department heads – first line middle managers – that actually implemented the changes. However, it struck me that some middle managers nearly always managed to implement changes and as a consequence contributed to an enhanced financial performance for the company, while others almost always failed. This happened despite each of these groups having the same challenges and the same resource base (except for their personal ability to lead change). This motivated me to dig deeper into the problems managers face when implementing change. Why do some people nearly always succeed while others nearly always fail? Why do senior managers and the literature (the ones recommended by consultants and management schools) underrate the significant role that middle managers, at least the first line heads of departments, play when it comes to managing successful changes?

The second explanation I have for writing this dissertation has to do with the fact that I attended an Executive MBA program some years ago. The literature and lectures concerning change in that program focused on two distinctive issues: top managements' vital influence in change, and employee reactions to change. My own experience had taught me that top managers have very little influence on the actual implementation of changes, although they are very important in giving directions and providing resources. Another experience I had was that there were always reactions to change. Individual reactions to changes based on the fact that somebody has to do something else tomorrow are natural, and should from my point of view not be the key issue when implementing change. If that is the issue, maybe the best thing is to do nothing. However, it is of course vital to any manager to listen and attend to reactions, but this must not be the main issue. The main issue should be long-term, enhanced business performance. The focus in the MBA program triggered my passion for change, and I wanted to enhance my own perceptions of competency in

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organizational change. I also wanted to contribute to the enlightenment of the middle manager's importance in change processes.

My passion for organizational and strategic change triggered deliberate action vis-à-vis The Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration to find out whether or not it was possible to attend a Ph.D. program. In this endeavor, I received great support from the EMBA directors, Tor Øyvind Baardsen and Lasse Lien. Without their great support and personal effort to help me apply for admission to the Ph.D. program, this dissertation would never have been produced.

Being a Ph.D. student at a Norwegian university or any college of higher education requires a financial backing either from the institution itself or from other sources. My former employer, "INSCO[1]", has been a generous financial source. Without the financial support from this company, I would not have been able to continue with this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my advisors: Associate Professor Inger Stensaker, Professor Julia Balogun, and Professor Christine B. Meyer for all their hard work and valuable contributions throughout the process. Especially, I would like to express great gratitude and respect to my main advisor, Inger Stensaker. Without her efforts in guiding me through a series of different ideas and initiatives, I might still be struggling in the early phases of this project. Her contribution to this project has been considerable, and I am very grateful for all the work she has done.

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Ole Hope

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[1] INSCO is a fictitious company name invented to secure the anonymity of the company and my respondents.

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1.   Introduction

As organizations continue to pursue planned change initiatives, researchers attempt to increase our understanding about how to successfully implement planned change as well as explain the high failure rates. Top executives and middle managers play significant but different and complementary roles in strategic change. Top executives focus on expected outcomes, boundary conditions, resource deployment, creating clarity and a shared understanding of these, while middle managers interpret what makes sense and what should be done, and not the least, manage details. Most of the strategic change literature focuses on top management's important role in securing successful results. However, lately there has been increased interest in how the middle management level influences change outcomes.

While the middle manager role in strategy has traditionally been viewed as contributing to the implementation of top management's intended strategies (Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994), which can be viewed as convergent action, there is also evidence that middle managers engage in divergent action (Burgelman, 1991, 1994; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Huff, Huff, & Thomas, 1992). Such action is often seen as negative and unconstructive because top management may be closely identified with the official strategy (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). Divergent actions do not need to be counterproductive (Burgelman, 1991, 1994; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Huff et al., 1992; Meyer, 2006), but managers are more likely to fail in effectuating strategic intent if there are tensions and different responses between different groups of middle managers (Meyer, 2006). This study sets out to understand how middle managers influence strategic change outcomes, particularly by tapping into how they themselves explain and defend their responses to strategic change.

The middle manager literature can be divided into two distinctive views: the dark and pessimistic view and the optimistic view (Dopson & Stewart, 1990, 1994). The trend is that there has been a move from the first view to the latter view in the recent literature on middle management. Unfortunately the optimistic literature on middle management's role in strategic change tends to ignore evidence from the more pessimistic stream of research, leading to two rather separated streams of research. Some of the early middle management literature viewed organizational change as a political process focusing on middle managers' self-interests and how middle managers often obstruct change initiatives.   The broad range of the studies in the optimistic research stream suggests that middle managers sensemaking

and sensegiving processes have a great and often constructive impact on the change outcome (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005). However, despite the recognition that sensegiving has to do with influencing the meaning construction of others, very little research has coupled sensemaking and sensegiving with organizational politics. This study attempts to overcome these shortcomings by drawing on both the pessimistic and the positive research stream on middle managers to explore middle managers' actions during organizational change.

In order to expand our understanding of why middle managers behave convergently or divergently in the context of change, I draw on political and discourse theory. Sensemaking is about meaning construction and reconstruction of individuals when they seek to create an understanding of the intentions of a strategic change. Sensegiving is, on the other hand, the process performed when somebody tries to influence others' sensemaking towards the sensegiver's perception of reality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). In addition, this study attempts to couple power, politics and discourse perspectives with existing knowledge on sensemaking and sensegiving during change since I will argue that sensegiving in particular is a highly political and rhetorical activity. Organizational politics is the practical domain of power (Buchanan & Badham, 2008), where power is about getting somebody to do what you want them to do, something they otherwise would not necessarily do (Hardy & Clegg, 1996). It is emphasized that the struggle of meaning is closely related to the competition for gaining power, and that organizational politics has to do with the creation of legitimacy for certain ideas (Grant & Hardy, 2004; Pettigrew, 1977). Legitimation may be created through discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; van Dijk, 1998; Vaara & Tienari, 2008).

The study explores how middle managers influence change outcome through their involvement in power, organizational politics and discourse. I focus on how middle managers have an impact on others' sensemaking and sensegiving, and how these sensemaking and sensegiving processes influence the change outcome. To enhance our understanding of what influences sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change, I have approached strategic change through the lens of power and politics and discourse. Regarding power and politics, I have analyzed the data to find out how middle managers influence the meaning construction of superiors and peers through political tactics.

I have empirically studied organizational politics and discourse through an in-depth study in one organization (INSCO). To study these phenomena a close connection to the

studied organization and the extensive knowledge of the organization and the business performed within this organization is required. On one side, knowledge of the organization studied is the key to observe, understand and indentify what political activity lies within the organization, and on the other side there is obtaining access to both observe and discuss controversial issues. As an insider, I had easy access to respondents that were willing to openly talk about controversial issues. In addition, knowledge of the business and organization was extensive, as I had worked as a senior manager in this company for more than eight years. Different qualitative data have been collected over a time span of three years.

The findings show that a more balanced view of middle managers' strategic contributions, including both pessimistic and optimistic perspectives, provides greater insights into exactly how middle managers work to influence change outcome. Middle managers play an important role in strategy, but this project shows that their contributions may be serving the interests of the company in some instances and the self-interests of the middle manager in others. This suggests that while there is an increasing focus on the middle manager as a key resource for implementing change, we should not forget the findings from the more pessimistic view when evaluating middle managers' contributions in the making of strategy.

This dissertation is organized as follows. I position the dissertation in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, the theoretical background and research perspective is presented. This is followed by three empirical chapters presenting three essays that approach the overall research question from different angles. Chapter 3, "Discourse Constructions in Retrospective Assessments of Change Successes and Failures", reveals how middle managers shape subjective perceptions of successes and failures. Chapter 4, "The Politics of Middle Management Sensemaking and Sensegiving", explores how a broad spectrum of emotional, cognitive and intentional responses to change fostered either convergent or divergent actions within different groups of middle managers. The final empirical chapter, Chapter 5, "The Gang of Four: Discourse Strategies to Legitimize Divergent Change Behavior", shows how a group of middle managers legitimize their resistance and divergent responses to a change initiative. Each of the empirical essays includes theory, methods and conclusions, however, in Chapter 6 some overall conclusions based on all three essays are presented, and in Appendix A, a methodological overview including all of the data and analysis that were used for the three essays is presented.

2. Theoretical Background and Research Perspective

2.1 Middle Managers and Strategic Change

A strategic change can be seen as an effort to deliberately adjust the formal structures, working procedures, system and processes in organizations, and the way individuals in organizations act and think in order to meet opportunities and threats and to improve the realization of organizational objectives (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Lines, 2005). Traditionally, top executives are seen as those who formulate and implement strategies. However, a broad range of recent studies has emphasized the middle manager as an important character when it comes to the factual implementation of strategy (Balogun, 2003, 2006; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997, 2000; Huy, 2001, 2002; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008). The increasing focus on middle managers has lead to a more nuanced perspective on the diverse roles managers on different organizational levels perform. Top executives are facilitators and deploy resources, while middle managers develop capabilities and execute the day-to-day decisions that link realized strategy to intended strategy (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Helfat et al., 2007). We know from studies that middle managers' involvement in the making and implementation of strategy has a direct impact on businesses' financial performance (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997, 2000; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990).

Middle managers have been defined in a number of ways, but three different dimensions tend to consistently create the basis for a definition: the hierarchical dimension (Currie & Procter, 2005; Huy, 2001, 2002), the functional dimension (Balogun, 2003; Currie & Procter, 2001; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Likert, 1961), and the responsibility dimension (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). A comprehensive definition of the middle manager should include all three dimensions. In this dissertation, middle managers will be defined as any manager positioned at least two levels below the CEO, and at least one level above line workers and professionals. Middle managers connect the organization's strategic and operational levels; they are responsible for at least the sub-functional workflow or business processes, but they are not responsible for the workflow or business processes of the organization as a whole.

The functions middle managers perform include mediation, negotiation, and interpretation between the strategic and operational levels (Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). They may also be seen as the linking pins (Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Likert, 1961; Mantere, 2008) between vertically related groups throughout the organization. A middle manager's main responsibility is for specific parts of the working/business processes in an organization. This means that they are vital in managing their own area of responsibility, and in coordinating horizontally with their counterparts in horizontally linked organizational units. The importance of this horizontal coordination should not be forgotten when focusing on the strategic role that middle managers perform when bridging the gaps between vertically linked organizational levels.

The middle manager performs her role (both vertically and horizontally) by interpreting her everyday experience of the actions and behaviors of others, and the stories, gossip, jokes, conversations, and discussions she shares with her peers about these experiences (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). Change issues and plans are formed into activities and action through these narrative and social processes, and the interpretation of the content and outcome of these interactions (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Rouleau, 2005). This mediating role gives middle managers a significant influence on an organization's strategy and change outcomes (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). However, the uniqueness of middle managers is their knowledge of operations together with their access to top management, which permits them to work as mediators between day-to-day operations and strategy (Nonaka, 1994).

The literature on middle managers can be divided into two distinctive views: the pessimistic view and the optimistic view (Dopson & Stewart, 1990, 1994). The pessimistic view tends to emphasize the need to reduce the number of organizational layers as an answer to an increasing computerization of organizational and working processes. In this view, the future of middle managers is at stake as information technology has enabled senior managers to widen their span of control, thus causing them to see a reduced need for a large number of middle managers to perform planning and control (Currie, 1999; Dopson & Stewart, 1990, 1994; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). From the pessimistic view, middle managers slow things down and act as filters and distance keepers between the company and responses to customers' needs (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). Middle managers are seen as characters that increase costs and add no value. Faced with the threat of being a

victim of downsizing as a result of surplus, the middle manager is caught in stress and demoralization, trying to find ways to survive (Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999). The pessimistic view is represented by such authors as Dickson (1977) who stated, "*Concentration of decision-making at the top levels discourages middle managers from believing that they can make decisions that matter*" (p. 66). Others have focused on middle managers being in the classic position of between a rock and a hard place (Keys & Bell, 1982), or meeting increased demands and expectations from ambitious and independent-minded employees   (Kanter, 1986). There has even been a focus on middle managers as a self-serving group who only intervene when their self-interests are challenged (Guth & MacMillan, 1986). From this view on middle management, it is worthwhile to register the self-serving and political angle that the literature has taken.

On the other hand, the optimistic stream of literature suggests that middle managers make important contributions to strategy and strategy implementation. This view, which is present in recent research, tends to emphasize the increasingly important role of middle management in change (Balogun, 2003, 2006; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Currie, 1999; Currie & Procter, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 1997, 2000; Huy, 2001, 2002; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Wooldridge et al., 2008). The role of middle managers has been transformed from that of a bureaucratic filter to a strategic actor closer to the strategic apex of the organization. The strategic middle manager is a personally involved entrepreneur with strategic focus (Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Huy, 2001; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Dobson & Stewart (1994) argued that : "*a slimmer middle management in a time of rapid change has a more important role to play than before*" (p. 76). This position has been supported by others such as Balogun (2003, 2006), Currie (1999) and Huy (2002) who emphasized the crucial role middle managers play in implementing organizational change. Middle managers have a "hands on" attitude to the details of the business and are a core component in translating change initiatives into practical changes in the day-to-day business and in implementing the detailed changes. Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) illustrated this point by stating; "*middle managers perform a coordinating role where they mediate, negotiate, and interpret connections between the organization's institutional (strategic) and technical (operational) levels*" (p. 466).

Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) found strong indications that middle management's involvement in strategy has a positive impact on organizational financial performance. They

identified two paths through which organizational performance was positively influenced by middle management's participation: A) through participation in the making of strategy, which enhances the quality of strategic decisions and B) through enhanced implementation processes, where middle managers are seen as the real implementers of strategy and therefore given the opportunity to create a shared understanding of top management's strategic intentions. A shared understanding of intentions may foster higher strategic consensus and as a consequence, improved implementation. Their finding indicates that both paths enhance business performance, but it is through involvement in the making of strategy (path A) that the outcome is most influenced. In later studies, Floyd and Wooldridge (1992, 1997) developed a framework for middle management's involvement in the creation and implementation of strategy. There, they concluded that middle managers in boundary spanning functions such as sales, marketing R&D and procurement are more likely to influence strategy than others, as they are externally oriented and hence are well positioned to get impulses from the external environment.

Other researchers within the more positive research stream have focused more on issues regarding change processes. Balogun (2003) introduced the concept of the middle manager as a "*change intermediary*" (p. 75) containing four middle manager implementation tasks: (i) undertaking personal change, (ii) helping others through change, (iii) keeping the business going, and (iv) implementing change into departments. She emphasized that middle managers act both as change implementers and change recipients, and therefore the term *change intermediary* is a better expression to embody their overall challenges as change implementators. She summarizes the middle manager's role as a change intermediary as the middle manager's ability to absorb and cope with the changes, and how they pass the changes on to their subordinates. This intermediation involves interpretation and translation of the change intent into implications for the middle managers themselves and their teams in terms of behavior and everyday working practices. The four explicit change intermediary tasks she has introduced may be presented in a role typology with two dimensions: nature of activity and orientation. The "nature of activity" dimension encompasses a sensemaking activity and a coordination and management activity. The "orientation dimension" is divided into two different orientation states: orientation towards the team (the middle manager is heading) or towards self/peers. This division of activity and orientation gives us four distinctive middle manager implementation roles: *Undertaking personal change* is a combination of sensemaking and orientation towards self. Through change, middle

managers face changes in roles and responsibility. This requires that they engage in the development of their new roles at the same time as they make sense of their new roles and responsibilities both practically and cognitively. *Helping others through change* is a combination of sensemaking and orientation towards the team. This is more to be seen as a sensegiving activity, where they need to translate and communicate the planned changes to their subordinates. This is also about handling resistance and providing support, coaching, and training. *Keeping the business going* is a combination of orientation towards peers/self and a coordination and management activity. During change, responsibilities and tasks change hands, as do staff. In this atmosphere of semi-coordinated chaos, middle managers have to take responsibility for tasks that are not their responsibility in the new organizational setting but were their responsibility in the old setting, as well as tasks that definitively are theirs. The main objective is to take care of all tasks so that the business does not suffer. *Implementing changes to departments* is a combination of orientation towards team and coordination and management activity. New working practices are developed together with other improvement issues, such as e.g. cost savings and quality improvements. In addition, gray spots - areas where dividing and responsibility lines between different departments and business units are unclear - must be enlightened and clarified. This is a task that may fall into the hands of the executing middle manager in the respective areas.

Much of the positive middle management research is grounded in a sensemaking perspective on change. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, p. 442) defined sensemaking as "*[it] has to do with meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempted [sic] to develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the intended strategic change*". Individuals make sense of situations in which they find themselves by communicating about reality as a continuous achievement. As a consequence, sensemaking is an interpretative process where individuals discover their inventions through interpretations of the intended changes. These interpretations have an impact on how the change recipients' create change and affect the change outcome (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). The counterpart to sensemaking is sensegiving. Sensegiving may be defined as "*the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality*" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Sensegiving has to do with influencing others' interpretations and hence meaning construction through different types of communicative and interactive behavior (Maitlis, 2005). Sensemaking and sensegiving are social processes where the sensemaker and

sensegiver are engaged in different and multifaceted negotiation processes to create their own mental picture of the changes (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005). The sensemaking perspective on change points out the challenging tasks middle managers perform related to both making sense of changes themselves and helping others make sense of planned change.

A related approach to middle management, which emphasizes roles during organizational change rather than tasks, was presented by Huy (2001). While Huy did not explicitly frame his research within a sensemaking perspective, his findings emphasize the important role middle managers play in terms of translating strategic goals into more operational practices. He also showed how middle managers take on a supporting role for subordinates during change. The four middle manager change implementation roles he introduced are: (i) the entrepreneur, (ii) the communicator, (iii) the therapist, and (iv) the tight rope artist. *The entrepreneur* role is associated with middle managers' position near the frontline, which allows the ability to see new possibilities in both problem solving and opportunity detection. Middle managers are often experienced, with great functional knowledge of the business, which makes them fertile ground for new ideas of growth and change. *The communicator* role has to do with establishing a positive attitude throughout the organization regarding proposed changes. Here middle managers play a vital role. They translate the initiative into language and metaphors their subordinates and peers understand. Middle managers very often have a widespread web of contacts in the organization, and they know whom to contact to get things done. Through this web of contacts, they are able to spread the word about the changes, and secure support for the initiative. *The therapist* role is middle management handling uncertainty and fear. Uncertainty may trigger demoralization, depression and paralysis. The middle manager is not in a position where she can ignore this fact, but has to face and handle these issues, in order to take care of employee well-being. Because of their proximity to their employees, they are in a position to tailor communication so that it suits each individual recipient. Finally, *the tight rope artist* shows how the middle manager needs to balance her attention between a set of different issues. Attention on issues such as having focus on the actual change implementation while she simultaneously needs to focus on the day-to-day business and employee morale. Negligence to either of these issues may lead to underperformance in one field or the other.

In summary, the optimistic view on middle managers emphasizes various ways in which middle managers constructively influence the making and implementation of strategy.

Although the optimistic view can be seen as a response and balance to a previously overly negative view on middle managers, one might argue that this later stream of (optimistic) literature tends to ignore the evidence of more counterproductive activities by the middle managers. There have been only a few studies over the past years accentuating middle management's important strategic role, while also highlighting how dysfunctional role conflicts may have a negative impact on the construction and implementation of strategy (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere, 2008; Meyer, 2006; Wooldridge et al., 2008). Furthermore, while middle manager's strategic activity encompasses a wide range of activities, such as issue selling, championing alternatives, implementing deliberate change and responding to change, the middle management literature focus mostly on middle managers strategic role as either *participators* in the making and implementation of strategy or as *recipients* of strategic change. Balogun (2003) is a notable exception as she emphasized the challenges that middle manager meet by acting both as a change recipient and as a change implementer in combination. This suggests that there is a need to investigate how middle management response to strategic change initiatives influences change outcomes. Therefore in the next section, I present some key contributions on responses to organizational change.

Research on responses to change can be divided into two main research streams: organizational (macro-perspective) and individual responses to change (micro-perspective) (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). The first category is concerned with explanatory factors and responses at the organizational level (Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998; Lozeau, Langley, & Denis, 2002; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007), and the latter focuses on how individual responses to change initiative may interfere with proposed changes (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Huy, 2002; Lines, 2005; Piderit, 2000; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). This couples responses to change, to sensemaking and sensegiving, and is as such a result of how individuals make sense of proposed changes. It is argued within the bulk of research on individual responses that organizations do not as such respond to changes, it is the different actors within the organizations who respond to change initiatives and that it is the different responses at an aggregated level that shape the organizational responses (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). While responses at the employee level serve to shape strategic change outcomes, both the pessimistic and optimistic research on middle managers suggest that middle managers are in a particularly powerful position in terms of influencing change outcomes. Existing research suggests that middle managers behave both convergently and divergently when faced with change. One explanation behind their

behavior lies in how they make sense of change and the interpretations upon which they act. A deeper understanding of these responses demands more insight into how middle managers explain and legitimize their behavior and how through their actions and communications they influence others' perception of change.

Piderit (2000) categorized individual responses to change in three dimensions: (i) cognitive, (ii) emotional, and (iii) intentional responses. The *cognitive* dimension refers to an individual's belief system. How the individual beliefs are regarding the proposed changes, whether they are negative, positive, or neutral, has an impact on change recipients' attitudes related to the changes. The *emotional* dimension refers to individual feelings in response to proposed changes. The *intentional* dimension refers to individual intent or decision to take some action related to the changes. In this context, intention is related to an employee's intent to act as a response to a new event, since a change initiative per se is a novel event. In the same context, behavior is seen as an active intervention that actually takes place (or has been taking place) distinguished from the intention to act. Intentions may range from an intention to support an initiative, to an intention to oppose it (Piderit, 2000). This categorizes intention as a reflection in the same way as emotion and cognition, in contrast to active behavior. Responses to change may of course be characterized as either negative, where change recipients react and act negatively regarding all three dimensions, or positive, where change recipients react and act positively in all three dimensions. However, it is more likely that responses to change initiatives are more ambivalent and complex than a simplistic two-dimensional approach: either negative or positive. Piderit (2000) emphasized the multidimensional perspective on responses to organizational change and the need for further empirical research on the phenomenon.

This multidimensional approach towards change attitudes may enhance our understanding of middle managers' responses to change, and as a consequence increase the possibility of achieving desired change outcome. Recognizing and understanding potentially ambivalent attitudes among middle managers can help us gain insight into both constructive and less constructive behavior on behalf of the middle managers in their role as change implementers. In addition, it is important to gain a better understanding of how middle managers, in their important dual role as change recipients and change agents, resolve potential ambiguities. For instance, if they have negative feelings and thoughts about a particular change, will this result in divergent behavior? Likewise, how will middle managers explain and legitimize changes that they disagree with vis-à-vis their subordinates?

In summary, despite a growing emphasis and literature on middle management's influence on strategic change processes and outcomes, we lack a clear understanding of what makes middle managers sometimes take on an active role in contributing to implement change and other times vividly work to not implement planned change. One reason for this could be that the middle management literature has been divided into two camps. The broad range of the studies in the optimistic research stream suggests that middle managers sensemaking and sensegiving processes have a great impact on the change outcome (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005). While sensegiving has to do with influencing the meaning construction of others, it is remarkable how little research there is coupling sensemaking and sensegiving with organizational politics. Yet we know from the more pessimistic literature on middle managers that organizational change is a political process where middle managers' self-interest or their beliefs of what is best for the organization is challenged (Buchanan, 2008; Buchanan & Badham, 1999, 2008; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Mintzberg, 1985; Pettigrew, 1975, 1977). One reason for the lack of linkages between sensemaking/sensegiving and politics may be that organizational politics is a phenomenon debated in literature (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Some would argue that it is unprofessional, unsanctioned and illegitimate, and others that it is inevitable, desirable and necessary to engage in organizational politics. In this study, I will attempt to draw on both streams of middle management literature in order to get a broader understanding of middle management responses to planned change initiatives.

2.2   Developing A Research Perspective

In this section I develop and present the overall research perspective underlying this study (figure 1). I then illustrate how the perspective is used in the three essays. The model highlights that political and discursive responsive aspects of middle management sensegiving and sensemaking are tied together and linked to change outcome. The model also attempts to illustrate the main contribution of the study. The overall objective for this dissertation is to show how middle managers influence change outcome through their responses to change and subsequently through their convergent or divergent behavior.

The light shaded boxes in the model illustrate how middle management involvement in strategy implementation affects the change outcome (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004; 2005). Middle management's involvement in the making of strategy enhances businesses financial performance (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Wooldridge et al., 2008). The final

change outcome may for example be positively affected if middle management are given the opportunity to create a shared understanding of top management's strategic intentions (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997, 2000; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). On the other hand, how individuals respond to change initiatives may interfere with change outcome as individuals may respond either convergently or divergently to proposed changes. Sensemaking and sensegiving processes amongst middle managers have been found as vital explanatory factor for understanding how middle managers influence change outcome.

The highlighted (dark) boxes illustrate the role of power, politics and discourse in affecting the sensemaking that takes place during organizational change. These parts of the model illustrate how middle managers, through engagement in organizational politics and discourse, affect others' sensemaking and sensegiving, and how these sensemaking and sensegiving processes influences the change outcome. The perspective is based on the assumption that power, politics and discourse have a significant impact on middle managers sensemaking and sensegiving and hence the change outcome. Individuals may behave or have intentions to behave in one way, but in the same time they may have emotional and/or cognitive responses in the opposite direction (Piderit, 2000). Power and politics influence individuals' actions through the creation of legitimacy for certain ideas, which may be in conflict with the same individual's originally cognitive and/or emotional and/or intentional position. Such legitimation may be created through discourse. It is argued that middle management sensemaking and sensegiving is a highly political process, where discourse plays a key role.
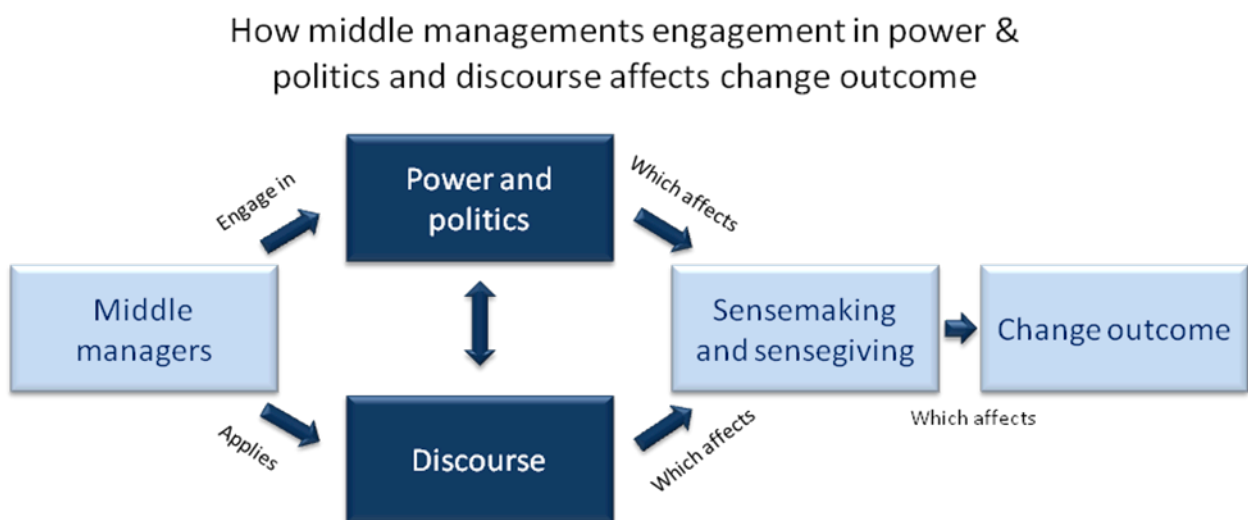

Figure 1: Research perspective

Organizational politics is the practical domain of power (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Power is about getting somebody to do something you want them to do even if it is against their will or that they else would not do it (Hardy & Clegg, 1996). Pettigrew (1977) introduced a widely cited definition of politics: "*Politics concerns the creation of legitimacy for certain ideas, values and demands – not just actions performed as a result of previously acquired legitimacy. The management of meaning refers to a process of symbol construction and value use designed both to create legitimacy for one's own demands and to "delegitimize" the demands of opponents*" (p. 85). Sensegiving is tight coupled to others' meaning constructions as it has to do with the attempt to influence others' sensemaking. As sensemaking is about how individuals make sense of organizational reality, or the organizational reality the sensegiver want them to see, sensemaking and sensegiving is tight coupled to organizational politics. Pettigrew (1977) holds out that politics is about the creation of legitimacy and the struggle for legitimacy is a struggle for the opportunity to influence meaning. The sensemakers struggle for influencing others' perception of reality and meaning construction may lead to actions that would not have taken place without the sensegivers influence. An underutilized approach for exploring organizational politics is discourse (Gordon, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2009; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Hardy, 2004; Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000; Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Mantere & Vaara, 2008).

Organizational discourse has to do with the struggle for meaning (Grant & Hardy, 2004), and as such is directly related to sensegiving. Discourse encompasses written and spoken text, visual images (e.g. pictures, art works), symbols, buildings and other artifacts (e.g. body language, dress code) (Fairclough, 2005; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Heracleous & Hendry (2000) defines discourse as "*any body of language-based communicative actions, or language in use*" (p. 1258). Discourse is a means to create legitimacy (Fairclough, 2003; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; van Dijk, 1998; Vaara & Tienari, 2008) for example for actions taken during change, such as divergent or convergent action. Discourse is connected to legitimation through the fact that specific discourses serve legitimizing purposes (Fairclough, 2003; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; van Dijk, 1998; Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Discourse has to do with the struggle for meaning, and the struggle for meaning can also be viewed as a fight for power (Grant & Hardy, 2004; Hardy & Phillips, 2004).

Studying sensitive and perhaps also controversial issues such as politics and discourse, demands specific approaches towards research. This is because the potential

controversial sides of organizational politics on one side and the tight coupling of politics and discourse on the other. Skilled political actors may not reveal their real intentions through what they say or do in only one setting. They reveal their real intention through their daily doings and communication. As a consequence of my former professional connection to the analyzed organization possible advantages in studying these issues are: (i) I have an extensive knowledge of the organization, the industry, and the business performed in the studied organization, and (ii) I had established personal relations with the respondents which gave me access to information they might have held back for complete strangers.

The recent strategy-as-practice research, which focuses on practices regarding the tacit and symbolic practices through which strategy is constructed (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008) lends itself to such a focus and has successfully been applied in several studies on organizational discourse. Social practice is the core of the strategy-as-practice research stream (Whittington, 2007). It is engaging in people's strategy activity and how they influence strategic outcome, what they do, opposed to a more classic approach that strategy is something firms have (Hoon, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 2006, 2007). The strategy-as-practice perspective assumes that strategy is shaped by a broad spectrum of managers and practitioners at many different levels in organizations, not only top managers (Balogun, 2007; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Hoon, 2007; Rouleau, 2005).

2.3   Outline and Brief Summary of the Essays

This dissertation is composed of three different essays approaching the overall research question from different angles. In this paragraph, I will show how the three essays are connected to different parts of the model presented in Figure 2. The colored ellipses show where each essay has its focus. Essay One, "Discourse Constructions in Retrospective Assessments of Change Successes and Failures" focuses on the connection between discourse and sensemaking/sensegiving. Essay Two, "The Politics of Middle Management Sensemaking and Sensegiving" has its overall focus on the political and power aspects of sensemaking and sensegiving. Finally in Essay Three, "The Gang of Four: Discourse Strategies to Legitimize Divergent Change Behavior" the discursive sides of organizational politics are explored. Each of the essays is briefly introduced below.

How middle managements engagement in power & politics and discourse affects change outcome
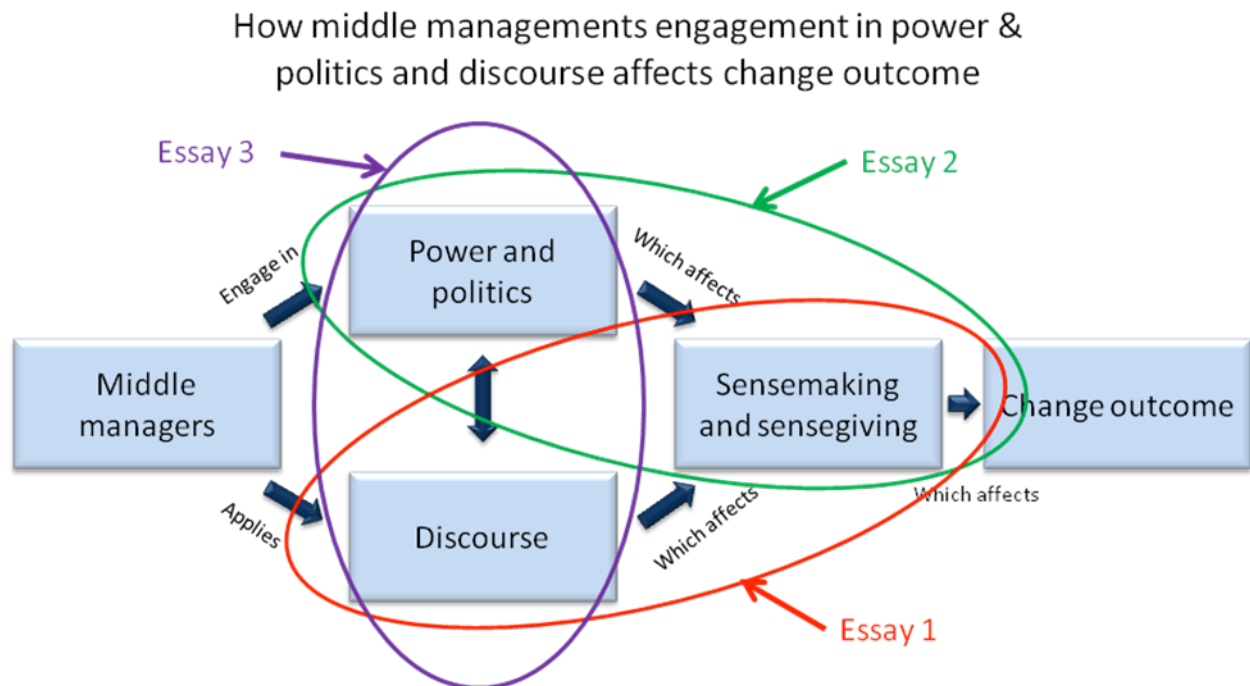
Figure 2: Research perspective related to essays

The essay presented in Chapter 3 shows that middle managers' evaluation of change outcome is not necessarily based on objective analysis and facts. Cognitive and emotional responses play an important role when change initiatives are evaluated. "Discourse Constructions in Retrospective Assessments of Change Successes and Failures" is an empirical essay, which argues that whether a change initiative is a success or a failure is a subjective matter. The discourse construction applied to communicate the change outcome has a direct impact on whether the outcome is viewed as a success or a failure. This study reveals how discourse constructions applied by middle managers limit the scope of others' sensemaking and by that shape their perception of reality. The retrospective assessments of two change initiatives are analyzed in-depth with a focus on middle managers' application of four discourse constructions: the rationalistic, the cultural, the role-bound and the individualistic construction of change outcomes. The findings suggest that the rationalistic and the role-bound discourse construction especially served as effective tools for sensegivers in limiting the scope of discussion. The rationalistic discourse constructions were effective for constructing change successes, in line with a more aggregated overall business oriented perspective, while the role-bound discourse constructions were shown to be effective for constructing failures and as a tool to create scapegoats responsible for the failures. In the cases analyzed, an informal group leader took process control (e.g. Hardy, 1996) very early on in the discussion. This leading figure took a role as the leading sensegiver (Gioia &

Chittipeddi, 1991) in the group processes, guiding the others sensemaking (Weick, 1993) in a direction that suited the sensegiver's perception of reality (Hardy, 1996). Regardless of whether the "sensegiver" defines a project as a failure or as a success, s/he is in a unique position to structure and influence the other group participants' sensemaking. In this way, the sensegiver is able to limit the scope of the discussion, and even be in position to guide the discussion in certain directions. The findings draw and extend recent research on discourse constructions by Vaara (2002) by showing how discourse constructions also serve to influence others' sensemaking and their perception of change outcome (Hardy, 1996). Hence, discourse constructions are closely tied to mechanisms for power and politics (e.g. Buchanan & Badham, 1999).

This study contributes to the strategy-as practice and middle management literature, as middle managers' discourse micro-practices are able to form the perception of strategy. This study also enhances the literature on organizational discourse by exploring middle managers' view on strategy by performing conversation analysis (Laine & Vaara, 2007). Finally, this study enhances our understanding of the four discursive constructions of success or failure in change narratives introduced by Vaara (2002) by showing how different discourse constructions have political aspects as they may serve different personal and organizational objectives when middle managers define change initiatives as successes or failures.

Chapter 4 reveals how middle managers' responses to planned change may constitute a broad mix of cognitive, emotional and intentional reactions. "The Politics of Middle Management Sensemaking and Sensegiving" explores how responses to change initiatives foster political activities and actions. The study reveals how several middle managers deliberately respond to the change initiative with divergent action. Other middle managers loyally implemented the change and hence showed convergent actions. This study contributes to the existing literature and extends it by revealing tactical actions and political skills that lie behind divergent and convergent action at the middle management level. The analysis reveals how middle managers mobilize different sources of power and rely on different types of political skills in order to influence other's sensemaking. By mobilizing process and resource power, several middle managers were able to influence meaning making (Balogun, Gleadle, Hailey, & Willmott, 2005; Hardy, 1996) and position themselves as major sensegivers, with great influence on others' sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The findings in this study suggest that these sensegiving processes contain a wide

range of political means to gain control over the processes, ranging from the active pre-project political ploy involving taking control over process and meaning construction in an open process, to the more closed processes where secrecy and manipulation were important means for influence. The study shows the tight coupling between power, politics, sensemaking and sensegiving. The study shows that those who are able to exert the power of process are able to have an influence over other people's meaning construction. The study also shows a tight link between the power of resources and the power of process; here, expertise is especially vital if actors manage to maneuver themselves into a position where they can control the process. Expertise as a basis for exerting the power of resources also has an impact on an actor's ability to exert the power of meaning.

This study contributes to existing literature on power and politics by providing access to rich qualitative accounts from respondents taking part in political behavior that gives insight into how politically skilled actors operate. This study also contributes to existing sensemaking and sensegiving literature through providing evidence for a tight coupling with power and politics, showing that sensegiving is politics in action. Finally, the study enhances the existing strategy-as-practice literature by showing the tight coupling between practice, politics and change outcome.

In Chapter 5 we see how organizational change may trigger oppositional responses. "The Gang of Four: Discourse Strategies to Legitimize Divergent Change Behavior" reveals both emotional and cognitive responses to change. It is an empirical essay that shows how middle managers attempt to legitimize deviant and oppositional behavior during organizational change. Four explicit legitimating strategies have been identified: emotional, group-loyal, rational, and argumentative strategies. Despite an overall shared goal of making sure that the suggested structural changes were not implemented, each middle manager in the study described different reasons for their divergent change behavior. They legitimized their actions using various discourse strategies. The *emotional* strategy was rooted in one particular individual's anger at being ignored and not given a voice, the *group loyal* strategy was based on one particular individual's loyalty to the management team of which he was a part, the *rational* strategy was grounded in statistical evidence, and the *argumentative* strategy was founded in the need to have a voice in the project.

This study enhances our understanding of middle managers and change by explaining the role they play in altering the path of change and shaping the change outcome. The study further contributes to the literature of discourse studies through a better understanding of

legitimation, and to the strategy-as-practice field through improving our knowledge of how skilled players operate.

3.   Discourse Constructions in Retrospective Assessments of Change Successes and Failures

3.1 Abstract

Many organizational change efforts are reported as failures. However, recent literature on discourse reveals that whether a change initiative is a success or a failure is a subjective matter, and the discourse construction applied to communicate the change outcome has a direct impact on whether the outcome is perceived as a success or a failure. Middle managers play a key role in implementing change. This study reveals how middle managers through discourse constructions limit the scope of others' sensemaking and shape their perception of reality. The retrospective assessments of two change initiatives are analyzed in-depth with a focus on middle managers' application of four discourse constructions: (i) the rationalistic, (ii) the cultural, (iii) the role-bound and (iv) the individualistic construction of change outcomes. The findings suggest that especially the rationalistic and the role-bound discourse constructions serve as effective tools for sensegivers in limiting the scope of discussion. The rationalistic discourse constructions were effective for constructing change successes, while the role-bound discourse constructions were shown to be effective for constructing failures.

3.2 Introduction

In recent literature, middle managers have been identified as the most important actors regarding putting change initiatives to work (Balogun, 2003, 2006; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Meyer, 2006). How middle managers make sense of change initiatives has had a great impact on how changes actually get implemented and the outcome of change (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Although research has identified that many planned change initiatives fail, whether a change is considered as a success or failure is a subjective matter dependant on the discourse used to communicate the outcome (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Vaara, 2002). This essay examines the active role of middle managers in constructing perceptions of change success and failure.

How change outcome is viewed and communicated is closely connected to discourse and discourse constructions (Heracleous, 2006; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000; Vaara, 2002; Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Much of the recent literature on middle managements role in strategy implementation and strategic outcomes has taken a sensemaking perspective on change (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007) but without explicitly linking sensemaking and sensegiving to the organizational discourse. Yet, organizational discourse is essentially about the struggle for meaning (Grant & Hardy, 2004), which can be understood as the attempts to construct organizational reality (Hardy, 2004) similar to sensegiving. Likewise, discourse produces power relationships and as such are political tools (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). Politics is about influencing individuals' perceptions of reality (Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Hardy, 1996), yet the linkages between discourse, power and sensegiving have not been made explicit. Hardy & Phillips (2004) highlighted that discourses produce power relationships, and as such constitute the social world. This draws attention to the subjectivity of discourses and to the way discourses limit and restrict the way of talking and behaving regarding the topic on which the discourse is constructed (Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Vaara, 2002). This essay sets out to explore how the linkages between discourse constructions, power and sensemaking/sensegiving influence perceptions of change outcome.

In order to examine these linkages, I apply a strategy-as-practice perspective, which implies a focus on practices regarding the tacit and symbolic practices through which strategy is constructed (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). Strategy-as-practice research deals with micro-practices of what people do, engaging in their strategy activity and how they influence strategic outcome, rather than focusing on strategy as something firms have (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Whittington, 2006, 2007). Social practice is the core of the strategy-as-practice research stream (Whittington, 2007); the actual activities associated with strategy making (Balogun, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2004). As such, the strategy-as-practice appears suitable for studying socially situated practices related to discourse and power issues. Existing research within this perspective has for instance shown that discourse has a significant impact on the formation of strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Laine & Vaara, 2007) and Vaara (2002) found that different discourse constructions were applied when change actors categorized change initiatives either as failures or as successes.

In this essay, I apply a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2005; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Mumby, 2004; van Leeuwen, 2008a; Wodak & Meyer, 2001) examining how discourse constructions affect power relations and middle managers' perception of reality regarding successes and failures in strategic change initiatives. In the analysis, I focus on how different middle managers describe and categorize change initiatives they have experienced: either as failures or as successes. Specifically, I identify which discourse construction they use to position themselves and how through their discourse construction they influence other people's understanding of the change outcome.

The findings indicate that middle managers play an active role, not only in implementing change, but also in retrospectively constructing change outcomes as either a success or a failure. This has significance for the strategy-as practice and middle management literature as middle managers' discourse micro-practices are able to structure the perception of strategy. Furthermore, this study enhances the literature on organizational discourse by exploring middle managers' view of strategy by performing conversation analysis (Laine & Vaara, 2007).

3.3   Discourse and discourse constructions

Change may lead to unintended outcomes (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) as a consequence of change recipients' reactions to change and how these recipients make sense of the intended changes (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Unintended outcomes may be seen as failures or as successes. They may retrospectively be valued as failures when the intention of the change program was not reached such as not implementing intended organizational structures. On the other hand, they may retrospectively be evaluated as successes if organizational objectives such as enhanced economic performances were met. However, what is defined as success and what is defined as failure are not solely grounded on objectivity. What is defined as success or failure is dependent on the interpretation of the objectives and how these objectives are met. The discursive constructions for which these interpretations are met have an impact on how individuals subjectively conclude these issues. Laine & Vaara (2007, p. 30) defined subjectivity as "*a discursively constructed sense of identity and social agency in specific context*".

This means that the same change initiative may be considered as both a success and a failure (Vaara, 2002) by different individuals or groups within an organization. We further know that how individuals attribute success and failure are tightly linked with one's own relationship to the project. If an individual has been active and participative there is a tendency to define the outcome as a success rather than a failure. This tendency is tightly linked to individual self-interest regarding prestige and career. As a consequence, individuals tend to link success to own actions and failure to the actions of others or to external matters (Vaara, 2002).

As a result of the fact that there may be different interests in defining a change initiative either as success or failure, different actors may apply various discursive strategies to present the project outcome and to attempt to influence other people's assessment of the change outcome. In this essay, discourse will be defined in accordance with the definition applied in Heracleous & Hendry (2000, p. 1258): "*any body of language-based communicative actions, or language in use*". This definition of discourse encompasses written and spoken text, visual images (e.g. pictures, art works), symbols, buildings and other artifacts (e.g. body language, dress code) (Fairclough, 2005; Phillips et al., 2004).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995, 2005; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Leeuwen, 2008a; Wodak & Meyer, 2001) is a key analytical approach in many recent studies of discourse. CDA is a method through which one may analyze the role "*played by language in the construction of power relationships and reproduction of domination*" (Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006, p. 792). CDA has to do with the thorough examination of the relationship between discourse and power, attempting to explore the relationships between discursive practices, events and text on one side, and social and cultural structures, relations and processes on the other (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Mumby, 2004; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The objective is to explore how social practices, events and texts "*arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power*" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135). Hardy and Phillips (2004) emphasized that when actors produce text, they can only do so by drawing on existing discourses, which again are limited and shaped by the construction and interpretation of the prevailing discourse. This observation pinpoints the inherent power struggle in discourses and the limitations actors have in these struggles. This study also reveals how the relationship of power and struggles over power with regard to who leads the discussion and thus structures the discourse. In addition it shows how these power relationships/struggles develop through

conversation when middle managers discuss and define change programs as failures or successes. The conversation analysis will be performed through the perspective of discourse constructions introduced by Vaara (2002).

Vaara found four different discursive constructions of success or failure in change narratives: (i) the rationalistic, (ii) the cultural, (iii) the role-bound, and (iv) the individualistic. *The rationalistic discourse construction* typically comprises references to traditional business performance measures such as profits, sales, costs, turnover etc. Success refers to increasing profits, increasing sales, reduced costs, satisfied customers, low turnover, a moderate level of conflicts, enhanced productivity, and other unquestioned performance measures. Failure refers to the same indicators but with the opposite sign. The argumentation applied in rationalistic discourses is exerted from a management perspective, where performance measures used to argue one's position are legitimate performance measures used in the organization. In other words this kind of argumentation may be said to be neutral because it refers to more or less objective performance indicators. This neutral argumentation is suited to hiding internal politics (Buchanan & Badham, 1999) among the decision-makers.

On the other hand, *the cultural discourse construction* is not neutral in the sense of argumentation. This construction takes into account that actors involved represent different parties in change initiatives. This representation may occur regarding subculture identity, national identity (in multinational corporations), and identity to premerger organizational entities. Success is seen from the perspective of one particular cultural identity, where the objective is to have success from own point of view at the expense of the other side (the other cultural identity). From this discourse construction success is not measured against rational and objective performance indicators, but is measured by to which extent their own solutions, ideas, working practices, etc are the surviving ones. Success has to do with being on the winning team at the expense of the losing side. In other words, cultural discourse illustrates "confrontations between different camps" (Vaara, 2002, p. 238).

The role-bound discourse construction has the role-identity within the corporation as a building block. Organizational actors are bound by their institutionalized positions in the organization. Organizational competition between different areas of responsibility makes the basis for this discourse construction. This competition has to do with different areas of responsibility endeavors to have their specific needs (such as resources, projects, funding etc) fulfilled at the expense of other areas of responsibility. Success is measured related to

achievements in this internal competition, rather than on overall business performance. All in all, it has to do with conflict of interest between different decision-makers.

The individualistic discourse construction contrasts the cultural and role-bound discourse constructions where the first has to do with individuality and personal characteristics and the latter ones have to do with actors being tied to their social position. Individualistic discourse constructions are individual autobiographies, where effects from specific people (even themselves) are emphasized. As an attribution tool accentuating individual performances, this discourse construction may serve effective purposes. Heroes and scapegoats are created. Credit given or taken for successes produces heroes, and blame given for failures produces scapegoats – in the end, this is an individual-level power game.

Vaara (2002) emphasized that different discourse constructions may appear in combination. He suggests this is more common for failure accounts and when one wants to legitimize and justify own actions. The cultural, role-bound, and individualistic discourse allows for problematization and relativization of success and failure. This enriches the possibilities for interpretations of the narratives, which can give a more pluralistic and critical perspective on changes (Vaara, 2002). In contrast, the rational discourse offers few such alternatives.

3.4 Sensemaking, Sensegiving, and Discourse Constructions

Sensemaking is a retrospective effort to make sense of situations in which individuals find themselves by communicating about reality as a continuous achievement. "*People make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe*" (Weick, 1995, p. 15). Sensemaking may be seen as individuals' discovery of their inventions. As a consequence of this argument, language games and text may be seen as artifacts of the sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995). This perspective is a direct link to Heracleous & Hendry's (2000) definition of discourse, where language-based communicative actions or the language in use are the key elements. Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) emphasized sensemaking as a meaning construction and reconstruction to interpret and understand intended changes. Balogun & Johnson (2004) called attention to the fact that individual's interpretation of intended changes will have an impact on the change outcome. If interpretation of intentions has an impact on the outcome, then the retrospective evaluation and interpretation of whether an initiative was a success or a failure will be affected by how

individuals made sense of the intentions. Discourse constructions (Vaara, 2002) will serve as effective tools in this sensemaking process.

Sensegiving may be defined as "*the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality*" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). It has to do with having an influence through the use of different types of communicative behavior, which ultimately has a major impact on change for both leaders and stakeholders (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Sensegiving is a socially constructed negotiation process (Maitlis, 2005), which engages sensemakers and sensegivers in different and often multifaceted negotiation processes (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005). Further it is a political process where individual sensemaking is affected by the persuasive techniques employed by the sensegiver (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). When sensegiving is a communication-based political inducement technique, discourse constructions may serve as effective tools for influence.

Discourse analysis is a method for examining the linguistic elements in the construction of social phenomena (Vaara, Kleymann, & Seristö, 2004). Weick (1995) described sensemaking as a social and cognitive process where the sensemaker develops interpretative schemes as systems of meaning through experience and socialization. Discourse constructions are tools where individuals use different discursive strategies to shape their perception of reality. Discourses are both socially conditioned and socially constructed: they are socially conditioned by being formed by particular social actors in specific settings, and socially constructed through their key role in social sensemaking activity (Vaara et al., 2004). From this we know that sensemaking and sensegiving are tightly linked to discourse constructions. However, we have yet to explore how sensegivers are able to affect other individuals' sensemaking through the use of discourse constructions. In addition, sensemakers use of discourse constructions in organizational politics should be further explored.

3.5 The study

I conducted a study of middle managers in a major Nordic insurance company – INSCO. The company had been through several strategic change processes in the last decade, such as mergers, organizational restructuring programs and changes in working practices and business procedures. In the group of middle managers studied there had been a

relatively low turnover over the last seven years. The study was conducted on a group of first line middle managers and their superiors (higher level middle manager) attending a strategy seminar. During the seminar, a practical exercise organized as modified focus group interviews or dialogues (Patton, 2002) was arranged. Modified focus groups are in this instance meant as focus group interviews without moderator; hence they must be seen as self-governed groups. The objective for this exercise was to engage the participants (middle managers) in an evaluation loop from past change programs regarding reasons for success and failures, process issues and skills issues, so that the division management could receive feedback and preferably enhance the division's ability to implement changes in the future. To do this it was necessary to let the groups create a mutual understanding within the group of the change programs that were successful and the change programs that were failures.

To give the focus groups a tool to guide the discussion, a structured open-ended interview guide was used (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). The overall guiding premise in this interview guide was to create an agreement of one change program that the group defined as a success and one that the group defined as a failure. To ensure open and effective discussions, the interview objects were, as far as possible, randomly placed in groups where they shared similar background (middle managers in the same company), but were unfamiliar with each other's work (worked in different sections and departments). Six groups with five participants each were appointed. The interviews were arranged simultaneously, as it was a premise from the company that the practical exercise would be conducted simultaneously. As a consequence of only being one researcher and having six simultaneously working focus groups, one person in each group was given the responsibility to tape-record the discussion and document the discussion in writing in a preformatted PowerPoint presentation formatted in accordance with the interview guide. No one was specifically given the responsibility to be a group leader. The objective was to have as open a discussion as possible without the limitations and biases a pre-defined group leader could bring to the discussion. Actors can only produce text by drawing on existing discourses, which again are limited and shaped by the construction and interpretation of prevailing discourse (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). The objective was to limit the impact on the discussion of one specific individual's perception of reality. However, in each group a leading figure emerged throughout the discussion, without any formal appointment from the researcher or acceptance from the other participants in the group.

The exercise lasted for three hours. All data from the group interviews were transcribed verbatim totaling approximately 400, together with the Power Point presentations.

The focus groups followed the structured interview guide, however, the unguided discussions led to interesting findings that emerged through the discussions. One interesting finding was that in two different instances one group defined a project as a success and another group defined the same project as a failure. Fortunately, these findings represented four different focus groups, which secured a rich set of data. Data from the two remaining groups have not been analyzed in this essay. The findings presented and discussed in this essay consist of only two different change projects, which constitute the cases (see Figure 1 – Cases). Each case consists of two embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2003) unit one represents one group that considered the project a success and unit two represents one group that considered the project as a failure. To secure anonymity for the respondents, each individual is identified with one capital letter in Figure 3 and when the data is presented.

Case 1 – Organizational Restructuring		Case 2 – "Sales Tip"	
Group 1 – Success	Group 2 – Failure	Group 4 – Success	Group 6 – Failure
L – Division Staff	G – Head of Dept.	S – Head of Section and part of mgmt.	R – Head of Section and part of mgmt.
G – Division Staff	B – Head of Dept.	L – Head of Dept.	W – Head of Dept.
M – Head of Dept.	K – Head of Dept.	A – Head of Dept.	E – Head of Dept.
D – Head of Dept.	S – Head of Dept.	O – Head of Dept.	H – Head of Dept.
S – Head of Dept.	M – Division Staff	U – Division Staff	V – Head of Dept.

Figure 3: Cases – Modified Focus Group Study

A narrative strategy was applied when analyzing the data (Langley, 1999; Van Maanen, 1979). First, a "thick description" was developed (Balogun & Johnson, 2004), and from this a first order analysis (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Rouleau, 2005; Van Maanen, 1979) was developed. The "thick description" and the first order analysis comprise the fundament for the analysis presented in this essay.   However, it should be emphasized that narratives are my own interpretations of data, and as such are not unaffected by my analysis (Brown, 2006).

Discourse constructions as they are presented in Vaara (2002) are used extensively as a tool to analyze the relations of power and struggles over power in the dialogues found in

the data. The criteria applied for categorizing each discourse construction is presented in Table 1.

Discourse Construction	Criteria
The rationalistic discourse construction	Focus on measurable objectives or objective performance indicators
The cultural discourse construction	Focus on confrontation between different sub units with their own shared values and basic assumptions.
The role-bound discourse construction	Focus on role-identity related to their institutionalized organizational position.
The individualistic discourse construction	Focus on individual characteristics such as attribution to make heroes and/or scapegoats.

Table 1: Discourse Constructions Criteria

3.6   Background

In the last decade, The Norwegian branch of INSCO had been through many different changes. However, the data in this article refer to two different projects: (i) a major organizational restructuring program in the year 2000, and (ii) a task-specific change in claims-handling procedures and customer dialogues.

3.6.1 Organizational Restructuring Program

The organizational restructuring program was a complete break with the traditional branch-specific organization where each branch was organized in own sections or departments, e.g. motor vehicle claims and buildings and contents claims. It even abandoned the traditional separation between the corporate and private market segments. All claims handling, regardless if it was a corporate or a private customer, should be handled by the same people in the same division. In this company this was perceived as a revolutionary idea. In addition, when changing the traditional branch-specific organization to what was called a "process oriented organization", all the company traditions regarding how to organize claims handling were left in place.

The "the process oriented organization" was organized into four sections and a division staff (see Figure 4 – Process Oriented Organization). Section One was defined as

the main entrance to claims handling regardless of claims type and size; this was the front office (call centre) section. They handled all the customers' first contact with the organization. Due to extensive analyzes of previous years claims, it was concluded that the front office section would handle 78% of the claims themselves, and the other 22% would be passed on to two of the other sections – section two and three: back office section motor vehicle claims and personal injury claims, and back office section buildings and contents claims. 78% of the claims represented only 20 % of the company's total claim compensations. The idea was that by establishing the front office section, one could enhance speed and customer satisfaction regarding the vast majority of claims, thus isolating the more costly and time consuming claims in the specialist sections where they had the time and resources to handle those claims properly.

To cope with the large amount of claims and the diversity of claims in the front office section, one essential idea was to have all claims-handlers handle any claim type regardless of their basic training and experience, which meant that a traditional motor vehicle claims-handler also handled buildings and contents claims and travel insurance claims, and vice versa. The section was organized into six mixed departments – called "virtual teams". As a support tool, the company would make a substantial investment in a new customer relation management system (CRM-System), which contained supportive scripts (check lists) for any type of claims.

The fourth and last section was a procurement and surveyor section, where one would focus on establishing routines, procedures and contracts for the entire claims-handling division regarding suppliers and contractors. One of the main objectives was to commercialize surveyor procedures to reduce claims costs and to enhance customer satisfaction.
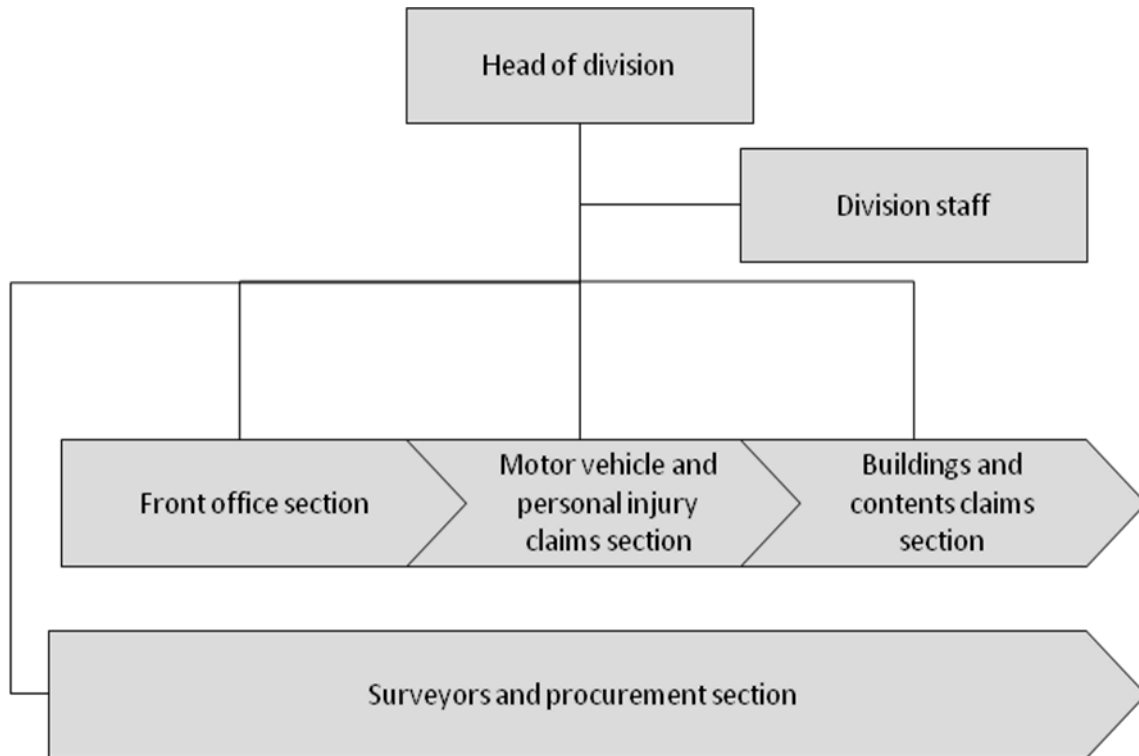
Figure 4: Process Oriented Organization

The restructuring program had four basic objectives: (i) customer satisfaction, rated by an external agency, should be increased to a defined level, (ii) claims handling cost should be reduced by a certain predefined level, (iii) claims costs should be reduced by a pre-defined amount, and (iv) the procurement section should be able to document expenditure cuts at a level of several hundred million NOK. These objectives should be reached by the end of 2003. It turns out that all these objectives were reached on time by good margins.

However, other things did not turn out as planned. The CRM-system was never developed to give the anticipated support for the front office section. The front office section had to abandon the idea that any claims-handler should be able to handle all claim types. After six months, the front office section was reorganized into branch-specific departments, but the front office idea was not abandoned. During the first two years, the division had a turnover that exceeded the company norm.

3.6.2 Customer Dialogue – "Sales Tip"

INSCO-Norway experienced a market share decline of around 20% during the first six months of the year 2005. A new pricing strategy was launched late in 2004, and

consequences were seen very soon when customers abandoned the company for other cheaper alternatives.

As one of a series of actions to enhance sales and keep loyal customers, the claims-handling division launched a project they called "sales tip". The claims-handlers were in dialogues with nearly 100, 000 customers a year but they were not authorized to sell new products to these customers. However, they were in a unique position to identify customers' missing coverage through customer dialogues. The claims-handling predefined customer dialogues did not contain specific questions to reveal missing coverage. The "sales tip" project's objective was to develop and implement customer dialogues, which contained questions so that missing coverage was revealed, so that these could be reported to the sales organization. The tips sent to the sales organization would contain information as to which customer it was, and what coverage was missing.

To secure implementation in the different departments, "sales tips" were incorporated in each department's balanced scorecards (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) with a specific number of tips each department should make available for the sales division. The CRM-system was adjusted to handle these tips. Some departments managed to produce the expected results but some did not. In summary, the front office section – which was the section that was the main executer of the project – managed to produce overall better results than expected.

However, this case was debated late in an introductory campaign period. It was decided that there should be an introductory campaign first, so that the organization could practically evaluate whether this should be a permanent procedure or not. When the discussions regarding this specific project took place, it was defined from corporate headquarters that this would be a permanent action to be taken by the claims division. It was to be fully implemented in the succeeding month (September 2005). The introductory campaign was regarded as a success from both the head of division and the management team in INSCO. As a consequence, the CEO decided the initiative to be a permanent action, and even used the initiative in internal communication as an example of a successful contribution to the company's overall performances in other areas than own areas of responsibility.

3.7   Case 1 – Organizational Restructuring

3.7.1 Organizational Restructuring as a Success

In the focus group that defined the organizational restructuring as a success, different discourse constructions were in use, however, as will be shown in this section, the most effective discourse strategy in this focus group was the rationalistic approach.   One of the group participants in the discussion took a rationalistic approach very early when the group was discussing whether the project was a success or a failure.   This specific person was not employed by the organization when the reorganization process took place, so she had no personal experiences to relate to the explicit process.   The discourse she drew on when constructing her text of what happened must have been colored by interpretations and discourses presented by her peers and superiors.   However, her argumentation was rationalistic-based combined with a role-bound discourse.   She took the lead in the discussion and acted as a sensegiver when conclusions were drawn.

> *They have reached the objectives. Three specific objectives were set for the reorganization: quality [as a means to reduce claims cost], customer satisfaction, and a third I do not remember. […]They reached the three objectives in 2003.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *The three objectives were quality, claims handling cost and customer satisfaction. (L)*

There were no disagreements within the group whether the objectives were reached or not.   The focus group concluded that the project was a success in a rationalistic perspective.   In this perspective, the individual who took the lead in the discussion stated very early that from an objective, measurable point of view this was a success.   This ended all discussions regarding the objective criteria.   Nevertheless, other perspectives regarding the change project that were considered as less successful were debated.   In this debate other discourse constructions were applied.

The change program had severe initial problems regarding dividing claims handlers into one front office section and into two back office sections – claims handlers that prior to the changes had been organized in branch-specific departments would now leave their traditional branch specific organization and start working in a more concept oriented way. The problems this brought about were perceptions of status.   The overall organizational perception was that those who were placed in back office sections obtained a higher status than those placed in the front office section.   This had to do with seniority and wages.   The

most senior claims-handlers, with the highest wages, were placed in back office sections. While debating this issue, a role-bound discourse construction was applied by several focus group participants.

The front office section employees felt like a B-team in relation to the back office sections being an A-team, regarding wages and status [...] (M)

Then a problem with the reorganization is that you have an A and a B team quite clearly. (L)

I believe it [the A and B team problem] was the feeling more in the beginning of the project, because they placed the most experienced and senior – those with the most lengthy service in the company, not necessarily the best qualified – in the[back office sections], while the latest employed were placed in[the front office section]. Many had the perception that working in [the front office] was seen as working in the B-team. During this process it was necessary to raise salaries in the [front office section] considerably to reduce these differences, and that made some impact on the situation. (M)

The focus group agreed that the management team had managed to cope with the status problem. When debating this issue, the management team introduced a role-bound discourse, but also cultural discourse was used in this debate, when the development in front office employees' perceptions was debated.

They have managed to establish a balance regarding status, at least in the motor claims area. (M)

What was it with the change program that led to not having an A and a B team any more? (L)

[...] they [the management team] have taken action regarding the A and B team issue. (G)

And that is appreciation! (S)

Appreciation! They have been praised a lot. They have actually been praised regarding different issues. [The front office section] has been brought up as something very positive. (M)

It has very much been about [the front office section]. (G)

[...]

The [front office section] is the spearhead in it [the project]. That is how they have appeared and profiled themselves. (G)

Here they use the metaphor "spearhead" as a positive expression for a basic assumption (Schein, 1992) within the front office section, an assumption that seemed to go

beyond the front office section and into the more basic assumptions among some managers too. Despite having agreed upon the change program being a success, issues such as abandoning the "virtual team" idea, a very top run process with next to no middle management involvement, conflicts, and the status discussion were emphasized as elements with the project that were not considered very successful. However, there was a consensus that the project was a success. Even six years later, no changes in the overall project plan except abandoning the "virtual-team" idea had been introduced. Loyalty to decisions was emphasized, and no replays had been introduced after implementation.

When debating conflicts, individual discourse constructions were used once. Here the head of division is attributed as being aware of conflicts and not accepting them.

We had conflicts over a long period of time really.

[…]

I remember this very well, and I also remember the message that there was no room for trouble here. It [reduction in level of conflict] was very focused at that time. [Head of division] did put pressure on his head of sections, which again did put pressure on their head of departments. (D)

As seen above in this focus group, all four discourse constructions were used when group participants debated project achievements retrospectively. However, the most prominent discourse construction applied in this case was the rationalistic construction. By taking a rationalistic approach very early in the discussion, one actor managed to set the agenda. Taking this active approach to the rational managerial measurable factors for success, she managed to elevate the discussion to a strategic long-term discussion rather than to focus on narrow, short-term conflicts and stress. Nevertheless, the group did discuss other more emotional issues that were not successful, applying discourse constructions such as role-bound and cultural constructions. The former head of division was recognized through an individualistic discourse construction when the question of conflict was raised. He was credited that conflicts were under control from the very beginning of the project.

The effective strategy we see in this focus group process is that one person took a rationalistic approach to the project very early in the debate.

When seeing the change program in retrospect, I do not immediately agree that it was a success. Regarding some issues it was not a success. (G)

From my point of view, the change program was most of all about the establishment of the front office section. (D)

[…]

A lot of those who were placed in the front office section were placed there against their own preferences, which made it rather noisy. There was a lot of turnover in that period of time. If we look in retrospect, they did not reach their objectives. (G)

They have reached the objectives. […] (L)

They increased the staffing greatly to accommodate to the new organizational structure, did they not? Today there is considerably more staff than prior to the changes. Basically a staff reduction was to be generated. (G)

That is the great mystery […] why they needed to increase the staff to do the same. (D)

[…]

It is actually a reality that the three objectives that were set, were all reached before schedule. (L)

OK, yes, but… (G)

[…]

The objectives have been reached. It took three years. (M)

[…] There were some heavy challenges, a lot of unsolved claims, and a lot of conflicts, were there not? Many in the front office section felt as a B-team. […] Even if we have reached the objectives, there have always to some extent been some conflicts under the surface. (M)

That is correct. (G)

This structured the context for the entire discussion throughout the focus group discussion. This is what Hardy and Phillips (2004) emphasized as the limiting and shaping effects of existing discourses. Being pro-active and elevating the discussion to an objective level framed the discussion. In this way one individual managed to take control over the process (Balogun et al., 2005; Hardy, 1996), thus controlling the sensegiving process. One basic premise that gave this individual this kind of leading role in the sensegiving process may be that performance measurement is highly developed and accepted as a management tool in this organization.

3.7.2 Organizational Restructuring as a Failure

In the second focus group debating the organizational restructuring project, the discussion took a completely different direction. As in the focus group defining the organizational restructuring project as a success, this group also established the debate

around one strong leader-like person, who from the start initiated the base line from where
the discussion should start. His approach to the project was biased by his negative attitude to
some of the initial solutions in the project that were abandoned – the "virtual team" idea.
When initially debating the project, the discussion was structured in a role-bound discourse
construction. The focus group attendees clearly defined themselves as one group regarding
the project, and what must be seen as the division management team as the opposite group.
The management team is initially referred to as "One", to really emphasize the distance
between the management team and the focus group attendees who were first line middle
managers within the company. This distance really outlines the conflict of interests between
the two groups.

> *Seen as a change process, it has even been going on for, and been established for,
> years. We have lived with it for the last several years [2000 – 2006]. Especially, the
> first implementation must be regarded as relatively unsuccessful. (G)*

> *One retreated in some issues; one has not implemented all of it, regarding the vision,
> yet. (B)*

> *No, not at all really, some of the premises have been dropped, for an example, the script
> supporting tool. That was the rationale from the start, was it not? […] (G)*

> *Yes, I do agree, regarding the vision, it has not been successful. (B)*

> *[…]*

> *One did not achieve the objectives one wanted to achieve […] if you think about the
> vision one had for the change program in year 2000, where everybody should be
> working within all claims fields [virtual tams] because one had a tool to support the
> scripts, which should guide you through each claim. The tool was just around the
> corner, but has not yet arrived [in 2006]. (G)*

As we can see, the role-bound discourse is evident where they consequently refer to
the conflict between their own position and the position of the management team. However
they did also apply a rationalistic discourse construction to really outline the failure
regarding objectives, emphasizing not having implemented the CRM-supported scripts and
having to abandon the idea of "virtual teams". The approach chosen may have both a short-
term horizon and a long-term horizon. The short-term horizon considers that they "are still
living with" the organizational structure implemented by the project, (the branch specific
departments in the front office section,) after being forced to abandon the idea of "virtual
teams". The long -term horizon considers they have not even implemented the CRM-
supported scripts as yet.

Their focus primarily appeared to evaluate what was called "the virtual teams" and the management's decision to abandon that part of the project. They had no focus on other parts of the overall project objectives or project issues. However, they were strongly engaged in defining what went wrong and why: first of all establish a new organizational structure without having the main premises in place. They continued to apply the role-bound discourse construction.

First one made the change, and then one hoped the supporting tool would arrive. (B)

This should be fixed after time passed, without really having any understanding of the consequences of the decision before having it all in place. (G)

One had to reverse it. It had to be reorganized again, make a split between motor claims handling and buildings and contents claims handling. (B)

They also questioned the objectives, in this case the objectives from their perspective: "the virtual teams".

The main objectives in a way, at least many of the main objectives defined, were not achieved. And maybe they were not even possible to achieve. (G)

Maybe the objectives were unrealistic? (B)

You could instead raise a question about unrealistic objectives improperly established commitment for the objectives, and perhaps not even a properly understood reality. Map and terrain do not fit. (G)

They consequently applied a role-bound discourse construction, all the time from their perspective as operational middle managers and the division management team as their opposite part.

[W]e may draw the conclusion that lower middle managers [first line managers], which we consider as professionals related to the specific branch, were not involved in the decision phase. (K)

This position was even more strengthened with the following quotations from the discussion regarding time and resources.

[We] were given no time to establish a good atmosphere regarding the project among employees. [We] were not given time for adequate training, one could not wait for the necessary tools one expected would be of good use. One placed employees in boxes, and hoped it would work over time. (G)

[Y]ou were not supplied with enough resources, regarding training or manning. (R)

None, none! Hardly any external conditions were in place. No adequate training, no adequate supporting tools, no adequate commitment, and not enough resources. (G)

In great contrast to the group that found this project to be a successful project, this group could not find any positive issues regarding the project. Where the first group showed initial divergent opinions, and the discussion led to the group's final consensus, this group had a collective negative opinion right from the start. Their conclusion was quite clear, and still applied a role-bound discourse construction. All participants in this group were lower level middle managers not taking part in the division management team. All of them were appointed as heads of departments that were heavily influenced by the change program and surrounding conflicts and turnover problems that were debated in the other group. It seems that the discourse they use as a fundament for constructing new discourses (Hardy & Phillips, 2004) are more or less shared, as everybody seemed to agree upon the perception of reality that this project was a failure.

This must be a principal instance of an unsuccessful change program (G)

I believe that is a feeling many of us had when this was launched – this solution cannot last. Even those of us who were managers – middle managers – should be loyal, but I believe all of us agreed upon that this was completely without meaning. (K)

By starting this discussion through a role-bound discourse construction, the scene was set to instigate the negative focus on the project. One basic premise for this continuous negative focus, was the leading role one key actor and main sensegiver took from the start. In this way he managed to narrow the perspective of the discussion, and managed to draw all the participants' attention to his initial discourse, rather than to elevate the discussion to a level where more rationalistic based objectives and results could be evaluated. However, it seems that he had great support for his perception of reality among the other group participants. In this case, a role-bound discourse construction was applied. Vaara (2002) made a point of the narrow perspectives that may appear when applying role-bound discourse constructions, where the focus may be more on self rather than on overall business performances. In this discussion, there are evident elements of narrow focus on self and own dissatisfaction rather than on overall business needs and performances.

3.7.3 Case 1 – success vs. failure

In both groups analyzed above, one key actor took the lead in the discussion even if no one was assigned a leading role. The discourse construction the leading figure applied when outlining the discussion may have had an impact on how the discussion in the group progressed, and how the group's conclusions were drawn. Here, we see the link between

discourse and power, where the leading actor produced a text that shaped the baseline discourse from which the discussion constructed the success or failure discourses. The social world is constituted by bringing certain phenomena into being (such as success or failure). Here the leading actor's discourse disciplines and limits the discursive context, which is the exercise of power (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). From the perspective of the management team, the project was seen as a success because the overall financial objectives were met. The individual who structured the discussion within the group that defined the project as a success managed through a rationalistic discourse construction to allow the group to accept the project as an overall success, despite the many difficulties and setbacks underway. By elevating the perspective to an overall rationalistic discussion, she managed to establish the agreement of this being a successful change early in the discussion, and by that allow the group to discuss the setbacks the project had during implementation. We see how the rationalistic discourse construction enabled one actor to structure the discussion and produce a system of power.

On the other hand, the other group concluded early on that the project was a failure. Here, the leading actor managed to get the group to conclude the project was a failure near the beginning of the discussion because some intentions were not implemented. This group applied a combination of role-bound and rationalistic discourse constructions. They pointed out that some objectives regarding the organization and IT support were not met, which was an undisputable fact. However, they did not elevate the discussion to other rationalistic perspectives, such as if the measurable financial objectives were met. They chose to have their focus on the issues that were not met, and structured this part of the discussion in a role-bound discourse, where they as first line middle managers had conflicting interests with the division management team. Even if the leading actor early and thoroughly established a discursive context that the project was a failure, he did not challenge the other group members' perception of reality, and by that allow a struggle for power. This way the relationship of power was created and strengthened rather than conflicted.

3.8   Case 2 – "Sales Tip"

3.8.1 "Sales Tip" as a Success

To understand the sensegiving processes in this case, it is essential to have an overall understanding of the premises in the internal agreements with the trade unions regarding

monitoring and measurement. The main premise was that the measurement figures for one single employee's performance would be only available to the superior placed at one level above the individual measured. This implied that managers on higher levels would not be entitled to view one individual's performance. In this case, the major sensegiver is organizationally placed one level above the individual claim-handlers' department heads.

When discussing whether this project was a success or not, the main sensegiver – the most senior manager in the focus group, and head of the front office section – applied a rationalistic discourse construction.

> *[The change initiative] has been through a developmental process starting as an idea, via a pilot [project], via a [introductory] campaign to an established process that should last forever. (S)*

He has pinpointed facts of what has been going on, facts that easily can be checked. His rationalistic approach is followed up by other group participants using the same discourse construction.

> *What you really have is a clear definition of an end result that can be quantified. (U)*

> *The only reason for us establishing those [quantitative] goals was to establish "sales tip" as an integrated part of our day-to-day business. The goals were only an agent, not more, not less. (S)*

However, the group as such did not completely agree to this being a success at this point, despite having the initiative established as a permanent procedure.

> *Then we should discuss whether this is a 100% success, because you let go of some of your tasks for a period of time to focus on other, at that specific time, highly enlightened tasks, it is another issue when the [introductory] campaign is finished, and you need to focus on everything again. (L)*

Here the opponent questions the simple rationalistic approach. She actually questions if any other tasks have been put aside just to fulfill a short-term objective.   Within the focus group, they agreed that the initiative at this point was not fully integrated in the day-to-day business, but that the process seemed to be a success at the time of the interview, which was conducted at the end of the introductory campaign phase. To have this initiative regarded as a permanently successful initiative was dependant on the next implementation step. They stressed the fact that a permanent success was dependant on the middle managers' active engagement and their ability to do the day-to-day follow up, using the scorecards as one effective agent. Here we see the argumentation changes the discourse construction from a rationalistic to a role-bound construction, where this focus group defined

themselves as the ones who understood this action and questioned whether the other middle manager have done the same.

> *If we have this discussion one year from now, we don't know if it is a success, even if it is established as a parameter in the scorecards, the managers need to use the scorecards and govern by them, or else it might fail. (U)*

They stressed the rationalistic measurement issues related to implementation relentlessly. Nevertheless, they had a critical assumption held by employees of the development of the overall perception of the business, even if critical initiatives were measured in the scorecards. Here they applied a role-bound discourse construction to emphasize the challenges that they as managers had regarding having their employees internalize "sales tip" as a necessary and important part of their daily production.

> *Even if the claims handling division produces ["sales tip"] on or above target, this does not say that the claims handlers have a better perception of the overall business. (U)*

> *Where do the employees have their thoughts regarding "sales tip"? [...] What is focused on regarding a task? What is "sales tip" with regard to the total monthly production, and what is our objective regarding registering "sales tip"? Let us say a surveyor's objective is to produce 1.5 "sales tips" a month. How many customers does he meet every month? If he says;" OK, now I have talked to three customers so far, and I have produced two "sales tips", now I can stop focusing on "sales tip" for the rest of this month", then you have not made any real change. Regarding what to produce day-to-day, what do they focus on? What is "sales tip" regarding their total production demands every month? What is our objective having them to produce "sales tip"? You do not achieve the intention by having a surveyor contribute 1.5 "sales tips" on average a month. (O)*

Even if they doubted any particular development in employees' overall perception of the business, they nevertheless stressed the need for using measurement tools to secure the implementation. Again, they returned to a rationalistic perspective to emphasize that success had been achieved.

> *We actually define the success by the fact that we have taken an initiative from an idea to something definitely measurable that can be a subject for follow up. (U)*

One manager referred to the challenge of how to get "sales tip" internalized in everybody's state of mind of how to do business, and returned consequently to a rationalistic perspective of how to gain future success.

> *I mean the other issues we have discussed here are effects we of course desire, but the objectives have been communicated in numbers. Numbers have been the objective. We need to achieve at least that much. (L)*

Individualistic discourse constructions were also applied when emphasizing what efforts were made to have the organization realize the importance of this project. Here he focuses on what he and the rest of the management team have done to bring the message to everyone's attention. In the following quotation we can see how the management team was credited for their efforts. A role-bound discourse construction is applied in combination with the individualistic, so as to emphasize how the management understands, and how they, the management team, need to have the others understand the issues too.

> *We have had three to four meetings with every department where we have had some focus on numbers, but most of all we have focused on why we should do this, why this is important for INSCO, what do we [the company] gain, how does our customer experience this: everything to establish an understanding. Even if the objectives and the follow up measures are related to numbers, the motivation […] has focused on efforts to establish the right attitudes. (S)*

Despite the focus group's doubts regarding to what extent the need for the "sales tip" initiative as a tool to increase sales was internalized in the minds of most managers and employees as a basic contribution for increased sales from the claims division, the group still considered the project a success. First of all this was because of the fulfillment of the quantitative objectives, and the discourse construction used to emphasize that fact is purely rationalistic.

> *The result so far is that we have reached our quantitative objectives. (A)*

Secondly it was argued this was a success because it was decided that the project should be established as a permanent action in the division. The discourse constructions applied in this argument are a combination of rationalistic (which focuses on measurements, balanced scorecards, and measurable objectives) individualistic (which focuses on how the CEO has supported the project) and role-bound (when emphasizing that at least middle managers and some employees believed in the project).

> *We established a quantitative objective, and we have concluded this to be an established process within the claims handling division. The pilot project gave the justification of that. We have decided to implement it [permanently] on the scorecards from [this] September. Objectives for each section and department have been set. We have even decided to provide the project with extra resources this fall – the process is of great importance for us. The CEO has supported the project […], given us credit for it, and expressed that this project is to be continued. Going from an idea, this is something people, at least middle managers, believe in – even a large portion of our employees as well. (S)*

However the group also concluded that there were declining results regarding "sales tip" at the end of the pilot program. The declining results were explained through a rationalistic discourse construction, namely by focusing on the broad specter of different numerical objectives by which managers have to govern their departments on one hand, and a role-bound discourse construction on another.

They think this is a good project, but at the same time you see they choose not to focus on it, when there is no follow up. (L)

Even middle managers who believe in this will skip this if we not were measured because we are evaluated by so many different variables. (S)

One of the focus group members summarized the discussion in the following way, and established an immediate consensus within the group, which in any circumstance is considered a rationalistic discourse.

The criterion for success is really being measured. (U)

In this group the most prominent discourse construction applied was the rationalistic construction. The overall perception for this being a success was based on the fact that the measurable objectives were achieved. The central sensegiver in this group took the lead very early in the discussion by emphasizing the importance of achieving the measurable objectives, and by taking this early approach, he established the fundamental form from where the discussion should start. His active engagement from the start in establishing a rationalistic approach as the theme of discussion was an important premise throughout the entire focus group debate. Other discourse constructions were later applied as well. The individualistic discourse construction served to credit the management team's effort to establish this successful project. The role-bound discourse construction was mainly used to show that somebody – mostly managers – had understood the purpose with the project but others had not – mainly employees.

In this case, as we see in the other success case, the rationalistic discourse construction is s most influential and powerful. This has to do with key actors taking early process control (e.g. Hardy, 1996). In addition, one should not underestimate the effects of having an organization with long and considerable experience in monitoring and measuring performance.

3.8.2 "Sales Tip" as a Failure

The second group using "sales tip" as an example, introduced the project as a failure. In a sense, their perspective was perhaps broader and deeper than the first group discussing the project. They focused on the noticeable success regarding the overall "sales tip" number generated in the pilot project on one side, and the fact that the sales and customer handling divisions were not able to transform those tips into sales activity. The latter was because the number of tips went far beyond what was expected. Another issue this group discussed was how the implementation was seen by different departments. In some departments, "sales tip" was integrated into each employee's working procedures, and by that considered successful. However, in others only a couple of claims handlers performed the expected tasks. This led to great variances in results generated by different departments. The focus group regarded this as verification that the process was a failure. In this group, as in all the others, one specific person took the leading position in the group. In this case, it was a person leading one of the back office sections. In his starting argument, he combined a rationalistic discourse construction with a role-bound discourse construction. Here he emphasized that from a measurement perspective the objectives were met, but the other division was not able to handle the huge amount of tips. Said rhetorically: "we managed, but the others did not", which is a classic example of a role-bound discourse.

> *[W]e agreed the number of tips were far better than expected. Then you can ask what did we expect? We did not know. We had no baseline from which to establish the objectives. There were a large number of tips coming in, and we concluded this was great. Because of the large amount of tips, those receiving them did not manage to handle all the tips. (R)*

His role-bound discourse was followed up by one of the others, applying the same discourse construction.

> *It went absolutely down the drain; they did not manage to follow up. (W)*

As a consequence of these role-bound approaches, the overall conclusion was drawn very quickly.

> *Said in other words, it was successful on paper, a successful project phase, but an unsuccessful continuance phase. (E)*

Regarding implementation, there were some disagreements, but all-in-all, they concluded that the entire implementation was unsuccessful. However, the implementation was supported by a department-wise competition, where the department producing the

highest number of tips would win a trip abroad. This competition gave some initial motivation to compete for the prize, but when the different departments discovered that one specific department took a tremendous lead, they backed out. To augment that the implementation failed, a role-bound discourse construction was applied. Here the person talking creates a distance to the management initiative by speaking about management as "they".

> *I'm not happy with the implementation either. In my opinion they were not able to tell those sending the tips how to do it. They answered vaguely on a lot of questions in the starting phase, which pulverized the motives. At least this is the opinion in my department; they crushed the intention, and we were left with an extra workload. Actually this task is a task for the sales division. Then you get an attitude saying: this is not my job; others are employed to do this. (H)*

However, the focus group had a discussion as to whether the upfront information and motivation was adequate or not. Again, the role-bound discourse construction was applied in such a manner that the group attendees distanced themselves from the entire project and project outcome.

> *[I]t is my impression, and the feedback from my subordinates is, that the planning was not properly done. [My subordinates] were insecure about what to do. (H)*

> *Did we manage to see the intention, or did it drown in the employees' frustrations? (E)*

> *I believe so. I think there is a difference between different departments. My department did probably have the intention [...]. They did actually motivate themselves, and they did receive some carrots along the way. Your department had some nice results the first month, you received the second place, and then the results fell. What I think is: they did a nice job in the introduction, they managed to motivate my staff, something must have been right, but, you could say, the follow up later on was not the same. (V)*

Different departments received the initiative in different ways, and met the challenges differently. In one department, they were very eager to win the campaign, and everybody took the initiative to produce good results, while in other departments, just a couple of claims handlers took the initiative. Obviously, there were differences in how department heads met the challenge. One manager who had success with the "sales tip" project" applied a combination of an individualistic and a role-bound discourse construction, actually de-emphasized own role, and emphasized group processes in own department.

> *I introduced this, as I do with every new initiative. When it started I saw them push and motivate each other. I saw them motivated for this campaign, and I started the follow up procedures. I did not want to be the one who cooled them down, so I sent them weekly updating and follow up mails. I did this for four months. (V)*

One other manager explained why the results were prominent in his department during the first period, before they started to decline. Here he applies an individualistic discourse construction to level the efforts done by two specific employees. He also applies an individualistic discourse while blaming himself for not taking proper action to produce the results expected.

> *Even in departments producing good results, only one or two produced tips, and still do. (W)*

> *That was the reason my department had good results the first month. I had two employees producing a lot, and then they became ill, went to a course, and were absent in the subsequent month. When they returned, they discovered the others had not produced a single tip, and the entire project fell to the ground. Obviously, this points directly to me as a leader, for not standing up and taking action, no doubt about that. (H)*

The management team's basic motivation for the project was an issue for debate. There were different views regarding if this was actually a task for claims handlers. Some meant it was, and argued for the initiative based on the fact that increased sales secured jobs. Others were skeptical. They saw the need for everyone to take action to secure jobs, but they were not convinced this was the way they should contribute to the company's bottom line. Clearly not everyone saw their role as active contributors, and projected the motivation task to the project's managers.

> *I feel that many middle managers [...] are waiting to say: didn't I say this would not work. Said in other words; we did not get the message through. (E)*

The main sensegiver – in this case a senior middle manager – took the lead and structured the discussion by applying a role-bound discourse. Through this tactic he constrained the debate – exerting power through discourse – and guided the group to an early conclusion that this was a failure. When the group discussed the basis for the project being a failure, individualistic discourse constructions were applied by different actors. This discourse construction was primarily applied to emphasize the employees' efforts for making the project a success, secondarily it was used to de-emphasize own efforts. However the most prominent discourse construction used when defining this project as a failure and arguing for why it was a failure was a role-bound discourse construction.

3.8.3 Case 2 – success vs. failure

In this case, we see an extensive use of rationalistic discourse constructions and role-bound discourse constructions. However, in contrast to the findings in Case 1, here the group who defined this project as a success used a rationalistic discourse construction to narrowly focus on one division's overall achievements, but did not elevate the discussion to debate whether this has been an overall organizational success or not. We see the execution of power through the construction of a narrowly focused discourse. In contrast, the group who defined this project as a failure emphasized that their own division managed to produce results above target, but these results had limited overall effects since those who were to receive the produced "sales-tips" were not able to transform them into measurable sales results.

Focusing on how the rationalistic discourse constructions are applied, we see here that the group defining the project as a success applied this discourse construction to limit the scope of the discussion, while the "failure" group used the rationalistic discourse construction to broaden the scope to an overall perspective. The same discourse construction may thereby be used in several ways. The other group leader headed a section which had only a minor interest in the project, and who viewed the project as an added workload for his employees.

Their active influence using discourse constructions can be viewed as sensegiving. Despite actors' use of rationalistic discourse constructions to underpin objectivity, defining whether a change is a failure or a success is a matter of subjectivity. Discourse constructions may be a tool for individuals, no matter what intentions they have, to structure discussions and influence how others make sense of situations, which is not only sensegiving but also highly political. This is per se political activity (Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Hardy, 1996).

3.9   Discussion

All group discussions analyzed above have one common denominator: a strong and active, although informal, group leadership (Yukl, 2006). The two success cases were dominated by a rationalistic discourse construction, and the two failure cases were heavily influenced by a role-bound discourse construction. In this section, the informal group leaders' structuring activities and the effect of the dominant discourse constructions and the purpose they seemed to play will be discussed. Through this discussion, I will show how

Vaara's (2002) discourse constructions can serve as to frame discussions and how different constructions also serve different political purposes.

3.9.1 How Discourse Constructions Act as a Framing Device

The analysis above has accentuated how the informal group leaders managed to guide the discussion through the application of different discourse constructions in certain directions that may have served their particular interests. This is the exercise of power to create a specific meaning in line with the leader's political interests (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Hardy & Phillips, 2004). Politics is about creating a perception of legitimacy through the management of meaning, often also called sensegiving. Management of meaning is a power game, where the ability to impose ones' interpretation of events upon others in competition with other meanings offered is the goal (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). It has to do with shaping a perception of reality and imposing this perception of reality on others (Brown, 1995; Hardy, 1996). In the cases analyzed in this essay, the interpretation of reality in the different groups were deliberately influenced in the direction of the "framer's" version of reality (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005).

In the success cases, the group leaders managed to guide the discussion to a rationalistic perspective despite other discourse constructions introduced by other group members. In this way, both of the informal group leaders managed to limit the scope of the discussion, and steer the sensemaking of others (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Through their rationalistic discourses, they contributed to the other group participants' retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995) of the results achieved and the perspective of the sensegivers (Maitlis, 2005). By keeping the debate at the company level – focusing on overall change objectives – and not allowing the considerations of impact on individuals, the changes were defined as a success.

By structuring the discussion into a rationalistic discourse, the sensegivers elevated the discussion from a narrow focus on self and the immediate short-sighted problems the change processes caused, to an overall perspective of what the projects might have to say for the overall business performance. However, the two groups approached the overall perspective differently. "Sales tip" was successful regarding rationalistic objectives in the claims handling division, but not an overall success since the sales organization seemed unable to handle the vast amount of tips. Here we can see indications of the limitation a strong group leadership may cause on a group's ability to see complex contextual issues. In

the "sales-tip" as a success group, we can see how the group leader managed to keep the focus on a narrow division of specific performances. By only focusing on division-specific performances and division-specific challenges, the overall organizational challenges and performance were overlooked. Through the limitation of the perspective of the debate to the rationalistic, the leading actor deliberately could create an illusion of success despite any individual and overall organizational problems it might have caused. It shows further the limitations a rationalistic discourse construction may cause in sensemaking processes, when discussions mainly are carried out on the premise of so called rational objective facts.

On the other hand, the organizational restructuring process group discussed problems introduced through other discourse constructions than the rationalistic, but the group leader never let go of the overall rationalistic objectives. This strategy made it possible for everybody to discuss the negative and unsuccessful sides of the project without losing the overall perspective that the project – rationalistically – was a success. In this group, the main sensegiving strategy applied by the group leader was a continuous repetition that the rationalistic objectives were met, objectives the company was able to measure by the bottom line. In this way, the group leader allowed a broad discussion, without leaving the overall perspective that the project was a success. In this particular case, the rationalistic discourse approach made the basis for a broad and open discussion rather than limiting it. By stating an overall rational and objective performance in accordance with the overall objectives for the business, she made room for a broad and open discussion.

In the failure cases, the informal leaders started their sensegiving processes by structuring the discussion into the perspective that some others did not cope with the challenges. This way both leaders managed to establish a kind of groupthink process (Aldag & Fuller, 1993), where the focus groups were the ones in control and someone outside of the group did not cope with the situation. By applying this role-bound discourse construction, the group leaders as prominent sensegivers established the premises for the others' sensemaking, and by that they structured the discussion to own perspectives. The main perspective in both cases is the shortsighted and self-centered focus. Both cases focused on short-term effects regarding self and own employees rather than raising the discussion to a level where the overall business perspective was the main issue. This kind of perspective was strengthened by the use of role-bound discourse constructions, whose nature is conflicting interests among different groups rather than a focus on overall business (Vaara,

2002). We see evident distance taking regarding the projects throughout both groups, where "others" were the problem, not themselves.

The group defining the organizational restructuring as a failure was guided by their informal leader straight into a shortsighted narrow perspective of the results achieved, or rather the results not achieved. Through his sensegiving process, the group leader managed to narrow the discussion strictly to procedural and content related questions, and not to overall outcome issues. If the discussion in this group is compared with the discussion in the group defining the project as a success, they both focused on the same issues as problematic and unsuccessful. But where the failure-focused group continuously chose to focus on the shortsighted negative issues, the success-focused group managed to elevate the conclusion away from the shortsighted narrow perspective to a more overall business perspective. In this specific case, it is evident that the informal group leader influences the sensemaking processes for the other group participants, and no one in the group challenges him or even tries to approach the project through another perspective (Aldag & Fuller, 1993).

In the focus group defining "sales tip" as a failure, the project was defined as a failure when the discussion was lifted to a role-bound discussion regarding the tip receiving division's lack of ability to constructively receive the tips. Here it is possible to see how this setting legitimized the project as a failure, despite the fact that some departments in the claims division actually managed to produce tips above expectations. The sensegiving tactic that is applied here is the role-bound discourse construction bringing the divisional conflict of interest to the table. In doing this, the leading sensegiver was able to structure the sensemaking processes in everybody's mind that this project was an overall failure, despite some successes in the micro organizational level.

3.9.2 How Rational Discourse Constructions Serve Overall Organizational Values

In the groups that defined the change projects as successes, the dominating discourse construction was the rationalistic one. Through rational discourse the informal group leaders managed to create a foundation for the discussion in line with a strong cultural artifact in the organization: "*the criterion for success is really being measured*".

By framing the discussion in line with prominent values in the organization, the agenda was set in accordance with the only accepted way of measuring successes or failures. Either you reach a measurable objective, or you do not. Through the establishment of an

early accept for using rational measurable objectives as the overall evaluation criterion for whether a project was a success or not, the discussion could be opened up for other perspectives. This way it was possible to open-mindedly discuss other sides of the projects without compromising the overall values in the organization.

3.9.3 How Role-Bound Discourse Constructions Create Scapegoats

The dominating discourse construction in the groups defining discussed projects as failures was the role-bound discourse construction. In these groups the informal group leader focused especially on how "others" were the reason that the projects failed. The role-bound discourse constructions do not support the existing core values in the organization.

In the "sales-tip" case, the leading character emphasized how the sales and customer service division were not able to handle the tips produced by the claims handling division. The discourse construction applied was used to make the sales and customer service division the scapegoat responsible for the lack of commitment to the project in the claims handling division. In the restructuring project, it was the division management who were the scapegoats. They tried to implement an organizational structure that was abandoned, and they were not able to provide the claims handlers with adequate IT-solutions.

3.10 Conclusion

In this essay I have shown that middle managers play an active role in constructing change outcomes as either a success or a failure. As seen, this contributes to the strategy-as-practice and middle management literature since middle managers' discourse micro-practices are able to form the perception of strategy outcome.

In all four cases analyzed, an informal group leader took process control (e.g. Hardy, 1996) very early in the discussion and by that tried to establish a power base. This leading figure took a role as the leading sensegiver (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) in the group processes, guiding the others' sensemaking (Weick, 1993) in a direction that suited the sensegiver's perception of reality (Hardy, 1996; Hardy & Phillips, 2004).

Regardless of whether the "sensegiver" defines a project as a failure or as a success, the sensegiver is in a unique position to structure and influence the other group participants' sensemaking by being the one that frames the discourse from where the discussion starts

(Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Hardy & Phillips, 2004). In this way the sensegiver is able to limit the scope of the discussion, and even be in position to guide the discussion in certain directions. The findings draw and extend the discourse constructions by Vaara (2002) by showing how discourse constructions also serve as power tools influencing others' sensemaking and their perception of change outcome (Hardy, 1996). Hence, discourse constructions are closely tied to mechanisms for power and politics (e.g. Buchanan & Badham, 1999). This study therefore enhances the literature on organizational discourse by exploring middle managers' view on strategy by the performance of conversation analysis (Laine & Vaara, 2007). Finally, this study enhances our understanding of the four discursive constructions of success or failure in change narratives introduced by Vaara (2002) by showing how different discourse constructions may serve different personal and organizational objectives when middle managers define change initiatives as successes or failures.

The rationalistic discourse construction was found powerful in elevating discussions from shortsighted and narrow perspectives to a more aggregated overall business oriented perspective. Nevertheless, this may not be a finding that could easily be generalized, even the findings supporting this view are found in different cases. A limitation regarding these findings is that the findings are related to an organization engrained with a basic assumption (Schein, 1992) that all performance indicators should be measured, and success is related to what extent measurable objectives are realized. This organizational context and culture most likely makes rationalistic discourse constructions particularly powerful.

The role-bound discourse was found powerful in narrowing perspectives when sensegivers want to guide conclusions in directions that suit their personal perception of reality. On the other hand, we have also seen role-bound discourse constructions open up perspectives (even if in this particular case, these resulted in broadening the perspective so that a project was classified as a failure). In the cases analyzed in this essay, role-bound discourse construction has been effective when defining projects as failures and as a tool to create scapegoats responsible for the failures. Even if these findings support findings by Vaara (2002), it is not possible to generalize that role-bound discourses are specifically well-suited strategies to define failures.

4. The Politics of Middle Management Sensemaking and Sensegiving[*]

4.1 Abstract

Middle managers play an important role when organizational change is to be implemented. The objective of this essay is to identify what political tactics middle managers exert to influence change outcome. The study reveals how middle managers through political actions influence the sensemaking of others, including their superiors. Drawing on sensemaking and sensegiving theory and political literature, middle managers' convergent and divergent actions during change implementation are examined. The findings suggest that middle managers have an influence on superiors' sensemaking by exerting the power of meaning. Middle managers mobilized resource power, such as expertise in the business, as a powerful platform for controlling the change process.

4.2 Introduction

Top executives are not able to affect change outcome solely on their own. They are the key in defining change intentions, but the real change implementers are the middle managers. Top executives and middle managers play significant but different and complementary roles related to strategic change. Top executives are facilitators and deploy resources, while middle managers develop capabilities and execute the day-to-day decisions that link realized strategy to intended strategy (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Helfat et al., 2007). Recent middle manager literature suggests that middle managers make important contributions to strategy and strategy implementation (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997, 2000; Huy, 2002; Whittington, 2002; Wooldridge et al., 2008). Middle managers play an active role in implementing top management's change initiatives, where they act as linking pins and mediators between the organization's strategic and operational levels (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Likert, 1961). Recent studies have called for research on the interactions between senior and middle manager interactions in strategic change (e.g

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[*] This essay was accepted and presented at the 25th EGOS Colloquium 2009.

Hoon, 2007; Rouleau, 2005). This study reveals the micro practices that occur in the schism between middle and senior management when declining performances are met with organizational changes.

The sensemaking and sensegiving literature focuses on how change initiators and change recipients develop shared cognition, perceptions and interpretations of change initiatives. However, it is remarkable how little focus politics has been given in this literature, especially when sensegiving has to do with influencing the meaning construction of others. Trying to influence others' meaning construction is, per se, political behavior (e.g. Buchanan & Badham, 1999). Politics is traditionally seen as self-serving, but recent research has shed more light on this perspective, and recent literature on organizational politics emphasizes that political behavior may be triggered as well by selfless motivation and actions (Buchanan & Badham, 2008).

The strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on the micro-practices of what people do through their day-to-day strategy activity and how they influence strategic outcome (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 2006, 2007). The practice perspective must also take into consideration the activities individuals actively choose not to do. It is the non-practices as much as the practices that make the difference in politics (Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008). To enhance our understanding of strategy-as-practice, we need to further explore how middle managers' actions regarding change initiatives include political behavior, and how this behavior affects the final change outcome.

In this essay, I examine the political ploy that emerges when middle managers face top management's intentions to confront declining organizational performance with organizational change. I identify the political tactics middle managers apply to position themselves to exert power to influence the change outcome. I especially focus on how specific political tactics affected the middle managers as sensegivers, who tried to affect others sensemaking so that they were able to influence change outcome. I draw on sensegiving theory (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005; Pye, 2005; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), middle manager literature (Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Huy, 2002), literature on convergent and divergent actions (Burgelman, 1994; Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007), and literature on power and politics (Buchanan & Badham, 1999; S. R. Clegg, 1989; Hardy, 1996; Hardy & Clegg, 1996; Hartley, Benington, & Binns, 1997; Mintzberg, 1985; Pettigrew, 1977)

The study is designed as an embedded single case study (Yin, 2003) conducted in a Nordic insurance company (INSCO), where a strategic change project was followed for eight months. Real-time, longitudinal data (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Pettigrew, 1992; Van De Ven, 1992) was gathered from a multiple set of sections and departments. The study examined an organizational change in the Norwegian claims handling division of INSCO.

This essay contributes to existing literature on power and politics by providing access to rich qualitative accounts from respondents taking part in political behavior. Such accounts are rare (Buchanan, 1999), and give insight into to how skilled political actors operate, which enhances our understanding of the nature of power struggles and politics in organizations. Furthermore, this study expands existing sensemaking and sensegiving literature through providing evidence for a tight coupling with power and politics, showing that sensegiving is politics in action. Finally, this essay provides a supplement to existing strategy-as-practice literature by showing the tight coupling between practice, politics and change outcome.

4.3   Theory

4.3.1 Middle managers divergent and convergent actions

The traditional middle manager role in strategy is implementing top managements' intended strategies. However, studies show that this perspective is too simplistic (Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997). Middle managers play a significant role in strategy processes, both in strategy formation and implementation.

The traditional middle manager role in strategy as an implementer of top manager's intended strategies (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994) can be viewed as convergent action. However, we know from the literature that middle managers' responses to change initiatives are more diverse than responses that lead to the performance of activities that are in line with top management's or corporate intentions (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Middle managers frequently engage in divergent action to develop a new strategic orientation (Burgelman, 1991, 1994; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Huff et al., 1992). This kind of action is often seen as negative as top management may be closely identified with the official strategy (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997).

Divergent actions do not need to be destructive (Burgelman, 1991, 1994; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Huff et al., 1992; Meyer, 2006), but managers are more likely to fail in effectuating strategic intent if there are tensions and different responses between different groups of middle managers (Meyer, 2006) and such actions are often seen as negative and unconstructive (Helfat et al., 2007). As actors having wide-ranging contact with the external environment, and through that, first hand information of external environmental changes, middle managers are in a position to play an important role in bringing divergent thinking into the shaping of strategy (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Hoon, 2007). Middle managers' divergent actions regarding change can be the result of either unintentional misunderstandings of corporate intentions, or the result of more deliberate misinterpretations (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007).

Convergent actions are viewed as middle managers responding and acting in accordance with corporate intentions (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). As in divergent actions, the convergent action may be both upwardly and downwardly oriented. The latter is related to what has been seen as the traditional middle manager task in strategy – implementing deliberate strategy – "*managerial interventions that align organizational action with strategic intentions*" (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, p. 155). The upward orientation action is related to synthesizing information – *the interpretation and evaluation of information [that] affects top management perceptions [...] within a given strategic context* (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, p. 155). Issue selling has been introduced as a concept for middle managers to help shape the strategic agenda (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001). Issue selling may be seen as sensegiving and as a means to affect others attempt to make sense of strategic initiatives (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; Wooldridge et al., 2008).

Recent studies have indicated that how middle managers make sense of change initiatives, and how sensemaking and sensegiving processes affect action are important for understanding what lies behind middle managers' convergent and divergent actions (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). I therefore turn to sensegiving and sensemaking theory next.

4.3.2 Sensemaking and Sensegiving

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, p. 442) define sensemaking as "*[it] has to do with meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempted [sic] to*

develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the intended strategic change". This introduces sensemaking as an interpretative process, where the change recipients' interpretations of the intended changes have an impact on how they create change and affect the change outcome (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

How individuals make sense of change initiatives affects whether the change outcomes are in accordance with the anticipated outcomes – convergent action, or are in conflict with the anticipated outcome – divergent action (Balogun, 2006; Stensaker, Falkenberg, & Grønhaug, 2007). Such sensemaking may take place in either horizontal communication and interaction or as a result of top-down communication. Research shows that most sense is made through the social processes of sensemaking at the inter-recipient level, which leads to the conclusion that the change outcome, whether it is in accordance with the intent or not, is largely determined by the interpretations of the change recipients (Balogun, 2006). The social processes of sensemaking are processes where change recipients interact in exchanging stories, gossip, rumors, jokes, conversations and discussions with each other to form an interpretation of what they should do to put their superiors' change plans into action (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Maitlis, 2005). Maitlis (2005) emphasized that individuals' interpretations, and thereby individuals' sensemaking, may be shaped by other's sensegiving efforts.

Sensegiving can be defined as "*the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality*" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) emphasized that sensegiving is a sequential and reciprocal process where the sensegiver and the sensemaker respectively are primarily dealing with influence and understanding. Sensegiving has to do with interpretation and how different players work to influence each other through different types of communicative and interactive behavior (Maitlis, 2005).

To sum up, from the sensemaking literature, we know that sensemaking is a social process (Maitlis, 2005), which engages sensemakers and sensegivers in different and often multifaceted negotiation processes (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005). It is an interpretation process where change receivers make their own visualization of the changes through conversation and interaction with others (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Change output may be different than intended due to individual, different interpretations of corporate intentions (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007).

Sensegiving is described as a political process, where others' decision making is affected by the sensegivers influence on their interpretations (Hoon, 2007; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Despite this however, organizational politics have been largely ignored in the sensemaking and sensegiving literature; hence there is still room to explore how politics may have an impact on sensemaking and sensegiving. I turn now to the literature on power and politics.

4.3.3 Power and politics

In a classic historical perspective such as the works of Marx and Weber, power in organizations has been tightly coupled to domination. Marx's position was linked to the ownership and control of the means of production, while Weber's position was not only linked to ownership and control over the means of production, but was also a result of knowledge of operations (S. Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Hardy & Clegg, 1996). These power foundations may be seen as based in the hierarchical dimensions of organizations, and are historically labeled as legitimate power. In contrast, power exercised outside formal hierarchical structures has been considered as illegitimate power (Hardy & Clegg, 1996). It is emphasized in the literature that the study of power in a management perspective traditionally has been a study of so-called illegitimate power, or power exerted by organizational members without hierarchical and structural sanctioning of their behavior (S. R. Clegg, 1989). In contrast to the bureaucratic "Weberian" perspective of power, other researchers view power as a struggle for own interests or as conflict of interests, where control over scarce resources increases power for those who control these resources at the expense of those who do not control these resources (Mintzberg, 1984; Pettigrew, 1975, 1977). This perspective is labeled "the functionalist perspective" (Hardy & Clegg, 1996) and views the use of power as dysfunctional, illegitimate and unsanctioned. This position is based on an assumption that the power that rests in organizational structures as functional authority is an unquestionable legitimate power, while power exerted outside the lines of command in a bureaucratically structured organization is illegitimate (Hardy & Clegg, 1996; Mintzberg, 1985). Hardy and Clegg (1996) presented a definition of power that may seem rather negative, but nevertheless is the basis of a broad stream of literature regarding power: *"[T]he ability to get others to do what you want them to do, if necessary against their will, or to get them to do something they otherwise would not do"* (p. 623). Hardy (1996) differentiates three different types of power: (i) the power of resources, (ii) the power of

process, and (iii) the power of meaning through which individuals can influence change outcome. *The power of resources* is linked to control over scarce resources. The power of resources is exercised by the deployment of key resources on which others are dependant. Decision outcomes may be influenced through individual control and management of resources such as: information, expertise, budgets, rewards, and punishments in directions that support their objectives. *The power of process* is related to influencing outcomes by controlling those who participate in decision-making processes and those who do not. This highlights another side of the power of process because it is possible to influence outcomes by indirect participation; you control who takes part in decision making rather than controlling decision making directly. This reveals a vision that the most powerful decision makers are not the ones we see, but the men/women behind the scenes. *The power of meaning* has to do with controlling or shaping perceptions, cognitions and preferences, which is per se sensegiving. This is possible by influencing what information is given, and how, and to whom, it is presented. It has to do with controlling language symbols and rituals. Balogun et al. (2005) described the power of meaning as "*a process of symbol construction and use designed to legitimize one's own actions and delegitimize those of opponents*" (p. 263).

Politics is power in action, where individuals use tactics and other techniques of influence to foster their will or objectives upon others (Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Hardy, 1996). A common consensus of the definition of organizational politics does not exist (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Nevertheless Pettigrew (1977) introduced a definition that is broadly cited (e.g. Buchanan & Badham, 2008, p. 77; Hardy & Clegg, 1996, p. 630): "*Politics concerns the creation of legitimacy for certain ideas, values and demands – not just actions performed as a result of previously acquired legitimacy. The management of meaning refers to a process of symbol construction and value use designed both to create legitimacy for one's own demands and to "delegitimize" the demands of opponents.*" (p. 85). Organizational politics is a phenomenon debated in the management literature (Buchanan & Badham, 2008), however, Mintzberg (1985) emphasized that political behavior is "*neither formally authorized, widely accepted nor officially certified*" (p. 134). On the other hand, Hardy & Clegg (1996) raised the question "*in whose eyes is power deemed illegitimate, unsanctioned or dysfunctional?*" (p. 629), which actually questions to what extent the organizational elites (e.g. senior management) serve organizational or personal objectives.

Recent research has emphasized the role power and politics play during change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Buchanan, 1999, 2008; Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Hardy, 1996). Political activity is more commonly applied in conditions of uncertainty and conflict (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Pettigrew, 1975). In the literature, there is an ambivalence regarding political activity: on one hand, whether it is informal and illegitimate activity and hence unprofessional and unnecessary, *or* inevitable and desirable and necessary activity on the other (Buchanan, 1999; Buchanan, Claydon, & Doyle, 1999). Political behavior has two faces – "the nice and the nasty". They may be both positive and negative for observers and recipients (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Nevertheless political activity is not necessarily an activity that is deployed with personal objectives, such as personal career objectives and/or organizational power. It might as well be a means for managers to serve organizational goals when they have diverse opinions and beliefs about change objectives.

Politics is about creating a perception of legitimacy through the management of meaning, which may be seen as sensegiving. Management of meaning is a power game, where the ability to impose ones' interpretation of events upon others in competition with other offered meanings is the goal (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). It has to do with shaping a perception of reality and imposing this perception of reality on others (Brown, 1995; Hardy, 1996). Fiss & Hirsch (2005) based the influencing processes in framing on how the interpretation of reality in different audiences is deliberately influenced in the direction of the "framer's" version of reality. Mobilization for and legitimation of strategic change may be found in framing. It is a process in which events are emphasized and encoded to create meaning by presenting some elements and withholding some elements (Fiss & Zajac, 2006). Fiss & Hirsh (2005) accentuated the political character of framing by stating "*framing emphasizes the external strategic process of creating specific meaning in line with political interests*" (p. 31). They further held that framing is similar to sensegiving, which is the tool individuals apply when attempting to influence the meaning construction of others. Summarized, there is support in the literature to uphold sensegiving and framing as similar concepts that are political tools through which it may be possible to influence the construction of meaning. As seen above, sensegiving is the core in political struggles and the fight for power.

In this study, I examine the role of power and politics in sensegiving and sensemaking by exploring how middle managers seek to influence the change outcome

through the power of resources, the power of process and the power of meaning. These analyses are based on the conceptualization of power as introduced by Hardy (1996),

4.4 The Study

The study was conducted in a Nordic insurance company (INSCO). INSCO conducts business within the general insurance industry in four Nordic countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. It is a top-three company in general insurance in the region, with 4,500 employees. The Norwegian branch has 1,800 employees, mainly situated in the country's largest cities. The study examined an organizational change in the Norwegian claims handling division, which has approximately 350 employees.

The division management team in the claims handling division recognized that they were unsatisfied with the claims handling processes. The claims handling processes were too time-consuming, too costly, and the level of accessibility for customers was too low. As a consequence the division management team decided to perform an analysis to identify areas where performance could be enhanced. The results of the analysis concluded that 112 different actions needed to be taken. These were mostly minor actions, but some were rather time-consuming and costly. The most dramatic action was to implement a new organizational structure (see "Intended change outcome", Figure 5).
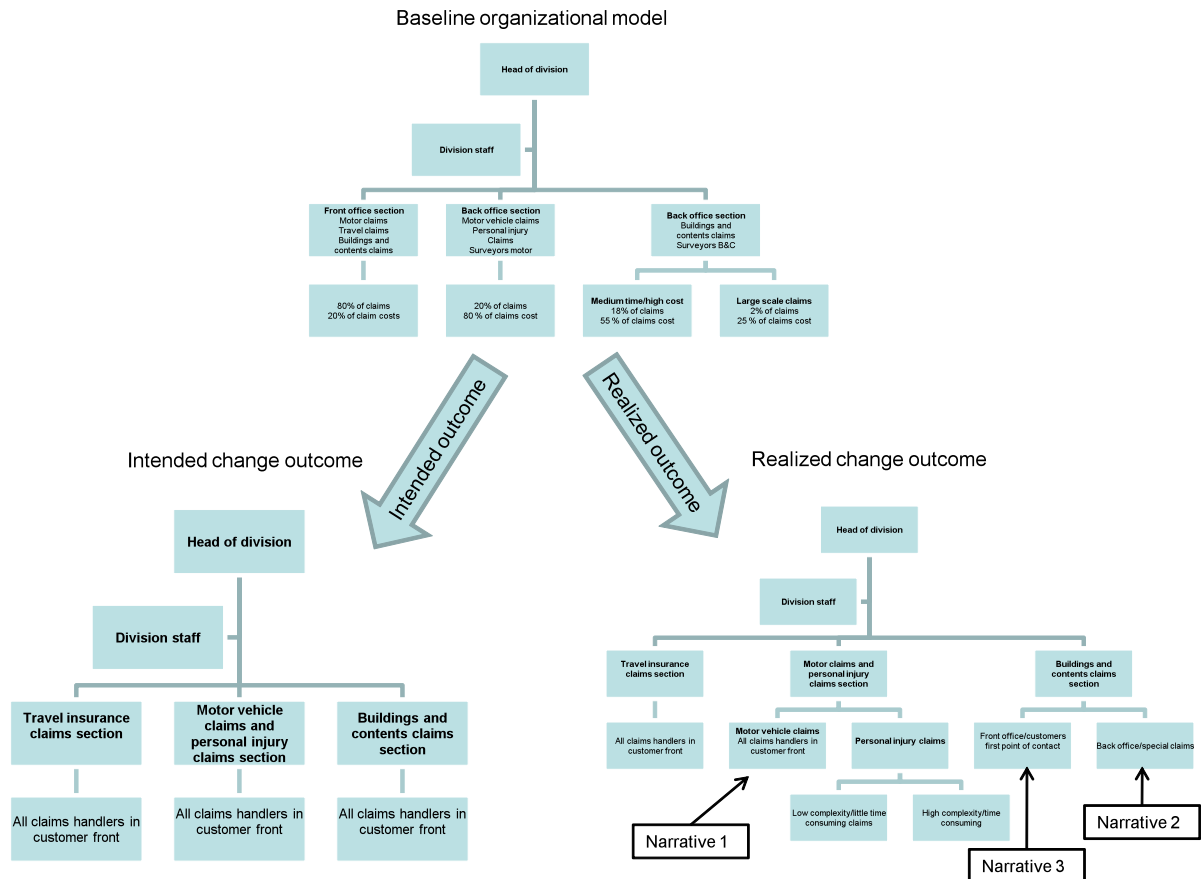
Figure 5: Baseline Structure, Intended Structure and Realized Structure

In contrast to existing procedures, it was decided that all claims (see "Baseline organizational model", Figure 5) should be handled at the customer call centre regardless of the claim's size, complexity or cost.   Three new sections were to be established: (i) travel insurance claims, (ii) motor vehicle and bodily injury claims, and (iii) buildings and contents claims. By having all claims handlers in the front office working in a call center-like environment, the objective was to enhance accessibility and by that customer satisfaction. This would eliminate the need for back office experts, and simultaneously give every claims handler the opportunity to handle all kinds of claim complexity.   There were no differences in formal qualifications between the majority of claims handlers, so they were qualified to do any claim within their area of expertise. By establishing new procedures for how to handle the low complexity and low cost claims, more resources could be put on claims where it was possible to reduce claim handling costs and claim costs. The new organizational structure was to be implemented by October 15, 2007.

Upon implementation, different organizational structures emerged in the sections (see "Realized change outcome", Figure 5). In both the travel insurance claims section and the

motor vehicle insurance claims section, the new organizational structure was implemented as planned by the project. For the claims section for buildings and contents however, the structure remained divided between the front office and back office departments, although one of the two back office departments was closed down. The personal injury claims departments, with a few minor alterations, were organized as before.

4.5 Methods

4.5.1 Data Collection

The study is an embedded single case (Yin, 2003) study, where the change project was followed for eight months. Real-time, longitudinal data (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Pettigrew, 1992; Van De Ven, 1992) was gathered from a multiple set of sections and departments within the claims handling division.

The primary methods for collecting data were interviews and personal "diaries" (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Denzin, 1989; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). To triangulate data (Eisenhardt, 1989), secondary data sources were collected, including internal company documents such as: decision memos, consultancy reports and written inputs from middle managers outside the decision process. In addition, more informal conversations between the researcher and middle managers took place over the telephone, over a cup of coffee, or as a quick chat in the company hallway or in middle managers' offices.

The personal "diaries" were personal reflections related to the change process recorded by the recipients in preformatted MSWord files, where five explicit themes were to be reflected. (i) What have you been working with over the last two weeks? (ii) What has been working well in the project so far, and what is the reason it has been working well? (iii) What has not been working well in the project so far, and what is the reason it has not been working well? (iv) What challenges for the project do you see in the following weeks? (v) Is there anything related to the project that you are lacking in order to be able to do your job as effectively as possible? (Resources, skills, guidance, information, etc.) A total of 29 diarists were recruited, consisting of 3 heads of sections (middle managers), 14 department heads (middle managers), and 12 ordinary claims handlers, where 3 participated in the project organization. The diarists were instructed to send their diaries by e-mail to the researcher every second week, starting May 18, 2007 and ending December 22, 2007.

Two types of interviews were performed. One group of interviewees was interviewed following a structured, standardized, open-ended interview guide (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003), and one group was interviewed following a semi-structured, open-ended interview technique (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Interview techniques were adjusted during the data collection process as a consequence of the emergence of new and interesting themes (Eisenhardt, 1989), such as deliberate political actions from a group of divergently responding middle managers. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. A total of 25 interviews were conducted. Of these, 14 were semi-structured interviews and 11 were structured interviews. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim.

4.5.2 Data Analysis

First-order analysis

The data analysis was organized in a first and second-order approach (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Here, first-order analysis is a narrative or a story developed through a journalistic approach. The objective is to create a story as near the reality of what happened as possible. The application of multiple data sampling techniques enhances the level of precision (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, despite the use of multiple data sampling techniques, a first-order data analysis will be subjective, even though every effort has been made to make it as objective and neutral as possible. It will be marked by how the members of the organization interpret what is going on in the organization and the researcher's own interpretation of the observed (Van Maanen, 1979). It is essential to get the first-order analysis as correct as possible, else it may lead to second-order concepts that are "*thin, hollow and perhaps altogether faulty*" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 542).

The main data analysis strategy that has been applied is the narrative strategy (Langley, 1999). Recent literature applying qualitative research methods (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Stensaker et al., 2007) uses an analytical approach based on the narrative strategy. This strategy is associated with the construction of a detailed story, based on the raw-data – the first-order analysis (Langley, 1999) – which tells the story from the perspective of the research participants. By writing up narratives or pure descriptions for each case investigated, it is possible to acquire each unique story as a stand-alone entity (Eisenhardt, 1989). These stories are vital to the generation of insight because they help us to organize huge amounts of data.

The objective of the data analysis was to capture the entire complexity and different actions that took place during the process investigated; this provided the development of a "thick description" (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Langley, 1999). The thick description was created by pulling together data from diaries, interviews, document studies and secondary data sources as small talk and telephone follow-up conversations. From this process, the data was organized in accordance with two completely different responses to the change initiative: convergent response and divergent response. The data were organized into two broad categories labeled divergent behavior and convergent behavior. In each category, several sub-categories were identified and established, for instance related to departments and/or branches. In the divergent behavior category, one specific sub-category had to do with actions leading to an alternative change outcome than what had been intended. Two subcategories evolved in the category of convergent behavior. The first included statements about open and direct conflict with those representing the divergent responding category. The second included statements of proactive and convergent behavior, where middle managers deliberately and actively managed to influence the meaning construction in the management team through framing. For these three categories, the data were coded in accordance with: how they behave and what tactics did they apply when trying to manage meaning, how did they act and respond, what did they do, why did they do it, and who actually did what.

Second-order analysis

The second-order analysis is a theoretical analysis of what was unfolded in the first-order analysis. Here the researcher examines the first-order findings for underlying explanatory dimensions (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), "interpretations of the interpretations" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 541). The objective is to discern deeper patterns, dimensions of understanding, patterns not necessarily perceptible to organizational members (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). In this way, theory emerges from the first-order data. In the second-order (Van Maanen, 1979), determination of a deeper understanding is attempted by performing a more theoretical analysis where the first-order findings are examined to find deeper patterns and dimensions based upon a theoretical perspective (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

4.6 First-Order Findings

In these first-order analyses three different narratives regarding the same strategic change initiative are presented: (i) middle managers' convergent action in the motor vehicle claims branch, (ii) middle managers' divergent action in the buildings and contents claims branch, and (iii) middle managers' convergent action in the buildings and contents claims branch. These narratives are three different stories about how middle managers' interventions in the process led to different change outcomes. Narrative 1 – The Proactive Players – gives an insight into the political tactics middle managers applied when trying to frame the challenges the organization were up against, and how these challenges could be solved organizationally. Narrative 2 – "The Gang of Four" – gives insight into the political tactics applied by middle managers who deliberately fought senior managements' change initiatives, and the tactics they applied when they were trying to delegitimize their opponents among their peers. Narrative 3 – "The Unsuccessful Followers" – gives insight into the passive attitude that develops when middle managers are supporters of proposed changes and the political tactics they apply when their perception of reality is threatened. Key events in each narrative are presented graphically in Figure 6.
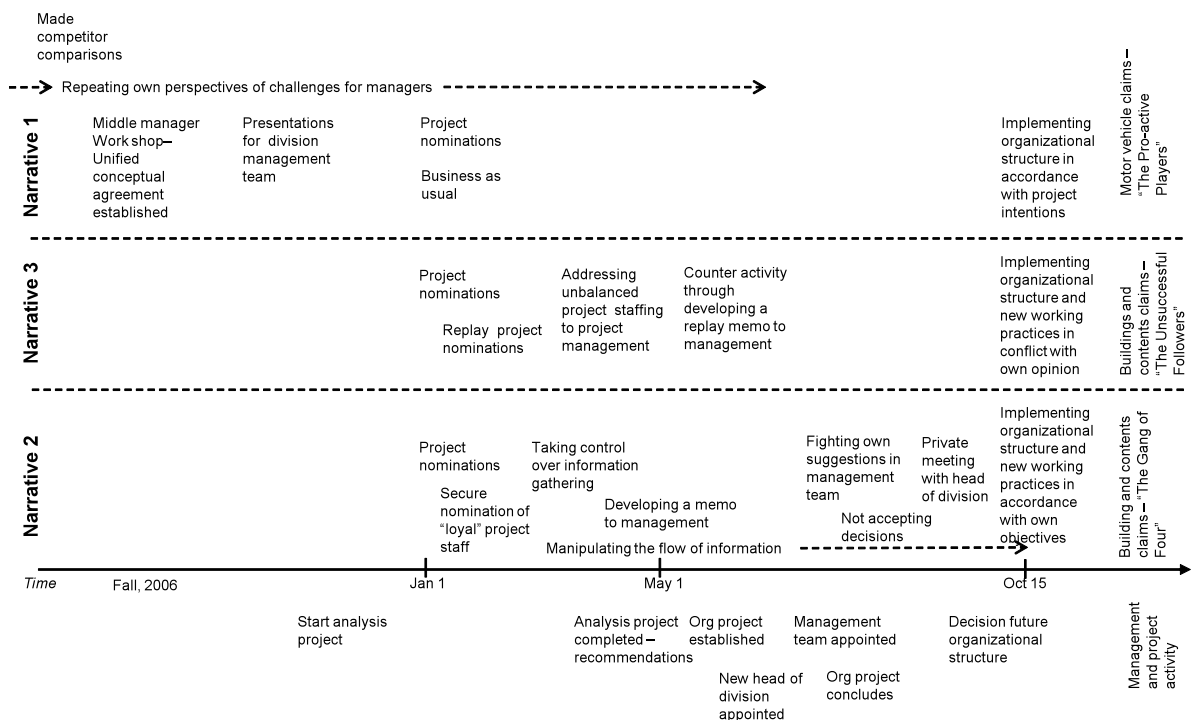
Figure 6: Timeline Narratives

4.6.1 Motor vehicle claims – Convergent Action – "The Proactive Players"

The motor-claims branch was divided into one front office and one back office section, as was the rest of the division before the change initiative took place. The surveyors were organized in the back office section, but served both front office and back office. In the fall of 2006, both the front office managers and the surveyor managers experienced a declining quality in the treatment of customers and business partners (such as garages, car rental companies etc.) In the front office section, there was a united call from the entire motor vehicle claims management team to take action.

> *We desperately needed to rethink our approaches. The front office motor vehicle claims departments were totally ineffectual (the Norwegian expression would be that we were "running on the wheel rim"). We were not coping with the volume, with quality regarding customer treatment and adjustments, and with being up to date. Neither were we able to satisfy our employees' call for development and more challenging tasks. (Middle manager front office, motor vehicle claims)*

The action the front office middle managers took was to arrange a workshop that included all of the front office motor vehicle claims middle managers, where issues of how to meet these challenges were debated. In the following workshop, they developed a consensus on what they viewed as an ideal solution regarding working procedures, how to exploit their resources, how to give employees the opportunity for growth and development and how not to enforce restrictions on the tasks the individual employee could do. Based on these conditions, they created a model of how they wanted the future organization to look. They wanted to merge the back and front office sections, where individual needs and wishes could be taken into consideration when a task was distributed, and an increased flexibility throughout the entire motor vehicle claims branch. The proposals and conclusions were presented in full scale in a management meeting in the front office section.

In the other part of the motor vehicle claims branch, the back office, the motor vehicle surveyors found problems similar to the middle managers in the front office section. They were dissatisfied with the working practices used in the claims-handling departments. They were especially dissatisfied with the old fashioned ways dialogues with customers were performed: an extensive use of post, a limited use of e-mail, and low telephone availability. They documented this by making a telephone test to their own company and its three major competitors, and by feedback from the large players in the auto-repair branch, such as the

major car importers in Norway. The telephone test gave the results that are presented below in Table 2:

	INSCO	COMP1	COMP2	COMP3
Average time to response in sec	55	30	33	20
Number of test calls	95	45	54	42

Table 2: Average Time to Response – Motor Vehicle Claims in Norwegian Insurance Companies[2]

When the division management team decided to go on with an evaluation of how the division performed, and how it best could meet actual and future challenges, it was decided that it would be interesting and necessary to hear how different middle managers saw the situation. Two middle managers were invited, one representative from the motor vehicle branch in the front office management team, and one surveyor manager. The first one was the one who had arranged the middle manager workshop earlier that fall, and the second one was the one who performed the telephone test (Table 1) and who constantly challenged the organization on how performances could be better.

Both middle managers involved in these presentations strongly indicated the need for organizational and procedural changes. The surveyor manager stressed the immediate need for altering claims handling procedures and supportive IT solutions to enhance the customers' and suppliers' experience when contacting the company. He stressed the need for enhanced telephone availability and enhanced electronic communication with customers and suppliers. He pointed out that the technology and the systems were already in place, but the procedural changes were not properly implemented. His main objective was to show the management team that by altering the claims handling procedures, the time spent on each claim would be reduced; as a consequence, there would be more time to answer telephones. He argued that it was possible to enhance efficiency, quality and customer satisfaction through handling claims by only one telephone conversation per claim. Finally, he introduced a merger between the front office departments and the back office departments. In their communication with the division management group, both managers stressed the

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[2] Source ppt presentation created by a middle manager and surveyors, to be presented to the division management team

need for changes in both working practices and organization even though they may have had slightly different approaches and reasons for their arguments.

The organization project, which was one of the main actions to be taken in the claims analysis project, was launched, with no middle managers from the motor vehicle branch participating in the project group. However, the surveyors were represented in the reference group, and expressed satisfaction regarding how the workload was divided. The final result regarding both working practices and organization seemed to be in line with some of the ideas that were introduced in the management presentations held by the two middle managers.

> *In the two weeks since implementation (15.Oct.07), I do have an impression of a positive development in the organization. There are NO queues on the telephone. This is how I dreamt it would be… In my opinion the reason is that the division management team did not deflect the wishes of some employees to keep their old habits. A leader has to bear the brunt of taking some decisions that can seem painful for some – until they get familiar with the new situation… (Middle manager motor vehicle claims)*

In Table 3 a list of applied tactics used by the convergent response group "The Proactive Players" is summarized, containing quotations from interviews, diaries, small talk and telephone follow-up conversations.

Applied tactics	Purpose	Evidence
Arranged a workshop	Establishing a shared perspective	We were rather united in our view of how bad things had become, and all of us met the same challenges from our employees. We were facing demands for more challenging tasks, and a risk for increased turnover. To start meeting these challenges, several of us took the initiative to arrange a workshop where these issues and how we could cope with them were discussed. (Middle manager front office, motor vehicle claims) We wanted to use our employees where it was wise regarding the company's needs and the individual's wishes. We developed criteria for how it could be practically arranged. (Middle manager front office, motor vehicle claims – in telephone follow-up conversation)
Compared own performances with competitors'	Documenting the need for change and the urgency involved	We cannot accept being ranked as the poorest performer by the garages. If we don't elevate our performance to a level where we are the best performer in our professional dialogue with the garages without any competition, they will prioritize our competitor's customers, and not ours. (Middle manager surveyors, motor vehicle claims)
Presented unified perspective for own management group	Establishing support for a change initiative	Based on our discussions at the workshop, a future organizational model was developed. We wanted increased flexibility for each employee. This was best taken care of in an organizational model where front office and back office were merged. We wanted to have a smarter utilization of our employees. This was presented in a management meeting in the front office section. (Middle manager front office, motor vehicle claims)
Made presentation for division	Establishing support,	"Paul" urged me to come to the division management team and give my opinion of the trials we had within the field of handling motor vehicle claims,

| management | understanding and initiative regarding change suggestions at divisional level | and how I thought these challenges could be met. (Middle manager motor vehicle claims front office)

I was asked to come to the division management team to introduce my thoughts about how we could enhance performance within the field of motor vehicle claims handling. (Middle manager motor vehicle claims surveyors) |
|---|---|---|
| Presented metaphors of actual and prospective solutions | Sensegiving | I'm not very skilled at expressing myself in writing, so I used this opportunity to create metaphors of high-level customer treatment for them. (Middle manager motor vehicle claims surveyors) |
| Gaining and gathering support from peers and superiors | Establishing support for a change initiative | There is a need for enhanced challenges in the front office departments and a need for a removal of workload in the back office departments. In the front office we may have a turnover challenge, and in the back office we may have a wear and tear problem. Is a merger between the two sections the answer? (Middle manager surveyors, motor vehicle)

I showed how we could develop our working processes and how this could be combined with a development of our claims handler's skills. These thoughts were received positively from "Roger" [head of back office section Motor vehicle claims], "Victor" [Head of Front office section], and "Susan" [Head of claims handling division]. (Middle manager front office, motor vehicle claims) |
| Accepted appointment to reference group | Securing being informed, and having the opportunity to speak up and influence decisions and solutions | I am participating as a member of the project reference group. This position suits me fine, "William" [branch expert motor vehicle claims] take care of the project group. We share the same opinion, and we share information. (Middle manager motor vehicle claims surveyors) |

Table 3: Applied Tactics "The Proactive Players"

4.6.2 Buildings and Contents Claims – Divergent Action – The Gang of Four

In another claims handling branch – buildings and contents – the process took a completely different direction. First of all, no one was involved or invited to express their thoughts in advance of the claims analysis project. The buildings and contents branch had been affected by conflict between the front office and back office sections for years. The conflict may have had its roots in different perceptions of what are the important and demanding tasks within the buildings and contents branch: having to expedite service routines and a high level of upfront customer service on one side, or being required to do the time-consuming claims handling of medium-sized, complex claims on the other. The total claims volume is approximately 34,500 claims each year, where only 3,500 claims are related to the latter category. The conflict was mostly about working conditions, criteria for

when to pass on one specific claim from the front office to the back office, differences in target figures – did the differences really reflect the differences in complexity, and the removal of load when telephone caller intensity was out of control. One middle manager expressed why the buildings and contents claim branch was not involved before the project launching.

We have had a latent conflict within [our] field for years. The back office guys look at themselves as more qualified than our front office employees, despite that they have the same formal and practical qualifications. We have what we call an A and B team. My impression is that the division management team doesn't want the conflict on their table. (Middle manager buildings and contents claims)

However, after the division management team decided to launch the claims analysis project and tried to shelter the core business, the front office and the back office section management teams chose different approaches. The back office management team took an active approach to try to control what happened in the project. This is when the notion "The Gang of Four" came to life.

[...] it is clear we are four – what was the name of the Chinese leadership in earlier days – "The Gang of Four", yes, that was when "The Gang of Four" came to life. (Middle manager buildings and contents claims back office group)

"The Gang of Four" was very active in the claims analysis project from the start. Despite the division management team's wish to shelter the core business, one of the most central core business players from the back office was positioned in several important positions in the project. By controlling a set of major positions in the analysis project, they could influence much of what was happening. One of the first things they did during the analysis was to rewrite the entire base of interview questions that was to be used in the data collection in the analysis project. In this way, "The Gang of Four" took control over the issues that would be focused on in the analysis. In order to make sure their arguments were properly understood and considered by the project, they took control over the production of a memo that was distributed among the reference group members on a consultation basis. However, the front office representative in the reference group did not receive the memo before the reference group meeting where it was to be discussed. The memo was thereafter passed on to the project management and the steering committee (division management team). In the memo, they not only focused on working practices, but they also took the opportunity to say something about the organization's future.

"The Gang of Four" was challenged by the fact that their opinion regarding future organization seemed to not be supported by the project organization as a whole, despite them having control over the most vital positions in the project regarding buildings and contents. This challenge resulted in considerable political action. They felt sure that they had low odds for gaining support for their position within the project without actively taking action. Having managed to situate their allies in almost every position in the project was not enough to take control over the project's overall position. This led to another type of engagement and action. Specifically, the actions that were taken mostly regarded gaining control over information: making sure "gang members" and their allies had always prepared their arguments and tried to foresee what arguments their opponents would apply, that information was deliberately spread or held back (like not distributing their memo to their opponents), and that information was gathered from a wide range of sources. Despite the influencing tactics employed, the propositions from the project group were to organize the division in contrast to the interests of "The Gang of Four".

A new head of division was appointed before the final conclusions regarding how to organize the division were made. The new management team started working right away with the organizational project as a steering committee and as a decision team. The head of "The Gang of Four" was appointed as a member of the new division management team. The atmosphere in the management team was principally to follow the suggestions from the organization project. Following the project's suggestions led to some disagreement in the buildings and contents claims field as a result of "The Gang of Four's" position regarding how the section was to be organized. These disagreements led to a series of meetings and postponements while the management team tried to reach a unified conclusion. Nevertheless, the management team made a decision to follow the solution suggested by the organization project. In the effort to get another decision than the original one, the head of "The Gang of Four" started manipulating the new head of division. This strategy actually produced the results he and his allies wanted. The most prominent influencing tactic he used was to have a personal meeting with the new head of division, where he could present his view and position without interruption. In the meeting he emphasized his broad experience within the buildings and contents branch, which included positions as surveyor, head of surveyors, head of claims handling departments, and finally head of back office section. He managed to maneuver the decision in a direction where the buildings and contents section

would still be organized into one front office and one back office milieu. The decision was in favor of the "Gang of Four", and against the project and the rest of the management team.

In Table 4, a list of tactics applied by the divergent response group "The Gang of Four" is summarized, containing quotations from interviews, diaries, small talk and telephone follow-up conversations.

Applied tactics	Purpose	Evidence
Disobeying management decisions about project representation	Securing caretaking of own interests	Should I not fight for what I believe in? Should I not have the opportunity to be of influence? […] The project has not even bothered to interview those who have been head of sections, asking for example, what do you think about the future? Seen from the main direction, what are your thoughts, do you have some contributions to the project? It hasn't been interesting to get an idea of what we knew, what we were thinking, or anything else. […] When they don't reach out their hand; please come and tell us whatever you like! Then I say OK, we can start with something else. That is what I have done; I have been hurrying intensely with my three trusted men. And they have had extraordinary loyalty. (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group)
		If I had been a "good boy" waiting on the sidelines we wouldn't have been where we are today. […] I'm not accepting that. When argumentation doesn't work, you have to take another approach. (Middle manager back office buildings and contents claims back office group)
Handpicking loyal and skilled personnel to project positions to get control over the entire subproject staffing	Taking control over all processes, analysis and conclusions produced in the project	Then I chose my A-team. Of course I did, because I want to have influence. I get that through the participating actors. I will not be a passive observer for twelve months, and see such things happen. (Middle manager back office buildings and contents claims back office group)
Taking control over the entire subproject staffing	Taking control over conclusions and decisions	If [we] had chosen somebody else to participate in the claims analysis project, these things would never had come up in this way (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group)
		There is a game going on. […] It's about positioning and influence. (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group)
Placing the most trusted man in many different positions	Being sure that the main idea regarding own position is properly taken care of	I decided to put my trusted men in as many positions as possible: to make sure we were able to pass on our experience, and the contents in projects that have been running for years. I even made sure that our surveyors were also broadly represented in the processes. (Middle manager buildings and contents claims back office group)
		Of course, I want to have influence, which I get through those who are participating (Middle manager buildings and contents)
Taking control over the information gathering in the analysis by taking	Taking control over the perception of reality	[The basic foundation] presented by the consultants was of no use to us in buildings and contents. The subproject team had to rewrite the entire base of questions completely. (Middle manager buildings and contents)

control over what questions are to be asked and what to focus on during data sampling		
Developing a memo supporting and giving the reasons for own position and objectives	Influencing others' perception of reality	Simultaneously we took the opportunity to have an opinion about the [future] organization. This was synthesized in a memo regarding working procedures, segmenting and organization. (Middle manager buildings and contents claims back office group)
Manipulating the flow of information by holding back information, and by distributing only bits of information	Making sure that the opposition was less informed and unprepared when issues were up for discussion and decision	The memo was produced as an input to the OD project in [the division]. In week 20, this memo was submitted on a consultative round to the reference group of the OD project. I took care of the submission and the follow-up procedures regarding [the division management team]. (Middle manager back office buildings and contents claims back office group)

I found it strange to not receive the memo from [the subproject manager]. (Middle manager front office building and contents claims front office group)

One hour before attending [a reference group meeting] I received a call from the subproject manager [buildings and contents] [member of "The Gang of Four"] who was to inform the meeting about a memo they had produced. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group).

It is to make sure that information is spread both here and there, and that you are at any time as well oriented as possible. I do believe I was better informed […] than anybody else. (Middle manager buildings and contents claims back office group)

I have used some means I never thought I would use. The policy instrument was actually to make sure [specific "gang" member] controlled all possible arguments. […] That is the real policy instrument, which is what we have done all the way, to try to have an influence. The project saw this a long time ago. (Middle manager buildings and contents claims back office group) |
| Questioning consultants' expertise | Shaping perception of own expertise | It is my opinion that the claims analysis project is governed by consultants. I do believe it is wise to use consultants, but it is, in my opinion, wrong that propositions related to future organizational solutions will be prepared for the steering committee mainly by consultants and other persons with little relevant experience from claims handling and next to no knowledge of what challenges the organization will meet. I also react negatively that some have preferences related to future [organizational] solutions, which they bring into the project without having them subsumed with the challenges we will meet. (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group) |
| Taking advantage of having a new head of division and his lack of historical background and direct experience in the particular | Making sure unfavorable decisions were not made | [The head of division] understood the seriousness in what I said. He wanted information about my opinion, and why. We had a session on this issue where he asked a lot of questions. […] He understood my opinion and why. That is when I think he found arguments and a solid foundation for it being wise to alter the strategy (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group)

It was to call attention to the risk of choosing the main process [the project's |

branch		suggestion]. For this field there would be a significant risk that what we had built up during the latter six to seven years would disintegrate. (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group)
Not accepting unfavorable decisions and by that securing replay on vital decisions	Making sure only favorable decisions were made	How this happened? I didn't accept [the proposed solutions regarding future organizational model]. [The new head of division] understood the seriousness of what I told him. (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group)
Arranging a one-to-one meeting with new head of division	Making sure the new division head's perceptions were in line with own interests	Then we had a separate meeting where he posed a lot of questions, a lot. […] I believe that he found a reasonable argumentation for why it was wise to deviate from his position. (Middle manager buildings and contents back office group) I have put all my professional expertise into this. […] I've used the knowledge I've got, the experience I've got from it. [...] I've seen so many models and solutions throughout the years; I've seen what works and what doesn't. Something that didn't work earlier may work now, but then something new must be added, another variant or something else so that it may work better at the next crossroad. (Middle manager building and contents claims back office group)

Table 4: Applied Tactics "The Gang of Four"

4.6.3 Buildings and Contents Claims – Convergent Action – The Unsuccessful Followers

As we have seen, the conflict-ridden buildings and contents branch were divided into a front office and a back office section. A perception of an A and a B-team has developed over time. The line of conflict is between the front office milieu and the back office milieu, with the latter the milieu that is viewed as the A-team. "The Gang of Four" represented the interests of the back office milieu. On the other side, the front office milieu has not acted as actively as "The Gang of Four"; nor were they able to organize themselves in the same way. The ones that represented the front office milieu in the political struggle that arose as a consequence of top management's intentions to alter organizational structure were department heads in the front office section. Their superior – head of the front office – decided to leave the company before the real political struggle regarding the future organizational structure commenced. These department heads were not as organized and coordinated as "The Gang of Four", hence they are labeled "The Unsuccessful Followers".

Like "The Gang of Four", "The Unsuccessful Followers" were also not invited to express their point of view at the beginning of the claims analysis project; nor did they take any active action to be players in the analysis project. They decided to follow the decision that no managers from core business should take part in the project organization even after confronting their superior with the fact that the back office managers had managed to get themselves placed in vital positions in the project. The choice to stay loyal to management decisions was clear.

However, frustration about how the project was staffed found expression in a diary.

The subproject has an unbalanced staff [related to how the division is organized]. Out of 6 delegates, only one is from [front office] the largest part [of the organization]. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group)

The different positions the two milieus held were explicitly expressed by front office managers, who due to process loyalty were not in a position to maneuver within the project. Because of lack of representation and through that, lack of information to one of the parties, conflict between the two milieus seemed to intensify. One of the project's objectives was to solve the conflict, not to intensify it.

I seem to remember that there were one or two meetings we [head of departments] participated in, when results were presented. [...] It was, of course a challenge that [the front office managers] and [the back office managers] were each stuck in their own, separate positions (Middle manager buildings and contents claims front office group)

The level of conflict was rather intensified during the project. As progress was made, the different positions were crystallized. When the back office milieu launched the memo they had produced within the boundaries of the buildings and contents subproject, reactions were intense from the front office managers. On short notice, they drafted a reply to the memo the "The Gang of Four" had produced, and sent it simultaneously to the project management and the steering committee (division management team).

When the project presented their conclusions, many of the back office issues were taken care of in the analysis project. However, when the project reached a conclusion later on regarding future organization, the front office perspective was the perspective that was reflected in the recommendations from the project. For a long time, it seemed that the recommendations from the project would be the end result of the organization project.

Due to the front office milieu's belief in the process and decisions made in the division management team, appointment of a new head of division and a new management

team, and the fact that their representative in the management team had left the organization without having been replaced by any other front office representative in the management team, the front office milieu had no alternative arena or channel to direct their input to but the project. The project, on the other hand, had already drawn its conclusions. Without a natural arena and communication channels, "The Unsuccessful Followers" entered a "wait and see" state of mind.

When conclusions regarding the future organization were reached, and the front office manager's and the project's position were not any part of the conclusions, disbelief and dissatisfaction arose.

When you get a new [head of division], he often chooses the safest solutions (Middle manager front office)

Special claims [back office], as they now call themselves, have really come out of this well off. What we sense is how happy they are with themselves. They are making comments such as "now the unsolved cases are moved to the other departments". Unsolved cases from the "old" [back office] departments have now been moved to the other departments [front office]. Of course when employees [in these departments] hear this, they are not very happy… (Middle manager front office building and contents)

In Table 5, a list of tactics applied by the convergent response group "The Unsuccessful Followers" is summarized, containing quotations from interviews, diaries, small talk and telephone follow-up conversations.

Applied tactics	Purpose	Evidence
Loyalty to managements' decisions and by that taking no positions in the project	Taking care of day-to-day business, and trusting in fair processes for the project	We did not participate in the process at all. Claims handling analysis should do the job, period. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group) For me it has to do with loyalty regarding running processes. That you take care of "business as usual", and have hope and believe in those who have the position to make decisions to make reasonable ones. I wouldn't bother to take the fight to them either. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group)
Trying to replay project appointments	Securing a more balanced subproject team	We notified "Victor" [our superior] about [how back office representatives had been appointed to project positions], but he didn't want a replay on this issue. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group) I made the project management team and "Victor" [head of front office section] early on aware of the unfortunate manning of the project team. Some were appointed to too many different positions. […] How a project is staffed and organized may have a considerable impact on the outcome; not the least having an influence on the perception of the process. The outcome may be influenced by the process, and I think it has been so in this case. […] We did meet

		["Steve"] everywhere. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group)
Taking the problem of an unbalanced subproject team to the project management	Securing a more balanced process	After the meeting I asked for a brief meeting with [the project manager and the head of the consultant team]. I felt I had to report that the way the subproject team was put together in no way reflected the building and contents claims organization. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group)
		Early on we saw the patterns of [the one-sided] project appointments. This was very unfortunate. The reason we chose not to fight for having our [own representatives on board] for long, was that we would never have finished such a fight. We would only be fighting that issue. We have had our fights for years, so this we know. […] They used ulterior motives to have their own representatives on board. The division management and "Joe" [the project manager] were warned, but they did not see the patterns. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group)
Wait and see, trusting the project management succeeding in their effort to implement their proposed solution	Having their preferred solution implemented without open fight	They must have done something, and we [their opposition] must have been a bit naïve; I have to admit that, in believing our initial arguments were outstanding. [Representatives for] the division management team presented arguments in favor of [our preferred] solution. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group)
Writing a reply memo to the memo produced by the opposition	Securing that their position and perception of reality were brought to the decision makers	One hour before attending [a reference group meeting] I received a call from the subproject manager [buildings and contents] [member of "The Gang of Four"] who was to inform the meeting about a memo they had produced. […] I was then told that I could present my own memo or make my own comments to the subproject recommendations. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group).
Arguing in favor of own position in management meetings	Trying to steer decisions in desired direction	It was I opposing the rest. That was how I felt. I repeatedly argued in favor of [our position], opposing "Steve" [head of department back office]. This management meeting turned out just as expected, and that was hard. "Paul" [head of back office section] gave me credit for my endurance, so I thought, OK, doing it my way may however be right then. (Middle manager buildings and contents front office group).

Table 5: Applied Tactics "The Unsuccessful Followers"

4.7   Second-Order Findings

I have shown how structural changes were met by both convergent and divergent actions. Convergent actions were applied by two groups of managers ("The Proactive Players" and "The Unsuccessful Followers") to support processes and decisions that were in line with the change initiative's original idea. The other group of managers ("The Gang of Four") applied divergent actions to achieve an alternative decision. In this specific case, both convergent and divergent actions were successful strategies; however one group of managers ("The Unsuccessful Followers") who applied a convergent action strategy failed. Both successful groups – "The Gang of Four" and "The Proactive Players" – argued that

they had "noble" intentions. Contrary to a great deal of the political literature, which presents the use of power as self-serving, Buchanan (2008) argued that *"political behavior [...] is not necessarily perceived to be self-serving"* (p. 61). The two groups simply had completely different perceptions of the right way of organizing the business to take care of both customer needs and the company's need for extensive cost control.

In this second-order analysis, the political tactics, the sensemaking activities, and the sensegiving activities found in the first-order analysis for "The Proactive Players", The Gang of Four" and "The Unsuccessful Followers" will be theoretically analyzed.

4.7.1 Politics, sensemaking and sensegiving – "The Proactive Players"

Floyd & Wooldridge (1992, 1994, 1997) introduced the middle manager change activity, "synthesizing information", as a convergent upwardly influential activity. "The proactive players" used the opportunity to respond to the division management's call for analyses to identify why performance was declining by introducing sincere suggestions of how the challenges of declining performance could be met. Middle managers are not objective channels for information (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). They interpret changes in internal and external environment, and propose solutions in accordance with how they interpret and make sense of assumed changes in their environment. Sensemaking is not getting things right that are based upon facts by creating the truth. Sensemaking is about creating the emergent story by incorporating emergent data as one sees it to create a story as broad as possible, thereby being more resistant with regard to criticism (Weick et al., 2005). "The proactive players" gathered information as they saw it, arranged it and presented it to the management team. This is practical sensegiving (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Pye, 2005) or framing (Fairhurst, 2005; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Fiss & Zajac, 2006), where the objective is to influence the meaning construction for the recipients. This is politics in action where the framing activity has one overall objective, which is to create a claim for legitimacy for how "The Proactive Players" interpreted the internal and external challenges (Pettigrew, 1977).

"The Proactive Players" constituted two different milieus that constructed a shared perception of how to meet future challenges, though they were based on quite different approaches about how to gather and present facts regarding these challenges. The claims handlers arranged a workshop to create a shared understanding of the challenges and how to

meet them. In this way, they created a shared interpretation of the situation and a shared understanding of how the organization should approach these challenges. By organizing the workshop and being able to reach a consensus, they managed to establish a legitimate claim to future organizational solutions. This is a claim actually based on the front office managers' narrow interests, but with no alternative claims presented, this claim might have been seen as desirable, proper and appropriate (Brown, 1994, 1998).

On the other hand, the surveyors chose an alternative approach to create legitimacy for their claim to change organizational practices. Their key concept was to do a "survey" gathering facts of how poorly the organization performed today. These facts were used as a legitimation tool for the propositions they introduced. Using the facts to establish a need for change and to create favorable images and metaphors of how a future organizational solution could look like, they managed to frame the perception of reality in a way that supported their cause (Fairhurst, 2005; Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Fiss & Zajac, 2006). This framing process was a construction of reality based upon the selective gathering and construction of events (Fiss & Zajac, 2006).

The politics applied by both milieus was the creation of a legitimate claim for organizational changes based on the ideas presented by these actors (Pettigrew, 1977). These ideas were supported by facts framed as an objective presentation of internal and external challenges. In this way they were able to delegitimize alternative claims, with stakeholders of these claims not even being given the opportunity to make presentations.

4.7.2 Politics, sensemaking and sensegiving – "The Gang of Four"

"The Gang of Four" was not given the opportunity to present their perception of challenges and opportunities regarding the claims handling division up front. When they became aware that the claims analysis project could be predisposed regarding future solutions, they started their political activities. Their political ploy comprised a broad spectrum of legitimizing activities regarding own ideas, and a broad spectrum of tactics applied to delegitimize the ideas and proposals from their opponents (Pettigrew, 1977). It is interesting to observe that the data set that served as "facts" for both the project team and "The Gang of Four" was the same, but they emphasized different aspects and evaluated parts of the data differently when they were framing their positions.

"The Gang of Four" faced a predefined process, where the process would be guided and managed by external consultants with support from some internal non-managerial

resources. These external resources may be labeled change agents (Balogun, 2006; Buchanan & Boddy, 1992; Hartley et al., 1997). Effective change agents need to be aware of the power constellations in organizations and be able to maneuver tactically within these constellations to manipulate the context to their advantage (Balogun, 2006; Buchanan & Boddy, 1992). In this case, we see how the change agents continuously adapted to the demands from "The Gang of Four" without letting the overt political ploy of "The Gang of Four" have an impact on the conclusions that had been drawn. They could do this because the power base from which they had their mandate was very strong. However, power is relational, not something anyone possesses (Balogun et al., 2005). When shifts in relations occur, the powerbase may also shift. This is what happened to "The Gang of Four". A new head of division was appointed, one member of the division management team left, and a new management team was appointed as a consequence of the organizational changes. These changes shifted the power base from that in which the change agents had their mandate: not immediately, but after a while. Here, we see how the relational aspect of power is displayed. The former head of division was responsible for appointing the change agents. This gave them a strong base of power and legitimacy for their proposals. However, when the principal changed, the same strong relationship was not transferred, and the power base declined. The arena opened the way for others to promote their agency – "The Gang of Four" – as internal change agents (Hartley et al., 1997). When the power base changed, "The Gang of Four" managed through politics to manipulate the context to their advantage (Balogun et al., 2005). In this case, we are able to identify the relational aspect of power (Balogun et al., 2005) and as a consequence the relational aspects of the legitimacy of certain ideas, values and demands (Pettigrew, 1977). The power base for the head of "The Gang of Four" was relational. When the new head of division appointed him as a member of the new management team, the head of "The Gang of Four" gained a new and stronger power base. This led to a shift in the legitimacy of the proposed solutions, where solutions proposed by "The Gang of Four" created the basis of meaning construction in the division at the expense of the propositions introduced and supported by the project management team.

4.7.3 Politics, sensemaking and sensegiving – "The Unsuccessful Followers"

"The Unsuccessful Followers" took early steps to try to create a power base for themselves at the expense of those who had managed to establish a powerbase within the subproject buildings and contents. "The Unsuccessful Followers" obviously had different

value preferences than their opponents – "The Gang of Four" (Brown, 1994). When they tried to have a replay on project appointments, they framed their arguments around what they saw as unbalanced project appointments. In this way, they tried to legitimize their own struggle for a replay on the project appointments, and delegitimize their opponents' position in the project. They did not succeed in their struggle for reappointments because their superiors did not want a replay on this issue, and by that intensify a well known but unwanted conflict between the front office and back office milieus. However, there is strong evidence in the supporting data that their opponents had a rather weak power base within the project despite their controlling most of the positions within the subproject.

Confident that the project management represented their position in the analysis project, they continued to do "business as usual" until further notice. There is no evidence in the data for this being a significant act in the legitimizing process for their position. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence in the data that "The Unsuccessful Followers" held a position that was supported by the project management and the project team. It should be debated to what extent "The Unsuccessful Followers" obedience to overall decisions strengthened their position as the ones who represented the true version of reality (Fiss & Zajac, 2006).

When "The Gang of Four" produced a memo to the steering committee, this was an attempt to frame their position and present their version of reality, and try to gain support from key stakeholders in the organization (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Weick et al., 2005). When their opponents, "The Unsuccessful Followers", were given the same opportunity to present their version of reality in a memo presented simultaneously, two distinctively different versions of reality were presented. We have seen that the project management supported the version of reality presented by the "Unsuccessful Followers". When the division management as the project steering committee decided (in the first instance) to support the perspective and the suggestions supported by "The Unsuccessful Followers", this position may be more one of plausibility than accuracy (Mills, 2003; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Plausibility tends to occur when stories seem to be in line with other data, ongoing projects, an aura of accuracy, a sense of current climate, and a prosperous future (Mills, 2003; Weick et al., 2005). At this stage in the project, it seemed that "The Unsuccessful Followers" had a solid base of power, since decisions were made in favor of their position. However, power is a relational resource (Balogun et al., 2005), and when relations changes, the power base might change as well. When changes were made in

the division management, the power base that "The Unsuccessful Followers" rested on was diminished. New superiors perceived their opponents' position as more plausible (Weick et al., 2005).

4.8 Discussion – How sources of power are used in sensegiving and sensemaking

As indicated above, framing, sensegiving, and organizational politics are interrelated as all three concepts are about controlling and shaping others' meaning construction and perceptions of reality (Fairhurst, 2005; Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hardy, 1996; Weick et al., 2005). Politics is the practical domain of power (Buchanan & Badham, 1999, 2008), and politics is about creating legitimacy for certain ideas to influence meaning construction. Organizational change is a power struggle (Mintzberg, 1984), where individuals and groups seek legitimacy to gain power (Brown, 1998), either as a reinforced power or as redistributed power. Organizational politics are especially apparent during change when ambivalence and uncertainty are at their peak (Buchanan, 2008). During change there is fertile ground for alternative perceptions of reality, but only one "reality" will end up as the dominant and surviving "reality". Therefore, the political struggle will be about the power of meaning. The power of meaning has to do with shaping others perceptions, cognitions and preferences (Hardy, 1996), which is about controlling what position will end up as the preferred solution. In this case, we have seen different tactics applied to manage meaning – the power of meaning. The tactics applied have been used to establish both resources power and process power as the means to establish power of meaning.

Being able to gain power over the process seems dependant on the actors having power over two kinds of resources: expertise and close connection to management. In controlling the resource expertise, you control a legitimizing resource in the sense of having power of meaning. However, this is a factor you need to have some degree of control over, whatever actions you take – convergent or divergent. The ability to foster some control over meaning construction is dependent on how the sensemaker perceives the sensegiver's expertise. On the other hand, the power of process gives actors control over who participates in the decision-making processes and who does not, which is a considerable base of power with regard to meaning construction. The data shows the need for tight control over process to achieve decisions in the direction you desire. We see the successful

convergent action middle managers ("The Proactive Players") manage to take an early control over process and by that the entire meaning construction processes in their part of the business. The unsuccessful convergent action middle managers ("The Unsuccessful Followers") did not take this kind of active control over process, and by that more or less left the arena open for the divergent action middle manager group ("The Gang of Four") – who eventually succeeded. In the end, the latter group's success was mostly founded on their ability to gain control of the top manager's meaning construction. First, they were unsuccessful, perhaps as a result of not controlling the process entirely despite having control over most of the project positions. Then, as a consequence of having the power of resources through expertise and organizational position (gang-member appointed to management team position), they managed to position themselves to have considerable influence over the final decision maker's meaning construction in the second round.

In this particular case, the data support a statement that the power of process is an important factor in influencing meaning construction. We see that those who succeeded without obstruction ("The Proactive Players) were able to influence the process by early action. Those who were reactive ("The Gang of Four") did not manage to maneuver themselves into process power despite controlling most of the project resources because they did not control the project management team where all procedural decisions were made. However, The Gang of Four succeeded in the end because they had the power of resources. Having power over resources – especially the power of expertise, such as extensive knowledge of business execution – may be influential regarding others' meaning construction. Nevertheless it is not as influential as the power of process. Without participation, influence is dramatically reduced, and with that the opportunity to exert the power of meaning.

4.8.1 Sensegiving in convergent actions

The middle managers that acted in a convergent manner had two entirely different starting points: (a) those who in advance of the project launch ("The Proactive Players") managed to set the agenda for the change initiative, and (b) those who did not participate prior to the project launch ("The Unsuccessful Followers"), but who saw the change initiative as a confirmation of their perspective as to how the business should be run.

"The Proactive Players" managed in advance of the project launch to set the agenda for the change initiative. What did they do to manage this kind of maneuvering? First of all,

they had the day-to-day hands-on control for the business and the daily challenges. They also managed to coordinate their overall perceptions of what their challenges were.

The workshop they arranged might be seen as a reciprocal sensegiving and sensemaking process within the group of motor vehicle claims managers. By discussing and presenting their different views, these middle managers managed to create a shared perception of the changes they wanted. These processes took place in a social setting, where both social and cognitive processes played an important role (Weick, 1995). During this kind of interaction, each individual draws upon their own interpretative schemes that the middle manager has learned from experience and socialization (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Weick, 1995). This workshop established an arena where middle managers were given the opportunity to socialize in a way that gave them a shared interpretation of the situation (Maitlis, 2005).

Since no manager was superior in relation to the others, the question of power of resources did not play a significant role in this process. No manager had extraordinary funding, significant slack, extraordinarily skilled employees (compared to the others), or the ability to control careers, rewards and punishment. The power of process, on the other hand, may have been stronger. Ideally, chairing a meeting may give significant power of process. This is done by influencing the agenda and not the least influencing who become speakers. However, there are no indications in the data that support that the power of process had been significant within the group of middle managers. The development of a shared interpretation of reality was developed in an atmosphere of socialization where each individual participant was given the opportunity for an active participation in the development of this united understanding of the situation. This indicates that no individual in particular was in an extraordinary position to exert the power of meaning on their own.

As subordinates related to the division management team, these middle managers had minor resource power, with the exception of expertise. However, they have shown that their pro-active approach gave them a considerable power of process and by that, power of meaning. By attending management team meetings and giving their point of view, they were able to both control and shape the management team's perceptions of what challenges there were in the motor vehicle claims branch, and how these could best be solved. This became the overall guideline for how to organize, not only the motor vehicle claims branch, but the entire claims handling division.

In the buildings and contents branch, the "The Unsuccessful Followers" trusted in the first instance that fair processes and an objective view (consultants) would secure a balanced sensegiving process and because of that did not take active persuasive steps in the beginning. The management team let the claims analysis and the organization project take care of different inputs regarding buildings and contents claims. The convergent group took their first step in active sensegiving when they wanted a replay of the project appointments, and a second step when they produced a memo to the management team. It seemed this was enough in the first place, since the first decisions were in favor of "The Unsuccessful Followers". Nevertheless, they did not succeed in the end because they did not engage in a directly active sensegiving process vis-à-vis the new head of division.

4.8.2 Sensegiving in divergent action

Different approaches were chosen by the two factions in the buildings and contents branch. The divergent group ("The Gang of Four") – by every means the most active one – saw the opportunity arising when the analysis and organization projects were organized. This was clearly stated by one of the managers as a question of influence. Influence is about power and politics (Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Hardy, 1996). Having influence means you are able to foster your will and objectives. In this process, one party reveals a willingness and desire for having influence – and power. From a sensegiving perspective, "The Gang of Four" took steps to gain the opportunity to influence the sensemaking of the project participants (consultants, staff members, management team, etc.) (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

The divergent action group tried to exert the power of resources, the power of process, and the power of meaning (Balogun et al., 2005, Hardy, 1996). Power of resources was exerted through deployment of resources in the project. The project needed expertise and information, which this faction to some extent controlled. They controlled the knowledge and expertise related to the costly time-consuming claims and surveyor procedures. This expertise was deliberately positioned where they had maximum influence. Nevertheless, this was not enough to gain control, because their expertise was related to approximately 3,500 out of 34,500 claims.

Expertise in handling the vast majorities of claims, on the other hand, was situated in the "convergent" group. In summary, the divergent action group, despite a deliberate strategy in positioning resources in vital positions, did not manage to establish a power base

founded on resources. The strategy regarding positioning vital resources played a more significant role regarding the power of process. The divergent action group managed to get their players positioned importantly as heads of subproject, project resources, members of reference group, and members of steering committee. This gave a significant power of process. In this way, they managed to steer the analysis in the desired directions. They managed to control who was actively participating in drawing conclusions and making recommendations in the project, and they managed to stay clear of their biggest opponents. By this type of maneuvering they managed to control who was participating in the processes and who was not. Process power should have provided some power to influence the decision makers' meaning construction, but it did not. Even if "The Gang of Four" had both power of resources through expertise and power of process they did not manage to position themselves to influence the construction of meaning. This was because the project management team, who had another opinion as to what were the best solutions for the organization, controlled the process of drawing the final conclusions for the project.

Rewriting the consultants' questions in the analysis project was an action well-suited to delegitimize the consultants and legitimize one's own actions (Balogun et al., 2005). "The Gang of Four" elevated own expertise and experience at the expense of the consultants. By controlling what questions were asked, they controlled the information for which to look. They indirectly manipulated and controlled what information was given (Hardy, 1996).   The power of meaning was also executed by holding information back, and delaying distribution of information, memos and propositions to other members of the subproject. They even disguised dissent within the group when launching information.

As we have seen, this was not enough to get decisions in favor of their position. However, they managed to have a replay in order to get another decision. Two explicit conditions led to this replay: (i) the appointment of a new head of division, and (ii) the appointment of one of "The Gang of Four" in the new division management team. At this stage, the discussion had left the open scene and moved behind closed doors. This person had no opponents, and was able to package the information in such a way that he controlled his superior's sensemaking. This sensegiving process may be considered as a " *…process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of…* " (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442) the head of division to a redefined view of the organizational reality. In this sensegiving process, he had the power of resources his position as the buildings and contents expert in the division management team gave him. This power base

was extreme. He was the newly appointed head of the buildings and contents section. Having been given this position, he was the one the head of division was dependant on in executing his strategy. He was the expert, and he had a group of loyal experts as his trusted allies. One might even say he also had some power of process, expressed by the fact that they were only two, and one – the middle manager – had set the agenda of what to discuss. He could guide the entire questioning process by the way he formulated his answers.

4.8.3 Sensegiving and power

In this study, we have seen how power of resources has had an impact on the power of process, and how these power bases have played a central role in subordinates' sensegiving processes vis-à-vis decision makers. These sensegiving processes have been materialized through political tactics, where the objective has been to influence decision makers' meaning construction. These sensegiving processes may be seen as execution of the power of meaning. We see a strong link from resource power via process power to the power of meaning. However, there are indications of direct links between resource power and the power of meaning as well.

Nevertheless, this study shows that the final decisions were made by individuals and management groups who were in position of a formal legitimate "Weberian" power base (S. Clegg et al., 2006; Hardy & Clegg, 1996). Despite this formal legitimate power, these individuals were exposed for subordinates' political sensegiving activities, whose objective was to influence final decisions. In this essay, we have seen the effectiveness of such politics, and not the least the relational aspects of power have been verified (Balogun et al., 2005). It has been demonstrated how changes in relations dramatically change power bases, and the central role organizational politics play in these relational power struggles.

We know from theory that sensegiving is a top-down and a horizontal process (e.g. Balogun, 2006). However, this study has revealed the bottom-up aspects of sensegiving. We have seen how both convergently and divergently acting middle managers have used political tactics to influence superiors' meaning construction, which is practical bottom-up sensegiving.

4.9 Conclusion

This essay has examined middle managements' political actions during the implementation of a planned structural change. As several other studies have shown, middle managers play an important role in implementing planned change and their actions can either be convergent and hence support the change goals, or be divergent, meaning moving in a different direction compared with the plans. Although divergent actions can be both intended and unintended (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007), in this study, several middle managers made a deliberately divergent action response to the change initiative. Other middle managers loyally implemented the change and hence showed convergent actions.

The analysis revealed how middle managers mobilize different sources of power and rely on different types of political tactics in order to influence other's (superiors, peers and subordinates) sensemaking.   By mobilizing process and resource power, several middle managers were able to influence meaning making (Balogun et al., 2005; Hardy, 1996) and position themselves as major sensegivers, with great influence on others' sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). We have seen that these sensegiving processes contain a wide range of political means to gain control over the processes, ranging from the active pre-project political ploy involving taking control over process and meaning construction in an open process, to the more closed processes where secrecy and manipulation were important means for influence.

The study shows the tight coupling between power, politics, sensemaking and sensegiving. The study shows that those who are able to exert the power of process are able to have an influence over other people's meaning construction. The study also shows a tight link between the power of resources and the power of process; here, expertise is especially vital if actors manage to maneuver themselves into a position where they can control the process. Expertise as a basis for exerting the power of resources also has an impact on an actor's ability to exert the power of meaning.

This study contributes to existing literature on power and politics by providing access to rich qualitative accounts from respondents taking part in political behavior, giving insight to how skilled political actors operate. This study also contributes to the existing sensemaking and sensegiving literature through providing evidence for a tight coupling with power and politics, showing that sensegiving is politics in action. Finally, the study

enhances existing strategy-as-practice literature by showing the tight coupling between practice, politics and change outcome.

5. The Gang of Four: Discourse Strategies to Legitimize Divergent Change Behavior[*]

5.1 Abstract

This essay examines how middle managers attempt to legitimize deviant and oppositional behavior during organizational change. A critical discursive analysis perspective is adopted to identify the legitimating discourse strategies used by four middle managers – "The Gang of Four" – who acted in a coordinated way to prevent the implementation of a new organizational structure. Despite an overall shared goal of making sure that the structural changes suggested were not implemented, each middle manager in the study described different reasons for their divergent change behavior. They legitimized their actions using various discourse strategies. Four different legitimating strategies are inductively developed: emotional, group-loyal, rational, and argumentative. The *emotional* strategy is rooted in one particular individual's anger at being ignored and not given a voice, the *group loyal* strategy is based on one particular individual's loyalty to the management team of which he was a part, the *rational* strategy is grounded in statistical evidence, and the *argumentative* strategy is founded in the need to have a voice in the project.

The study enhances our understanding of middle managers and change by explaining the role they play in changing the path of change and shaping the change outcome. The study further contributes to the literature of discourse studies through a better understanding of legitimation, and to the strategy-as-practice field through improving our knowledge of how skilled players operate.

5.2 Introduction

Middle managers play a significant role during change (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Huy, 2001, 2002), both as recipients of change initiatives and as active implementers. Power and politics also play an important role during change (Balogun et al., 2005; Buchanan, 1999, 2008; Buchanan & Badham,

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[*] This essay was accepted for presentation at Academy of Management Annual Meeting 2009 (due to personal circumstances the essay was not presented).

1999, 2008; Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn, & Harrell-Cook, 1996; Hardy, 1996; Hardy & Clegg, 1996), and middle manager involvement in politics may have a significant impact on the change outcome. Middle manager involvement in power and politics may be through convergent and active support or through divergent activities in relation to the organizational change initiatives. If the behavior is against the interests of the organization, then political behavior is often characterized as self-serving and a means to achieve hidden goals (Buchanan & Badham, 1999, 2008), and therefore it becomes important to legitimize this type of behavior. Organizational change is tied to power, politics and control (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009).

Middle managers will react when their self interests and/or their beliefs of what is the best for the organization are compromised and engage in activity broadly labeled as resistance to change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Brown et al., 2009; Dent & Goldberg, 1999a, 1999b; Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Piderit, 2000; Wolfram Cox, 1997; Zell, 2003), setting out to sabotage the change, or getting the change decisions reversed (Brown et al., 2009; Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007).

The individual aspects of working through resistance lead the attention to the micro-level phenomena we find in the concept of "the doing of strategy" (Johnson et al., 2003). Strategy-as-practice research deals with micro-practices of what people do, engaging in people's strategy activity and how they influence strategic outcome, rather than focusing on strategy as something firms have (Hoon, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Johnson et al., 2003; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Whittington, 2006, 2007). This perspective suggests that strategy is shaped not only by top managers but also by a broader spectrum of managers and practitioners at multiple levels in the organization (Balogun, 2007; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Hoon, 2007; Rouleau, 2005). Social practice is the core of the strategy-as-practice research stream (Whittington, 2007). Here it is focused on practice, the actual activities that are associated with strategy making (Balogun, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2004). However, there is more to it than practice. It also has to do with praxis, the work that comprises strategy in which strategy is formed (e.g. meetings, presentations, and talking) and practices that are the socio-cultural artifacts through which strategy work is done (e.g. Porter's five forces, SWOT-analysis, PowerPoint, spreadsheets, and budget systems) (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Whittington, 2007). There is increasing research on practices regarding tacit and symbolic

practices through which strategy is constructed, practices such as narrative, rhetoric and discourse (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008).

We know that discourse plays a significant impact on the formation of strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Laine & Vaara, 2007). How change outcome is viewed and communicated is closely connected to discourse and discourse constructions (Heracleous, 2006; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000; Vaara, 2002; Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Whether the change outcome is a result of convergent or divergent actions, the outcome has to be legitimated one way or the other. Legitimation and discourse are connected through the fact that specific discourses serve legitimizing purposes (Fairclough, 2003; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; van Dijk, 1998; Vaara & Tienari, 2008); *"discourses provide the "frames" with which people make sense of particular issues, and give sense to them"* (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 987). van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) introduced four main legitimizing strategies, the way language is used and functions to construct legitimacy: (i) authorization, (ii) rationalization, (iii) moral evaluation, and (iv) mythopoesis. However, these authors addressed the need for more focus on the micro-level discursive practices and strategies to construct sense of legitimacy. A good, but underutilized approach, for exploring political play is discourse (Gordon et al., 2009; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Hardy, 2004; Hardy et al., 2000; Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). One avenue that discourse (critical discourse) opens up to us to explore resistance is legitimation tactics (Phillips et al., 2004; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara et al., 2006).

Middle managers can be skilled political players (Balogun et al., 2005; Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Therefore, in this study I adopt a discourse approach to explore how one specific group of middle managers, which named themselves "The Gang of Four" (referring to the former Chinese leadership), retrospectively legitimized their successful divergent political actions in a strategic change initiative. I will specifically explore which micro level discourse strategy each of the four "gang members" used to individually legitimize their divergent political action, an action that may be seen as counterproductive regarding the overall change initiative objectives. This case is rare as the researcher was given the opportunity to closely observe intense political activity. The focus on legitimation strategies applied by the individual managers in the "Gang of Four" was identified throughout the data collection process as an emerging and particularly interesting theme (Eisenhardt, 1989). In analyzing the data, critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be applied. This analytical perspective will be used to identify and analyze micro level discourses in individual

legitimation. I explore how these micro-practices in strategy making influence the macro perspective in strategy in order to better get an understand of how individuals influence strategic outcome (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008).

5.3 Discourse and Legitimation

In the last couple of years a large stream of work in the social sciences has applied discursive approaches (Heracleous, 2006; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Vaara, 2002; Vaara et al., 2004; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara et al., 2006).   Discourse is defined as: *"any body of language-based communicative actions, or language in use"* (Heracleous & Hendry, 2000, p. 1258), which encompasses written and spoken text, visual images (e.g. pictures, art works), symbols, buildings and other artifacts (e.g. body language, dress code) (Fairclough, 2005; Phillips et al., 2004).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995, 2005; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Leeuwen, 2008a; Wodak & Meyer, 2001) is a key analytical approach in many recent studies of discourse. CDA is a theory (Fairclough, 2001) that analyzes the role *"played by language in the construction of power relationships and reproduction of domination"* (Vaara et al., 2006, p. 792). Fairclough (2005) emphasized that CDA has two facets: first, it analyzes the relation between discourse and other social factors, and second, it analyzes the discourse elements of social events, social practice and social structures. Language is regarded as a social practice in CDA (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Further, it considers the context of language use to be crucial, especially since CDA emphasizes the relation between power and language (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA consists of a series of different traditions and approaches (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, pp. 262-268). In this essay however, an approach to CDA is based on the socio-cultural change and change in discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) and the discourse-historical method (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2001) subsumed in Vaara et al. (2006) in five essential features of CDA. One, CDA attempts to make visible problems that often pass unnoticed. Two, CDA always takes place in a socio-historical context. Three, CDA is intertextual where text and discourse acts are linked with others to shape understanding. Four, discourse is not neutral regarding ideological content. Five, CDA is the interplay of relationships between discourses, genres and styles in a particular social context.   This specific approach focuses on the discursive constructions of power

relations and social identities (Mantere & Vaara, 2008), which makes it very suitable for analyzing the discourses of power and politics during change.

Legitimation plays a key role in organizations and in social life in general (Phillips et al., 2004; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara et al., 2006). Vaara and Tienari (2008, p. 986) defined legitimation as "*creating a sense of positive, beneficial, ethical, understandable, necessary, or otherwise acceptable action in a specific setting*". Here the key is that it is the discourse that is the legitimation-creating appliance. In other words, it is the discourse or set of discourses that creates legitimacy for specific positions or actions. Legitimation has an interactive dimension because this is a discursive response when one's legitimacy is challenged. This is a discursive action provided for defending oneself for actions (past or present) that could be criticized by others. Legitimation is an institutionalized justifying discourse the purpose of which is to verify institutional actors' respect for established norms and values (van Dijk, 1998). In this sense, legitimation is a power game. Legitimation as a justifying instrument serves the purpose of verifying power relations within the organization. A premise for analyzing legitimation in an organization is that nobody has absolute power in an organization, which means that power somehow is restricted or limited. This perspective leads to a notion that all institutional players routinely need to legitimate their actions (van Dijk, 1998). van Dijk (1998) emphasized that legitimation is typically political as a consequence of the relation between institutional power and legitimation.

Given the CDA and legitimation perspective presented above, the CDA perspective allows the discursive analysis to examine the actual discursive practices and strategies applied to legitimate political action within an institutionalized organizational setting. Through an analysis of individuals' justification of own resistance to change, we enhance our knowledge of drivers for resistance, and hence add new insights to practitioners in strategy making.

van Leeuwen (2008b) made a thorough introduction to what he calls four "*major categories of legitimation*": authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis. This is a framework to answer the classical "why" questions: "Why should we do this in this way?" or "Why should we do this?" (p. 105). Vaara et al. (2006) introduced an alternative model for analyzing discursive strategies in a media context, based on an argumentation that the van Leeuwen (2008b) model of discourse legitimating strategies cannot be straightforwardly used in a media setting. Inspired by the above-

presented frameworks I inductively develop four individual discourse legitimating strategies which serve as legitimating tools for divergent political activity in this study.

5.4   The Study

The study follows an embedded single case study design (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Pettigrew, 1992; Van De Ven, 1992) in a large Nordic general insurance company (INSCO), where a strategic change initiative was followed for twelve months. From the claims handling division in the Norwegian branch, real-time longitudinal data was gathered. The primary methods for data collection were interviews and personal "diaries" (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Denzin, 1989; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), however other data sources such as small talk and follow-up talks via telephone, as well as secondary data sources such as internal company documents such as decision memos, consultancy reports and written inputs from middle managers outside the decision process were gathered to triangulate the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Two types of interviews were performed. The techniques were adjusted during the data collection process as a consequence of the emergence of new and interesting themes (Eisenhardt, 1989), such as deliberate political actions from a group of divergently responding middle managers. For one group of interviewees a structured, standardized, open-ended interview guide was applied (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003); another group was interviewed following a semi-structured, open-ended technique (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). The structured interview guide consisted of questions regarding the change process: how the change program affected the middle manager's personally, how the program affected their subordinates, what about the process worked well, what could have been done differently, did the middle manger have the opportunity to give input to the program, and how given inputs were received. These interviews gave considerable insight into the ongoing power struggles and the emerging conflicts between different sub groups of middle managers and between sub groups of middle managers and the project organization. The semi-structured interviews consisted of questions regarding: conflicting interests between different groups of middle managers and between groups of middle managers and the project organization, what were the conflicts about, how they met these conflicts, why did they engage in these conflicts, how the middle manager met suggestions from the project, their opportunity to give input, and how inputs were received. These interviews gave rich data regarding power struggles and political tactics on one hand, and legitimation and justification of own position on the other.   Each

interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. A total of 25 interviews were conducted. Of these, 14 were semi-structured interviews and 11 were structured interviews. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim.

The data analysis started out with the writing of a narrative (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Langley, 1999) that pulled together inputs from diaries, interviews and other data sources to develop a "thick description". The first step in this process was to write a chronological account for the entire division. The objective was to understand the diarists' and the interviewees' impressions and interpretations of the process. The second step in the analysis was to write the description of three different groups of middle managers and how they met the change initiative. The findings showed that the divergent actions by one group of middle managers involved extensive political skills, and this group was the most successful in influencing the change outcome.

CDA is not a technique in itself, and may be seen as much as theory or rather as a theoretical perspective on language and a broader sense of discourse (such as body language etc.) than as a method. This gives room for an analysis of the social processes, which is a broader spectrum than the language itself (Fairclough, 2001). In this case, these broad analyses of social and political processes have taken place through the development of the thick description and the three narratives of the separate political action groups. In this particular essay, it is the individual discourses (expressed through spoken text in interviews) that are analyzed. In the analyses I search for answers to the "why" questions (van Leeuwen, 2008b), i.e. why did you act politically, and why did you act divergently regarding the organizational objectives. These questions will enlighten us as to how the four individuals ("The Gang of Four") legitimated their own behavior. In some instances it will be necessary to search for some "how" questions to establish the premises for the "whys". Although the analysis in this essay focuses more on verbal evidence as opposed to social processes, the social interactions that were observed will be included when evaluating the data and the findings.

The four legitimating strategies that are presented in the findings section of this essay have been inductively developed based on how each individual in "The Gang of Four" responded when they were challenged regarding their own political actions regarding the actual change initiative. When searching for characteristics for each of the four legitimating strategies, I was looking for explicit discourses where each individual tried to create a positive, understandable and acceptable perception of their actions (Vaara & Tienari, 2008).

I have a previous professional connection to three of the four respondents. Until the autumn of 2003 (four years prior to the interviews) I was a member of the division management team of the claims handling division in INSCO-Norway. When this essay was produced I had left the company. While employed by INSCO, I was the manager for two of the respondents – though not simultaneously. These close connections could have both advantages and pitfalls. The pitfalls might be that the respondents exaggerate their own roles in the political ploy or on the other hand underplay their own role to make an impression on me based upon their perception of my position in the area of conflict. Another pitfall might be that I would be biased for one solution or the other, based upon my own perceptions of what is the best for the company. To reduce the effects of these possible pitfalls, it has been necessary to gather a broad spectrum of data and do the wide-ranging three steps analysis as presented in this section. The advantages my experience from INSCO may provide have two facets: the first is the advantage of having a high level of expertise in the area of interest and having established relations with a broad base of people in the organization, which leads to the second advantage, which may be that established personal relations are a benefit when it comes to openness in the interview situations – as an "internal trustee" they tell you more than they would to a complete stranger.

5.5 Background

Four middle managers in INSCO deliberately organized themselves as a group to secure their own interests in an organizational restructuring process. The group was established before any organizational restructuring program had been introduced, but they suspected that such a program would be launched. This suspicion was based on their insider knowledge of the results of an analysis that had been performed. The group of deviant middle managers called themselves "The Gang of Four" with reference to the former Chinese leadership.

> *[…] it is clear we are four – what was the name of the Chinese leadership in earlier days – "The Gang of Four"? Yes, that was when "The Gang of Four" came to life. We have given each other various arguments, tested arguments; do these arguments stand the strain in a debate? We have speculated about which counter arguments will be presented; we have done a considerable piece of work, definitely… (Paul[3])*

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[3] All names used in the essay are fictitious to secure the anonymity of the respondents.

[...] we are four persons who have discussed these issues. It is me, it is [Paul], [Steve] and [George]. We did not plan to be this kind of "The Gang of Four" from the very start; it happened on the way. ... mostly because we felt that the project management – at least I felt that the project management – ran over the arguments that I presented. (Eric)

In the fall of 2006 the Head of the Claims Handling Division in INSCO-Norway initiated an analysis program called "claims analysis" to identify and reveal the potential for reducing costs and enhancing customer satisfaction. In this process, three different informal groups of middle managers were established where two were rather loosely organized and one was a group of closely connected individuals. The two loosely organized groups, which represented middle managers from the motor vehicle claims branch and the buildings and contents branch respectively, acted in accordance with their superiors' decisions and loyally followed instructions given. On the other hand, the remaining group ("The Gang of Four"), who represented middle managers from the buildings and contents branch, acted divergently in relation to the decisions of their superiors. The divergent actions happened from the very start of the program, and lasted throughout the entire program. In the beginning of the program this group – in contrast to what was decided – placed themselves and their trusted allies in any project position they could, such as reference group and sub-project groups. However, it was decided that no managers could participate in these groups because they should take care of the day-to-day business.

The organization project was expected by "The Gang of Four", since they were aware of the preceding analyses. Once again, they managed to place themselves in vital positions. Nevertheless the organization project proposed an organizational structure that contrasted the opinion of "The Gang of Four". Through intense political activity, "The Gang of Four" managed to get a decision regarding organizational structure in their own branch in favor of their own position. This decision resulted in the implementation of different organizational structures in different branches in the division, a decision that was in conflict with the overall objective for the entire change program.

In the following analysis I will analyze the discourses applied by each middle manager in "The Gang of Four" and how they attempted through their discourse strategies to legitimate their own political behavior.

5.6   Findings

5.6.1 Paul – Emotional legitimation strategy

Paul was the head figure in "The Gang of Four". He is an experienced manager who has been with the company more than 20 years, most of them within the buildings and contents branch in different middle management positions. He has considerable experience in managing and participating in different change programs, and in accordance with this he must be seen as a senior and skilled player. The strategy he uses when legitimating his divergent political actions I have labeled the "Emotional Legitimating Strategy". The characteristics of this strategy have to do with an emotionally based argumentation of why he took part in, or rather headed, the divergent political activity. His actions were based on his anger at being sidelined in the process, that his extensive experience and rather senior position was overseen by the consultants and staff who were engaged as project team.

When asked when the political actions started and who took part, he emphasizes his own motives and actions.

What I have done? I have used my twenty-two years of experience within the [general insurance industry] where most of them have been within [the buildings and contents claims] branch. With my knowledge of this branch I have tried to present arguments showing that the proposed solution is not the best way to handle our challenges. I have tried to present advantages and disadvantages regarding both solutions. [...] I have been determined regarding what solution to choose. The other alternative has been without interest for me. Maybe I have been locked into one position, but I have used my knowledge of and my experience in [the branch]

We can see he bases his argument in relation to his position as an experienced manager within the branch. Further he emphasizes what he did himself, underlining his own role as a key player in the political ploy.

Let us begin at the start of the claims analysis last autumn. When it was to start, the question was: who should participate? I was thinking: what are we going to do now? We are going to reveal gaps. The gaps revealed will probably result in a process where we are going to have a second look at the organization one way or the other.   What we choose to do after such a process will result in working processes that will last for at least some years: three, five, seven, or whatever it will be. It may be important for me to engage a kind of A-team in the claims handling profession. [...] Then I chose my A-team. Of course I did, because I wanted to have influence. I get that through the participating actors. I will not be a passive observer for twelve months, and see such things happen.

He emphasizes the reason he took an early active approach in the power play was the need (or wish) to have extensive influence on the development of the area where he has a significant position. He also emphasizes the close link between himself and his trusted allies in "The Gang of Four" and other trusted allies. Here he reveals some of his political activity and how he secured influence and information though others.

> *I always made sure I had someone in place – I have had someone in place all the time. [...] I have been more involved than anyone else; it is a deliberate choice. Damned if I will sit on the sidelines! [I] have been involved in positioning [and] influencing, to put it that way. During the last twelve months I have had a very close dialogue with three people. In addition, I even had a couple [more] in the analysis project itself.*

He accounts for his own actions and the role he played in the political ploy, and legitimizes his actions by referring to solutions that he and others have established in the organization during the last couple of years. The engagement in the ploy has to do with the need to defend the solution in which he has significant ownership, solutions he and they worked for through their formal organizational roles. Placing himself on the sideline and just waiting to see what happens is not in line with his value system. He was up for a fight for his convictions.

> *Why did [I] not sit on the sideline like all the others? That is because I thought it might be wise to take part in the game, and where this game was ending. If I had been a "good boy" waiting on the sideline, we wouldn't have gotten where we are today. Then, what I and many others have been working for the last couple of years would not have been here for two years. I do not accept that. When argumentation doesn't work, you have to take another approach.*

Another issue that triggered the political behavior is what may be seen as being ignored by the project management and the project group. When the project group collected data for their analysis, they did not interview the section managers who also were members of the division management team. Paul repeatedly refers to how being left out of the key processes by the project group triggered his political actions. He claims that he and his fellow heads of sections, through their formal positions, had an interest in having their perspectives presented for the project, and that their opinions should have been taken into the overall consideration. From his point of view, it seems that the project group had no interest in hearing their opinions.

> *Should I not fight for what I believe in? Should I not have the opportunity to have an influence? [...] Let me give you a banal example – this fight is more like a war. The project has not even bothered to interview those who have been heads of sections, asking for example, what do you think about the future? [...] Seen from the main direction, what are your thoughts, do you have some contributions to the project? It*

has not been interesting to get an idea of what we knew, what we were thinking, or anything else. [...] When they don't reach out their hand; please come and tell us whatever you like! Then I say OK, we can start with something else. That is what I have done; I have been hurrying hard with my three trusted men. And they have had an extraordinary loyalty.

He follows up his perception of being overseen and neglected by the project, and uses this as an argument for why he initiated his fight against solutions suggested by the project. These experiences nevertheless have triggered what may be seen as an adjustment of his value system when he is holding out lessons learned and his failures of judgment. His self evaluation takes him to a point where he is clear that such political activity may be unnecessary in the future, from his point of view, if only he is more accurate when projects are initiated and more outspoken when issues are debated.

Do not refrain from listening. Do not fail to see, do not neglect. Such behavior only triggers your entire inventory of emotions, and it triggers a fight you've never seen before. That was what they got, at least from my side. I have learned something for the next time something like this happens. There are two things I would do: first, the mandate must be crystal clear on what responsibility the project is to have, and second, I will not keep my mouth shut. I will not be the nice and polite guy in meetings, even if it costs me my job. That is the only way to move ahead.

So far the discourses used to legitimate his actions have been centered on two issues: neglect and influence. In both these issues, his discourses are very emotional and value-based. He cannot hide his anger at being overlooked and his anger over having his own influence reduced when the claims analysis project was established.

Loyalty is another perspective he draws on when he is legitimizing his actions. He problematizes to whom he is to be loyal: superiors, company, project, customers etc. He is absolutely aware of the risk he is running, the risk of being defined as disloyal within a company setting.

First, if I had chosen somebody else to participate in the claims analysis project, these things would never have come up in this way. If George and Eric had not been engaged [in the project] we would not have had the results we now have. Somebody may think this is disloyal. Disloyal regarding what? Where should I put my loyalty?

However, he emphasizes that his political actions have to do with loyalty, loyalty to "those who actually pay his wages – the customers", not to the project management or to consultants. He has to be loyal to what he believes is the best solution. ["Those who actually pay our wages" is an internal company discourse for customers]. He claims that he is focused on the best solution for the company and the customers. He legitimizes his own

actions by continuously pointing out how beneficial his solutions and ideas are for the company. He never lets go of what is the basic foundation for his intense engagement in this political ploy: what is best for the company. He does not once refer to what is best for him on an individual level, but he emphasizes that he will fight hard for what he believes in, and for what he has been struggling for years.

> *When you do what I have done, you cannot do it in the open. When issues are not handled openly, you could start to question participants' loyalty, I think. In some cases you might. In this particular case, I could have said the same, but to whom should I be loyal? Should I be loyal to the views of a project manager and some consultants, and the direction they want me to take? I cannot! From my point of view, that is misunderstood loyalty. I have to be loyal to what I believe is the best solution; I cannot be loyal to anything else. From this perspective I have the opinion that it is my duty to work for that solution. If I choose not to work for what I believe in, then you may question my loyalty: loyalty to those who actually pay our wages.*

It is especially interesting to see how he holds out the efforts he had to make to take care of the interest of the customers. However, his argumentation is again focused on his own position, what he believes is the best solution. Again, he is arguing through a discourse with a rather strong emotional undertone.

5.6.2 George – Group Loyal Legitimating Strategy

George played a significant part in "The Gang of Four". He headed one of three surveyor departments within the buildings and contents branch. He had been at INSCO approximately five years, serving all of them in the same position. Before entering INSCO, he had several years of experience from the same position within a competing company. The strategy he used when legitimating his divergent political actions have I labeled the "Group Loyal Legitimating Strategy". The characteristics of this strategy have to do with loyalty to the management team of which he is a part. He supports the unified solution "The Gang of Four" is struggling to implement despite not being convinced this is the best solution. He bases his legitimation on being loyal to his allies and nearest colleagues.

George is not as dedicated to the solution as the rest of "The Gang of Four".

> *[Some of us] found a solution that would have been even better for INSCO. The solution chosen was something in between what I would have done and what the project would have done.*

When confronting him with why he engaged so heavily in the actions performed by "The Gang of Four" he refer to being loyal to decisions within the management team of

which he was a part; the management team of the back office section buildings and contents. Loyalty is a key in his legitimation of his own participation in "The Gang of Four's" political ploy. So even if he thought there were better solutions for how to organize the buildings and contents branch in the future, he supported and worked for "The Gang of Four's" solution with reference to loyalty to the decision. His loyalty may be seen as a value-based choice.

It is only because I have been loyal to what we [The Gang of Four] have decided.

He argues strongly and supportively in favor of the actions that took place as a part of the political ploy performed by "The Gang of Four". He calls attention to what he sees as necessary contextual conditions for enhancing the level of claims handler skills in the complex and time consuming claims (back office claims). He emphasizes the need for having the back office claims handlers [the specialists as they started to call them] assembled in one milieu, so that they would have the possibility to share knowledge and experiences, in contrast to what would be the case if the specialists' milieu was divided, and they were split between the other departments. This indicates that he further legitimates his own participation in the political activity through rational arguments, for example by expressing the need for dividing the claims handlers into one specialist and one "generalist" milieu. Although it seems that he is working for what he thinks is the second best solution, he supplied rational and supporting arguments for the solution.

If [employees] are going to have some kind of development and have some kind of advanced skills, it is necessary that they be placed together in one milieu. This is far better than the alternative where two to three are placed [in Bergen] and two to three are placed in Trondheim. The ones in Trondheim will not have anybody to confer with, and in the end the quality will decline. [The main office with all specialist support is placed in Bergen. au.]

Another issue legitimating his support for and active participation in the political actions was related to the fact that he participated together with the majority of "The Gang of Four" in the analysis that occurred before the reorganization project. The subproject buildings and contents had an overrepresentation from the back office milieu.

If you take a look at who was doing the analysis [in the claims analysis project], you will soon see where the analysis is taking us. [...] Eric headed the subproject from the start of the analysis project. Then I entered the field. Our superior was Paul. In specific tasks during the process, the same individuals were represented. We had a couple of workshops, where only those who worked in the subproject participated; the back office milieu [complex and time consuming claims] was overrepresented.

The conclusions drawn in the workshops arranged by the analysis group were not supported by the project management; they wanted another solution. The project management recommended an organizational solution that was very different from the one the subproject buildings and contents had proposed. When referring to this issue, he is suggesting that the project management was prejudiced regarding the organizational model, and that they did not even consider the suggestions from the analysis project. Similar to Paul, George clearly expresses annoyance regarding how the main project group handled (or rather refused to handle) the input he and his allies had put forward.

> *I do believe it is because the project [management] wanted another solution. They did not even look at the conclusions drawn in the subproject analysis, or glance at the conclusions from the workshops. [...] This may be because they already, in advance, had thought of another conclusion.*

When legitimating own actions and support he attacks what he perceives as a prominent artifact regarding the organizational culture. He condemns what he recognizes as an overall attitude throughout the entire organization; organizational members focus on self rather than what is best for the company. He does not count himself as a member of that culture, despite having an important managing role in the claims handling division. He expresses moral indignation at the focus on self rather than the business when it comes to choosing organizational solutions. In his indignation, he is questioning his colleague's loyalty to the company.

> *That is because there is a dysfunctional culture in INSCO. Employees are not concerned with what is best for the company; they are mainly concerned with what is best for themselves and their departments. [...] You may disagree as much as you wish [...], but as long as you get your paycheck from INSCO [...], then it is a part of your job; you better deliver! [...] But there are many who only think of self and their [own] best [interest], and don't bother of the rest [...] Now and then, they should have concentrated on getting a picture of the whole.*

This explicit discourse shows that George is of the opinion that decisions regarding this project have not been driven by objectivity, but by subjective individual interests. However the interesting issue in this particular case is the fact that he is one out of four who deliberately fought a decision of future organizational structure, a decision that was founded in the overall claims handling strategy.

Last but not least, he also focuses on the same issue, which was described by others as being ignored by the project, the fact that the "leader of the gang" (Paul) experienced not

being heard. He emphasizes the efforts the leader made without managing to bring his argument and suggestions through to the project group.

Paul did a tremendous effort for buildings and contents. I do believe it was a tough battle. I believe he was very alone in his struggle; he presented argument after argument, but did not get through.

This gang member's engagement seems to be focused on what he considers is loyalty, loyalty to the "Gang" and loyalty to the company. The latter is shown when he confronts what he considers is a dysfunctional cultural artifact in the organizational culture. However, it seems that his loyalty to the "Gang" at this stage is stronger than the loyalty to the company. He supported what he thought was the second best alternative, he did not fight for the solution he considered being the overall best solution.

5.6.3 Eric – Rational Legitimating Strategy

Eric was the least experienced of the four. He did not head his own department. He was a branch expert serving as an associated member of the back office section management team. The strategy he uses when legitimating his divergent political actions have I labeled the "Rational Legitimating Strategy". The characteristics of this strategy have to do with always referring to statistical and measurable facts when arguing. Throughout the entire legitimation, he consequently refers to statistical facts to legitimize his own actions. This rational approach seems to narrow his perspectives and limit his ability to evaluate other perspectives.

From the very start of the project, Eric was determined that an organizational model that had similarities with the existing organizational structure was a favorable model. Here the claims handlers were divided into two milieus: one large unit handling the fast track claims, which constituted the vast majorities of the claims [the front office section], and one small and specialized back office unit handling the complex, time consuming and costly claims [the back office section]. With this starting position, he entered the analysis project, and tried to convince the project management team that the existing organizational solution was the best way to solve the complete set of challenges in the buildings and contents branch.

Before the start of the analysis project I had gathered some data that showed that after all between 80 % and 90 % of our claims represented individual compensations less than 10.000 NOK. [...] It shows that the low cost claims involve most of the manning. There was little consideration about how one should solve this issue. Who is going to

work with the low cost claims? Are we going to have a first line [front office] and a second line [back office], or is everybody going to work with these particular claims? How are we going to solve this issue? They never answered my questions regarding these issues. That was when I started to be skeptical as to whether anyone in this particular project was able to come up with a solution that would allow for all issues in an optimal manner.

I also gave some signals that it might be wise to prolong the established diversification between different handling procedures, the fact that some claims need more attention and follow up than others, that is to say completely different framework conditions that the fast track/low cost claims. I tried to give some input that we had to consider this question and that we needed to focus on the [different needs]. Once again I did not get any response. The signals that came back, were that we should think of a general solution for the entire claims handling division; all branches are going to have a similar organization as a starting point. This perspective made me somewhat uneasy.

He bases his position initially on a rationalistic discourse by referring to some numerical analysis he had done before entering the analysis project. However, his adversaries in the project management seemed to not take these rational issues into consideration. When not getting a positive response in what he considered as a rational and objective argumentation for his position, and instead finding the opposite, he found good reasons for taking active part in the political ploy. Said in other words, he legitimates his action based on what he sees as a rejection of a rational argumentation. When he explains why the project management took the position they did he emphasizes that they had a different objective than a pure rationalistic one.

He gave his explanation as to how "The Gang of Four's" suggestions were rejected. The focus on internal issues such as equality between employees and the necessity to keep out the differences between what was seen as an A-team vs. a B-team, rather than focus on what he sees as rationally founded organizational needs were subjects emphasized by this gang member. He could not defend the position of the project management because he was convinced they had not been through a thorough analysis of what was the total expected delivery by the buildings and contents branch. Again, through a slightly different discourse he legitimizes his own actions rationally.

I do not see that argument as valid, because they had not at any point in time been digging into the matter and getting an overview of what buildings and contents really should deliver in total. It was a one-sided customer focus, but no reasons for why it was wise that everybody should do everything. We suggested solutions, and presented reasons for why it ought to be as we suggested. These suggestions were only brushed aside based on one thought: "now it is important, especially out of consideration for the customers, but also in consideration for the employees in buildings and contents, that there should no longer be an A and a B team. It was important to get rid of this division

because there had been a great deal of focus on the conflict between the front office section and the back office section [in the former organizational model]. It became an important issue for the project management to erase the division between the two milieus through the chosen solution: not to continue the old comprehension of an A and a B team. The solution that came then was that everybody should handle all claims.

The project management's rejection of what he considered rational arguments led to the mobilization of Paul and his allies in "The Gang of Four". He continuously legitimizes the actions that were taken through a rationalistic discourse. He consequently refers to data and how their argumentation is substantiated in data. From his point of view, the establishment of "The Gang of Four's" divergent activity was grounded in what he considers as a neglect of facts from the project management. From that point "The Gang of Four" intensified their struggle to gather data that supported their position.

This was when we started to work out some strategies ourselves. We started to gather more data to substantiate why our solution would be a wise solution always trying to support our position with data. Historically based data and thoughts of what is important when different types of claims are to be solved.

Not only does he legitimize the behavior of his allies and himself by using discourses that accentuate what they did and others did not do – "we did something the others did not do, we systematized facts", but he effectively delegitimizes the project management and their objectives by stating that they did not analyze objective facts, they had other objectives. He consequently applies rationalistic discourses to underline the position he and his allies took. They collected data extractions and systemized the different claims segments (which in this context means grouping claims regarding the size of compensations, where the segments are as follows: (i) < 30.000 NOK, (ii) 30.000 – 100.000 NOK, (iii) 100.000 NOK – 1.5 MNOK, and (iv) > 1.5 MNOK), claims type (damages caused by water, burglary, fire etc.), and the numbers of claims in each segment and type. These data were subsumed in a memo "The Gang of Four" presented to the project steering committee. He also emphasized that they could present evidence for which claims they could document expenditure cuts, and that those savings were directly linked to the working practices in the back office departments.

We did something the project management did not do at the same point in time: We gathered data extractions of the claims we have within the buildings and contents branch. We found how many claims there were within each segment, and what claim type they were. Based on these data, we produced a memo where we introduced concrete suggestions […] to solutions; how it is possible to optimize the working processes within the different amount segments, and why it is important to continue the division as a front office and a back office milieu. Even if the project management

decided not to take the content of the memo into consideration, I think it was necessary to produce the memo to be able to have come to where we are today. We had a document from which we could make our arguments. A document where we could refer to figures, where we could show previous achievements, and where we could present expenditure cuts. [...] Where we have the best opportunities to reduce expenditures! We could refer to expenditure cuts in the back office section, expenditure cuts realized as a consequence of their working practices. Working practices that are time consuming, but that give considerable expenditure reductions in claims where you should spend a considerable amount of time.

Through the consequent application of rationalistic discourses he appears convincing when he explains the reasons for his engagement in political actions. He has no tendencies to argue emotionally. It seems that his engagement is solely based upon a conviction that the solution he and his allies represented is the best solution for the company.

5.6.4 Steve – Argumentative Legitimating Strategy

Steve together with Paul was maybe the most active player in "The Gang of Four". He was heading one of two back office departments within the buildings and contents branch. He had been at INSCO approximately ten years, serving all of them as a department manager. Before entering INSCO, he had several years of experience from the same branch in a competing company. The strategy he used when legitimating his divergent political actions have I labeled the "Argumentative Legitimating Strategy". The characteristics of this strategy have to do with him stressing the need for debate before any decisions are made. He consequently emphasized the need for debating solutions and bringing in different perspectives in the debate. It is emphasized that the original process in the change initiative had not been willing to do so. Underneath the upfront argument regarding the necessity of having a debate, his own ambitions to have a voice in the project are evident.

He emphasizes that he has another position than the project management and the consultants. It is stated that members of the project management and the external consultants had their own agenda in the project, and that they failed in their attempt to have their ideas implemented. He suggests that it was the project and not "The Gang of Four" who had an agenda in having their own solution implemented. In this way he is projecting the self-serving aspect onto the project and not "The Gang of Four".

What is obvious is that the project team as a project team, which consists of a couple of individuals from the claims division supportive staff and a couple of individuals from [the consulting company], has had their own dynamic and their own agenda. They had their ideas, which they fought a hard struggle to support. They had their ideas of how things should be, and things have not fallen out like they wished, that is a fact!

The [project team] had a very clear plan, and [they] have, in some issues, been defeated.

In his discourse he is rather confrontational regarding his view of his opponents' position and motives. Despite that "The Gang of Four" had placed their members and trusted allies in various positions and through that had considerable influence on the analysis and the conclusions in the analysis project, their efforts did not work regarding the recommendations for future organizational structure. When the project team launched a suggestion of future organization, Steve considers them in conflict with the conclusions in the analysis. He proposes that these suggestions have other foundations than the claims analysis, and if anyone says anything else, they are out of line. He emphasizes that he knows the analysis better than anybody, he has even written questions for the analysis.

We [The Gang of Four] participated wherever we could participate. I was in all the time. To a great extent it was we, I, who made the questions for the CDA-analysis [Categorical Data Analysis] in the buildings and contents branch, even the ABC-analysis [Activity Based Costing]. I took an active part in the analysis. I tried to participate wherever I could. When we reached the time for analyzing the most challenging and interesting phenomenon [...], how in the future we are going to be organized and structured [...], it did not hinder the organizational committee to present their own ideas and thoughts. Where these [ideas] came from, and why [they came], is difficult to say. However, they were there. They [the organizational committee] will probably claim they found some ideas in the [results of] the CDA-analysis. That is bullshit! I know the [analysis] far better than they do. They have no backing in such a claim; honestly, we have had several discussions regarding this issue. They cannot get away with it!

He has little trust in the project management. He claims that they have had their own agenda all the way, and that the project has fought hard to get it their way.

It is obvious that [the project team] has had their own agenda, which has been crisp and clear. There are some issues they have been willing to fight a hard struggle for, and things have to some extent been pushed to extremes.

However, he and his allies ("The Gang of Four") have been represented wherever there has been a position where they have had an opportunity to get their voice through, they were represented. Or as he states it; *"wherever we had an opportunity to say something, we said it"*. Here he emphasizes the need to be heard, being able to use his voice. An interesting issue in his discourses is his clear distinction between the ability to use his voice and the authority to make decisions. The latter seems at this stage in his argumentation not to be the important issue for him, but it is of great importance for him to being able to use his voice without having to fight for the chance of being heard.

We have participated wherever we could get a seat, in working groups, in reference groups, wherever we have been given an opportunity to give voice, we have let ourselves be heard.

I do not say we need to make the decisions or to have the final word, but we should at least be heard in this process. [It is important] to be heard without having to fight for the opportunities to have a voice.

He is clear that in this process there have been no opportunities to debate alternatives, where those who are going to live with the solution have had an opportunity to debate different solutions. When he gives an account for his position, he accentuates his respect for the project team's professional capability, but he has no respect for their knowledge of claims handling and surveying. There has been no room for brainstorming regarding solutions, and he considers this as a great loss. He is not explicit regarding legitimation for his participation in the divergent actions in this discourse, but the underlying accusation that there was no debate regarding different solutions, leaves an impression that his motivations for his actions are the lack of debate and involvement.

The opportunity this process has blocked is the opportunity to evaluate other alternatives. This, I think, is a loss. We have not had any discussions where those who are going to live and work with the solution have had an opportunity to give their view on what is really possible to do, and what is not, and what alternatives we have. […] They do not have a clue! Take it as it is! They are very skilled but […] they are the ones in the division who know least about claims handling in [the division]. That is a fact, and it is OK. They are extremely skilled and intelligent people, they know a lot, but regarding [claims handling] they do not know very much. They have never done claims handling, they have always seen it from a helicopter perspective. […] The brain storming about what we can do, and how we may do it has faded away. That is the real loss in this case. Where have all the good ideas gone? There has not been any room for them, not any place for them to pop up. That is a pity!

His expertise regarding buildings and contents claims is evident in the next quotation. He shows through the application of rationalistic arguments that he knows his business. When commenting on the organizational structure proposed by the project, he holds out that there is nothing new and revolutionary with that one. The proposed solution, from his point of view, does not have a proper solution for the medium-sized claims (>100.000 NOK and < 1.5 MNOK). Here we can see tendencies of a rationalistically founded legitimation for his actions.

Their solution is the most unexciting organizational structure in a claims handling organization ever. It is neither new nor revolutionary. It is basic. It has been tried several times before. […] Medium-sized claims are not properly taken care of in this solution. […] That is a fact – not a theoretical one – because we have seen it, and tried it. […] We have promoted another solution. We have been through the figures, but they

have not been interested in the first place [in our view]. 90 % of the buildings and contents claims cost less than 30.000 NOK. 3 % cost more than 100.000 NOK. These 3 % cost more than 50 % of our claims compensation; summarized, they cost more than the 90 % [low cost claims]. You have to start using your brains then. There are different approaches, different perspectives on how to handle these matters.

The debate and the chance to be heard are both central to his legitimation of own actions. As in the next quotation where he discusses a memo sent from the subproject – buildings and contents – a memo there was no consensus about, he gives an impression that a "counter memo" that was sent from his opponents was all right. He gives an impression that it was a good thing that the steering committee received different views regarding future organization of the division. What he attacks is the project management, which he insinuates had no interest in that debate.

In the first place, the subproject team buildings and contents claims presented a memo. There was not even consensus in the subproject regarding the memo. [...] That is somewhat problematic and that is a pity. [...] Our objective was to present the arguments. [...] Then the steering committee needs to have it presented in a proper manner, so that they are able to evaluate [the different perspectives] based on [these inputs]. That was the basic idea [when the memo was produced]. However, [...] what happens then is that the managers in [the front office section] do not agree with our perspective, they have very different opinions regarding some issues. They produce and send their own memo. In the end, I believe, they were sent together to the steering committee. There were two different perspectives presented in two different ways with two different starting points. From my point of view, I think this was all right. This way all perspectives are in the open, and the argumentation is presented for the steering committee by what one could call the owners [of the argumentation]. [...] I do not think the project team wanted it this way [...], they wanted to control the flow of information themselves.

In this quotation he reveals something new in his argumentation. Here we see that he starts debating whether presented facts are objective or subjective, and he concludes that it is a matter of subjectivity. This discourse is still building up under the perception that for him the most important reason for his engagement in "The Gang of Four's" struggle for their solution is the debate, and the opportunity to have a voice in the process. However, here he is discussing that the arguments used are subjective, not objective. This statement may lead to thought that there are other underlying reasons for his engagement in "The Gang of Four" than having the possibility to be heard.

The presentation of facts is one thing, but facts are not always neutral and objective. It depends of course on how you present the facts, what you chose to present, and what you choose to emphasize. [...] From the perspective of our position within the buildings and contents branch, we wanted to present what we thought was important, what we thought was critical, what we thought was important that we took care of etc. [...] I do

believe there are different opinions, different perspectives from where issues are viewed. As a starting point I think that is straight. [...] There are different arguments, but they need to challenge each other [...]. Then we are able to present the differences, so that those who are going to make the decision are able to balance the different views against each other. [...] From my point of view we have managed to enforce the debate against the will of the project team.

5.6.5 Four Legitimating Strategies

This case study reveals four individual legitimation strategies used in an organizational change setting. The need to legitimate one's own actions occurred as a result of four individual's deliberate political actions. The political actions were a divergent response to a management supported change initiative. Though the legitimating strategies were diverse, the overall foundation for their divergent political activity was based on two different issues on which "The Gang of Four" showed a unified interpretation; what was considered as a rejection of their expertise (especially the expertise of Paul – the gang leader), and what they considered as the project team's biased position regarding future organizational structure.

All members of "The Gang of Four" were explicit in their opinion that the project team were biased regarding one organizational solution, the solution "The Gang of Four" least wished. It is striking that no one could provide any evidence that this was a fact. They assumed that the project team had an idea with no support in any analysis or data. But, if the words of Steve – "*I do believe there are different opinions, different perspectives from where issues are viewed*" – are representative for his personal position, then at least one could expect a more nuanced perspective from his point of view. Nevertheless, they were all very clear that the project had made up their mind before the analysis, and not after. Maybe the issue on a biased position may be turned the other way around. Maybe it was "The Gang of Four" who was biased regarding a future organizational model? If we look into George's position – he wanted another solution, different from both alternatives – then it might be possible to draw a conclusion that it was "The Gang of Four" (or the majority of them) who was biased.

All in all, maybe the strongest trigger regarding the divergent behavior is to be found in what may be seen as a slight arrogance from the project team, the sidelining of the most experienced managers. This sidelining was interpreted as a rejection of expertise and seniority (both regarding time of service and position). Was it the process of deciding that no managers should appear in the project that was the problem? This decision was the same

for all branches, not only the buildings and contents branch, a decision everybody else respected – even the buildings and contents branch managers that represented the opposition to "The Gang of Four". Nevertheless, it seems that it was the process more than anything else that triggered the divergent actions. Despite "The Gang of Four's" mutual understanding and opinion of what were the key triggers of the divergent political activities, they legitimated their behavior very differently.

What characterizes this particular case is how harmonized "The Gang of Four" was regarding objective. However, how they legitimized their participation in the political ploy that led to a quite different decision than the project-initiated one is very diverse. In Table 6 below the four different legitimating strategies applied are summarized.

Legitimation strategies	Characteristics
Emotional	Anger for not been given the opportunity to give voice
Group-loyal	Loyalty to the management team of which he is a member
Rational	Argumentation based on statistical evidence
Argumentative	Discussion is a means to give voice

Table 6: Legitimating Strategies

The diversity between the different legitimating strategies may be connected to how affected the different "gang members" would be by the final solution. Only two "gang members" would be directly affected by the changes. Paul– emotional legitimation – was from the very start fighting for his own position as head of the back office section buildings and contents. If the solution proposed by the project would have been effectuated, his position might be challenged. This may have affected his desire to have a voice in the project, and may serve as an explanation of why he engaged in the political ploy in the first instance. The other person who directly would be affected by the solution proposed by the project was Steve – argumentative legitimation. He was heading one of the two back office departments in the branch. If "The Gang of Four" had lost their struggle, he would have been facing a completely different challenge as a possible department head in a call center department. That may account for his desire to have a voice in the project. George – group-loyal legitimation – on the other hand was the head of one of three surveyor departments.

He and his department would not in any circumstances be affected by any of the proposed solutions. His legitimation does not reflect any need to have a personal voice in the project, rather that his group ("The Gang of Four") should have one. He chose to fight for the solution his management team colleagues thought was the best solution and not the solution he himself thought was the best one. Finally Eric – rational legitimation – did not have any formal management position. He was an associated member of the back office section management team because he was holding the position as branch expert. He had no subordinates that were affected by the changes, and he was not affected by the changes himself. His position would have been unchanged whatever organizational model was chosen. He approached the project with the perspective of the expert with a high level of statistical knowledge of the composition of the entire base of claims. His narrow statistically founded approach does not allow for other broader reflection. Despite very different legitimating strategies, there are still some very interesting similarities between some of the discourses.

The need for having a voice in the project was very evident in two of the legitimating strategies despite a very different approach and articulated motivation. Paul and Steve with respectively emotional and argumentative legitimation founded both their argumentations in having a voice in the project. Paul did not try to disguise his objective to have his distinctive mark ("fingerprint") on the final solution. In his argumentation he referred all the time to two issues: he wanted and demanded to have a personal voice in the project, and what was best for the company and the customers. Steve, on the other hand, tried to disguise his desire to influence the final solution by holding out that his main objective was to secure a debate, and to make sure that every aspect of the alternatives was illuminated. He emphasized that there are no such things as objective facts in issues like the ones in this case, which more than indicates that he has his own agenda as well. If every issue should be debated, why did they not take George's preferred solution into consideration? Paul and Steve had different legitimating strategies, but their objective was to have a voice in the project. Paul is not able to hide his personal and self-serving motivation in the project despite that he refers to the customers and the company when he is legitimating his actions. His personal and emotional engagement is still obvious. Steve, on the other hand, tried a more sophisticated legitimation strategy where the self-serving and personal ambitions are less clear. However, it is still about the desire to have a voice in the project and by that being able to have influence.

The question of loyalty has been raised by two of the gang: Paul and George. The loyalty Gorge refers to is most of all the loyalty to the gang. His entire legitimating strategy is based on this group loyalty, despite him trying to link his perception of loyalty to the company as well. In the latter, he is not very convincing since he has supported and even been fighting for a solution he thinks is the second best solution for the company. His group-loyal legitimating strategy does not seem to be self-serving in view of the fact that he is not directly affected by any of the alternative solutions. Paul, on the other hand, refers to loyalty to the customers and the company as a secondary legitimating strategy. When he refers to loyalty he is concerned about the customers, and what he thinks is the best solution for them. Another facet of loyalty he introduces is loyalty to himself: what he believes in, what he thinks is the best solution. He is not concerned about being loyal to the project. When the question of loyalty is raised by these two individuals, they have very different perspectives of the loyalty by which they legitimize their actions. George focuses on loyalty to the management team because he has other preferences regarding how to organize the business. Paul focuses on loyalty to himself and his own beliefs and to what he thinks is best for the customers.

Eric is the only individual who has a rationalistically founded legitimating strategy. He establishes his entire legitimation on what he considers as unquestionable facts. From his point of view, there is only one answer to the question of how to organize the section. He bases his position on fact and his (and his allies) interpretation of these statistical data. No questions are raised as to whether these data could be interpreted from another point of view or not. It is not considered if an alternative approach could lead to a completely different conclusion (which may be exactly what their opponents did). In contrast to his fellow ally Steve, who is clear that "facts are not always neutral and objective", the rationalistic approach he has chosen narrows his perspectives and does not allow for other perspectives than his own. Steve who may be the one of the respondents who show some kind of acknowledgement to the fact that there may be different ways to evaluate the data, which may lead to alternative conclusions, is the other respondent who to some extent uses rationalistic discourses to back up his position. However, it is striking to see the contrast between how these two individuals use their knowledge of the statistical facts in their discourses.

5.7 Discussion and Conclusion

Studies where researchers are given the opportunity to closely observe intense political activity are rare. Buchanan (1999) emphasized the difficulties researchers have to find "*rich qualitative data to this topic*" (p. S 75). Studies emphasize the unexplored nature of organizational politics, particularly regarding individuals' subjective experience (Buchanan, 1999, 2008; Ferris et al., 1996). These "*leave us with a limited understanding of the logic underpinning such behavior as it is understood by initiators*" (Buchanan, 1999, p. S 75) . This study gives a considerable insight into applied tactics followed by individual legitimation and justification of why these tactics were applied, and as such is a reply to the call for studies examining the individual logic of political behavior. On the other hand, this study confirms findings in recent studies studying resistance to organizational change through legitimating discourses underpinning anger, frustration, and helplessness on one side and legitimating discourses related to the individuals' self-concepts and self-continuity being threatened on the other (Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Zell, 2003). Nevertheless, other legitimating discourses are not to the same extent pinpointed in the literature on resistance. Especially, discourses in the legitimating strategies categorized as "Group-loyal" – supporting an initiative he thought were the second best – and "Rational" – pure rational (though maybe subjective) justification –enhance our understanding of resistance.

There has been call for more studies on micro-level discursive practices and strategies to construct a sense of legitimacy (Vaara et al., 2006). This essay examines thoroughly individual discursive legitimating practices, and as such enhances our knowledge of legitimation as such.

Individual legitimating discourses of divergent actions (or resistance) are symbolic practices from which strategy is constructed (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). These are micro practices that show and enlighten what individuals actually do when engaging in strategy, which as such are strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Whittington, 2006, 2007). This study also enhances the strategy-as-practice literature by examining and showing how individuals through political activity shape strategy, and how their ex post legitimating strategies enhance our understanding of individual drivers in strategy making. Knowledge of how skilled political players operate and how these players affect strategy making through their political tactics is another side of what this study reveals.

This study reveals how middle managers through the extensive use of political tactics are able to alter the path of an intended change. Four explicit legitimating strategies have been identified: emotional, group-loyal, rational, and argumentative strategies. These strategies were applied to individual discourse in an attempt to legitimize deviant actions aimed to prevent an organizational change from being implemented. The individuals participating in the divergent actions used different discourse strategies to legitimize and defend their actions. There are very few studies of discursive legitimacy in general, and even fewer in organizational context (Vaara et al., 2006). This study contributes to the understanding of discursive legitimacy, especially regarding individual legitimating strategies when resisting change initiatives.

One advantage with this study is that in this study we had access to four rich accounts of political behavior. The study gives an impression of how skilled political actors operate and why they took the actions they did. By having access to these accounts it is possible to enhance the understanding of individual divergent responses to change, and how these individuals legitimated their actions. These rich descriptions were given because of previously close professional connections between three of the respondents and the researcher. Nevertheless, this is also this study's most prominent limitation. However, this study is based on a rich collection of data, where the story of the four individuals is confirmed by other respondents, both peers and subordinates, which mostly represented the opposing side in the conflict.

Another limitation is the possible idiosyncratic nature of a single case study such as this. However, the single case study is justified when the case study is a revelatory case – the opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon that previously have been inaccessible to scientific investigation, or when the case represents an extreme or a unique case (Yin, 2003). There are few studies that investigate discursive legitimation strategies (Vaara et al., 2006), which supports the revelatory case approach. This case is also a unique case because of the close relations and interdependence in "The Gang of Four". By choosing the embedded design cross-case analysis is possible and by that the internal validity is enhanced (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Future research should continue to focus on individual discourse legitimating strategies in an organizational context. Most studies regarding discourse legitimation strategies in an organizational context are related to more aggregated discourses such as discourses in the media (e.g. Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara et al., 2006).

6. Conclusion

The findings from this study support the notion that middle managers play a significant role during organizational and strategic change. Without active and goal-oriented participation from middle managers, no real change will happen. However, middle managers may also play a destructive role and hinder or alter the achievement of the change objective. Even if middle managers actively engage in oppositional activities, they may have the best interests of the company in mind. This dissertation shows various facets of middle managers' responses to change initiatives. Some responses show cognitive, emotional and intentional responses in line with the top management's intentions. On the other hand, others illustrate cognitive, emotional, and intentional responses that collide with the intentions of the top management. Responses to change are something in between the very positive and the very negative, where there are great varieties in the individual responses regarding the three dimensions of responses introduced by Piderit (2000).

Through three empirical essays where middle managers responses to change initiatives have been examined from different theoretical angles, further insight has been developed extending the current literature on change, middle management and responses to change. My findings support and extend the recent literature that emphasizes the importance middle managers play in organizations. However, my findings also suggest that middle managers may play a distinctively destructive role if they respond negatively in one or more of the response dimensions: cognitive, emotional or intentional. This dissertation has enhanced our understanding of individual multifaceted responses to change initiatives. Our knowledge on how individuals' political micro-practices affect the change outcome, and even alter the path of change, is enhanced. It further extends our knowledge of how individuals legitimize their actions when they through political actions manage to alter the path of change so that the change outcome does not correspond with the intended change outcome. Finally, this dissertation shows how framing and discourse within groups affect the group participants' subjective perception of changes. The implication for practice is an enhanced understanding of the necessity for managers to be aware of phenomena such as politics and discourse when planning and managing change initiatives.

6.1 Lessons Learned

This project was developed as a result of my own experiences regarding middle managers and implementation of change. My cognitive position at the start of this project was that middle managers had a significant impact on the change outcome, a position manifested in the positive middle management literature. This position has been strengthened and verified through this project. Nevertheless, this project has broadened my perspectives on responses to change. Middle managers are not only key implementers of change; they may well serve as key obstructers to change. The findings in these studies show that some middle managers obstruct changes out of self-interest, which provides support to the more pessimistic and negative stream of literature on middle management.

Seeing this project in retrospect, I have reflected on what could have been done differently. First of all, if I were to start a project like this once more, I would not use structured, standardized, open-ended interview guides. I would have preferred using semi-structured interview guides, letting the respondents to greater extent form the content of the interviews. In this way, I probably would have had access to an even broader and richer set of data.

Nevertheless, if I were to use a structured interview guide in a subsequent project, I would use a shorter interview guide with fewer questions. The one I applied in my project contained questions of such a scope that each structured interview lasted at least 90 minutes. The lesson learned is that if I had focused my scope in the interview guide, I might have had the time to do even more follow-up interviews, or at least have had the opportunity to contact the respondents in hallway conversations, or telephone conversations one or two times more after the initial interview.

I think it would have been an advantage to do a preliminary study with a couple of interviews and a couple of diarists before rolling out the study onto the entire organization. In this way, the interview guide and the preformatted diaries could have been prepared and adjusted for the interesting questions that emerged. Nevertheless, both diaries and structured and semi-structured interviews worked well and contributed to a broad and rich set of data.

There is one issue where I am very satisfied with the study. When the political ploy in project number two was identified in the second interview I performed, I was able to change the interview technique in the other interviews, where people involved directly or indirectly in the ploy were interviewed. In this way, I managed to combine data collection

processes that could take care of more than one research question. Doing this enhanced the scope of the study, and gave a richer set of data. The follow-up interviews and small talks that followed the main interviews is another area where I am happy with the development. Through these interviews and conversations many unclear matters could be verified or abandoned.

For the particular research questions examined in the different essays, qualitative methods seemed very effective. The data gave insights into different and complex inter-human processes that would have been very difficult to explore through quantitative methods.

6.2   Strengths and Limitations of This Study

Perhaps the most prominent advantage with this study is the access to rich individual accounts of political behavior. Such accounts, where researchers are given the opportunity to closely observe intense political behavior, are rare. It is especially difficult to find rich qualitative data regarding organizational politics (Buchanan, 1999). These accounts enhance our understanding of individual responses to change, and how these individual responses lead to different political actions. These rich descriptions were given because of previously close professional connections between a number of the respondents and the researcher. Nevertheless, this is also this study's most prominent limitation. However, this study is based on a rich collection of data, where the stories told are confirmed by other respondents and other data sources.

Another advantage with this study is access to unguided conversations and discussions regarding strategic change initiatives. Through conversation analysis, we are able to enhance our understanding about how middle managers are able to influence others' perception of strategy. How strategic initiatives are assessed is not solely a question of objectivity, but rather a subjective matter, based on how individuals' assessments are influenced by others.

In one of the studies on which this dissertation is based, an embedded single case design was applied (Yin, 2003). A limitation may be the possible idiosyncratic nature of single case studies. However, single case studies are justified when the case is a representative case, an extreme or unique case, a critical case in testing well-formulated theory, the longitudinal case, or a revelatory case – the opportunity to observe and analyze a

phenomenon that previously have been inaccessible to scientific investigation (Yin, 2003). This particular single case study met three of these justification criterions. The first criterion to be met is uniqueness. The rich qualitative data regarding organizational politics has already been discussed as an advantage regarding this study, as such data is rare. The second criterion to be met is the longitudinal case. The case was studied at two different stages in time: first throughout the project including analysis, design and implementation phases, and secondly after implementation. The third criterion that was met is the revelatory case. As rich qualitative data on organizational politics are rare, this specific study reveals a phenomenon that previously has been difficult to observe closely.

Both studies are from the same company in a small market with rather unique macro economic conditions. This may lead to possible idiosyncratic findings and conclusions. Nevertheless, through extensive literature studies and reviews it is possible to find support for the generalizability of the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

A third limitation may be that the studies conducted for this dissertation were carried out by only one researcher. To cope with this limitation, multiple data sources and multiple data collection techniques have been applied. This was in order to secure a broad range of data making it possible to triangulate data to enhance internal validity. Another technique that was applied to reduce this limitation is cross case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989).

6.3   Suggestions for Future Research

This study reveals how discourse constructions may serve as power tools influencing others' sensemaking and their perception of change outcome (Hardy, 1996). Hence, discourse constructions are closely tied to mechanisms for power and politics (e.g. Buchanan & Badham, 1999). Further studies should be conducted to widen our knowledge of how discourse in general and discourse constructions specifically serve political purposes and how these political processes influence change outcome.

In this thesis we have seen a clear connection between sensegiving and organizational politics. There has been remarkably little focus in the literature linking these theoretical concepts. I therefore suggest that future research should focus even more on how organizational politics are used as a tool in influencing others' meaning construction or sensemaking.

A continued focus on individual discourse legitimating strategies in an organizational context is a topic for future research. Most studies regarding discourse legitimation strategies in an organizational context are related to more aggregated discourses such as discourses in the media (e.g. Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara et al., 2006).

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Appendix A: Methods

Research Design

Doing this case study research, investigating organizational politics and how middle managers use discourse to influence others and to legitimate own behavior, some design requirements are essential. The first and fundamental requirement is an organization to which the researcher is provided access. The second requirement while studying organizational change is access to real change processes where the researcher is given the opportunity to gather real-time evidence of the change process. Longitudinal data is a premise to capture the political ploy that emerges through change when conflicting interests meet. The third and final requirement is access to data sources. Studying sensitive and controversial issues such as politics and discourse require respondents who actually are willing to share their experiences. As rich qualitative accounts from respondents taking part in political behavior are rare (Buchanan, 1999), such accounts must be provided to enhance the quality of the study. Access to secondary data sources such as internal documents is another vital data source requirement.

Access to the organization was secured through invitation from former colleagues. As an insider, there were no formal restrictions to access or to whom I could contact. In one study, access to respondents and hence data was provided as a consequence of engaging the researcher as a lecturer in an internal seminar for middle managers. In another study, access to real-time data was secured through an explicit invitation to follow a change program over time gathering longitudinal data. Data were collected from multiple sources, both primary and secondary sources. Being an insider established openness between the researcher and those who were researched, helping the researcher to get close to the case and the political activity in which each individual engaged.

Two research projects with different designs have been pursued: (1) a modified focus group study, and (2) an embedded case study. The first study was of middle managers in the general insurance business. Studies were performed within one company, which I will refer to as INSCO. INSCO conducts business in four Nordic countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. It is among the top three companies of general insurance in the region, with 4,500 employees. The Norwegian branch has 1,800 employees, mainly situated

in the country's largest cities. The study examined an organizational change in the Norwegian claims handling division, which has approximately 350 employees. The company had been through several strategic change processes in the last decade, such as mergers, organizational restructuring programs and changes in working practices and business procedures. The study was conducted on a group of first line middle managers and their superiors (higher level middle manager) attending a strategy seminar. In this practicing group of middle managers there had been a relatively low turnover over the last seven years.

During the seminar, a practical exercise was arranged by the researcher as unguided focus group interviews or dialogues (Patton, 2002). The objective for this exercise was to engage the middle managers in an evaluation loop from past change programs regarding reasons for success and failures, process issues and skills issues, so that the division management could receive feedback and enhance the division's ability to implement changes in the future. To do this, it was necessary to let the groups create a mutual understanding of change programs that were successful and change programs that were failures. The study was conducted as modified focus group interviews due to restricted time and access to respondents in this particular case. Modified focus groups are meant as focus group interviews without moderator in this instance; hence, they must be seen as self-governed groups. Not equipping the groups with a moderator was a question of limited resources – both in time and manpower on one side and creating as open an atmosphere for discussion as possible on the other. The objective of not using a moderator was to limit the impact on the discussion of one specific individual's perception of reality, and to have as open a discussion as possible without the limitations and biases a pre-defined moderator or group leader could bring to the discussion.

A structured open-ended interview guide was used (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003) to give the focus groups a tool to guide the discussion. The overall guiding premise in this interview guide was to create an agreement of one change program that the group defined as a success and one that the group defined as a failure. To ensure open and effective discussions, the interview objects were, as far as possible, randomly placed in groups where they shared similar background (middle managers in the same company), but were not familiar with each other's work (worked in different sections and departments). Six groups with five participants each were appointed. The interviews were arranged simultaneously, as it was a condition from the company that the practical exercise would be conducted simultaneously. As a consequence of only being a single researcher and having six simultaneously working

focus groups, one person in each group was given the responsibility to tape-record the discussion and document the discussion in writing in a preformatted PowerPoint presentation, formatted in accordance with the interview guide. No one was specifically given the responsibility to be a group leader. This was based on the same logic as for not having a moderator: Establish an open discussion without the possible limitations and biases a predefined group leader could bring to the discussion. However in each group, a leading figure emerged throughout the discussion, without any formal appointment from the researcher or acceptance from the other participants in the group.

The exercise lasted for three hours. All data from the group interviews were transcribed verbatim, totaling approximately 400 pages, together with the Power Point presentations.

The focus groups followed the structured interview guide, however, the unguided discussions led to interesting findings that emerged through the discussions. One interesting finding was that in two different instances, one group defined a project as a success and another group defined the same project as a failure. Fortunately, these findings represented four different focus groups, securing a rich set of data. Data from the two remaining groups are not analyzed in this dissertation.

The second study was an embedded single case study (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Pettigrew, 1992; Van De Ven, 1992) in the same Nordic insurance company (INSCO), where a strategic change initiative was followed for twelve months. From the claims handling division in the Norwegian branch, real-time longitudinal data was gathered. The primary methods for data collection were interviews and personal "diaries" (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Denzin, 1989; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), however other data sources were gathered to triangulate the data such as small talk and follow-up talks via telephone, as well as secondary data sources such as internal company documents including decision memos, consultancy reports and written inputs from middle managers outside the decision process (Eisenhardt, 1989). Two types of interviews were performed. For one group of interviewees a structured, standardized, open-ended interview guide was applied (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003); another group was interviewed following a semi-structured, open-ended technique (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). The techniques were adjusted during the data collection process as a consequence of the emergence of new and interesting themes (Eisenhardt, 1989), such as deliberate political actions from a group of divergently responding middle managers. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

A total of 25 interviews were conducted. Of these, 14 were semi-structured interviews and 11 were structured interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data collection techniques applied were chosen based on very different reasons. The focus group technique was chosen as a consequence of external conditions such as access to a large number of possible respondents in a limited time frame and limited physical area combined with limited resources. This particular design was chosen to secure input from all possible respondents and to provide access to a broad range of data. The multiple data collection techniques applied in the second study were chosen to secure the ability to triangulate data to create a better understanding of ongoing processes throughout a change process, enhance validity, and contribute to better conclusions.

Data Collection

In this section data collection methods will be described. I will especially focus on describing the sources of data and strengths and weaknesses of the approach chosen as well as lessons learned regarding the different data collection techniques applied in the two studies.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews (Balogun, Huff, & Johnson, 2003; Patton, 2002) were organized as a structured interview using a preformatted, open-ended interview guide (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). One challenge I met was that the six focus groups had to do the interviews simultaneously. This reduced my opportunity to observe and guide the interviews in each group. Not being present reduced my opportunities to guide the discussions in the direction I wanted. On the other hand, this gave the participants the freedom to let the group processes guide the discussion. This provided me with a richer set of data than if I had been present and guiding the discussions. Another facet of not being present was how group dynamics evolved in the different groups. Issues such as status, redistribution of power and dominance could occur (Balogun et al., 2003). One advantage of not being present in each group was that the structured interview guide acted more as a discussion guide rather than as a script to a strict and disciplined interview. This broadened and opened up the discussions, which gave wider and richer data that allowed new and interesting themes to emerge. To compensate for my absence in the respective groups, a group coordinator was appointed.

Their task was to take care of the tape recorder and simultaneously try to document the groups' different conclusions in writing. However, what was experienced was that one person, in most instances one other than the group coordinator, took an informal leadership in the group. The informal group leaders strongly influenced the discussions in each group. This is thoroughly discussed in the essay "Discourse Constructions in Retrospective Sensegiving and Sensemaking".

The ways in which the unguided focus groups informally organized themselves, with at least one person leading the group processes, had important implications for my findings. My findings show the impact these informal leaders had on the overall conclusions in the group. These unguided groups contributed to the materialization of new research themes. If the groups had been guided by me or a research assistant this may well have led to a more structured debate and process within each group giving each participant an opportunity to give stronger voice to alternative suggestions in each group. On the other hand, such a structured process could have limited the scope of each discussion and obstructed the surfacing of interesting research themes.

Interviews

In the second study, the first interviews were conducted following a structured, standardized, open-ended interview guide (Patton, 2002, pp. 344-347; Yin, 2003, p. 90). The interview guide that was developed for this specific study was designed to give data that would enlighten one specific research question. During the first three interviews, themes emerged that were outside of the original scope of the study. These themes were of such great interest that the interview strategy was changed. The possibility to pursue interesting emerging themes is one of the strengths of qualitative research. Interview techniques were adjusted during the data collection process as a consequence of the emergence of these new and interesting themes (Eisenhardt, 1989). The new theme that emerged was deliberate political action from a group of divergently responding middle managers. This led the research in the direction of power and politics rather than the initial research theme: middle management change management skills. Out of a total of 25 interviews, only 11 were structured interviews. The structured interview strategy was suitable for answering the original research question, but less suitable to providing the rich data that supported the new and emerging themes.

Fourteen interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). These interviews were conducted among middle managers who were directly or indirectly involved in a political ploy that emerged as a consequence of the change initiative investigated. As an opening sequence in every interview following the three first interviews, respondents were invited to comment upon the political ploy. The interview technique was adjusted according to whether the interviewee had a relation to the political ploy or not. Those who had a relation to the ploy were interviewed following a semi-structured interview guide.

My experience is that structured interviews, following a structured interview guide, are very well suited to provide good data regarding one specific research question. However, the structured interview limits the scope of data, and by that the richness in the data. This reduces the possibility for new and perhaps more interesting themes to emerge. On the other hand, interviews following a structured interview guide provide the researcher with organized data, which may be an advantage when analyzing the data.

The semi-structured interviews gave the respondents a less limited scope in their stories. This enhanced the richness in the data showing a wider set of nuances regarding the emerging research question. Data gathered through semi-structured interview guides enhances the complexity in the data and by that the data analysis. However, which interview strategy is the most suitable will vary from case to case, depending upon the research question and research theme. Whether it is an interview following a structured or a semi-structured interview guide, the really important issue is to secure the openness in the questions. The purpose of qualitative interview techniques is to make sure that the interviewees' perception of the world is expressed in their own words and their own terminology (Patton, 2002).

Diaries

Personal "diaries" (Balogun, 2003; Balogun et al., 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Denzin, 1989; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) were collected in the second project. The personal "diaries" were personal reflections related to the change process recorded by the recipients in preformatted MSWord files, where five explicit themes were reflected. (i) What have you been working with over the last two weeks? (ii) What has been working well in the project so far, and what is the reason it has been working well? (iii) What has not been working well in the project so far, and what is the reason it has not been working well? (iv)

What challenges for the project do you see in the following weeks? (v) Is there anything related to the project that you are lacking in order to be able to do your job as effectively as possible? (Resources, skills, guidance, information, etc.) A total of 29 diarists were recruited, consisting of 3 heads of sections (middle managers), 14 department heads (middle managers), and 12 ordinary claims handlers, where 3 participated in the project organization. The diarists were instructed to send their diaries by e-mail to the researcher every second week, starting May 18, 2007 and ending December 22, 2007.

Using a preformatted structured diary, I limited the input each respondent could give through these. However, the objective in structuring the diaries was to ease each respondent's workload regarding the diaries to enhance the probability that they would do the job. The experience throughout the project was that some of the respondents dropped out, while others needed several reminders to send in their diary.

The combination of diaries and interviews supplied me with information-rich data that could be cross-verified through triangulation (Table 7), which enhanced the overall quality in the data set.

Secondary and Other Sources

To further triangulate the data (Eisenhardt, 1989), secondary data sources were collected, including internal company documents such as memos and consultancy reports. In addition, more informal conversations between the researcher and middle managers took place over the telephone, over a cup of coffee, or as a quick chat in the hallway or in their offices.

The written data served well as verification of data gathered through interviews and diaries. The informal conversations over the telephone, in the hallway or over a cup of coffee were very useful to enlighten different issues presented in the data. My experience is that these informal meeting places were very valuable as a means of clarification and verification of other data sources. The richness in my data would have suffered if these informal processes had not been conducted. In Table 7, examples of richness in data are presented, verifying that the same issues have been found in various data sources. By gathering data from various sources the reliability in the data is secured.

Interviews	Diaries	Secondary and other sources
We desperately needed to rethink our approaches. The front office motor vehicle claims departments were totally ineffectual (the Norwegian expression would be that we were "running on the wheel rim"). We were not coping with the volume, with quality regarding customer treatment and adjustments, and with being up to date. Nor were we able to satisfy our employees' call for development and more challenging tasks.	I find it striking that it is the employees [including head of departments] themselves […] that have expressed the need for changes and reorganization. I perceive that the management team has preserved its "side" from [year] 2000 – which was outdated a long time ago. In other words, the change pressure has come from inside, which is rather exceptional. At the same time, this may be an advantage for the implementation as the classic change resistance will be eliminated.	For motor vehicle claims customers it seems that factors other than the actual claims handling have a lot to say regarding their overall satisfaction with the company.
We cannot accept being ranked as the poorest performer by the garages. If we don't elevate our performance to a level where we are the best performer in our professional dialogue with the garages without any competition, they will prioritize our competitor's customers, and not ours.	In the two weeks since implementation (15.Oct.07), I do feel an impression of a positive development in the organization. There are NO queues on the telephone. This is how I dreamt it should be… The reason for this, in my opinion, is that the division management team did not deflect the wishes of some employees to keep their old habits. A leader has to accept making some decisions that can seem painful for some – until they get familiar with the new situation…	<table><tr><td></td><td>INSCO</td><td>COMP1</td><td>COMP2</td><td>COMP3</td></tr><tr><td>Average time to response in sec</td><td>55</td><td>30</td><td>33</td><td>20</td></tr><tr><td>Number of test calls</td><td>95</td><td>45</td><td>54</td><td>42</td></tr></table> Average time for response – Motor vehicle claims in Norwegian insurance companies (source ppt presentation created by a middle manager and surveyors, to be presented to the division management team)
Then I chose my A-team. Of course I did, because I want to have influence. I get that through the participating actors. I will not be a passive observer for twelve months, and see such things happen. (Middle manager back office buildings and contents claims back office group)	I have this feeling that the division management team is governed by the project and not the other way around. The organizational solution is well wrapped in the analytical conclusions, and this gives us limited possibilities to launch creative input.	For several weeks I tried to convince "Vince" that it was necessary to have a new look at the organization. He was so convinced we had the right organization related to our objectives.
I gathered my most trusted staff members and started a process where we wanted to document the necessity to organizationally divide the 32000 [fast track] easy claims and the 2000 – 2500 more demanding claims. A memo to the project was composed. Eric and George – especially George – got undeservedly a lot of credit for this process. The truth is that I was the man behind this, and I used the channels I had into the project. We stuck together in this effort the four of us – "The Gang of Four".	The memo was produced as an input to the OD project in [the division]. In week 20, this memo was submitted on a consultative round to the reference group of the OD project. I took care of the submission and the follow-up procedures regarding [the division management team].	There are several reasons for the subproject committee to conclude that there is a need for a back office department. We have considered issues such as claims costs, customer satisfaction, working procedures, claims frequencies, the necessity for focusing, and the need for having a specialist milieu.
They must have done something, and we [their opposition] must have been a bit naïve, I have to admit that, in believing our initial arguments were outstanding. [Representatives for] the division management team presented arguments in favor of [our preferred] solution.	One hour before attending [a reference group meeting] I received a call from the subproject manager [buildings and contents] [member of "The Gang of Four"] who was to inform the meeting about a memo they had produced.	To enhance the quality of claims handling in both front and back office sections, we suggest that today's customer focus in the front office section and cost focus in the back office section are to be integrated. […] Our opinion is that the best way to meet this challenge is to integrate qualification from both the front office section and the back office section in future departments.
How did this happen? I didn't accept [the proposed solutions regarding future organizational model]. [The	[T]here is established an organization project, where I'm a member of the reference group. The	I'm sure I would have done some other appointments…

new head of division] understood the seriousness in what I told him.	organization project is, as a matter of fact, a staff and consultancy project. They have obviously a clear opinion of how even the buildings and contents claims area are to be organized, and they have their own agenda related to this. We, of course, do not agree.	
The experience is that no change has occurred. […] At least three, or two, of [my subordinate managers] have an opinion that this is a sanctioning of what we used to have, there has been no change. […] This is the leadership challenge, to have them to take the same direction as I do.	I did believe and hope that we in the buildings and contents claims area should not end up in the situation we now have. I'm disappointed and frustrated regarding the process so far. My opinion is that we have underestimated the significance of a broad representation [in the project] and an open an honest process.	I believe [the head of division] was afraid of losing George [head of second line department]. To be sure to keep him, this decision was taken.
We have had a latent conflict within [our] field for years. The back office guys look at themselves as more qualified than our front office employees, despite that they have the same formal and practical qualifications. We have what we call an A and B team. My impression is that the division management team doesn't want the conflict on their table.	Even at the start of the claims analysis project the [front office] leaders were skeptical about George's [back office leader] participation in the project. We preferred claims handlers as project participants. We notified [our superior] "Vince" about this, but he didn't want a replay on this issue. As we feared George now wears several hats, both as a participant in the reference group and as a subproject participant. […]	We did not participate in the process at all. Claims handling analysis should do the job, period.

Table 7: Example of Richness of Data Gathered From Different Sources

Preliminary Conclusion

One of the great challenges and advantages in doing qualitative research is how to handle the new and interesting themes emerging during the data collection process (Eisenhardt, 1989). During my data collection processes, I found a broad spectrum of interesting and challenging themes emerging. This led to changes in both data collection techniques (changing from structured to semi-structured interviews), and the overall research question. My intended research question was: What skills should middle managers hold to be effective implementers of organizational change? While interviewing middle managers taking part in organizational changes, it was the different responses to different change initiatives that struck me as the most interesting perspective in the data. First, the new findings led to a widening of the scope of the second study. Secondly, it resulted in a changed overall research question from focusing on middle management change management skills to focusing on middle management political micro-practices in responses to change initiatives.

Data Analysis

The two different research projects performed were organized differently. The first project was a focus group interview project organized at one specific point in time that invited middle managers to retrospectively debate different change initiatives. The second project was a project organized as a strategy process research project (Langley, 1999; Pettigrew, 1992; Van De Ven, 1992).

The approach chosen to the data analysis was inductive. In the first project, the themes emerged through the transcription process of the focus group interviews. Through the transcription process, the groups' different perceptions of the same changes were immediately identified, which guided me in the direction of analyzing why these perceptions were so different. For the second research project, a "thick description" was developed to capture the story in the project and to find themes to investigate (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Langley, 1999). Developing a "thick description" is important to capture clear and embedded picture of the changes. When studying sensitive issues such as politics in organizational change, it is important to capture and understand the context at multiple levels regarding the change initiative. To capture and understand middle managers' actions, it is necessary to get an insight into what is happening within their own organizations at their own level, levels above and underneath them, as well as it is important to get an insight into what is happening in the external environment. This is especially important as what is considered as illegitimate political action in one organization may be seen quite differently in another. When analyzing interviews and diaries in this project, the convergent and divergent responses as phenomena emerged early on in the process. The respondents could easily be divided into two different categories, those responding divergently and those responding convergently. As a consequence of the "natural" categorization of the data, I decided not to use qualitative analysis software. I nevertheless spent a considerable amount of time and effort in learning how to use NVivo 2.0, which I applied to my focus group data. However, I found the added value of using this kind of software on my data was limited, so I decided not to use this software in my data analysis.

In the first project, data was categorized in different categories for each focus group: success, failure, middle management skills, senior middle managers and junior middle managers. For each focus group, a narrative (Langley, 1999; Pettigrew, 1990) for a success story and a failure story were put together, assembling and using the different respondents'

inputs given through the focus group interview. For each success and failure story, the different responses were coded in accordance with how the discourses were framed and the issues the different discourses emphasized. Then, a first-order analysis (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Van Maanen, 1979) was written up for four focus groups, where respectively two and two groups discussed the same project, one as a failure and one as a success. Then a second-order analysis (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Van Maanen, 1979) was performed doing cross case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989) to find similarities and differences between the different narratives. In the second-order analysis (Van Maanen, 1979), I tried to find a deeper understanding of these connections by looking at the evolving patterns of discussion among the interviewees. This is a more theory-based analysis where the first-order findings are "*examined for underlying explanatory dimensions*" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, pp. 437-438).

The second project was first developed to capture the entire complexity and different actions that took place during the process investigated and this provided a "thick description" (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Langley, 1999). From this process, the data was organized in accordance with two completely different responses to the change initiative: convergent response and divergent response. As the interviews and diaries were analyzed, the respondents could naturally be divided into two broad categories: divergent responses and convergent responses to the change initiative, and the data were organized into these two broad categories. In each category, several subcategories were identified and established, subcategories related to departments and/or branches. In the divergent behavior category, one specific subcategory distinguished itself because the individuals who represented this category managed to get an alternative change outcome than the one intended. In the category convergent behavior, two subcategories evolved: one that included statements about open and direct conflict with those representing the divergent responding category, and another that included statements of proactive and convergent behavior. For these three categories, the data were coded in accordance with: how they behaved and what their emotional, cognitive and intentional attitudes were, how did they act and respond, what did they do, why did they do it, who did actually do what, and how did they legitimize their actions. Based on this broad coding, a first-order analysis (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Van Maanen, 1979) was written up for each category by pulling together accounts from diaries, interviews, small talk, official documents and other written, secondary data sources. In the second-order (Van Maanen, 1979), the determination of a deeper understanding was

attempted by performing a more theoretical analysis where the first-order findings were examined to find deeper patterns and dimensions based upon a theoretical perspective (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

As presented above, the main data analyzing strategy applied was the narrative strategy (Langley, 1999). Recent literature applying qualitative research methods (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Stensaker et al., 2007) has used an analytical approach based on the narrative strategy. In these works, a first-order and second-order data analysis presented in Van Maanen (1979) was applied. This strategy is associated with the construction of a detailed story, based on the raw-data – the first-order analysis (Langley, 1999). These stories are vital to the generation of insight because they help us to organize large amounts of data. By writing up narratives or pure descriptions for each case investigated, it is possible to obtain each unique story as a stand-alone entity (Eisenhardt, 1989). These narratives should be constructed before one tries to generalize patterns from cases or from across cases.

The first and second-order approach was thoroughly introduced and debated in a sensemaking perspective in Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991). Here, first-order analysis was emphasized as being a narrative or a story developed through a journalistic approach. The objective is to create a story as near the reality of what happened as possible. To be able to do so, different data collecting techniques are applied, often in a longitudinal perspective. The data collection techniques used may be: interviews (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007), use of diaries (Balogun & Johnson, 2004), document analysis (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), active participation in day-to-day business (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008), and observations (Maitlis, 2005). Applying multiple techniques enhances the level of precision (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, despite the use of multiple data sampling techniques, a first-order data analysis will be subjective, notwithstanding every effort to make it as objective and neutral as possible. It will be marked by how the members of the organization interpret what is going on in the organization and the researchers' interpretations of the observed (Van Maanen, 1979). It is essential to get the first-order analysis as correct as possible, or else it may lead to second-order concepts that are *"thin, hollow and perhaps altogether faulty"* (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 542)

The second-order analysis is a theoretical analysis of what has been unfolded in the first-order analysis. Here, the researcher examines the first-order findings for underlying explanatory dimensions (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), "interpretations of the interpretations"

(Van Maanen, 1979, p. 541). The objective is to discern deeper pattern dimensions of understanding, patterns not necessarily perceptible to organizational members (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). In this way, theory emerges from the first-order data.

The narrative strategy may lead to theoretical contributions that are high in accuracy, but are seen as low in simplicity and generality (Langley, 1999). Langley recommends researchers to combine the narrative strategy with other data analysis strategies to enhance both simplicity and generality. It is possible to develop a novel and generalizable theory through the use of a narrative approach to data analysis. However, researchers can enhance the possibility of actually developing a strong theory this way by combining the narrative approach with other techniques. It is possible to develop a strong theory through single case approaches based on a narrative approach, given the use of supplemental evaluation techniques. Nevertheless, Van Maanen's (1979) warning regarding the need for and the importance of an accurate interpretation and reconstruction of what actually is studied is important to have in mind.

Validity and Reliability

Validity assessments in qualitative research serve two purposes: (i) that the research is credible in the eyes of other researchers, and (ii) that the research is credible in the eyes of those researched. In this project, the first category consists of construct validity and internal validity. Construct validity refers either to (i) what extent the a-priori specification of constructs that are measured against the data adequately represents what is intended by the theoretical accounts of the constructs being measured or (ii) developed constructs, constructs that inductively are constructed and defined through the data analysis. Internal validity refers to what extent conclusions about causes of relations are likely to be true. The second category consists of descriptive validity, which refers to the accuracy of the data and to what extent enough descriptions have been provided to adequately establish an understanding of the setting (Maxwell, 1992), and interpretive validity, which refers to what extent those researched agreed with the interpretations that were made.

Construct validity was secured through a constant comparison of data and constructs. Through extensive use of quotations as empirical evidence it is possible to evaluate the empirical data to constructs. As new constructs inductively emerged during the project, multiple sources of evidence and a broad set of indicators served to increase the validity of

these emerging concepts. These emerging constructs are supplemented with definitions and empirical examples.

Process research serves as an effective tool to show causal relationships. The longitudinal nature of one of the studies strengthened the relationships of the concepts. Patterns of relationships among concepts were found over time, which strengthened internal validity.

The descriptive validity of the data was secured through data collection from a wide range of respondents through different data collection techniques and from other secondary sources. The respondents represented different departments and different organizational levels with different responsibilities. Facts were verified by comparing responses from different individuals responding through different channels (interviews, diaries, small talk, and secondary sources).

During semi structured interviews, small talk and follow up conversations, interpretations of data were tested on respondents to secure interpretive validity. The interpretations presented in these settings were mainly verified by respondents. When interpretation disagreements occurred, the issue was raised in other settings where the interpretation was verified. No conclusions are presented that have not been verified by organizational members.

External validity assessments have been used to test whether the findings in the study are generalizable outside the explicit case studied. However, the problem regarding generalizable findings has been the most prominent barrier in doing case research (Yin, 2003) Two tactics may be applied to enhance external validity: (i) using theory in single case studies generalizing findings to theory rather than other cases, and (ii) using replication logic in multiple case studies trying to generalize findings from one case to the following cases. In this study both tactics have been applied. Findings have been analyzed through existing theory to see if it is possible to explain the finding through theory. In multiple and embedded case studies, findings also have been cross case compared in a replicating fashion. In one of the cases, theory was inductively developed, which represents an attempt at generalizing to theory, which then in turn can be tested on other contexts to establish external validity.

The question regarding reliability is whether another researcher would arrive at the same conclusions, if the same procedures were followed. The objective is not for others to

replicate the research, but rather to assess the reliability of the conclusions. The methodology applied is thoroughly presented in the data collection and data analysis paragraphs in this introduction. All of the data are stored electronically both as word processing files and audio files, so that it is possible for other researchers to access. As presented in Table 7 above, data from different data sources has been triangulated to enhance the reliability of the data.

Personal Connection to Organization Analyzed

I had been a member of the division management team in the claims handling division in INSCO. I left the management team in the autumn of 2003, three years prior to the data collection in my first project (the focus group interviews), and four years prior to the interviews in the second project. This experience has given me a considerable insight into the business performed in the object of analysis. This insight has been a great advantage when interviewees addressed business specific issues. Further, this insight has been helpful when interpreting data.

In addition, my former connection to the milieu investigated has given me a considerable advantage regarding access to interviewees. Everybody who was asked to participate either as diarist or as interviewee, or both, gave a positive response. Later on in the process when it was necessary to do follow-up conversations or to gather written material, my personal connection to the interviewees seemed to be an advantage. Another advantage I experienced was that established personal relations were a benefit when it came to openness in the interview situations – as an "internal trustee" they told me more than they would to a complete stranger.

My prior connection to the organization might also lead to some pitfalls. The most challenging pitfall to avoid was the limitation my own practical experience in the company might have on my interpretations of the data. A second pitfall might be that I would be biased toward one solution or the other, based upon my own perceptions of what would be the best for the company. A third pitfall might be that the respondents would exaggerate their own roles in the political ploy, or on the other hand, underplay their own role to make an impression on me based upon their perception of my position in the area of conflict. To reduce the effects of these possible pitfalls, it has been necessary to gather a broad spectrum of data and do a wide-ranging data analysis.