Scrutinizing the Barriers to Organizational Change
- Analyzing the Soft Barriers to Change from an External Change Agent Perspective

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ABSTRACT

About 50-70 % of all change initiatives fail and one reason for this is soft barriers, which mainly depend on people. These barriers are challenging to manage because individuals react to change in different ways. Due to these difficulties, companies look for help from consultants, who are perceived to have wide knowledge about change. Hence, the authors have studied the change process and the soft barriers from an external change agent perspective by interviewing nine experienced consultants. The results indicate that no phase in the change process is prominently more problematic than another, instead each phase is the outcome of prior phases. If the critical barriers in each phase are considered the change can be successful. Several soft barriers to change have been identified; lack of goals and vision, no demand for measurements and follow-ups, and a too large and homogenous project group without relevant competence or a clear driver of the change. Additionally, the findings suggest that top management is specifically problematic due to that they are often not united, are impatient and struggle with power and politics. Thus, the study indicates that resistance often starts from the top, which affects the rest of the organization and the outcome of the change.

**KEY WORDS:** Change Management, Organizational Change, Organizational Barriers, Soft Barriers, Change Processes, External Change Agents, Consultants
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1. INTRODUCTION

_For every action, there is an equal and opposite re-action’ - Newton’s Third Law_

Even if Isaac Newton’s Third Law of Motion is discussed within the area of physics, its basic principles might explain the results of change initiatives. This perspective demonstrates the fundamental challenges with change; by implementing a change (an action), you get resistance (a re-action) from the members within the organization.

1.1 Organizational Change

To succeed in a dynamic business environment and gain a competitive advantage, companies need to be able to change and reach the full value of their transformation (Aiken & Keller 2000). These changes can be everything from gradual changes to more drastic changes of for example processes or systems (Safar, Zavod, Fulop, Defields & Dowd 2006). Even though companies realize that change is a crucial factor to survive, research indicates that 50-70 % of all change initiatives fail (Kotter 1995; Bruch, Gerber & Maier 2005; Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn & Christe-Zeyse 2013). We believe that one reason for the consistently high rate of failure is organizational barriers (Bovey & Hede 2001; Smith 2005). Barriers are synonymously associated with obstacles and challenges that hinder the path to successful change. It is crucial that companies define the barriers that exist within the organization to successfully change, where both hard barriers and soft barriers can be found. (Kotter 1995) It is not uncommon that there is a deeper focus on the hard barriers to change, more technical elements, than the soft barriers, more human elements (Bovey & Hede 2001). Individuals react to change in different ways, why the soft barriers to change are often difficult to manage. Research has concluded that successful change depends largely on people and less on technology and that “the soft stuff is hard”. (Jørgensen, Owen & Neus 2008) Since organizations still find it difficult to manage barriers and change is imperative, we believe that there is great relevance to study these soft barriers in-depth.

There is a growth of consulting firms, which indicates that organizations are finding it difficult to handle change (Parry, Kirsch, Carey & Shaw 2014). Additionally, research indicates that many organizations find the soft aspects to be the most challenging. There is a

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demand for identification of critical elements in the change process and practical confirmation on how organizations can handle change in a successful way. Scholars agree that the change process itself involves complexity. (Jørgensen et al. 2008) Hence, as of today it is difficult for researchers as well as for practitioners to understand the width of these critical elements for example the soft barriers; which they are, why they occur and when these different barriers can be an actual problem (Bovey & Hede 2001; Smith 2005; Parry et al. 2014). Our aim is to study the change process together with an identification of soft barriers to change.

- **Research question 1:** Which are the soft barriers to organizational change?
- **Research question 2:** Why are certain soft barriers to organizational change more problematic and more common than others?
- **Research question 3:** Which phase of the change process is perceived to be the most problematic?

There is an entire business evolving around change management and consulting firms have not hesitated to introduce their own programs and tools to needing companies (Christensen, Wang & van Bever 2013). Due to the difficulties with implementing change initiatives companies often bring in help from experts outside the organization. It is especially significant to consider the external change agents, the consultants, when studying the barriers to change because they are claimed to be more effective in change processes than the employees themselves (Ginsberg & Abrahamson 1991). Consultants are perceived to have wide knowledge of change processes due to their exposure of different organizations and industries (Ben-Gal & Tzafrir 2011). Most studies investigate change from an internal angle, for example the employees’ perspective (Bovey & Hede 2001; Parry et al. 2014) or CEO’s and project manager’s perspective (Armenakis & Harris 2002; Jørgensen et al. 2008). We believe that by studying barriers to change from an external change agent perspective, a consultant's, we can enrich the study and add valuable and complementary information to the field of change management.
1.2 Aim & Contribution
An illustrative oversight is argued to facilitate the identification of barriers. The objective and purpose of our thesis is therefore to identify the soft barriers to change and illustrate the central phases of the change process. We aim to investigate deeper by interviewing experts about their thoughts of critical phases and common or problematic soft barriers. Our thesis will provide practitioners with a clearer understanding of the most critical phases of change, and which barriers that need to be observed at every stage. The fundamental objective is to bridge the gap between academic frameworks and intuitive practices and to increase the likelihood of permanent and successful change initiatives empirically. Additionally, our contribution is to add valuable insights from change experts theoretically.

1.3 Delimitations
The focus in this study will not be on one specific type of company or industry. Thus, why different internal or external company or industry specific characteristics will not be taken into consideration. Emphasis is not put on any particular kind of change, instead we focus on the general term of organizational change. Additionally, we look at organizational change as a strategic move by the company. We believe that leaders and managers have significant influence over key factors within an organization, such as the people, structures and processes and therefore can plan somewhat ahead. Change is usually investigated from a revolutionary or evolutionary perspective. We have chosen to follow many scholars’ view on change as evolutionary (e.g Lewin 1958; Kotter 1995; Armenakis, Harris & Feild 1999). This means that change is perceived as gradual and slow, and can be divided into different stages because this perspective embraces the members of the organization’s reaction through the change process (Miller 1982).

1.4 Disposition
The first part of every section will be discussing the change process and its phases. In the second part, reactions to change and soft barriers will be identified and discussed. Additionally, in the second part explanations to why some barriers are more common or problematic will be reviewed. These will be studied first from a theoretical perspective, then from an empirical perspective and finally we give a comparison and analysis between the two.
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Change Process & its Phases

We will begin with a presentation of the change process to provide an overview. In order to answer our research question about which phase of the change process is perceived to be the most problematic, we begin by identifying and defining the phases. One of the most prominent and central change models was developed by Lewin (1958), which will build the foundation of our conceptual framework and conceptual model. This is referred to as the Three-Phase Model and is used as the basis for many modern change models. This might be due to the fact that the change process is very complex but this model perceives change as a linear process (Armenakis & Bedeian 1999), which is argued to add a dimension of simplicity and practical relevance (Levasseur 2001). By embracing this perspective on change and explaining the stages, we can facilitate an identification of critical factors within each step and the most problematic phase.

1. The first stage, the unfreezing stage, is the most important stage since it requires an understanding of the current situation within the organization. The unfreezing stage deals with preparation and motivation before the change ideally can take place.

2. The next step is the change phase where the inner movement will create a reaction to the change and the needed adjustments are made. The members within the organization are ‘unfrozen’ and moving towards a new way of behaving and working, where support and communication is crucial.

3. The final step is the refreezing stage, which suggests stability once the changes have been made. The refreezing stage should involve acceptance from the organization and the change should become the new norm. However, institutionalization takes time and happens gradually.

We perceive that Lewin’s model includes both drivers of and barriers to change. The driving forces are to push the organization into a state or direction in which the change can occur. Lewin stated that restraining forces, barriers, are hindering change and they push the organization into the opposite direction. Despite the fact that Lewin mentioned restraining forces during the change process, less emphasis is put on identifying them. His focus remained on the change process itself. Notwithstanding, Lewin’s work has been highly appraised, but has also met some criticism during the years. Kanter, Stein and Jick (1992)
criticized the Three-Phase Model for having a rather static concept and argued that change is instead emergent and dynamic. Furthermore, Lewin’s model is aimed to understand planned changes in relatively stable organizations but the critics have proclaimed that change is complex and should therefore not be treated as a linear process (Dawson 1994). Nevertheless, in our opinion the Three-Phase Model gives a clear, yet simplified, understanding of the change process.

Below is our interpretation of the change process mentioned by Lewin (1958). The phases are renamed to give a more practical understanding of which critical elements each phase involves. The preparation phase is before the actual change occurs, where an understanding of the organization is created. In the implementation phase the actual change begins and the organization starts moving towards the new. The last phase is the institutionalization phase where the organization embraces and accepts the change, and it becomes the new norm.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1. Illustrating how the change process and its phases are perceived in this study.*

2.2 Soft Barriers to Change

2.2.1 Resistance

There is a vast amount of literature about negative attitudes towards organizational change from the employees in a company. When going through a transformation, resistance from the members of the organization was the most mentioned obstacle in a study of 500 companies by Bovey and Hede (2001). Additionally, more than 50 % of these 500 companies stated that managing resistance was tough. The authors further argued that resistance is a natural reaction to change since it involves moving from the known to the unknown. Employees have diverse capabilities and readiness when it comes to adjusting to a change initiative. Unreasonable thoughts, such as worries, were some of the most collateral aspects to resistance. The risk of resistance in the organization is higher the more illogical and unreasonable thoughts the employees are having. A problem is that companies instead of strategically managing resistance, are fighting it. Bergström, Styhre and Thilander (2014) explained that it is a
mechanism to cope with inadequately executed change initiatives. Additionally, the authors stated that there are many ways in which this resistance can express itself. It can result in desperate reactions such as sabotage, resentment, doubt, distancing or disappointment. It may also be revealed as panic, anxiety and frustration, resulting in absence from work and declining job performance (Safar et al. 2006).

Resistance has been identified as a reaction that hinders successful change that in turn depends on how well an organization handles specific and concrete soft barriers to change. We believe that in order to decrease the level of resistance from the employees these soft barriers have to be identified. Soft barriers to change that lead to resistance will be discussed below and are italicized, and then summarized in appendix 1.

2.2.2 Soft Barriers in Preparation Phase

Several soft barriers to change can be identified as critical in preparation phase. It is essential to develop and create a sense of urgency around the need for change in the beginning of the process. To create a sense of urgency an honest dialogue and discussion of potential threats and opportunities were suggested. Additionally, it is of importance to define a clear vision early in the project. Without an understandable vision, a change initiative can easily be perceived as confusing and unclear and may lead the company in the wrong direction. Moreover, companies need to bring together a team, a coalition, to lead the change process and to continue building urgency and momentum around the need for transformation. (Kotter 1995) According to Kotter this is vital in the earlier stages of a change initiative, why we categorized it as important in the preparation phase.

Bruch et al. (2005) did a case study on a large company where the focus lied within the preparation phase (pre-implementation). Referring back to Kotter’s discussion about a coalition, an important part of that team are employees who know how to promote, implement and drive the change throughout the entire process. These people can be change agents. *If the significance of these effective change agents is not understood and the key people are not identified, the change process will have difficulties moving forward.* Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) also emphasized the importance of change agents, when they were investigating internal change agents through the development of a model. Their model explains, among other things, the importance of change agents, how change agents influence the organization and their credibility. The authors further stated that *change agents need to*
understand the employees’ behavior, attitudes, mindsets and individual objectives before implementing the change.

An area we identified as problematic in the literature and critical in the beginning of a change process is communication. In order for people to feel committed to the change, an aligned and clear vision needs to be communicated. If this vision is communicated correctly, negative feelings against the change could be reduced. (Parry et al. 2014) The vision can be communicated through a change message. Except for the vision, two other aspects should be included; the difference between present position and desired position, and the organization’s ability to change. If there is no articulated change message or the change message is not well communicated, the change recipients may regard the change as non-engaging. (Armenakis et al. 1993)

The purpose of the change needs to include the long-term perspective. Additionally, bad decision-making when planning and implementing the change can have durable consequences. The resources need to be planned and organized in order to achieve the objectives. If this is not considered, it may be difficult to create a sense of urgency in the first stage of the process and motivation during the implementation. (Bruch et al. 2005) However, it is not only the strategic goals that have to be recognized and considered in a change initiative. It is of great importance that the members’ capacity and ability to handle changes are included (Safar et al. 2006).

When the initiators of the change are discussing the process they need to consider the existing traditions, norms and values within the organization (Bruch et al. 2005). Phelan (2005) on the other hand stated that by fostering a culture in alignment with the change, uncertainty and anxiety can be reduced and new norms and values created, since the culture can be seen as ‘a shared belief system of predictable behavior’. We could identify that Armenakis and Lang’s (2014) findings were similar to Bruch’s et al., since they claimed that leaders on top levels need to accurately diagnose the culture. If they fail to recognize the correct underlying assumptions, beliefs and values, the new culture will not be aligned with the change.

\[\text{The change message is an announcement message concerning the upcoming change projects dedicated to the organization’s members. Apart from the announcement, the purpose of the change message is often to provide information to create readiness and motivation to adopt and institutionalize the change. The change message is often delivered by a change agent.} \] (Armenakis & Harris 2002)
2.2.3 Soft Barriers in Implementation Phase

The guiding coalition mentioned by Kotter (1995), includes different groups of people driving the change. An important group is top management and the leader. Bruch et al. (2005) discussed top management and the leader with regard to credibility. The authors claimed that top managers should only do what they feel committed to and fully support, in order to show credibility to the members of the organization. A discrepancy between what has been said and what has been done can lead to negative energy and reinforce the critics of the change. Smollan (2013) specifically investigated trust when change occurs and emphasized its importance during a change initiative. The author said that it is essential that the employees trust the leader, in order for them to embrace the change. Lack of commitment from top management is also discussed in several papers. In a study by Jørgensen et al. for IBM (2008) about managers’ ability to handle change, it is evident that this is one of the most significant challenges when implementing change projects. The authors stated that leaders play a key role in sustaining commitment and building legitimacy in the change process. This can be connected to Barrat-Pugh, Bahn and Gakere’s (2013) conclusions where they claimed that lack of management and leadership skills is considered major barriers to change since the change recipients are in great need of support throughout the transformation.

As key people in change projects change agents can be seen as supporters and promoters of change. Furthermore, change initiatives would not be successful unless they manage to motivate the employees and enhance their confidence. It is crucial that the change agents think about the way they are behaving, and that they do not limit their employees’ individual freedom and communicates clearly. The change agents need to be able to listen and learn from the members of the organization in order to understand how to approach and communicate with them. (Klonk, Lehmann-Willenbrock & Kauffeld 2014)

In the literature we also found that middle managers are identified as key people in a change project. Buchanan, Claydon and Doyle (1999) studied change from a managerial perspective and claimed that if the middle managers do not have the right expertise or capacity to handle change, it could affect the employees’ attitudes towards change. Bruch et al. (2005) also discussed managers and their decision-making. The authors stated that it is important for managers to make decisions. It is also important that the decisions are made in the right order and that they are focused on significant aspects. Managers sometimes fail to consider the resistance factor in the decision-making, and sometimes also forget to include all relevant
members in the organization. This can inhibit the employees’ commitment to the process. Bergström et al. (2014) studied resistance and mentioned that middle managers have to clarify the purpose and explain suitable ways to change. Additionally, middle managers can help employees to see the change from the initiators’ perspective, hence, translate top-down. However, the managers tend to get contradicting messages from top management that have to be forwarded to the employees, which can be seen as an indication of managers being stuck in the middle.

Another group that should be discussed is Human Resources (HR). We have found an increasing number of scholars that have stressed the relevance of having support from HR in change processes. The role of HR is changing due to drastic increases in change rates in organizations, even though the role of HR varies from one organization to another. However, in the context of change, HR responsibility involves supporting the needs of the organization by being a change mentor. (Jorritsma & Wilderom 2012; Ullah 2012) Barrat-Pugh et al. (2013) are also discussing the role of HR and are in alignment with mentioned researchers. The authors claimed that HR are mainly equipped to support, coordinate and motivate both employees and managers, are often the link between management and employees, and act as ‘gap reducers’. By having HR professionals that realize that managing change is challenging and emotional for the change recipients, resistance in the organization could be reduced.

Christensen (2014) emphasized communication as a recognized tool when implementing change. The author investigated communication in a change setting and said that unstructured communication and poor quality of information content are critical barriers to change. It is the quality and not the amount of information that can reduce the employees’ insecurity. Additionally, in order to reduce resistance the information has to consider the uncertainty of the employees. (Allen, Irmer, Jimmieson & Bordia 2007) Higgs and Rowland (2005), who studied leadership in change initiatives, stated that the leader of a team, a division or an organization needs to frame change in a pedagogical way. Leaders that lack communication skills might suffer from ineffective leadership (Jacobs et al. 2013). Both key information and the importance of the change process must be communicated in order to keep the employees’ attention (Bruch et al. 2005).
2.2.4 Soft Barriers in Institutionalization Phase

Kotter (1995) argued that change projects sometimes fail due to declaring the victory too early. He explained that a common mistake is to say ‘thank you, good bye’ to the consultants too quickly which may result in that the organization is going back to how it was before initiating the change. Parry et al. (2014) stated that *top managers often simplify the requirements from the employees, request too much and set extreme deadlines*. This gives an indication that the managers want the change to be done faster than what may be possible. Hence, this could lead to confusion and stress for the employees and result in resistant behavior. Additionally, in order for the change to become permanent, top management and/or change agents must not forget to *reduce the amount of activities that counteract each other* (Safar et al. 2006).

Kotter (1995) suggested that instead of declaring victory, leaders should focus on short-term wins to gain credibility and trust from the members within the organization. Short-term wins show that the organization is moving forward. The commitment level can continue to stay high, which will facilitate institutionalization of the change. Kotter stated that it is the managers’ responsibility to set objectives and establish goals early in the process in a structured way in order to ultimately reach the goal. Support, trust, and commitment are all critical factors for leaders to keep the motivation high through the process and the institutionalization. Therefore, according to Higgs and Rowland (2005), *supportive and empowering leadership styles* are preferred. Another way to keep the employees motivated and engaged in the process is to illustrate key information by monitoring the change. This can also facilitate institutionalization. (Bruch et al. 2005)

We found culture to be a quite researched soft barrier in order to get the change institutionalized. The culture in an organization influences its members on how to act and behave, but also their beliefs and values, and may therefore become a barrier to change. There are fundamental implicit and accepted assumptions, which are the foundation of the culture. (Armenakis & Lang 2014) It is of importance that the *change process is aligned with the culture*. Some change processes are suitable for dynamic cultures while some fit better with rigid cultures (Bruch et al. 2005). The main goal with the change process is to make it ‘the way we do things around here’. By making the employees embrace the change as a social norm it will eventually become institutionalized. (Kotter 1995)
2.3 Conceptual model

The figure below (figure 2) is visualizing the way we summarize the literature about soft barriers to change. The different phases are also included and when the barriers seem to affect resistance that, in turn, leads to failed change projects. In the preparation phase we can see that it is crucial to identify key people to drive the change, understand the current situation and organization, and clarify where the organization should be heading. In the implementation phase communication, support and commitment seem to be essential while the institutionalization phase involves barriers that hinder the change from becoming the new norm. The creation of the conceptual model below was done in order for us to facilitate our research of these barriers empirically.

Figure 2. Illustrating our conceptual model and soft barriers identified in previous literature.
3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1 Research Design

The objective of our study is to present a descriptive model that includes the central phases of the change process to illustrate the most critical phase. Additionally, we hope to identify the soft barriers to change, where we have added valuable insight and comments from consultants. We began our research by analyzing the literature and we initially reviewed two academic journals\textsuperscript{iii}. Based on the information from these we found other interesting journals and papers linked to our research area. Together they have created our conceptual framework. In order to extend our knowledge, we worked in parallel with complementing theory with critical areas mentioned by the consultants.

We chose a method that provided the consultants with an environment where they could share their thoughts in an open way and in this context semi-structured interviews were preferable (Hannabuss 1996; Qu & Dumay 2011). We are trying to capture the holistic understanding of the soft barriers and interviews are argued to be preferable when creating an overview of a phenomenon (Miles & Huberman 1994). Moreover, in previous research on organizational change, several studies using semi-structured interviews can be found (e.g. Higgs & Rowland 2005; Allen et al. 2007; Price & Whiteley 2014). Our interviews were more like a discussion where we asked the consultants how they experienced change. We identified specific areas in the literature in advance, which is claimed to help systemize the process and to help the interviewers to focus on the key issues (Hannabuss 1996). We formulated questions based on these areas, which were mixed with follow-up and intuitive questions. This is argued to receive more elaborate answers according to Qu and Dumay (2011). We had to consider several significant aspects when we were conducting the interviews in order to gather as valid data as possible. Firstly, staying focused on key issues and asking questions in a non-judgmental way were important (Hannabuss 1996). Secondly, it was essential to ask clarifying questions, when necessary, and to have an appropriate balance between direct and indirect questions (Qu & Dumay 2011). Similar to other researchers using semi-structured interviews (e.g. Allen et al. 2007), we tried to phrase the questions in a way that minimized the risk of leading the consultant in a certain direction. Additionally, we asked the consultants about their interpretation of specific theoretical concepts that we are using in this study. This helped align the consultants and us. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009; Qu & Dumay 2011)

\textsuperscript{iii} Journal of Organizational Change Management and Journal of Change Management
After the interviews we let the consultants read the gathered data, in order to assure that we did not misinterpret the information given to us (Allen et al. 2007).

After the semi-structured interviews we had an observational element where we asked the consultants to map out 25 barriers (see appendix 1), which we had identified in previous literature, into the process map. This was done so that we could identify which phase involved most soft barriers and hence also distinguish the most problematic phase.

3.2 The Consultants

Several organizational change researchers have claimed that it is of importance to include change agents as a variable when investigating change (e.g. Ginsberg & Abrahamson 1991; Leppitt 2006). They have to act as objective, unbiased enablers of change and have consultative roles including counseling and coaching (Bourantas, Vakola, Gouras & Nikolaou 2007). Additionally, a change agent can be a professional resource that empowers the members of the organization, a management support function, or an analyst (Leppitt 2006). Change agents can be divided into two categories, internal and external. The internal change agents are members of the organization, employees, while the external change agents are people outside the organization, for example consultants. Kotter (1995) recommended that organizations should use consultants as an approach to challenge the status quo. The consultants are the focus of this study. There are indications that consultants are knowledgeable in finding ways to implement flexible and comprehensive change processes. Consultants may also be clever at finding the right solution to a problem, and at developing, exploiting and combining solutions (Case, Vandenberg & Meredith 1990). Due to the consultants’ external view of change, they may not have the same understanding of how the change process is actually experienced by the members in the organization. However, we believe that they have an outsider perspective and may have therefore more objective opinions and experiences. Hence, including consultants could still add other valuable findings to this field. Information about the specific consultants in our study will be presented in the section ‘Data Gathering’.
3.3 Operationalization

3.3.1 Change Process & its Phases

To answer our research question about which phase that is perceived to be the most problematic, we used Lewin’s process model as the foundation in an observational element. Soft barriers to change were identified by us in the literature and then categorized into one of the three phases, depending on how the different areas were discussed in previous literature. At the end of the interviews the consultants were asked to map and cluster these barriers into the process map. First, we studied the amount of barriers that the consultants mapped into specific phases in the process map. Secondly, we also asked the consultants about their perception of the different phases during the interviews in order to somewhat balance the different phases and the barriers in each phase against each other.

3.3.2 Soft Barriers to Change

To answer our research question about which the soft barriers are, we begun with discussing resistance. Additionally, we identified the most frequently mentioned barriers by the consultants, using our conceptual model as guidance. Hence, we analyzed the transcripts and highlighted both resistance and the most frequently mentioned barriers by several of the consultants. We will equate most frequently mentioned barriers with more common or problematic soft barriers to change. In order to answer our research question about why certain barriers more problematic or common than others, we asked intuitive and follow-up questions using the most mentioned barriers as guidance. We also asked follow-up questions when the consultants emphasized certain barriers during the interviews. We looked for explanatory factors that could illuminate why certain barriers were specifically highlighted.

3.3.3 Operationalization Model

Since our purpose is to study soft barriers to change and the chosen method is semi-structured interviews we have chosen to translate previous research into investigative parameters. By identifying specific factors we can create a link between the literature and our empirical findings. The areas we have studied throughout this thesis will facilitate the formulation of our interview questions to ensure that all parts of the conceptual model are considered. The model below illustrates which data collection method we used and how we will identify key information in order for us to answer our research questions.
Operationalizing our conceptual framework into investigative factors is an attempt to assure ourselves that we are studying what we aimed to examine according to our research questions. This was done in order to increase the validity of the study. In regards to interviews, reliability issues are usually a concern since the data can be claimed to be non-standardized, complex and dynamic. However, we did a combination of a standardized (specific themes decided beforehand) and a non-standardized approach (intuitive and follow-up questions) when interviewing. Additionally, we operationalized previous research to visualize to the reader how we came up with our standardized interview questions, which facilitates a replicate of our study and may therefore also increase the reliability. (Saunders et al. 2009)

### 3.4 Data Gathering

To obtain a sample for the empirical study, we began by defining the kind of consulting firm that works with planned strategic organizational change initiatives. We searched for Swedish companies that would fit our description of a consulting firm. Additionally, we preferred to conduct the interviews face-to-face, why the location of the firm was taken into account in the company selection. All the consulting firms found were contacted by e-mail, either directly to a consultant or to an official company email. After a first response, we sent a brief description

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<tr>
<td>3: Which phase of the change process is perceived to be the most problematic?</td>
<td>The process map and semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Amount of barriers and how the consultants weight different barriers and phases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Operationalization model illustrating how we will investigate this empirically.
of the area we had decided to investigate, the purpose of the study and which kind of questions we intended to ask during the interviews. Similar strategies have been used by researchers who have conducted semi-structured interviews in order to prepare the interviewees (e.g. Price & Whiteley 2014). We got a positive response from nine consultants. Three of the interviews were held over the phone. There were several disadvantages with phone interviews; we could not observe the interviewee when responding to our questions, the answers may have been less detailed (Bryman & Bell 2005) and the interviewees could not help us with the observational element. However, we believe that the additional six interviews will add the necessary data. The interviews were held during a period of three weeks, each interview lasted between 45-90 minutes and they were all recorded and partially transcripted. Due to time limitations we were not able to fully transcribe the interviews. By at least partially transcribing we tried to reduce the risk of misinterpretation and provide higher reliability for the reader (Saunders et al. 2009).

As mentioned in the first section in the Methodology chapter, it is of great importance to include experts when investigating organizational change, who have developed a comprehensive understanding of the change process (Kotter 1995). All consultants are in one way or another working to help clients to implement change initiatives. The sample was therefore selected partially by us finding the right consultants judging by the information on their websites, or by the organizations themselves based on the information we gave them in the e-mail. Out of the companies and consultants contacted, nine consultants agreed to participate in an interview and they come from five different consulting firms. After nine interviews we believed that we had reached some level of saturation because we began to see a pattern where some aspects and barriers were mentioned by most consultants. For more information about the consultants see table below (table 2).
**Table 2. Description of the selected consultants.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Area of expertise</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Years as consultant</th>
<th>Current title</th>
<th>Additional info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Strategy &amp; organizational change</td>
<td>Energy industry and public sector</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Partner &amp; Management Consultant</td>
<td>Has written 4 reference books in change management and organizational management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Organizational change and business development</td>
<td>Engineering industry and public sector</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Senior partner</td>
<td>Business Manager for Management Consulting department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Enhancement of customer experience, leadership training and organizational development</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Senior Consultant</td>
<td>Has a background in Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Leading the company, consulting and sales</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>CEO, Business Consulting &amp; Senior Consultant</td>
<td>Has been the CEO for the last 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Improvement management and leadership</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Project Manager (at client) and Management Consultant</td>
<td>Has over 40 years of experience from improvement management in several large firms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Change management and CRM</td>
<td>Healthcare, pharmaceutical, telecom, transport &amp; infrastructure sector</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Senior Advisor</td>
<td>Studying medicine on the side, hence combining healthcare with consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Business development ERP systems</td>
<td>IT-industry Yellow pages</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>System/Software Developer with international experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Strategy, organizational change, culture analysis and business development</td>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Management consultant</td>
<td>Has 9 years of experience working with organizational change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Business development</td>
<td>Banking, finance and insurance</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>Management consultant</td>
<td>Additional areas of expertise; process analysis, requirements analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Data Analysis

We had different methods to analyze our results and to answer our research questions. To answer our research question concerning the most problematic phase we had a deductive approach where we used previous research as guidance and compared the consultants’ perspective to the literature. Furthermore, the consultants mapped out the identified soft barriers (see appendix 1) from research in the process map, which was analyzed together with previous findings. Further, the semi-structured interviews also gave an indication of what the
consultants thought of each phase. Some implications arose when trying to answer our third research question. Empirically it might not be as evident when an organization enters a new phase. During the interviews we became aware that the consultants are not always involved in change projects in the institutionalization phase, something that was also mentioned by Kotter (1995). The change becomes embraced and accepted as the new norm in this last phase, however, it can take a long time before the change is fully institutionalized. We got the impression that most of the consultants in our study stay until the organization starts embracing the change, however, since they may leave before the change is fully institutionalized it may affect their experience and expertise of the last phase. Hence, this will also affect our findings. Due to that we have decided to look at the end of the institutionalization phase as when the change almost has become the new norm. Since researchers, consultants and we may perceive the transition between phases differently it can affect our results. Because of this limitation, we created our conceptual model to illustrate what every phase includes. Additionally, we asked the consultants about their perception of the change process and its phases, to make sure our views were aligned.

To answer our research questions concerning the soft barriers to change and why some are more common or problematic than other, we had an inductive approach where the consultants openly shared their experience of change. We wanted the consultants to discuss difficulties with change initiatives and see which barriers that were mentioned top of mind. We identified more common or problematic soft barriers to change by analyzing the number of consultants mentioning specific barriers and by identifying when certain barriers were particularly highlighted during the interviews. However, a common disadvantage when conducting interviews is generalization issues (Saunders et al. 2009). An important note is that we are not interviewing the companies that have gone through change initiatives but instead consultants that have wide knowledge of a variety of change initiatives. These experts have already drawn general conclusions based on their experience, which we believe will add richness and depth to our results and can give generalization more credibility. Our research’s primary aim is to provide indicators of which the soft barriers are and how they are perceived empirically. Furthermore, since we do not limit our study to any specific type of organizational change, industry or company we believe that our conclusions and results can be applicable to many different companies.
4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1. Change Process & its Phases

We have decided to begin with the results from the observational element since it provides a holistic view of the change process. We combined the results from the process map with the consultants’ additional thoughts about the different phases.

4.1.1 The Process Map

We could identify inconsistency when the consultants all answered differently concerning where the soft barriers occur in the change process, so we decided to exclude those. We have determined to only present the barriers that all consultants or all except one consultant agreed on being critical in the same phase. By looking at the process map (figure 3), one can see that the consultants agreed on most barriers in the implementation and preparation phase. Organizations seem to struggle in the preparation phase with change messages, clarifying the purpose and diagnosing the culture. That top managers are demanding and impatient also appear to be an issue in the preparation phase. In the implementation phase, barriers that concern the change agent seem to be critical. Managerial decision-making and the leader’s communication skills also appear to be of essence. The only barrier that a majority of the consultants agreed on being critical in the institutionalization phase is the lack of support from HR.

![Process Map](image)

*Figure 3. Process map illustrating critical phases for some of the barriers.*
4.1.2 Problematic Phases

The consultants had varying opinions concerning which phase of the change process that is likely to be the most problematic. According to respondent 7, planning is easy but several of the respondents revealed that planning and preparation are often not carried out or not focused on (if companies do not involve consultants) (e.g. Respondent 8). Respondent 8 described that a common mistake done by organizations is to rush into the implementation phase, which could have durable consequences for the outcome of the change. The planning must be done in order for the implementation phase to go well (Respondent 6). According to respondent 5 and 8 the implementation phase needs less work. Respondent 4 on the other hand, mentioned that the implementation phase often involves conflict. Furthermore, respondent 4 argued that this phase is problematic as it requires changing behaviors.

*I believe it is comforting for them [the clients] that we support them in the implementation phase. Because it is often a long and heavy phase, there are many people involved, and it is in this phase where the first line managers need help too [...] Additionally, if you have not done your homework in the planning phase it will be evident during this phase.* (Respondent 6)

However, respondent 5 did not share this view and argued that everyone can implement, but preparation and follow-up are more difficult. For example organizations are missing to set targets or goals in the planning phase which makes it difficult to evaluate the change in the end (Respondent 7 & 9). Respondents 3 and 5 emphasized the importance of only measuring relevant factors. With regards to the institutionalization phase, respondent 8 mentioned that when they, as consultants, leave the company they never know if the change will be permanent since it may take time and not be evident right away. The consultant further described the final phase as a result of the first two, inclining that good preparation and implementation will lead to institutionalization of the change. However, after the implementation it is easy to slip back to old routines and it can be difficult to get the change embedded in the organization (Respondent 7). The consultant further argued that institutionalization is perhaps the most difficult phase because it requires continuous repetition.
4.2 Soft Barriers to Change

The results below are based on the interviews with the consultants regarding which the soft barriers to change are and why they are perceived common or problematic.

4.2.1 Resistance

Respondent 8 and 9 argued that the foundation of barriers is the fear of change and that barriers are related to people and behaviors, including those who drive the change. Respondent 6 claimed that some might be change fatigue with an ‘it-was-better-before’ approach leading to the inertia of staying in the safe old organization. People may be resistant because they are afraid of what will happen next and what will possibly affect their position (Respondent 7). Respondent 9 shared a story that exemplified this;

A man gets up in a meeting. We were there to digitalize and change the folder structure, and he yells, he is almost crying. Here is a grown man in a suit, who basically says; 'If I do not get to keep my folders I will die!!' And he actually said the word ‘die’. (Respondent 9)

Change can threaten people’s expertise and personal identity causing them to react negatively towards the change and they may feel personally attacked (Respondent 9). It is difficult to go from the known to the unknown (Respondent 5). Furthermore, respondent 5 mentioned the importance of framing, since people tend to “shut down” as soon as they hear the word change:

I started by renaming it to improvement. Change is difficult for people. Since it is believed that: 'I must change myself'. In fact, it is about changing the way of working and because of that you might as can well talk about improvement. So I am working on improvement management rather than change management. Everyone wants to improve himself, however not everyone necessarily wants to change. (Respondent 5)

4.2.2 Most Frequently Mentioned Soft Barriers

A total of 90 soft barriers to change (see appendix 2 for full list) could be identified during the interviews with the consultants. We have decided to present the barriers
that were mentioned by a majority of the consultants. The table below visualizes the soft barriers that were mentioned by more than four of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOFT BARRIERS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Number of consultants mentioning this barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not a united <strong>top management</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No demand or responsibility for <strong>follow-ups</strong> of the effects of measurements</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big homogeneous <strong>project group</strong> without relevant competence or clear driver of change</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top management</strong> is impatient and has no endurance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and politics within <strong>top management</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No clear project <strong>goal, outcome goal or vision</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Illustrating the most frequently mentioned barriers during the interviews.

One of the most frequently mentioned soft barriers to change was that the **top management is not united**. Thus, the top managers do not have a common understanding of why the change is needed, where the change is aiming and how the change will be undertaken. Seven out of the nine respondents mentioned this soft barrier that prevents successful change. Furthermore, five consultants mentioned **power and politics within top management** as a barrier. Another barrier emphasized by five out of nine consultants is the fact that **top management is impatient and has no endurance**. According to the consultants top management tends to rush things due to time limitations. Together with top management, the project management group can have huge consequences on the change process. According to five of the consultants a **too large group of people with homogeneous backgrounds in the project group, that lack relevant competence and without a clear driver of the change** can have negative effects. A barrier mentioned by six consultants was the **lack of measurements and follow-ups after the change has been implemented**. It is not uncommon that the project group or top management forgets to demand measurements and make someone responsible for the follow-ups. **No clear project goal, outcome goal or vision** was also mentioned as a barrier by five consultants.

Based on table 3 we can identify four critical areas; goals and vision, measurements and follow-ups, the project group, and top management and the leader. Hence, it is of interest to understand why these seem to be more common or problematic.
4.2.3 Goals & Vision

Several of the consultants discussed different types of goals for a change initiative. Respondent 4 divided it into three important factors; project goal, outcome goal and vision. The vision is where the organization is heading. According to respondent 4 the vision has to be crystal clear. The respondent was not the only consultant discussing the vision. Respondent 3 and 6 stressed that organizations sometimes do not know how to build a common vision and that it can be difficult to agree on what should be done and why. The consensus is often missing. Several consultants mentioned that if the vision is not clear for the members of the organization it may backfire as resistance. Respondent 2 expressed it as:

*The affected people must get a picture of what it will look like in the end, a vision [...] You have to clarify these things before embarking on change.*
(Respondent 2)

Project goals are set along the process, for example different deadlines. The outcome goal is the main goal of the change, for example happier customers, happier employees, saved amount of money and so on. Both project goals and the outcome goal can help achieve the vision. (Respondent 4)

4.2.4 Measurements & Follow-ups

Respondent 2 emphasized the importance of communicating small effects continuously during the process, since the change is built on smaller steps. Respondent 3 also mentioned this but was instead referring to the vision;

*How are you supposed get through? How are you supposed to reach the next level? You have to find a new vision along the way. Something new to hold on to, since the entire organization is constantly moving. You have to be challenged again and again.* (Respondent 3)

One issue that was brought up by a majority of the consultants was the lack of measurements and follow-ups, once the change has been implemented. Respondent 3 expressed that in the best of all possible worlds you do follow-ups. However, respondent 1 and 8 stated that it is difficult to measure if a change initiative has been successful and if the organization has embraced the change. Many organizations forget about the final outcome goal during the
process and are instead too focused on delivering continuous results. Respondent 1 further stated that organizations mostly focus on what have changed instead of going back to the vision, why we are changing. It is also of importance that someone in the staff takes responsibility that these results are reached (Respondent 8). Managers responsible for the change could be one example, however they usually do not demand any follow-ups. This is mainly due to that fact that they are being impatient, and it becomes quite easy to go back to the old. (Respondent 3 & 4) Respondent 2 claimed that soft values are important to measure, but that it is easy to forget to follow-up the structural factors of the project, since it can have effects on the end result. Respondent 6, on the other hand, said that the soft values are very important and sometimes quite difficult to evaluate.

4.2.5 The Project Group

If informal leaders are identified, they can be assigned meaningful roles in the change project group and can in turn convince the rest of the employees. However, it is important not to focus too much on employees who are resisting the change. Some might turn positive but some are maybe not even supposed to come along. (Respondent 8)

Maybe you should not strive to convince 100%. Not everyone will think that this [change] is very good, it might be sufficient with 85% and then those 85% will affect the remaining 15%. But if there are a number of informal leaders among the 15% they will have a major impact, so that is why you need to identify them. (Respondent 2)

Respondent 2 said that one way of looking for informal leaders is by identifying employees who have worked a long time within the organization and have had several positions. Respondent 7 said;

It is important to have 'super users' who are the advocates of the system [the change] in the organization [...] They are also the persons that are difficult to convince and persuade. (Respondent 7)

Another group that may be a part of the project group is Human Resources (HR). All of the consultants pointed out that HR’s role varies a lot, depending on the type of the organization and what kind of change that is under way. Respondent 3 argued that it is important to include
4.2.6 Top Management & the Leader

The most essential group to support the change is top management (Respondent 2, 3 & 6). All nine consultants mentioned the impact of top management on the organization and the change process, and several barriers were emphasized. The political aspect (referring to internal power struggles) within top management was one of them and it was mentioned by five of the consultants. Respondent 1 said that people and politics is the main issue that often takes time. Different things motivate people and top managers are often afraid to lose power. Respondent 2 had the same perspective and claimed that there is a constant internal power struggle. Respondent 9 also discussed power, money and fear and stated that they are all interrelated. Personal power struggles can have huge consequences and put the entire change process on hold.

The importance of a united top management was another barrier emphasized by seven out of the nine consultants. Respondent 6 claimed that a united top management facilitates gaining support in the organization, and without a united management there is not a strong leader. The top managers are nervous because they are responsible for the change and will be held accountable (Respondent 7). Respondent 1 expressed this issue as;

The most important success factor is to have a top management, if it is at this level the change is driven, where everyone with heart and soul stands behind the change. 'This is what we will do, this will be changed and we are going in that direction.' If this is in place, change is often quite simple. (Respondent 1)

In order for top management to gain support in the organization, the employees need to trust and respect the management (Respondent 1 & 7). Respondent 9 claimed that top management sometimes forgets to consider the emotions that may arise in the organization and that they
can be quite naive. Top management is not always acting as professionally as you might think (Respondent 4 & 8). Respondent 5 stated that it is not uncommon that top managers govern poorly, which respondent 1 & 9 explained deeper. They claimed that top managers are not always abandoning their own personal views. Moreover, top managers are not making decisions based on knowledge of what is actually happening in the organization. Additionally, top managers sometimes fail to deliver results in a pedagogical way, fail to make the employees comfortable and are guaranteeing too much. The respondents further stated that the top managers are often impatient; they do not realize that change takes time. Respondent 3 also discussed this topic and claimed that top managers often believe that they neither have the time nor the authority to deal with change.

The leader did not receive as much attention in the interviews as top management. However, some interesting thoughts are worth mentioning since the leader usually is one of the top managers. Respondent 5 claimed that a leader needs to be a relationship builder, must communicate well, challenge each and every individual, challenge the group and be patient. A common mistake is management-by-fear which can have negative consequences.

*My mantra is that everything extremely good and everything extremely bad starts at the top. Simply speaking, a good organization often has a very, very capable leader.* (Respondent 5)

Respondent 7 stated that the organization can quickly lose trust in the leader and it may take a long time before it is rebuilt. The leader has to give the employees freedom, give them responsibilities, be supportive, be dedicated and practice what is being preached (Respondent 6). It is not uncommon that both top management and the leader do not understand that they also need to change (Respondent 3 & 5). Respondent 3 had an example of this;

*Not so long ago, I was talking with a CEO within a very, very conservative industry. And I tried to tell him: 'So, you are also expected to change...' I saw that he winced; he did not see that coming.* (Respondent 3)
5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Change Process & its Phases

Based on the process map we could identify soft barriers that are more or less problematic that need to be considered in the preparation, implementation and institutionalization phase. Thoughts from both researchers and practitioners together with the soft barriers in each phase, will be analyzed below.

Our empirical result reveals that the preparation phase concerns planning and getting the employees ready for the change. The consultants agreed that it is essential to identify and understand the current situation of the organization in the beginning of the process. This study further strengthens the fact that if the new state is too far from the current situation, the organization might resist the change. This is supported by previous research, stating that it is difficult to move from the known to the unknown (Bovey & Hede 2001). When analyzing the process map it is evident that clarifying where the organization is heading and why the change is necessary is important in the preparation phase. According to previous research, the vision and the purpose need to be clarified to assure that the company moves in the right direction (Kotter 1995) and to keep the employees engaged (Armenakis et al. 1993). If the employees do not know where they are heading and why the organization needs to transform, they cannot understand the change nor accept it. One might assume that the organization would have discussed these issues before even initiating the change. However, our findings suggest that this is not always clear for the organization before they start implementing the change. Additionally, indications from this study highlights that top management tend to be impatient and stressed, and that this usually is a barrier in the preparation phase. The fact that top managers request too much and set extreme deadlines is in accordance with Parry et al. (2014). If top management pressures the employees early in the process they might resist the change.

There is strong evidence from both previous research and the consultants that the preparation phase includes planning and information so that the organization can prepare for the upcoming change. The vision and the purpose were emphasized as particularly critical areas as well as the fact that top management tend to be impatient. One aspect of interest highlighted by the consultants was that companies do not specifically focus on planning and preparation, which may be explained by top managers’ lack of patience. The consultants emphasized that the planning needs to be done correctly in order for the following phases to
go well. Just as Lewin (1958) stated, preparation seems to be an important step since the preparation phase is the starting point of the project and affects the rest of the change process. However, the overall impression from the consultants was that the preparation phase does not have to be too challenging, if the soft barriers in this phase are considered. One explanation to why the consultants may find it easier than organizations in general could be that the consultants have experience in finding the right solutions (Case et al. 1990) and are accustomed to planning and preparation.

In the implementation phase the organization starts to transform. From our results it is possible to draw the conclusion that the implementation phase includes interaction with the employees and the project group becomes more active in the organization. The process map implies that support (motivation), communication and an understanding of the employees are critical when implementing the change. This is further confirmed by the fact that Lewin (1958) emphasized these key areas in the second phase. Just as in the preparation phase many soft barriers to change can be identified in the implementation phase (see Process map). The consultants emphasized the importance of an understanding of the employees and the ability to motivate them. According to Armenakis et al. (1993) an understanding of the employees facilitates supporting the organization. If these barriers are not considered, employees’ commitment and attention to the change initiative may decrease (Bruch et al. 2005) and resistance may arise (Allen et al. 2007). The importance of the project group was highlighted by the consultants but not the specific members of the team in particular. The consultants also agreed that decision-making and communication are critical in the implementation phase. This conclusion is also supported by Allen et al. (2007) who argued that the quality of information can reduce the employees’ insecurity. Hence, communication and information can reduce resistance. Based on our findings it is possible to draw the conclusion that one must be prepared for that this phase is heavy and can involve a lot of conflict due to the difficulty of actually changing behavior. The consultants agreed that support, encouragement and motivation are key in order for the implementation phase to be less problematic. Moreover, just as in the preparation phase if the soft barriers are considered, the implementation does not have to be overly challenging according to the consultants.

Empirical evidence in this study can support the fact that the organization starts to embrace and accept the change in the institutionalization phase. Hence, the change becomes the new norm (Lewin 1958). However, we found that institutionalization often takes time, which is in
line with previous research. According to our conceptual model (based on previous research) and the process map, it is evident that there are fewer barriers in the institutionalization phase. According to the consultants, lack of support from HR is perceived as a barrier for achieving acceptance in the institutionalization phase. Lewin (1958) stated, without discussing HR specifically, that in the last phase acceptance from the organization is needed. This indicates that HR might be able to support the organization to embrace and accept the change. Regardless of the amount and type of barriers, one aspect of interest is that the institutionalization phase seemed to be less apprehensible because the consultants had difficulties discussing this phase in more detail. The consultants looked at this last phase as more of an outcome of planning and implementation. It is not apparent if Lewin (1958) looked at this the same way but he emphasized that the change has to become the new norm, which takes time. This would indicate that the new norm is created by actions taken in preparation and implementation phases and not in institutionalization phase. One reason for the consultants’ responses could be due to the fact that they sometimes leave before this phase begins, which would also be supported by Kotter (1995) who claimed that companies tend to say, “thank you, good bye” too early to the consultants.

It was not evident which phase of the change process that is the most problematic. The consultants could not explicitly identify one phase as more challenging than another. The process map illustrates that the preparation and implementation phases have the most soft barriers mapped out by the consultants, while they only agreed on one barrier that is critical within the institutionalization phase. Thus, all phases involve more or less critical soft barriers to change. However, not only the amount of barriers illustrates the most problematic phase, there are other factors affecting too. Our findings indicate that each phase is the outcome of the previous phase. Hence, if the critical barriers in each phase are considered, resistance can be reduced and the change can be successful.

5.2 Soft Barriers to Change

Resistance was brought up by all of the consultants during the interviews as a challenging reaction to change, which supports previous findings (e.g. Bovey & Hede 2001). There is strong evidence from both the literature and the consultants that resistance is something organizations need to be prepared for and be able to manage, but that it is difficult to know how the employees will react and how to handle these reactions. There is a consensus among both researchers (Bergström et al. 2014) and practitioners that resistance is the employees’
way of coping with change. However, from the viewpoint of the consultants, resistance exists on all levels in the organization. Even people initiating and driving the change can show resistance, which is not as emphasized in previous literature. Important to keep in mind is that people can react very emotionally and aggressively, which further strengthen the fact that resistance cannot be neglected. The consultants’ perspective on resistance seemed to be in line with this study. Hence, that resistance to a great extent depends on soft barriers in the organization and if the soft barriers are considered and managed, resistance can be reduced. Four areas including soft barriers were identified as more common or problematic according to the consultants. These are; goals and vision, measurements and follow-ups, the project group, and top management and the leader.

When analyzing our results we got the impression that setting goals and clarifying the vision are crucial. A majority of the consultants mentioned the barrier No clear project goal, outcome goal or vision. A vast number of explanations can be found both empirically and in the literature to why this soft barrier may be more common or problematic. Previous findings show that moving to the unknown is difficult, but by having clear goals and a clear vision, the future can become less unknown (Bovey & Hede 2001). According to the consultants, many organizations seem to forget to explicitly clarify each goal and the vision before initiating the change. Kotter (1995) claimed that it is the managers’ responsibility to establish goals early in the process and to achieve them during the implementation, and he was most likely referring to what the consultants called project goals. Thus, if analyzing this and including Kotter’s findings, one can understand that the managers might not realize that setting goals is their responsibility. Since the importance of setting goals cannot be fully supported by previous research since it was not specifically highlighted in the literature as a critical factor, our result is just an indication that this is essential. In addition to the goals, the importance of a vision was identified in our empirical result. The consultants said that if the vision is not clear and communicated, resistance might arise. According to previous research, a consequence of not focusing on the vision is that the commitment among the employees may decrease (Kotter 1995; Parry et al. 2014). The consultants also claimed that the vision needs to be clarified before implementing the change. If there is no vision, confusion may appear and the company will be led in the wrong direction (Kotter 1995). Additionally, the vision can help create motivation (Kotter 1995), which has great effects on resistance (Bovey & Hede 2001). One reason identified in our empirical result for why clarifying the vision may be particularly common or problematic is because organizations do not always know how to build a vision.
Another reason according to the consultants is the fact that it is difficult to agree on which direction the organization should go. When analyzing the findings in this study it can be understood that the project goals and the outcome goals can be seen as factors affecting the vision. Hence, if those are clarified beforehand it might facilitate clarification of the vision. The importance of clarifying the vision is supported by researchers, why a conclusion can be that the vision is a critical factor in order to successfully change.

To summarize, the fact that clear goals are essential is supported by practitioners and that clarifying the vision is critical is supported by both researchers and practitioners. When analyzing our results it was evident that setting goals may be common or problematic because no one takes responsibility that it is done. Another conclusion is that it is difficult to agree on a common vision because people have different agendas and are influenced by their own personal views. Regardless, goals need to be set and a vision clarified in order for the employees in the organization to know where they are heading and how they should get there.

Several of the consultants claimed that there is often a lack of measurements and follow-ups. There seemed to be some inconsistency among the consultants about whether to focus on continuous results or the final outcome. In previous literature support for that it is essential to focus on monitoring (Bruch et al. 2005) and short-term wins (Kotter 1995) can be found. The results of this study reveal that lack of monitoring, measuring and follow-up can lead to a decrease in credibility, trust and motivation among the employees. A few reasons for why there seem to be a lack of measurements and follow-ups can be found both in the literature and in the interviews with the consultants. The first explanation might be that there is no demand for this, according to our empirical findings. Thus, employees can easily slip back to their old routines. Kotter (1995) stated that the change is only institutionalized when it has become the social norm. Analyzing these findings, measurements and follow-ups can be seen as tools to make the employees embrace the change. Another reason identified in the findings of our study for why there is a lack of measurements and follow-ups is difficulty of measuring structural and specifically soft values.

We can see that measurements and follow-ups are critical in order for the organization to embrace the change, but this area has not received a lot of attention in previous research. Hence, our results is only an indication that lack of measurements and follow-ups decrease motivation, increase resistance and lead to unsuccessful change since it cannot be fully
supported by the literature. Furthermore, this is problematic due to the fact that no one is taking responsibility for the measurements and follow-ups and that the organization might not always know what or when to measure. The consultants argued that when nothing is being measured it is difficult for the individuals to feel responsible for the change.

Our findings as well as previous research (e.g. Kotter 1995) demonstrate the importance of putting together a team that can lead the change and that the project group needs to be well-composed. The consultants argued that the project group can be a soft barrier to change if it is too large, homogeneous and if the members do not have the right skills. Additionally, the group can be a soft barrier if it lacks a clear driver of the change. If the group is not diverse it might be difficult to convince and motivate the rest of the employees, according to the consultants. A diverse group most likely has wide knowledge and can easier find for example suitable ways to communicate with the employees. Internal change agents or informal leaders can be a part of the project group since they can promote the change and motivate the employees (Klonk et al. 2014). It may not always be easy to put together a diverse group of people. The consultants discussed the difficulty of convincing and persuading internal change agents and informal leaders. Moreover, the internal change agents or informal leaders are argued to have a lot of influence in the organization, which was identified in both the literature (e.g. Leppitt 2006) and in the interviews with the consultants. If the internal change agents or the informal leaders are not included in the project group and resist the change, it can have huge consequences on how the rest of the organization embraces the change. Another part of the project group can be HR according to previous research (e.g. Barrat-Pugh et al. 2013). However, there is little empirical evidence to support that it is crucial to include HR. Only one consultant thought that HR’s support in change initiatives is essential, and important to note is that this consultant has a background in HR and could see potential benefits with including HR that the other consultants did not. Analyzing our findings, we can see that HR might not fully understand their role in change initiatives, while researchers might assume that HR has, and hence realize their full potential. Furthermore, the consultants argued that the project group often is too large. If drawing conclusions from our empirical result, we believe that this could be due to that top management puts together many people (as an attempt to get a diversified group) instead on focusing on getting the right persons with the right skills and knowledge. Additionally, in a large group of people power and political issues can arise and result in that the members have difficulties with putting their personal opinions
aside, which inhibit the group to make good decisions and will affect the outcome of the change.

In summary, we got the impression that it can be problematic to put together a well-composed project group. The explanations to why this soft barrier is common or problematic can be found both from researchers and practitioners. Reasons may be that it is difficult to know whom to include, convince those people to be a part of the project group and assure that everyone understands their roles.

Our empirical result suggests that several soft barriers to change can be found within top management. During the interviews the consultants argued that top management is the most important group to support the change. A difference identified between previous research and our empirical findings is the barrier concerning power and politics in top management, which was discussed by several consultants but not specifically in the literature. Since this finding cannot be supported by previous research, our empirical result can only indicate that power and politics may be a critical soft barrier to change. Nevertheless, it was mentioned by a majority of the consultants and several explanations can be found to why this barrier is common or problematic. It can be argued that people have different opinions and are motivated by different things, they all have their own agendas. Additionally, previous research states that people have different capabilities and readiness when adjusting to change (Bovey & Hede 2001). The irritation that may arise due to that people want different things can express itself in various ways, for example frustration (Safar et al. 2006). The findings in our study indicate that power struggles can affect the entire change process and therefore also the end result.

Another barrier mentioned by the consultants, which might be due to power and politics, is the importance of a united top management. The consultants specifically emphasized that this is a very common and problematic issue. This soft barrier can have huge consequences since it was claimed during the interviews that everything good or bad within an organization starts from the top. Our findings suggest that when top management is not united there is no clear driver or strong leader of the change. Additionally, if top management is united it is easier to get support from the employees. This is in accordance with previous findings, thus if the employees do not feel the commitment they might start doubting the leader and resistance may arise (Safar et al. 2006). Some explanations to why it is difficult to unite top management
can be found both from researchers and practitioners. If top management is not united it might be due to the fact that top managers do not always practice what is being preached. The top managers can give mixed messages both within the group and to the employees in the organization. This was also discussed by Bruch et al. (2005) who stated that leaders should only do what they can fully commit to. Additionally, top management might not be united because they are afraid that they may be held accountable and responsible for any unsuccessful change. The consultants also said that top managers are not always acting as professionally as one may think, why frustration can occur and divide the group. In conclusion, our empirical findings indicate that if there is a strong and united top management, the organization will likely support the change since top management strongly influence the rest of the organization.

Our empirical result also shows that top management is often impatient. According to previous research this can lead to top managers setting extreme deadlines (Parry et al. 2014). Additionally, organizations may declare victory too early (Kotter 1995) and believe that the change is successfully implemented before it is actually institutionalized. These findings in the literature further strengthen the consultants’ concern about top management being impatient. A consequence of this is stress and panic among the employees, which in turn can result in resistance (Safar et al. 2006). The consultants believed that this soft barrier might be more common or problematic due to the fact that managers believe that they do not have the time to manage change initiatives and that they do not realize that change takes time.

Overall, our results indicate that there are a lot of issues concerning top management. We believe that top management has great influence over the rest of the organization and how the employees embrace the change. Our findings suggest that top management is problematic due to internal struggles within the group where power and politics affect how united the group is and that the fact that top managers tend to be impatient affect the entire organization.
6. CONCLUDING PART

6.1 Discussion

It has not been easy to identify the most problematic phase in the change process. We found that the institutionalization of the change is a critical step since it is less apprehensible and it is in this phase the change really needs to be embraced and accepted. This last phase can be seen as the outcome of the first two phases even though less active actions are needed here. Important to note is that this finding may be affected by the external change agent perspective, since the consultants are not always involved in the institutionalization phase but can be seen as experts in preparation and implementation. Hence, we believe that they might have a different understanding of this stage than the organization itself. If you consider the most critical barriers in the planning and implementation phases, the institutionalization phase may be less problematic. We therefore emphasize the importance of making well-considered decisions in the beginning of the change process. In terms of the theoretical contributions in this study, we conclude that all the consultants perceived the change process as linear with different phases. This interpretation has received criticism as it lacks practical basis. However, all the interviewed consultants had the same view on the change process, which supports Lewin (1958) and other researchers with the same perspective. This finding is important since our study is based on this assumption and our empirical results could have been questioned otherwise.

Resistance was mentioned thoroughly during the interviews and our findings suggest that it depends to a great extent on how the organization handles other more concrete soft barriers. The most frequently mentioned barriers were identified in the areas; goals and vision, measurements and follow-ups, the project group and top management. A surprising finding is that setting goals and clarifying the vision are not focused on before initiating the change. One might assume that this was the obvious first step in order to plan and prepare the change. Furthermore, measurements and follow-ups do not seem to be demanded either. We believe that setting goals is a prerequisite in order to successfully measure and follow-up the change, which might explain why this is not done. Another aspect worth emphasizing is that the project group itself has not received a lot of focus in the change management literature. Different members of the group have been discussed separately but the dynamics and the composition of the group have not been specifically highlighted. We believe that barriers connected with the project group are more visible because the consultants usually work
closely with this group. Another finding worth highlighting is the differences between top management and the leader. Previous literature seem to have a more leader-oriented focus than the consultants who perceived top management as a collective group to be more important. Hence, in reality the leader itself might not have as much influence and power as all of the top managers together. Top management seems to struggle mostly with power issues, politics, disagreements and lack of patience.

According to the consultants, these areas increase or reduce resistance depending on how the organization is handling or managing them. Resistance is undoubtedly the most challenging reaction to change. However, our findings suggest that it is not only the employees that react negatively towards the change but that resistance exists on all levels in the organization. This conclusion is somewhat different compared to researchers who have mainly focused on the employees’ negative reactions and feelings. Furthermore, it seems that top management has internal struggles leading to resistance, which may affect the rest of the organization. Our study further supports the fact that soft barriers to change are mainly connected to people and that the ability to realize and understand that individuals react strongly to change, may simplify the process.

6.2 Conclusion

We cannot identify one phase in the change process to be more problematic than another. Our findings indicate that each phase is the outcome of prior phases and if the critical barriers in each phase are considered, resistance can be reduced and the change can be successful. However, the last phase, institutionalization phase, is less apprehensible and manageable. There are not many concrete barriers to avoid or actions to take in order to facilitate this step according to our result. Institutionalization is claimed to be the outcome of the first two phases. This indicates that if preparation and implementation are handled correctly, the organization will embrace the change. In our study we have recognized resistance as a challenging reaction to change. Furthermore, we identified several barriers that lead to resistance. Unsuccessful change can depend on not having clear project goals, outcome goals or vision. Measurements and follow-ups are critical to make sure that the organization has embraced the change. It is important that the project group is not too big, heterogenic, knowledgeable and has a clear driver of the change. Additionally, top management is specifically problematic since they have to set politics aside, stand united behind the change and be patient. Organizations consist of people with different objectives and fears that
sometimes need to evade their own values and behavior. In previous literature the focus has been on how to handle the employees’ reactions to the change. Based on our findings we can draw the conclusion that it all starts from the top, thus top managers’ opinions and behavior affect the rest of the organization. If they are acting as if they are not supporting the change, then their employees will probably not stand behind it either. We cannot provide practitioners or researcher with one universal solution that identifies all soft barriers to change, reduces all resistance and lead to successful change. However, by being cautious of what is critical in every phase an organization can enhance the possibilities of successful change. Furthermore, referring back to Newton’s Third Law\textsuperscript{iv} that stated \textit{For every action, there is an equal and opposite re-action}, we would like to emphasize that this reaction does not necessarily come from the employees. Our findings suggest that resistance often starts from the top of the organization.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

Through our study we have found several topics that should be focused on in the future. We believe that measurements and follow-ups have great importance in change initiatives and could therefore be of interest to investigate further. For example it would be beneficial to understand how companies actually work within this field and what the effects are. Moreover, we suggest that the activities of top management might need further research. According to the consultants, top managers can have great effect on the entire change process and it is one of the main issues that takes time to manage. Our study involved the perspective of the external change agents’, the consultants’, and we believe that getting information from the members within the company could give a more specific view of this issue. During our study we found that the consultants are not as involved in the institutionalization phase, which further strengthen the fact, that it is of interest to study the change process and its phases internally.

\textsuperscript{iv} NASA n.d.
REFERENCES


Bryman A. & Bell E., 2005, Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder, Liber AB.


APPENDIX 1
Soft barriers to change identified by literature:

1. No articulated change message or change message not well communicated
2. Unstructured communication and poor quality of the information (e.g; the purpose of change is not communicated, the uncertainty of the employees is not considered when communicating change, organization’s ability to change is not included in the communication nor the discrepancy between current position and desired position
3. Change process is not aligned with culture
4. Inaccurately diagnosing the culture and not recognizing the correct assumption, beliefs and values
5. No consideration of existing traditions, norms and values
6. Not realizing the significance of key internal change agents nor finding them
7. The internal change agent does not understand the employees’ behavior, attitudes, mindsets or objectives,
8. The internal change agent does not manage to create confidence or motivate employees, instead limits their freedom
9. The internal change agent neither listen to nor learn from the employees, it is a one-way communication
10. Managers do not have the right expertise or capacity to handle change
11. Managers are not making decisions at all, or the decisions are not made in the right order and they are focused on the wrong aspects (e.g; they are not considering the non-readiness and resistance and are excluding relevant employees)
12. The purpose with change is not clarified and no suitable way to change has been identified by the managers
13. Managers fail to translate the perspective from the change initiators top-down (from top management to employees)
14. Lack of support from HR
15. Leader lacks communication skills and is not framing the change in a pedagogical way and is not clearly communicating what the change involves (e.g. direction on where the change is going or vision)
16. Lack of supporting or empowering leadership styles,
17. Lack of leadership skills
18. Lack of commitment from management
19. Lack of support, trust and commitment for the leader, lack of credibility by the leader, and a discrepancy between what has been said and what has been done
20. Top management requests too much and sets extreme deadlines
21. The purpose of the change is not including the long-term perspective
22. The resources are not planned nor organized in order to achieve the objectives
23. Bad decision-making in planning and implementation affects the long-term result of the change
24. Employees’ capacity and ability to handle changes are not considered in the change program
25. Activities that counteract each other have not been reduced
## APPENDIX 2

Soft barriers to change identified by the consultants:

### The change process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOFT BARRIERS</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No understanding of the change process and its phases</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological phases not consistent with transition phases of the project</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees not changing behavior in implementation phase</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long planning phase short implementation phase</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A readiness analysis is not made in the preparation phase</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No focus on reinforcement</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to involve decision-making people throughout the whole process</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals not moving forward, get stuck in conflict/implementation phase</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough planning before the project starts</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Purpose, vision, information & communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOFT BARRIERS</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrational purpose with the change</td>
<td>x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No clear project goal, outcome goal or vision</td>
<td>x x x x x 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing too much on the project goals and not the outcome goals</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too solution-oriented, not enough focus on the vision</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No/little effort is put into communicating the vision</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees do not understand the purpose or the vision</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No or insufficient information and communication</td>
<td>x x x x 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No consistency or continuity in the communication</td>
<td>x x x x 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not communicating through different channels</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not adapted the communication for the different phases</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information presented is not transparent enough</td>
<td>x x x x 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicators do not understand organizational or communication psychology</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No communication plan or strategy</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No/poor cooperation regarding communication between internal/external change agents</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonest communication</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management is not informing about present state</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lacks communication skills</td>
<td>x x x 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Top management & the leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOFT BARRIERS</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not a united top management</td>
<td>x x x x x x 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management does not believe in the change</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No trust for top management in organization</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management does not think before they act - no suitable governance</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact-based decisions are not taken by top management</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management does not live as they preach</td>
<td>x x x 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management is impatient and has no endurance</td>
<td>x x x x x 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and politics within top management</td>
<td>x x x x x 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management does not understand that they need to change too</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No understanding or knowledge of how people react during change</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management is not engaged</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management gives mixed messages</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lacks the ability to create structure and clarity</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader is not curious</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lacks situational-leadership</td>
<td>x x x 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lacks courage</td>
<td>x x 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lacks logical thinking</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lacks social skills</td>
<td>x 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader is absent and is not acting as a leader</td>
<td>x x x 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader is not showing everyone the same respect</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader delegates without leading</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader does not engage the employees</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lack of pedagogical skills</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader does not put his personal opinions aside</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers gets pressured during the change process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers does not have time or resources to drive the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers does not have the right competence to drive the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough meetings to make the managers comfortable with the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers cannot translate information between top management and employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers are not informed or involved early in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers are not embracing the new way of doing things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The project group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal leaders are not identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big homogeneous project group without relevant competence or clear driver of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project group is not allowing employees to be involved or take responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project group fails to identify the symptoms of resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project group fails to identify enthusiasts early in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not taking the criticism into consideration and using the resistance in a positive way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts in project group about how change is implemented - no plan of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not identifying nor highlighting gains on individual- or organizational level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project group assimilates change management with training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of discussions but no decision-making in project group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-makers in project group not aware of biases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong focus and priority issues during the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No understanding for the time requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR managers do not understand organizational psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR receive no mandate to lead change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No team spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurements, follow-ups &amp; institutionalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too much focus on the delivery rather than the effect of the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not measuring the right things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent people revises the result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The solution is not user-friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not focusing on the long-term perspective during the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No demand or responsibility for follow-ups of the effects or measurements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not finding measurements in the planning phase that will be followed-up after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization does not feel ownership over the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees are impatient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not educating employees, hence they do not have the right competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture not encouraging innovation and flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change not aligned with culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The climate is bad and the culture is weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader lacks an understanding of his/her impact on the culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts about roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation difficulties between headquarters and employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3

Interview questions:

Introduction questions

1. What is your area of expertise? Any specific industry or company?
2. How many years of experience do you have?
3. What is your current title?
4. In what way have you been involved/worked with change initiatives?
5. How do you define organizational change/change process?
6. How do you define barriers to change?

Resistance

- Based on your experience, what are the difficulties with change programs?
- Can you give us some examples of why you think companies find it so difficult to succeed with their change initiatives?
  - Why are these specifically difficult?
  - What causes these difficulties?
  - Can you tell us about a situation where you experienced that?
- Do you think that organizations struggle more with managing soft or hard factors during change initiatives?
  - Why do you think that?

The Change Process

- How do you look at the change process?

PREPARATION

- What are the difficulties with starting off a new change initiative?
  - What needs to be considered during the planning of the change initiative?
- Is it common to use change agents?
  - What is their role?
  - Is it difficult to identify change agents?
  - What is usually difficult for change agents? Which mistakes do they usually do?
What is important when it comes to communication in the beginning of the change process? What mistakes or difficulties can usually be found?
  o Is there usually an articulated change message? What can be problematic if there is? If there is not one why? Which consequences can that have?

IMPLEMENTATION

- What can be problematic when the specific implementation is occurring?
- What is usually difficult when it comes to information and communication in the implementation phase?
  o Why is this specifically problematic?
- What kind of role has the leader here?
  o Are there any skills the leader needs to have?
  o Are there any important parts that have to exist in order for the leader to have the organization with him/her?
- What kind of role has the change agent in the implementation phase?
  o What is important for the change agent to do?
  o What kind of skills is necessary?
- What role has middle managers in this phase?
  o What is the most problematic factor when it comes to middle managers?
  o Which are their most difficult tasks?
  o Which skills are critical for them to have?
- What role has HR in the implementation phase?
  o What mistakes do they usually do?

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

- What can be difficult when the change is supposed to be institutionalized in the company?
- Does change initiatives often meet the expected time frame?
  o Why/why not?
  o Whose fault is that?
- When is the work is done?
  o Which role has the leader in the institutionalization?
- When is the change institutionalized?
  o What can delay this? Or not make it happen?
• What is the role of the culture?
  o Is the culture usually considered?
  o Is the culture usually diagnosed?

**The Role of the External Change Agent**

• When you have worked together with a client in a change initiative: what was your role?
• What do you see as your most important responsibilities and tasks during a change process?
• Do you find some things difficult about your work?