JUMPING THE TRACKS

capability of employeeship during a strategic change

BACHELOR’S THESIS IN PEDAGOGY

Author: Anja Panduro Pedersen
Tutor: Rose-Marie Olsson
**Blekinge Institute of Technology**
Section for Industrial Economy

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**Author:** Pedersen, Anja Panduro

**Tutor:** Olsson, Rose-Marie

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**Abstract:** Employeeship is a growing organizational resource. Yet many organizations forget to focus on their employees during change processes. In modern society change has become an inherent feature in most organizations and employees are expected to be competent and adapt. They are expected to maintain their capability of practising employeeship during changes. The study aimed at gaining an understanding of how employees experience their capability of employeeship during a strategic organizational change. The study built on a recent development in Denmark as changes where implemented in the Danish public school system. Building on theories about employee capability and employeeship the study examined how teachers experienced their own capability of adapting to and performing during changes. The study examined how employees experience their own employeeship. To analyse the experienced employeeship a qualitative study was carried out with semi-structured interviews of six public school teachers. A hermeneutic approach was applied to the study in order to gain a holistic understanding of the experienced capability of employeeship. The result shows that strategic changes in organizations not only involves changes to organizational structures. It also involves changes to how employees experience their own capability of employeeship. It changes the balance of their lived worlds.

**Keywords:** capability, employeeship, empowerment, medarbetarskap, organizational change, strategic change

Nyckelord: employeeship, empowerment, förmåga, medarbetarskap, organisatorisk förändring, strategisk förändring
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Introduction

Organizations face the prospective of growing culture flows and international competition. They are challenged by current streams and tendencies in society. Consequently, employees are met by demands of rapid changes to work procedures or the organizational structure. Changes may occur on a smaller or larger scale, but no matter the scale, changes may influence how employees experience their work environment and work procedures (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2009). Even smaller changes may constitute difficulties for employees as work tasks in an industrialized environment are becoming more and more complex (Ahrenfelt, 2013). Employees require the capability to respond to growing demands, the capability to participate in problem solving and utilizing their competencies in changing environments (Davis & Hase, 1999). Employee involvement in problem solving is requested as they are expected to take their share of responsibility. Solving problems during organizational changes is no longer a leadership concern as distribution of roles is changing within organizations (Møller, 1994; Tengblad, 2009). How capable employees are of participating in organizational practices and how they manage their relation to changing work processes, has therefore come to attention in recent years (Hase & Tay, 2004; Tengblad, 2006, 2009).

In the course of my education, I became interested in the different facets of being “a good employee”. What it entails and how it takes place. As employees are expected to perform well both individually, in teams and during changes within an organization, they are faced with an ever growing strain on their employeeship. Employees are expected to be capable and contribute during major organizational changes (Ahrenfelt, 2013; Hållsten & Tengblad, 2006).

During the same period as my education, the Danish government decided to implement a new public school reform in record time. Along with the school reform, another major reform (the working hour reform) was devised to alter the working hours and working procedures of the teachers. All of these changes implemented to the public schools constitute a strategic change to both working structures and organizational structures. I began to wonder how the teachers experienced their own role in this change. How they experienced their employeeship. Would they be capable of maintaining a sense of employeeship during the radical change the school system was undertaking?

Organizational context

The context in which employeeship is studied may affect the experience of the same as employeeship has a mouldable and contextual nature (Tengblad, 2009). Therefore, a short presentation of the organizational context forming the framework for this study is introduced in the following paragraphs.

The structural changes (the two reforms) executed in Danish public schools were implemented in August 2014. The strategic changes made to the structure of the school system itself (affecting both students and teachers) include longer school days for the children, additional educational classes (more teaching), foreign languages from an earlier age, assisted homework late in the day (at the school), movement during classes and more optional subjects in the senior classes (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014). The working hour reform (only affects the teachers) includes teaching more classes each week and full presence during the week, meaning being present at the school for at least 35 hours a week (Uddannelsesforbundet, 2014).
Thus, teachers are no longer able to divide the work between home and the school or to work after hours. Likewise, it entails fewer hours for preparation.

This whole scenario constitutes a strategic change (it is radical in nature) as the two reforms seek to restructure organizational directions in order to achieve higher qualifications and knowledge among the students (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014). It also changes the time schedules and procedures provided for the teachers to achieve these goals. The new strategy of the two reforms was decided at government level; however, the main responsibility to implement and effectuate the strategy was placed on the individual school.

**Concept definition**
The following concepts are central to the study as they compose the direction of the research. An introduction to the concepts and the subsequent problem formulation lead to the purpose of the study.

**Employeeship** focuses on how employees themselves behave and react in order to perform in the interest of the organization. It entails committing oneself for the best of the organization and finding ways to “be a good employee” (Møller, 1994, p. 5). The concept of **empowerment** is often used in connection with employeeship as it entails possibilities for the employees to perform and develop their abilities (Kinlaw, 1995). In empowerment, the management is expected to provide an arena for their employees to exercise their potentials (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Kinlaw, 1995; Møller, 1994). Employeeship as a concept, however, arises from the individual employee and cannot be coerced by the management (Seeholm & Salomonsson, 2006; Tengblad, 2009).

**Employee capability** entails being able to deal with situations in the work environment, among others a changing environment. A capable person is “more able to respond to the demands of a rapidly changing and ambiguous environment where there is a requirement to do more with less” (Davis & Hase, 1999, p. 298). Capability thus entails being capable of learning, performing and using competencies in any workplace environment.

**Strategic change** involves changes to the vision of an organization and enables the organization to take strategic advantage of current modes in society. It is difficult to control because many elements are changed in the organization at the same time and often the instigation of a strategic change is not articulated very well or mediated to the employees (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

**Problem formulation**
The field of employee participation within organizations has received growing attention in recent years (Hällstén, 2008; Kilhammar, 2011; Tengblad, 2009) and there is a need to broaden the understanding of employee participation. Employee participation implies commitment and an effort to ensure productivity, relations and quality in the organization. Employees are expected to exert what is considered good employeeship by the organization (Møller, 1994). However, employees also have to be capable of exerting employeeship. They have to be capable of using their competencies during times of change (Davis & Hase, 1999).

Organizations are living organisms in the sense that they are systems of mutual interdependence. Organizational development and leadership is therefore as much dependent
on employees as vice versa (Ahrenfelt, 2013). As part of this mutual dependency, employees are expected to exert a certain amount of participation and productivity, even during times of change; to exert employeeship (Hällstén, 2008). However, are employees capable of using their competencies according to management expectations during a strategic change? Employees have to constantly interact in the context of the organization as well as in the context of their own lived world and the two do not always match. Though the concept of employeeship entails certain guidelines “(…) employeeship (also) stands for the relationship and workaday activity; it becomes an attitude that is not always predictable” (translated from Swedish in Hällstén, 2008, p. 94). There is thus a need to understand how employees experience their capabilities during the complexity of a changing environment. How and if they are capable of using their competencies in an unfamiliar environment (Hase & Tay, 2004).

Examining how employees themselves experience their capability of exerting employeeship is of interest to both organizations and the pedagogical field of science as employees feeling capable, have the ability to learn new tasks (new competencies) and to utilize them (Hase & Tay, 2004). Examining employee experiences in connection with employeeship may therefore increase the understanding of actual capability of employeeship. This understanding may benefit both employees and organizations in times of change. Understanding employee experiences in a turbulent environment may provide a tool for human resource management to develop and encourage a heightened sense of capability among their employees. It may provide a collective tool for employeeship.

**Purpose and question formulation**

The purpose of the study was to attain greater understanding of the capability of employeeship. To broaden the understanding of how employees themselves experience their capability of employeeship during a major workplace change.

- How do employees experience their capability of employeeship during a strategic workplace change?

**Prior research**

Employeeship is often the English translation of the Swedish concept of ”medarbetarskap” (Bertlett, 2011; Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Kilhammar, 2011). The concept is mainly studied in Scandinavia and received growing attention during the 1990’s (Hällstén, 2008). It is therefore a fairly new field of research. As it is primarily a Nordic concept the amount of existing research is limited (Kilhammar, 2011). Tengblad (2006) suggests that one of the reasons why the concept of “medarbetarskap” (employeeship) is primarily developed and used in Nordic countries (predominantly Sweden) is due to post-materialism. The Nordic countries have a history of employees exerting post-material values as they are more prone to demand higher standards and less inclined to accept working conditions they consider beneath their competencies (Tengblad, 2006). Post-material values concern quality of life, self-actualization, independence and autonomy (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2004; Seeholm & Salomonsson, 2006).

Searching for prior research mainly results in doctoral dissertations and books on the subject. Even the English term of employeeship provides a scarce amount of scientific articles.
How employees themselves handle their relation to work tasks and their organization therefore appears to be an area with a scarcity of scientific articles. The concept of empowerment, on the other hand, has been widely examined. It gained popularity in the 1960s in pursuit of allowing (empowering) employees to gain influence in their own work procedures (Hällstén, 2008). Main focus in former studies has therefore been on the relationship between leadership and employees. How management may provide leverage to employees and the best approach to achieve this goal (Kilhammar, 2011).

Areas of employeeship

Historically and conceptually the English terminology of employeeship is foremost connected to Möller’s (1994) theories as he coined the term in the mid-nineties to shift focus from leaders to employees. Möller found that management was taking too much of the blame for organizational failures and that some of the responsibility lies with the employees. In other words, leaders and employees need to co-operate in order to direct joint energy at solving potential problems. In Sweden, various researchers have found inspiration from Möller in their interpretation of employeeship (“medarbetarskap”), taking a slightly different approach to the concept (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006). Whereas Möller (1994) is relatively definitive in his normative description of employeeship, the Swedish approach examines employeeship in a broader perspective. Employeeship becomes self-management of relations and is not necessarily regarded a set of norms to strive for.

Most of the existing studies on Möller’s (1994) conception of employeeship follow the lead of empowerment as they primarily examine employee involvement in connection with teamwork and leadership (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Jönsson, Muhonen, Scholten & Wigerfelt, 2014). Many of the studies discuss the difficulties in connection with developing employeeship, especially how leaders and management may support employees and provide the possibilities for developing employeeship. Prior studies mostly examined how employees should behave in order to be good employees (Bertlett, Johansson, Arvidsson & Jern, 2012; Jönsson, et al., 2014; Kilhammar, 2011; Jakobsen, Nahnfeldt, Nyroos, Olin-Scheller and Sandlund, 2010). The studies are not intended as a direct evaluation of the employee. It is more a matter of how the employee relates to his/her own work; how employeeship functions at the individual level and how it is expressed (Bertlett, 2011; Kilhammar, 2011). The definition and examination of employeeship varies slightly depending on the researcher. A study by Bertlett et al. (2012) found that leadership is an inevitable aspect of employeeship, but according to other researchers, employeeship may also be defined in terms of self-management (Irfaeya, Liu & Tengblad, 2006; Seeholm & Salomonsson, 2006; Tengblad, 2006, 2009). A study by Jakobsen et al. (2010) examines whether appraisal interviews actually support employees in finding a level of employeeship or whether it is simply a tool for organizations to set norms. In Hällstén’s and Tengblad’s book (2006) attention is mainly on how employeeship may unfold in a certain context. Most researchers do, however, agree on the principles behind the concept (Bertlett, 2011), that employeeship entails how employees manage their own relation to work tasks, leaders and colleagues (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Irfaeya et al., 2006; Seeholm & Salomonsson, 2006).

As employeeship is often studied in connection with leadership and development of employeeship, prior studies primarily have an employeeship-leadership approach (Bertlett, 2011; Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Tengblad, 2009). Tengblad (2009) found there are four
degrees of employeeship that leaders have to manage: adaptive, specialized, enterprising and boundary-crossing employeeship. Employees exert adaptive employeeship when they take a passive attitude and follow the flow. Specialized employeeship is exerted when employees are able to take responsibility for a certain area and share that knowledge. Enterprising employeeship is exerted when employees work independently and are not held back by how it used to be. Boundary-crossing employeeship takes place when employees inspire confidence in colleagues and participate in maintaining the social climate. Thus, some studies use the concept of employeeship as a strategy for employees while other studies use the concept as a strategy for leaders (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006).

**Capability**

In relation to employeeship, not much research concerns employee capability. Most studies concern employee ability rather than capability or employee competence rather than capability. Hällstén and Tengblad (2006) state that developing employeeship requires an environment in which the employee is able to participate and able to commit. Davis and Hase (1999) at the same time state that employees not only have to be able to, they also have to be capable thereof. It is not enough to provide the ability (environment); employees also have to be capable of utilizing the ability. According to Tengblad (2009) employeeship is based on the capability of finding joy and meaning in every day work and cannot arise from a sense of duty or reward systems. In that sense, Tengblad (2009) agrees with the view that developing a sense of employeeship is entirely up to the individual employee’s capability thereof, as it cannot be coerced by the management. A view shared by Seeholm and Salomonsson (2006) as they stress the importance of employees being responsible for their own competence development.

Lind Nilsson and Gustafsson (2006) find that a pedagogical approach is often lacking when organizations implement changes to work procedures, thus disregarding the inner understanding by their employees. In their study, Hase and Tay (2004) examine complexity theory in connection with capability. They find “that there is a vast difference between knowledge and skills, and actual learning” (p. 3). Looking at the complexity of capability beyond the concept of competence, Hase and Tay find that employee competence cannot simply be expressed or attained by a linear approach to skills and knowledge. Organizations often chose the linear approach in their search for competent employees as it is assumed measurable and they have a history of focusing on competence development to ensure progress, as skills and expertise are regarded valuable resources (Paloniemi, 2006). Instead, Hase and Tay (2004) propose that organizations have to enable employee capability. Employees thereby receive the resources to attain competency. Capable employees possess self-efficacy and are able to learn in various kinds of environments. If an employee is not capable of dealing effectively with the complexities of the environment, they may not be capable of attaining (learning) new competencies (Hase & Tay, 2004).

**Theoretical Background**

As the purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the experienced capability of employeeship, a descriptive rather than a normative approach to employeeship was found most suitable. How employeeship takes place rather than what it strives at being or becoming. The

As employeeship is a very broad area of research, a model (Figure 1) developed by Irfaeya et al. (2006) was chosen to serve as delimitation of the concept. The model of employeeship is partly based on Møller’s (1994) views on employeeship as well prior studies on employeeship. The main theoretical framework for the current study therefore consists of a combination of the model described below, supported by a collective notion of descriptive employeeship by Hällstén and Tengblad (2006), Irfaeya et al. (2006), Møller (1994) and Seeholm and Salomonsson (2006) as well as the notion of capability by Hase and Tay (2004).

![Diagram of Employeeship Model](image)

**Figure 1.** The model of employeeship developed by Irfaeya, Liu and Tengblad (2006, p. 79).

**Commitment** entails a feeling of involvement in one’s own work, colleagues and the organization as a whole. Employees have a sense of meaning in their work and are willing to perform their best (Irfaeya et al., 2006). It is about not feeling indifferent to one’s work tasks and the outcome one produces (Seeholm & Salomonsson, 2006). Employees have a sense of meaning in their work and feel content. There is an experience of satisfaction of being part of the organisation and an effort to produce the best possible outcome for the organisation (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006). If there is a difference between the performance or effort by employees and their actual ability then employees are considered to display a commitment gap, as they are not acting according to their fullest capability (Møller, 1994).

**Co-operation** entails caring about one’s relation to colleagues and feeling willing to try one’s best to collaborate. Employees feel able to help and support their colleagues in a respectful manner, appreciate support, and accept the knowledge offered by their colleagues (Irfaeya et al., 2006). Employees have a sense of belonging and feel comfortable interacting with colleagues. They contribute to the workplace atmosphere and the overall satisfaction in the working community (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006). Feeling loyalty towards colleagues and the organisation is important to co-operation as employees feeling loyal may contribute positively to the social culture (Møller, 1994).

**Responsibility** entails feeling able to take an initiative. Employees feel able to work without guidelines or directions from the management and are able to take responsibility for the outcome of their own work and their own capabilities (Irfaeya et al., 2006). Seeholm and Salomonsson (2006) regard the conception of responsibility as central to employeeship as it contains factors
such as work tasks, innovativeness as well as personal and professional progress. Responsibility also entails being able to balance the sense of responsibility with psychological and physiological wellbeing. It entails not feeling indifferent in relation to work tasks or the organisation (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006).

**Complexity of capability.** Capable employees exert self-efficacy, are able to utilize their competence in changing environments and to learn within the environments. The complexity of capability is a non-linear process in which employees are or become capable of dealing with unpredictable environments (e.g. strategic changes). The same environment may not enable capability in all employees, as learning happens on the employee’s own terms and not as a response to a set of rules or instructions. Capability also entails being flexible and able to work well with others (Hase & Tay, 2004).

**Method**

*Scientific Approach*

A hermeneutic approach was applied to the study in order to gain deeper understanding of how employees (six teachers) experience their capability of employeeship during a strategic change. The hermeneutic approach was chosen to gain insight into the lived worlds of the employees; the unique experiences by each employee (Schmidt, 2006). Studying their narratives about their lived experiences and the meaning they ascribe their situation may provide insight into the phenomenon of employeeship (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Schmidt, 2006). The hermeneutic approach is not interested in explaining the actual situation, but rather finding meaning in the phenomenon and understanding the present circumstances (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Ödman, 1979). Thus, the hermeneutic approach is very contextual and not directly applicable to other situations. As hermeneutics focuses on understanding and interpreting the meaning of contextual experiences the approach is suitable for analysing the experience of a transitory situation such as a strategic change.

There are two important concepts within the hermeneutic approach: comprehension (the researcher’s own prior knowledge) and the hermeneutic circle (the interaction between the parts and the whole). As prior knowledge and comprehension of a subject may interfere with the analysis, the researcher’s own comprehension needs attention throughout the process. The hermeneutic circle is about the constant revision of the whole when reading and rereading the parts. The hermeneutic circle may be considered a puzzle of parts that emerge through the lived experiences. Piecing the parts of the puzzle together slowly forms a spiral of understanding as the parts become a whole. However, as the whole is never a constant and new parts continually emerge, the spiral continues endlessly (Ödman, 1979). The more the parts form a whole, the better the understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon (Westlund, 2012). Both of the concepts within the hermeneutic approach were applied continuously throughout the study.

*Comprehension*

In order to shed light on possible pitfalls of misinterpretation it was important to include the researcher’s own comprehensions in the search for understanding (Westlund, 2012; Ödman, 1979). In the current study the researcher did not have any prior comprehension about the
particular organization in question (the individual school). However, as the organization is part of the Danish public school system the researcher did have comprehensions of being a child within that system (the researcher attended Danish public school during childhood). Comprehensions concerning prior experiences of being an employee within an organization undergoing changes were also present. However, comprehension not only builds on memories, it provides a sense of direction when seeking understanding. According to Ödman (1979) “without comprehension there is no problem (to research) and nothing to provide clues” (translated from Swedish, p. 81) during the search for understanding. The researcher thus became aware of forming new comprehensions during conversations with employees as they provided insight to their lived worlds and it was the researcher’s intention to gain understanding of these lived worlds. Ödman states, that comprehension is connected to intentionality as the intention to understand the parts of new experiences requires a constant reinterpretation of comprehension and understanding thereof. Thus, to limit the production of misinterpretations during the analysis and interpretation process comprehension was kept in mind throughout the current study.

**Data collection**
The study was conducted by means of the qualitative method of interviews to provide a deeper insight into the experiences by the informants. The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) with six public school teachers. All six teachers are employed in the same organization (at the same school). They have been employed at the school for several years (between 9 to 19 years) and are therefore familiar with the organizational situation both prior to, during and after the strategic change. The choice of semi-structured and thematic interviews provided a number of open-ended questions each referring to a category within the model of employeeship (Appendix 1). It was thus possible to go into depth with topics concerning the categories depending on the answers provided by the informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Westlund, 2012). The qualitative method of semi-structured interviews therefore provided an opportunity to understand the world through the eyes of the teachers; to understand how capability of employeeship was experienced by employees (the teachers).

Contact to the informants was established through one of the teachers. The intermediary teacher sent out an enquiry among her colleagues and five other teachers consented to participate. The informants consist of five women and one man between the ages of 36 and 56. All of the informants are Danish (as is the researcher). The interviews were therefore conducted in Danish. The interviews were recorded using a mobile phone app to ensure accurate reproduction of the lived experiences at subsequent word for word transcription. Five of the interviews were conducted on site at the workplace in question. One teacher was interviewed in her own home. Thus, all of the teachers were in familiar surroundings during the interviews.

**Data analysis**
The interviews lasted from 40 to 65 minutes and were transcribed in their full length. They were not translated into English directly, thus reading and re-reading of the transcribed data was done in Danish to ensure the most accurate analysis. Quotations selected for presentation was subsequently translated into English. The analysis of the empirical material collected through semi-structured interviews was carried out using an analytical software program and each
transcription was loaded into the software in order to generate descriptive coding and structure. To systematically analyse emerging meaning in the transcribed texts.

Applying the NCT model (Friese, 2012) to the process, categories were generated by Noticing things, Collecting things and Thinking about things in the empirical data (the transcribed interviews). To gain understanding of the formulated question, aspects on employeeship and capability were applied throughout the analysis process. Codes generated in the noticing process were thus mainly conceptual, however, some descriptive codes were generated as not all noticed things fit into a conceptual coding at first. Things emerging in the texts during the noticing process were subsequently collected in codes related to the aspects of commitment, co-operation and responsibility. Thus the theoretical model of employeeship was applied in the analysis process. Thinking about things was a recursive process throughout the analysis. Collecting noticed quotations under common labels emerged via thinking of relations in the data. By going back and forth between the parts (noticing) and the whole (collecting), thus applying the hermeneutic circle.

Data interpretation
During the interpretation process attention was on the result generated during the analysis process (the collected quotations). The theoretical model by Irfaeya et al. (2006): commitment, co-operation, responsibility and Hase’s and Tay’s (2004) view on capability were actively incorporated into the evaluation (thinking) of the collected quotations. New subcategories began to emerge during the re-reading of the experiences recounted by the informants. The generated subcategories were revised multiple times (as according to the hermeneutic circle) during multiple re-readings to reach an understanding of the whole.

Comprehension by the researcher was taken into account at each reading of the empirical data to limit misinterpretations, as new comprehension emerged at each reading increasing the intention to understand the parts of the experiences (Ödman, 1979). The principles of the hermeneutic circle were applied throughout the interpretation to reach an understanding of the lived worlds as recounted by the informants. Examining the parts of the interviews relative to the whole enabled the process of interpretation, as statements by one employee may only be understood relative to statements made by other employees. The individual parts of the interviews thus formed the whole experience of employeeship.

Ethical considerations
In studies involving people the researcher is required to provide information about the nature of the study and integrity rights before informants agree to participate (Cohen et al., 2011; Gustafsson, Hermerén & Petersson, 2004). As the current study concerns experiences by employees, considerations such as information about anonymity and knowledge about the study are essential to an ethical approach. Thus, written information was sent to the intermediary teacher about the purpose of the study, prior to agreement. Having consented to participate each of the participating teachers was again informed (in written format) about the purpose of the study. They were also informed about anonymity and how the empirical data was handled. They all agreed to being recorded for transcription and were informed that all recordings would be deleted after transcription. They were made aware of their rights to terminate the interview at any point or to state if some information revealed during the interview was to be disregarded.
during the analysis. The same information was repeated at the beginning of each interview. Thus, all informants were acquainted with the ethical aspects of the process.

As integrity is one of the ethical aspects applied in the current study the researcher considered confidentiality and consequences for the informants throughout the process. Data is presented as not to reveal the identity of an informant (confidentiality) or to discredit the informants in any way (consequences). The researcher has an important role in this process as comprehension may influence the representation of the informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The hermeneutic principles were followed to minimize comprehension as much as possible as not to distort the meaning conveyed by the informants or to embellish the results in favour of the problem formulation (Gustafsson et al., 2004).

Reliability and validity

When studying a phenomenon, validity and reliability are important aspects to consider as they determine the setting for what is examined (whether the study meets its purpose, validity) and how it is examined (whether the study is dependable, reliability). They strengthen the study and minimize sources of error (Bjereld, Demker & Hinnfors, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). In the current study the approach was described to strengthen reliability, however, as qualitative research is not directly repeatable it reflects on the reliability of the study (Cohen et al., 2011). Comprehension and context are other factors affecting reliability. The interviews were not highly structured in the sense that they consisted of semi-open questions. The researcher’s own comprehension may therefore be a factor as follow up questions may have been asked in relation to the researcher’s personal interests. The setting in which the informants received questions may also influence the answers given as both interruptions and personal chemistry between the informant and the researcher may influence the outcome (Bjereld et al., 2012). Another factor that may affect reliability is the context in which the study is examined. The situation of the teachers is transformative (they are in the middle of a change process) and the study may therefore not be repeatable at a different time. Thus, reliability of the study has some pitfalls, however, they have been considered and reflected on continuously during the process.

To gain high validity the outcome of a study should be as representative of the phenomenon as possible. Cohen et al. (2011) recommend applying concepts that are recognizable and accepted within the field of study. Thus, the current study utilizes known and accepted concepts and theories from prior studies concerning employeeship and capability. According to Cohen et al. the qualitative method of interviews may affect the outcome as people have individual ways of experiencing. The outcome therefore depends on the type of informants chosen for the study and the type of questions asked as well as how the questions are formulated (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The informants were not specifically selected for the current study as the inquiry for participants went out broadly to all teachers at the school. Thus the outcome may have been different had other teachers chosen to participate or another school had been asked. An additional factor is the mix of languages used in the study. Chosen quotations from the interviews were translated from Danish into English. As idioms and sayings are expressed differently in the two languages some meaning may have been lost in translation.

Method discussion

The hermeneutic approach provided a method to examine the context in which the interviews were carried out as well as the immediate experiences by the teachers. The situation experienced
by the teachers during the interviews may be considered a snapshot in time and their experiences may therefore have changed in the intervening period. The spiral form of the hermeneutic circle provides room for adding new parts to the study and thereby gain an even greater understanding of the phenomenon (Ödman, 1997). Prior studies in employee capability and employee behaviour have predominantly applied quantitative methods and most often studied employees in connection with leadership; mainly using the concept of empowerment (Kilhammar, 2011). A qualitative study with interviews offers insight into the nature of employeeship during an strategic change. It may provide greater understanding of how employees experience their own participation and capabilities in this process.

Open interviews have both advantages and disadvantages in the sense that the interviewer is able to go into depth with the narratives, but at the same time the informants do not necessarily receive the same questions as they do not head down the same road in their narratives. During transcription of the current study it was noticed that some questions asked to one informant where never asked to another though it might have been insightful. The fact that all interviews were recorded may also have influenced the answers given by the informants as the knowledge of being recorded may restrain some of them from answering freely.

Results

The analysis shows that there are various aspects of the experience of employeeship during a strategic change. While going back and forth between the parts and the whole during analysis, some aspects emerged within the categories of commitment, co-operation and responsibility as presented in the following. Experiences of capability is incorporated into the main categories.

The experience of commitment
The teachers experience a difference in their approach to work tasks. They state feeling unable to uphold the same sense of commitment and quality as prior to the changes.

Quality of work
Time is indicated as the main factor for a reduction of quality in their work. They do no longer feel capable of providing the same level of teaching as prior to the changes. The degree of experienced reduction in quality varies from teacher to teacher as they have chosen different approaches to tackle the challenges. One teacher tries to focus on specific tasks such as bringing as much creativity into the teaching as possible. Another teacher has chosen to follow a checklist to keep track of all the work tasks. A third teacher has chosen to lower the bars of ambition to keep up. They feel they used to be able to do more and have more flexibility. As one teacher states:

It is (swears) hard when you feel like you are not delivering what you know you are capable of delivering (…). “Here are the books, read and write a report”…I really don’t think it’s fair, I really don’t think it’s right, but I have to do it.

Creativity
There is a sense of increase in workload as the new working hours provide too little time for them to prepare. Some of the teachers feel they are always lacking behind with preparation and
they are not able to see how they can change their current situation for the better. The time factor is experienced as a hindrance to their creativity. The fact that they have to grade papers and work on projects between or directly after teaching “that isn’t really like, uh…the good kind of energy so to speak (…). It certainly isn’t just as effective” one teacher says. This is backed by another teacher stating: “well, you are definitely more creative when you meet during the evening than right after having taught for six hours straight”.

The teachers no longer willingly spend longer hours at school or take home extra work as they feel robbed of their freedom to do so. This results in great frustration among the teachers as they have an experience of decrease in creativity and quality. ”Well, it’s one’s identity as a teachers that is put to a test, you know”, one teacher proclaims, while another makes a comparison between being an artist and being a teacher in the sense that teaching is not regarded a 9 to 5 job, but rather a lifestyle. Capability of creativity is central among the teachers. However, they do not feel capable of being creative on demand. As one teacher expresses it:

> When somebody from outside the school tells me that now you have to have movement in your teaching…and I don’t know how to incorporate it so it makes sense (…). I’m thinking, but it doesn’t make sense, we are doing Martin Luther King now in English, right…how? Are we supposed to jump to him or what?...And right there, I get performance anxiety, you know (…). Then I begin to doubt. I’m brought out of balance somehow, you see.

Being able to let go of their expectations is something the teachers struggle with as they on the one hand want to perform well, but on the other hand have experiences of having to dismiss certain demands or ideas in order to reach the set goals for the new reform. Goals the teachers experience as unreachable as they cannot find the resources or support to achieve them.

**Checking in and checking out**
The teachers experience a change in the flexibility of their work. They compare the change in working hours to that of workers checking in and checking out when going to work. Prior to the reform they experienced a willingness to stay on and finish something they had started or to commence new projects, but “now it’s literally like…like when time is up, then you just let go of whatever you are doing” one teacher proclaims. They express frustration that their flexibility has been limited, though some also experience a liberation, as they are no longer able to take home a lot of work. They feel there is a clear line between work and private life now as opposed to prior to the changes.

*The experience of co-operation*
The social culture in the organization is considered to be positive and the teachers state having a great relationship to their colleagues.

**Support**
There is a common wish to support each other, but at the same time the teachers report feeling powerless and stifled. They describe experiences of having a hard time upholding their ability and their desire to help each other out. One teacher states: “I do think that my colleagues, uh…they really do want to support, but they uh, they are all really busy, you know”. Another teacher expresses the experience of support this way:
I feel safe being around my colleagues, so in that sense we are able to support each other... both by backing each other and allowing room for muttering. There has to be room for that. But, but at the same time we are powerless... that is, we are (laughs) united in being powerless.

The teachers experience a reduction in their energy level. Some have a general sensation of energy loss while others are able to keep work energy and private energy separate. There is, however, an overall lack of willingness to begin new projects with colleagues. Doing projects with colleagues is now dismissed as it is considered taking up too much time. Reports of stress related experiences also occur among the teachers. They are aware of both their own symptoms and the collective hardships of their colleagues, but at the same time they do not know what to do about it. They feel unable to relieve each other. They are frustrated that they are not able to help each other with work tasks as the tasks usually demand special knowledge (they cannot help with each other’s classes or preparation) within an area of education. One teacher proclaims: “we may say that we support each other, but in reality we can’t really make a difference”. A mathematics teacher cannot substitute for a history teacher and vice versa if they do not know the subject. The teachers therefore find it hard to support each other professionally.

Collaboration
A wish to choose which colleagues to collaborate with on new projects, emerges among the teachers, as the choice of colleagues influences the amount of time used on the project. Time they feel will be taken from their limited time for preparation. They have experiences of being turned down when they present new ideas as well as turning down ideas themselves. Concern that they are heading down a road of competition among colleagues is also expressed. Competition in the sense that they are concerned about a differentiation in how time for preparation will be divided among the teachers:

It can completely sow discord in a group of teachers like that, you know, because we have been so used to everybody having the same… terms in some way, you see... so maybe if some suddenly get more preparation time for something and some receive more… while others... oh dear…

The concern is shared by another teacher with the impression that colleagues are beginning to:

Look more at each other’s schedules, you know... like, well, “do you have that many hours?” And “hey, wait, why do you?”... right. There is more of that glancing over each other’s shoulders, you know.

The experience of responsibility
The teachers like being teachers, they like the feeling of making a difference in the children’s lives. One teacher expresses it like this:

The school reform and the working hour reform, they are external things, you see... they have come and left their mark, but the essence of, of my job, you know to teach, being together with the children, that hasn’t changed. I’m still very content about that.

Acceptance
At the same time, the teachers report experiencing a change in their level of ambition and satisfaction with their own achievements. Being well prepared and knowing the material they
present to the students is at a premium among the teachers. They report experiences of coming unprepared to classes, because they were unable to find the time to prepare:

Some times I’ve told the children that I just haven’t had the time…uh, and other times I just put, you know, on a good face to a terrible story, right, and I just stand there and think, no way…this isn’t acceptable. If I as a teacher don’t…know the goal or…or if I begin something, you know the didactics and choose the wrong method or something like that…and then realize while I’m teaching…good God, I’m not going the direction I wanted to or what is this?…I truly get frustrated.

Practicing being able to accept the situation and accepting that they are not able to maintain the same level of quality has high attention among the teachers. “I make it work, because I’ve chosen to turn down my ambitions”, one teacher proclaims. This is backed by another teacher saying: “I feel like I can take responsibility for having a good quality in my teaching, but it’s not as good as it used to be”. While yet another finds it completely unacceptable having to turn down ambitions as s/he feels responsible for how it affects the students: “I just don’t think I’m able to do that (…) and I think that’s why I feel it’s wrong, because you just can’t compromise when you’re dealing with people and children”. The teachers have a hard time accepting the experience of quality loss. One teacher states:

Sometimes it may take 3-4 weeks before I’m able to return their assignments, that is (swears) unsatisfactory, you know, when it’s not supposed to take more than two weeks…but it…but I just stand there and say…well, I just didn’t have time…and in the past I would never have imagined ever doing that.

The teachers report having a hard time coming to terms with their current situation as the memories of how it used to be is still fresh in memory.

Management
The experience of a lack in communication about how to tackle the new elements of the reform is present among the teachers. They have an understanding of the limitations of their management as most of the changes were regulated at government level and the school has a bad economy. Nevertheless, there is a feeling of neglect by the management at the school as the teachers express wishes for the management to take a more active role in the change process and to provide more guidance.

When asked about management reactions, one teacher replies: “then they’ll just say (…) you just have to lower the bars for your teaching and…well (shrugs)”. This notion is backed by another teacher stating: ”they have moments where they simply say, that we just have to fix it…but I just can’t do that, you see”. Yet another teacher utters resignation towards the management: ”there are some things that…that I…uh, choose not to relate to, because…then it simply becomes too meaningless, you know”.

Jump aboard the train
The teachers experience the change process as a runaway train. They make the comparison to a train, because their management used this metaphor to describe the change process. They have difficulties seeing why and how they should take joint ownership in the change process. One teacher explains it like this:
They said, “if it is a moving train then you can choose to sit in the front carriage or you can choose to…to sit down the back”…and, and I thought, no, I am not on that train, I am lying on the tracks. Someone has tried my up, you know. I am not on board that train…I can’t, I can’t follow those thoughts, because I’m really scared. And, and I’m scared it will ruin my working life, you know, that it will take the pleasure out of my work, right.

They do not feel capable of taking control or having a say in the navigation. They feel they have no say in when and where the train stops, how fast it is going or in which direction. There is a sense of struggling with the incorporation of some of the new elements into their teaching. It has become hard for the teachers to focus on both working within the limited preparation time as well as rethinking their teaching so all the new elements are incorporated meaningfully.

Interpretation

The study was based on interviews with employees, their experiences of capability and how it may shape employeeship during a strategic change. The analysis shows that experiences of capability of employeeship undergo a process of imbalance during a strategic change and that practicing employeeship is dependent on the context in which it is experienced. Some reoccurring aspects of experiences emerged during the hermeneutic analysis of the empirical data. A model of the found aspects (Figure 2) was formed to represent the imbalance the teachers were experiencing in their capability of employeeship. The interpreted data is presented according to these aspects and the elements from the applied theoretical framework (commitment, co-operation and responsibility and capability) are interweaved in the context.

![Figure 2](image-url)

**Figure 2.** The imbalance in experienced capability of employeeship during a strategic change. Not feeling capable creates an imbalance in the experienced employeeship. A decrease in the experience of capability thus generates an increase in the experience of commitment gap, inequality and less involvement as these come to weigh heavier on the scale of balance.

*The commitment gap*

Prior to the strategic change, the teachers had a sense of being capable of achieving their goals. During the change process they experience a gap between what they used to be able to achieve
and what they are capable of achieving within the setting brought on by the working hour reform. Thus, the teachers find that they are doing their best, but at the same time, they do not feel capable of accomplishing all the goals they set for themselves. Their sense of commitment gap is, therefore not due to a reduction in their general commitment towards their work tasks or the organization. It is rather due to a sensed reduction in their capability of performing at their best (due to time pressure). The complexity in capability mentioned by Hase and Tay (2004) is visible in the sense that the teachers still possess their competencies, however, they do no longer feel fully capable of utilizing them. They lack the arena to practice their commitment and their sense of why and how to perform their tasks.

According to Møller (1994) “the gap creates a big difference between the actual performance level achieved by the employees and the performance level they would be able to achieve if they did their best” (p. 6). Doing one’s best, however, does not appear to be an issue among the teachers as they all state being very committed to providing the best teaching they possibly can. They are not indifferent to the outcome of their work tasks, which Seeholm and Salomonsson (2006) state as important to both the sense of commitment and responsibility. The teachers rather experience a reduction in their capability of achieving the outcome they wish to achieve. They generally experience that they do strive at achieving their best under the given circumstances, which involves being committed according to Irfaeya et al. (2006). Yet they have experiences of gaps in commitment and a confined sense of capability. The experience may be due to a constant comparison to pre-reform conditions; what they used to be able to do and what they are able to do now. Their sense of a commitment gap may thus be spawned by their sense of confined capability to utilize their competencies.

Some teachers choose to focus on only selected parts of their work tasks in order to achieve quality in what they do, others choose to lower their general level of ambition in order to make ends meet. This may indicate a decrease in their sense of responsibility towards the outcome of their work, which according to Irfaeya et al. (2006) and Møller (1994) is important for the results of the organisation. In general, however, the teachers themselves do not have the experience of a decrease in their own responsibility. They rather have the experience of being capable of taking an initiative to bring some sort of meaning and quality into their teaching despite the new conditions, for instance by deselecting certain aspects of the new reform. The teachers have the experience of taking initiative and committing fully to producing good results in the aspects they do select (the work they personally find important in regards to the children). The teachers thus have the experience of possessing a level of self-efficacy and being capable of dealing with some of the elements in their new environment which according to Hase and Tay (2004) is essential to capability. The sense of responsibility towards the children may therefore be influencing their general experience of commitment as responsibility towards the children and their individual school is much stronger than their sense of responsibility towards the school system in general. This may lead to the experience of a commitment gap (being indifferent to some elements of the reform). Thus, the teachers do have the experience of responsibility. They do have a sense of commitment, but they may not entirely be capable of performing the desired employeeship as demanded by the organisation.

Seeking balance
The teachers have become more aware of guarding their own well-being by being selective in their approach to their work. They generally put a lot of effort into finding a balance during
their workday and finding ways to make sense of their work. According to Hällstén and Tengblad (2006) physical and psychological well-being is important in being capable of producing a feeling of responsibility. The teachers try to find a level of work achievements they are willing to accept and they are willing to compromise in order to produce the best results they are capable of achieving under the given circumstances. Some are willing to compromise the quality of their teaching while others are not willing to head down that road. This indicates a difference in the conceptual experience of responsibility. It also shows a level of commitment on behalf of the teachers as they are trying to maintain a level of meaning and involvement in their work (Hällstén and Tengblad, 2006; Irfaya et al., 2006).

The teachers have a clear sense of being responsible, but at the same time there is a difference in the amount of work and results they are willing to produce for the organization. Thus, even though the teachers have the experience of responsibility, they also show a decrease in initiative and involvement (Irfaya et al., 2006) at relative levels. They have chosen different paths to find the level of balance. This may be due to their different experiences of capability. Some feel more capable than others to navigate within in the new framework of the reforms. According to Hase and Tay (2004) being flexible is an important part of feeling capable and some of the teachers have a hard time letting go of pre-reform times. Some have chosen to disregard certain aspects of the new reform, such as constantly incorporating movement into the teaching. Some have chosen to accept that they are not always able to come fully prepared to class. Others again have chosen to completely lower the bar for the outcome of their teaching. Taking initiative and being capable of taking care of oneself are central elements of responsibility (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Seeholm & Salomonsson, 2006), but at the same time the teachers feel frustrated and have a hard time finding meaning in some of the new aspects of their work. The fact that the teachers are more aware of and committed to taking care of themselves and that they are aware of their own approach indicates that the perimeter for individual performance and meaning has been stirred. Hällstén and Tengblad (2006) state that the sense of commitment is linked to the experience of satisfaction. The teachers may therefore be seeking individual levels of commitment where they can reclaim satisfaction in their work.

**Inequality**

An experience of inequality has emerged among the teachers after the strategic change. They still have a sense of commitment towards their work; however, commitment in work ethics and ambition has suffered in the change process. This is mainly due to the different circumstances of the teachers. Their commitment towards the children is unaffected. Some of the teachers work with older children, some work with younger children, while others work with different age groups. The age groups require different approaches and levels of flexibility. Thus, a couple of the teachers express an almost resigned sense of commitment, while others feel they are coping because they are able to combine preparation for more than one class in one go (same age groups). The teachers thus experience different levels of capability in relation to the arena provided for them to perform their tasks and the experienced flexibility within the arena.

To what extent the level of commitment has suffered thus varies from teacher to teacher due to the time factor. All of the teachers have the same amount of time to prepare, but the amount of work to be done within the timeframe varies and affects their sense of capability as some do not feel capable of acquiring new competencies in their new environment (Hase & Tay, 2004). According to Seeholm and Salomonsson (2006) employees are to take active part
in their work; a capability some of the teachers struggle with. They struggle to balance their
sense of responsibility with their psychological wellbeing. Some struggle more than others due
to differences in work tasks, but they all experience a strain on their capability of maintaining
the same amount of activity as prior to the organisational change. The sense of inequality
prompts experiences of being powerless. Having a sense of power and influence is a main
element in the concept of employeeship (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Møller, 1994) and the
teachers have the experience of being deprived of both power and influence.

The sense of inequality also affects the sense of co-operation among the teachers, as
they feel more competitive and guarded of their own time than they used to. According to
Irfaeya et al. (2006) respecting the abilities of colleagues is important to feeling committed and
the teachers are aware of the strain inequality may have prospectively on the feeling of co-
operation. They worry it may cause a rift in their capability of maintaining the otherwise positive
sense of co-operation at the school. The worry to lose their sense of belonging and the respectful
atmosphere they experience among their colleagues leads them down the road of experiencing
a reduction in their loyalty towards the organization. They have maintained their loyalty towards
the individual school they work at; however, loyalty towards the school system as a whole has
suffered greatly. According to Hällstén and Tengblad (2006) the feeling of commitment is
connected to a sense of being part of an organization and the teachers have generally lost faith
in the system. Some no longer feel proud to be a teacher. They are committed to teaching as a
profession, but they no longer wish to tell others that they are teachers.

Finding a level of involvement
Energy levels drop drastically in the teachers after having taught for many hours and they are
therefore not capable of concentrating on their preparation; a preparation they have to do before
going home. The teachers find it difficult to muster up the energy to participate in projects or
activities that are not directly involved in their own teaching. Contributing to the work place
atmosphere by supporting and interacting with colleagues is vital to co-operation (Hällstén &
Tengblad, 2006; Irfaeya et al., 2006) and the teachers are aware of these factors. They do care
about their relation to their colleagues, but they find it difficult to find the energy to begin new
projects or exchange new ideas. Their capability of taking the initiative to interact with their
colleagues has suffered in the change process (Hase & Tay, 2004).

Involvement is an important factor to employeeship according to Irfaeya et al. (2006) as
it demonstrates the capability of contributing to the collective information flow and to the
understanding of organizational procedures. The teachers have a hard time incorporating all of
the new elements of the school reform into their teaching as the limited time for preparation is
regarded a major obstacle. Thus, they experience a need to find a new level of involvement in
order to cope. They do not feel capable of maintaining the same level as before the change
process was instigated. They do not feel equipped to balance the distribution of preparation with
the number of tasks they have to perform and the number of classes they have to teach. They
are not capable of committing fully on all aspects of their work tasks as it involves time. Time
they feel they do not have.

Jumping the tracks
The teachers feel powerless in the new situation, as they no longer are able to structure their
work the same way they used to. A few of the teachers have taken a somewhat indifferent
approach to their own performance as they feel bound on hands and feet. The feeling once again arises from the time factor. They feel there is not enough time to implement or learn new tasks. Being capable of learning within the environment is essential to acquiring new competencies according to Hase and Tay (2004) and the teachers are thus experiencing a decrease in their sensed competencies to perform their tasks. Some still try to influence the situation, while others have resigned and try to reach an acceptance of their situation.

Irfaeya et al. (2006) state that employeehip is a matter of taking initiative, give support and willingness. This is well in line with the view presented by the leaders at the school prior to the change. They used the metaphor of a moving train bringing about changes. The metaphor was not well received by the teachers as they do not have the experience of being aboard the train. It is more an experience of being tied up on the tracks or having to jump the tracks. The organizational change was implemented too quickly for the employees to reach a sense of co-ownership or participation in the change process. They are left with a sense of the train going off the tracks rather than being able to stay on course. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the teachers are not willing to support and learn new tasks or that they do not wish not take an initiative. Their experiences of the level needed to achieve these aspects may simply lie at a different level than that expected by the management.

Taking an interested in the organization is important to the sense of responsibility (Møller, 1994) and the teachers are generally interested in the train going in the right direction, but they find there are too many obstacles on the tracks for them to be capable of taking part in the train ride. They are not able to look past the sense of commotion brought on by the strategic change. If the working hour reform had not been implemented parallel to the public school reform they may very likely have felt capable of managing. The public school reform in itself did not constitute a major change that affected their experience of employeehip, it was rather the combination of the two reforms that triggered the changes in experience. The sudden change in activities has left some of the teachers paralyzed. Their sense of responsibility towards the school system as a whole has suffered. Being capable of working without guidelines from the management is part of exerting responsibility (Irfaeya et al., 2006) and the teachers have a hard time making ends meet. Some of the teachers look to the management for more guidance, while others choose to simply ignore some of the new elements implemented with the reform. The level of self-efficacy which is essential to feeling capable (Hase & Tay, 2004) varies among the teachers, but they do feel motivated to teach the children and they try to reach the goals they set for themselves. Some, however, state not always being capable of completing theirs task and this indicates a decrease in self-efficacy.

It is difficult for the teachers to follow the tracks leading to the next step, as the change was sudden and chaotic (in their experience). Thus, the train ride (the change process) has taken its tolls on both commitment, co-operation and responsibility. The teachers struggle to maintain their sense of meaning and willingness to adapt (commitment). They struggle to maintain their sense of belonging and their loyalty towards the school system (co-operation). They struggle to maintain their psychological and physical well-being and be innovative (responsibility). At the same time, they are intent on doing their best for the school and for the children. They are intent on supporting their colleagues and the school the best they possibly can and they are intent on finding a balance to make thing work. Their capability to do so has, however, suffered in the process. The train has jumped the tracks instead of leading them to the next station (the next step). They do nevertheless struggle to find a way to get on board the train. Not the train dictated by the management, but their individual train of meaning and balance in their work.
Discussion

**Capability of employeeship**
The study shows that the actual experience of employeeship during a strategic change does not match the ideal of employeeship (Irfaeya et al., 2006) or Møller’s (1994) normative views. Leadership may well be important to employeeship as stated by Bertlett et al. (2012), but in the current study leaders play a minor role in the experience of being capable of exerting employeeship. Actual employeeship takes place in the lived worlds of the employees and they experience an imbalance in their capability thereof. Time is the spark that fires the teachers’ experiences and the leaders contribute to the fire both positively and negatively. There is, however, a general frustration among the teachers that the leaders contribute to the experience of a commitment gap because they urge some of the teachers to lower their bars of ambition. The inner state of each employee and their general sense of capability play a central role in their approach to a new environment. It is not simply a matter of empowering employees by providing the “right” environment, employeeship is a matter of being capable of finding joy and meaning in any environment as stated by Tengblad (2009).

**A changing environment**
The current study took a somewhat different approach to employeeship than previous studies in the sense that leadership was almost absent. The current study aimed at gaining understanding of employee experiences of employeeship within a contextual environment. As radical changes are often chaotic and difficult to control (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2009) the role of leadership received a diminutive role as the environment itself was the main factor of influence. During implementation of a strategic change organizations need to not only be aware of communication and individual differences among their employees, they need to encompass these individual differences (Ahrenfelt, 2013). Radical shifts in work tasks may have immense implications for the experience of employeeship and how employees find meaning. This reflects well on the experiences by the teachers during the reform changes. Time is the main issue and being able to deliver the goods and to do one’s best is important to all of them as they feel they do not have the time. This may be the reason why they experience a reduction in their capability of delivering the quality of work they want to. The changes happened so quickly that the teachers felt the air knocked out of them and they struggle to find meaning. According to Tengblad (2009) the capability of finding joy and meaning in every day work must come from within the employee and is not something the leaders are able to provide.

**Post-materialism**
In Denmark, like Sweden, employees are likely to display post-material values when it comes to working conditions, as they have a history of high welfare politics. Individualistic values such as finding meaning in work tasks, self-actualization and equality are at a premium. Employees are as much concerned with issues relating to their quality of life and autonomy as they are with economy (Seeholm & Salomonsson, 2006; Tengblad, 2006). The teachers in the current study are not foreign to these values. They share experiences of post-materialistic views. Experiences of inequality, dissatisfaction, inflexibility and imbalance. They have a hard time coming to terms with the restrictions in their autonomy (self-government). The approaches
taken during the organizational change symbolize top-down leadership for the teachers and their
experienced need for autonomy does not agree with this type of organizational management. It
may be argued that one of the reasons for the experienced gap in commitment among the
teachers is due to their post-materialistic views. These views may not mix well with their
experience of working within an inflexible and rigid environment.

According to Seeholm and Salomonsson (2006) employeeship may be contradictory to
post-materialism in the sense that employeeship entails loyalty towards leaders and colleagues
while post-materialism entails autonomy. This view conforms with the teachers experiences of
having a hard time maintaining the same sense of employeeship as prior to the strategic changes.
The teachers are not intentionally counteracting the organization as they try to stay loyal towards
both their leaders and their colleagues. They do, however, at the same time disagree with the
strategies for the change process and put a lot of attention into finding balance. Thus, the
teachers try to maintain their sense of employeeship, but their individual values are interfering
with their capability to stay on track with employeeship.

Degrees of employeeship
According to Møller (1994) the teachers in the current study do not exert employeeship, thus
the question arises whether they actually experience employeeship? As their experiences go
against some of the aspects of Moller’s view on employeeship, it can be argued that what the
teachers experience cannot be employeeship. Nonetheless, the teachers do strive at being the
best employees they can be. They do try to be committed, co-operate and be responsible. But,
due to their current situation (the strategic change) they are not capable thereof or have the
energy to look at their own employeeship as an ideal; as something to strive for. In their
experience, they are simply struggling to hold their heads above water and try their best at being
committed, to co-operate and being responsible. Thus, the experience of employeeship is
present. It is, however, a modified version of the ideal of employeeship.

Tengblad (2009) found four degrees of employeeship and they are interesting in this
connection. How the teachers actually experience their employeeship may be related to his
notion of degrees. The teachers in the current study appear to have changed their degree of
employeeship during the strategic change. Some of the teachers have the experience of a shift
from being a specialized employee and “being knocked back” to an adaptive employee (novice,
passive, following the flow). They have the experience of having to start from scratch and not
being capable of being the teacher they want to be or to work at the same degree as prior to the
change. Other teachers have the experience of shifting from being an enterprising employee to
being an adaptive employee. The common denominator for the teachers is that they experience
a shift in the degree of their employeeship. They experience a necessity to be passive in certain
aspects of the change and follow the flow. At the same time they are intent on finding their way
back to other degrees of employeeship. This conforms with Tengblad’s notion that
employeeship is mouldable and contextual in nature. The teachers’ experiences of employeeship
appear to be mouldable and contextual as they have shifted during the change process and they
are trying to shape their employeeship in the context of the new environment.

Finding the right train
How employees experience their capability of employeeship depends on the contextual setting
in which it is experienced. The purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the
experienced capability of employeeship during a strategic change and the hermeneutic approach provided the necessary framework to examine the experience in a contextual setting. The study shows that organizational changes affect not only organizational structures but also the lived worlds of the employees. A strategic change thus not only changes how employees experience the organization as a working environment, it also changes how they experience their own capabilities of navigating and learning within that environment.

Organizations have a tendency to view employeeship as a static concept that can be taught (Hästén & Tengblad, 2006; Tengblad, 2006, 2009). According to Hase and Tay (2004) learning new competencies cannot be dictated by the organization and employees can therefore not be expected to immediately be capable of adapting to the changes made to the structure of the organization. Thus, organizations need to look at supporting their employees in becoming capable before they focus on ventilating their expectations and demanding that employees jump aboard a moving train. Employees need to feel capable of developing their competencies before any actual learning takes place (Hase & Tay, 2004). According to Jakobsen et al. (2010) leaders think they can provide tools for employees to develop their competencies and achieve an ideal employeeship, however, in the current study they do not feel capable of achieving an ideal employeeship. Both the current study and the study by Jakobsen et al. show that organizations may take a misdirected approach when expecting their employees to be capable of readily jumping aboard a train. To expect that competencies to navigate in an unknown environment is a given to being a “good employee”. Organizations may therefore need to take on new measures when dealing with the experience of employeeship among their employees. They need to find the train of employee capability and not just the organizational train of employeeship.

Suggestions for future studies
As post-material views may play a role in the experienced employeeship, studies considering this aspect may provide a greater understanding. The current study only discusses the concept of post-materialism, but from a Nordic perspective, it is an interesting aspect in the research into employeeship. As Scandinavians are more prone to have high demands in their work life (Tengblad, 2006) they may well have a different experience of their capability of employeeship during changes than employees from other countries. Studies researching the element of post-materialism in connection to capability of employeeship may therefore provide a greater insight to employeeship as a phenomenon. A mixed method of questionnaires on employeeship and interviews going into depth may also strengthen the reliability of a future study as employees may answer more freely in a questionnaire than face to face with the researcher.

The majority of prior studies have taken an employeeship-leadership perspective and leaders are a vital part of the work place as the interaction between employees and leaders is essential for work relations and organizational enterprise (Bertlett, 2011). A study taking leadership experiences of a strategic change into account may therefore add to the understanding of how the employees experience their capability of employeeship. By studying, the parts of experienced leadership in relation to the experienced employeeship during changes, a better understanding of the steps to be taken during organizational changes may be reached. A phenomenographic approach to a future study may provide aspects to additional understanding of how employeeship is experienced. Looking at how experiences may vary among employees during a strategic change may provide better tools for the management to charge capability of employeeship and focus on areas needing most attention during times of change.
References


Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide
The guide has been translated from Danish into English. The questions do therefore not have the exact same wording as during the interview sessions.

Background questions
- Age.
- Can you briefly tell about your background as a teacher? (Subjects, age groups, employed how long).

Commitment
- Can you tell about you view of the teaching profession?
- What was your experience of your work prior to the reform changes?
- What have been the greatest changes for you? Can you give an example?
- In your opinion, what will the changes mean for the future of the school?
- Has your personal involvement in your work been changed? In what way?

Co-operation
- What was your experience of the general communication about the changes?
- What is your experience of the atmosphere at your school? (Colleagues, leadership)
- What is your experience of the support among colleagues?
- What is your experience of the support from your leaders?
- Has the workload changed among the colleagues? (Increase, decrease?) What is your experience thereof?

Responsibility
- Can you briefly tell about your approach to the recent changes? (Work procedures, preparation, etc.)
- What is your experience of your current situation? (Autonomy, flexibility, influence)
- What is/was your role in the change process?
- Did you have time to reflect on the changes? Can you give an example?
- What are in your opinion the most positive and the most negative aspects of the change?