



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

INFLUENCE IN SENSEMAKING DURING CHANGE

A Study of the Swedish Police Reform and Subsequent Change Work

Robert Kihlberg

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Dissertation for PhD

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Appended papers

Article I

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on four articles, and examines efforts of influence in processes of sensemaking during, and subsequent to, the Swedish police reform. Sensemaking – a process where individuals work to understand what is going on when they encounter confusing events – is of central importance for how organizational change unfolds. Influence in sensemaking refers to activities with capacity to shape persons preferences and perceptions, as they try to make sense. In this dissertation, the overall purpose is to increase the understanding about influence in sensemaking during micro-processes of change. The research questions address how efforts of influence in sensemaking at different organizational levels can be understood, and by which means actors attempt to influence others sensemaking. The research applies sensemaking and sensegiving as its theoretical framework. With a qualitative approach, and ethnographic methods, influence in sensemaking is examined on four levels: Article 1 examines how the strategic level of reform promote change through visual media. The results show how 44 videos function to layer meaning and construct stereotypes in attempts to influence how the sensemaking of change would take place. Article 2 reports an ethnography of middle-managers involving employees in a multivocal process that aims to influence how sensemaking evolves. This process has four features: open-endedness, low control over cues given, several sources of cues, and the encouragement of complexity and ambiguity. Article 3 studies employees working as ‘change’ agents at employee conferences. Results show that these actors exert influence in three ways: drawing on positional power, acting powerless, and by attempts to give power away. Article 4 reports an ethnography of employees enacting a change initiative. The results show how employees’ various enactments involve episodic power, which influence the sensemaking process to varying degrees and towards diverse ends. Overall, the results from the articles outlines three understandings of influence in sensemaking: top-down efforts, reflexive interactions and responsive enactments – each with particular consequences for *who* can take part in processes of sensemaking, organizing, and change work, *when* and *how*. For organizations, the results imply a need for managers *and* employees to raise awareness of others as well as one’s own influence in sensemaking, as it shapes the way they make sense of, understand, and enact organizational change. In a larger perspective, this has significance for which forms of organizing are stimulated to develop – democratic or undemocratic.

1. Introduction

When organizations go through change, individuals try to make sense of what is going on. Based on their understanding of the ongoing changes, they take actions in ways which have consequences for the organization's development. The emergence of understanding does not occur in isolation, but is rather a process that is subject to influence. In this dissertation, the focus is on such influence, and on how it is expressed. Using ethnographic methods, micro-processes of change are studied on four different organizational levels within the Swedish police. The findings contribute to existing knowledge on the processes of sensemaking: its actors and means of influence.

In the research on sensemaking, the process of sensemaking is considered to be of importance for organizational change processes as well as the outcomes of such processes (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sensemaking refers to a process where individuals work to clarify and understand what is going on when they encounter ambiguous, unexpected or confusing events (Cornelissen et al., 2012; Weick, 1995). This process is central to organizing (Glynn & Watkiss, 2020; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), and a common approach in sensemaking studies is to examine how sensemaking is triggered, and what effects sensemaking has on other organizational processes (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Organizational change is a typical trigger for sensemaking as change often entails uncertainties about the future and what changing conditions may bring about for individuals working on different levels of organizations (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). For instance, individuals' expectations may become disrupted when managers make changes in structure that disturb or overthrows existing understandings of the organization and its practices, or when organizational meanings about culture or identity are directly targeted (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Mantere et al., 2012). Furthermore, as "people act their way into sense" (Weick, 1995, p.130), they also generate additional triggers for sensemaking. This highlights the circular relationship between "sense" and "action" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p.19) commonly called enactment in sensemaking literature.

In studies of sensemaking during change, major planned change initiatives that affect the organization and individuals' ways of working are most prominent. By contrast, less attention has been paid to frequent minor planned and unplanned changes that lead individuals to engage in

sensemaking in order to restore interrupted organizational activities (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). In this dissertation, I focus on sensemaking triggered by change initiatives that take place on different organizational levels after a major organizational reform. This approach entails close examination of micro-processes of change in which individuals attempt to influence sensemaking through various means and participate in discussions about the organization on topics such as leadership, identity, and organizational culture.

Theoretical developments about sensemaking during organizational change are based on the view that change is the result from interactions among actors (Ford & Ford, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) around issues that require intense sensemaking (Bartunek et al., 2008), such as development initiatives (Bolden & Kirk, 2009). In these interactions, individuals use language to construct, share and negotiate meaning in their daily work (Hardy et al., 2005; Thomas et al., 2011; Tsoukas, 2005). This view on change implies an attention on 'changing' rather than 'change' (Weick & Quinn, 1999) and on the ways actors individually and collectively construct understandings on the basis of their own preunderstandings, identities, experiences and beliefs (Balogun, 2006; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Weick, 1995).

From this viewpoint, organizational change contains multi-authored (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007) and ongoing processes where managers, various change agents and other employees take different sensemaking positions, resulting in discrepant sensemaking amongst organizational members (Brown et al., 2008). Change is thus characterized by shifting perspectives, positions and allegiances (Thomas et al., 2011), as individuals debate, contest, negotiate and struggle over meaning (Lawrence et al., 2012; Mumby, 2005; Thomas et al., 2011; Weick, 1995). Through such activities, some interpretations become legitimate whilst others are discarded and disappear (Brown, 2005; Gephart, 1993). Thus, processes of sensemaking do not take place in a vacuum but involves tensions, political struggles (Weick, 1995), and a variety of influences (see Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). To capture and analyse influence in sensemaking, a fruitful approach is to focus on the empirical examination of micro-processes of change, and the settings where efforts of influence on the processes of sensemaking are likely to occur (e.g., meetings and workshops). Moreover, focus need to go beyond change plans and implementation strategies developed before the launch of the change initiative.

Within the field of organization studies, a reoccurring critique of research on organizational change is that research within this field regularly focuses on the outcomes of sensemaking during change, rather than the process of sensemaking (see Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). As a result, various actors' influence is neglected in the analysis of sensemaking processes (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005), and the diversity of their goals and interests are downplayed (Schildt et al., 2019). Therefore, to better understand the dynamics of sensemaking processes, it is important to integrate the influence of multiple actors into the analysis of sensemaking. Regarding "influence" as concept, the etymological meaning refers to "flowing in" and "to flow into" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2022). For the purpose of this study, the influence term will serve as a metaphor for how people shape the "in-flow" of meaning in processes of sensemaking through various means. A more exact definition of influence, as applied in this dissertation, is *activities with capacity to shape or control organizational members preferences and perceptions, as they attempt to make sense of ambiguous issues or situations.*

Studies on influence in sensemaking have commonly described influence in terms of sensegiving, which is defined as "the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p.442). The concept of sensegiving stems from research on change management and managers efforts to influence others' perceptions during change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensegiving is intimately tied to sensemaking; in fact they are occasionally described as two sides of the same coin, whereby "one implies the other and cannot exist without it" (Rouleau, 2005, p.1415). This relationship is visible in studies of "manager sensegiving" and "employee sensemaking" which imply that the interplay between managers and subordinates during change processes is characterized by one party providing sense and another one receiving it (e.g., Kraft et al., 2018). The concept of sensegiving broadly labels and describes efforts of influence in sensemaking during organizational change. Since its introduction, the concept has been further examined and described in terms of sensegiving modes (see Kraft et al., 2015) and practices (Schildt et al., 2019). Other constructs, such as sensebreaking, (Pratt, 2000; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2014), sensehiding, sensespecification (Monin et al. 2013) and sense-censoring (Whittle et al. 2016) illustrate additional influence efforts in sensemaking where meaning is deliberately destroyed, hidden or censored. Research on sensegiving has predominantly focused on leaders and senior and middle managers influence on subordinates (see Maitlis & Christianson,

2014), whilst other organizational members are mainly portrayed as employee sensemakers or recipients of change initiatives.

Thus, while many researchers recognize that influence in sensemaking may flow in many directions, there is nonetheless a tendency to empirically focus on sensegiving as a top-down activity, conducted by actors in formal positions of power. The fact that many studies targets how managers give sense means that less is known about other types of influence patterns. For instance, how influence may emerge from other organizational members, or how influence is expressed when organizational members enact change initiatives presented to them.

Additionally, although efforts to influence processes of sensemaking are carried out by people in formal positions of power, the power construct is seldom pronounced in sensemaking and sensegiving literature. Power, which is in itself a broad research area and replete with tensions (see Clegg et al., 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2014), can be defined as the capacity to influence other actors with specific interests in mind (Fleming & Spicer, 2014) towards a certain course of action (Clegg et al., 2006). This definition of power highlights the close relationship between episodic forms (i.e., activities) of power and influence in sensemaking. In fact, both sensegiving and sensebreaking have been described as concepts that “provide insights into the managerial use of episodic power” (Schildt et al., 2019, p.2). However, despite the close connection between the concepts of episodic power and influence in sensemaking, little remains known about the ways in which power operates in sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Schildt et al., 2019). Therefore, in this dissertation, current concepts in sensemaking that involve influence, such as sensegiving, are more closely integrated with episodic power (see Fleming & Spicer, 2014). This means that I consider different individuals’ efforts of influence in processes of sensemaking as potential expressions of episodic power, regardless of whether it is managers or employees who exercise the influence.

With regard to means of influence, language is considered key (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), and the ways in which language is used to exercise influence are manifold. Frequently described means of influence include storytelling (Brown et al., 2009), narratives (Sonenshein, 2010), metaphors (Cornelissen et al., 2012), persuasive language (Bosma et al., 2015), gestures (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012), and discursive competence (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). A commonality of all these approaches is that they influence access to and the content of cues for others’ sensemaking. However, while managers’ communicative strategies

towards a predetermined organizational future is well researched, less is known about different actors' use of language to influence each other when the organizational future is not predetermined. Little is also known about the way's employees use language as means of influence when they are encouraged to play a central role in changing the organization and its' practices. Finally, while the use of spoken language to influence others has been thoroughly studied, we currently have a poor understanding of how influence is exerted through non-human objects (e.g. videos) in change initiatives. Despite the fact that communication technology is now widely used by all members of organizations, how media such as videos can be used as means to influence others' sensemaking has received little attention to date (c.f. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015).

A site in which various actors' efforts to influence each other's sensemaking are visible and can be studied is the Swedish police reform and subsequent change work. This latter involved formal implementation of a new organizational structure, as well as subsequent regional and local processes of change made at multiple organizational levels. Within this broader context of change, numerous micro-processes of enacting change took place. These involved attempts to create a "new management philosophy" with aim to empower a wider group of organizational actors and thereby realize more of the organization's overall potential. Although such major strategically initiated organizational changes are common (Sturdy & Grey, 2003), they have proved difficult to manage as individuals throughout the organization enact change initiatives in unpredicted ways (Balogun, 2006; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Bartunek et al., 2006). Some research even suggests that most change initiatives fail (i.e., Beer & Nohria, 2000).

Therefore, research that focuses on sensemaking in micro-processes of change at different organizational levels is important, as it may clarify why major change initiatives unfold in a certain way. The context of the Swedish Police reform enables the study of influence, including episodic power, via the strategic level of the reform, using videos to promote the organizational reform within the Swedish police. In addition, the Swedish police reform provides opportunities for the examination of efforts to influence sensemaking on different organizational levels. This involve the study of middle managers who explores alternative forms of organizing, and employees who are given the role of change agents with delegated responsibilities for arranging change work. It also involves employees throughout the organization who are expected to participate in organizational change work in ways they have not previously made.

1.1 Purpose and Research questions

The purpose of this dissertation is to increase the understanding about influence in sensemaking during micro-processes of change. To fulfil the purpose, efforts of influencing others sensemaking on several organizational levels are closely examined. The following research questions (RQ) set the direction of the studies included in this dissertation:

- How can efforts to influence sensemaking at different organizational levels be understood?
- By which means do actors attempt to influence the sensemaking of others?

The questions are addressed through studies of influence, sensemaking and sensegiving made in four articles, where each article focus on one particular organizational level as illustrated in figure 1.

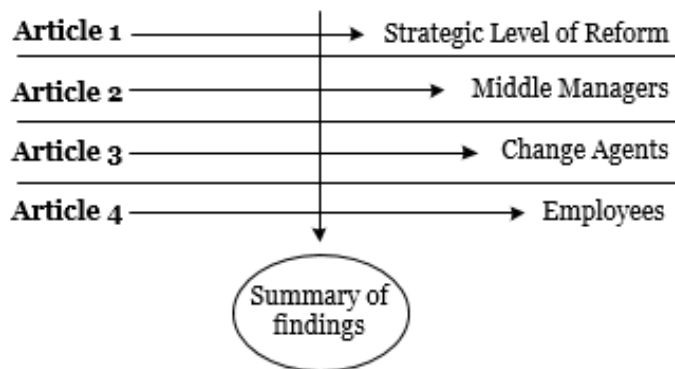


Figure. 1. The link between articles and the respective organizational level.

The choice of the concept influence over sensegiving, is in this thesis done purposefully to facilitate a broad approach to the question of how sensemaking is impacted by aspects such as power dynamics and social relations in micro-processes of change. As I will outline below, sensegiving is one approach to understand influence in sensemaking, but other concepts are also available to describe this relation.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

As shown in the introduction, sensemaking on all hierarchical levels of organizations play a crucial role in organizational change. Consequently, when the influence of others' sensemaking fail, organizations find it difficult to achieve in-depth and long-lasting change (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

This chapter introduces the concept of sensemaking, thereafter the connection between sensemaking and organizational change is discussed. The influence concept is thereafter introduced and related to various manifestations, such as sensegiving, sensebreaking and sensehiding. This part of the framework also connects the concept of influence to episodic power.

2.1 The Sensemaking Perspective

The literature on sensemaking explains how individuals try to create meaning and comprehend what is going on around them when they encounter ambiguous, unexpected or confusing events (Cornelissen et al., 2012; Weick, 1995). This dissertation departs from research with a sensemaking perspective that positions sensemaking as social process that to a large extent occurs between people as they take part in constructing, reconstructing and influencing how meanings emerge. One influential theoretical root of sensemaking can be traced to phenomenology and the writings by Garfinkel (1967) and his ideas about the ways individuals construct an understandable world through language, action and reflexivity. Central in this line of thought is that individuals shape their actions and make them meaningful in relation to a certain context, and that this context is constantly redefined by the actions made.

Weick (1969, 1995) further developed these ideas through the concept of sensemaking, which he describes consisting of seven key properties. Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues and finally, it is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) describes how these properties unfold in organizations in three interrelated and cyclical sub-processes.

First, individuals *create* an initial sense of a situation by noticing and extracting cues from their lived experiences. Second, they *interpret* this initial sense and shape it into a more coherent and organized sense of the situation. Third, they *enact* these interpretations and more organized sense, which generate new iterations of the cycle. The concept of enactment is here central for describing how new iterations are generated as it highlights the circular relationship between “sense” and “action”(Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p.19) and that “people act their way into sense”(Weick, 1995, p.130).

From this perspective, sensemaking goes beyond interpretation, as it involves actors who play a role in constructing and authoring the events that they attempt to understand (Weick et al., 2005). Similar to Garfinkel’s (1967) notion of reflexivity, Weick explained that individual actions become subject to reflexivity which in turn provides a new basis for further actions. Thus, sensemaking is a highly social process that takes place between people as they contest and negotiate meaning when attempting to understand the organizational world and take collective actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Maitlis, 2005; Weick et al., 2005). Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) contributed with the notion of *intra-action* to this topic to highlight that sense is not an object which can be transferred from one actor to another, but rather an activity in which various individuals intertwine their sense-making activities. For instance, when an employee reacts to a change initiative introduced by managers, their reaction simultaneously influences the managers’ sensemaking of the change initiative.

A central point in the sensemaking approach is that processes of sensemaking do not occur in isolation; they are shaped by a range of factors in situations where sensemaking takes place (Gephart, 1993; Maitlis, 2005; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christiansson, 2014). These factors include, for instance, language, emotions, power and technology, and can be purposely used as resources to influence others sensemaking. Within the field of leadership, Smircich and Morgan (1982, p. 258) paid particular attention to leadership as a factor that shapes how sensemaking emerges. They considered leadership to be “realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of others” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, p. 258). According to this perspective, leadership is a phenomenon that represents a dialectical relationship between those in leadership roles and the people that they lead. The former has a position of power, from which they “provide a focus for the creation of meaning” and “manage meaning in such a way

that individuals orient themselves to the achievement of desirable goals” (p.262). Therefore, Smircich and Morgan underlined that a formal position is a resource that grants some individuals more opportunities to exercise influence in sensemaking than others. This attention to a specific group (i.e., leaders) suggests that some individuals has more *agency* in sensemaking than others. It also implies that *meaning* – how a statement or an object should be interpreted, the specific understanding of an idea, or the particular content (Alvesson et al., 2017, p.110) – is a central target for those with an interest in shaping others’ sensemaking, further action, and course of organizational change.

The sensemaking perspective described in this section encompasses several components, as illustrated in Figure 2. In the figure, the three large ellipses and arrows refer to the central subprocesses, and iterative cycles, of sensemaking, as described by Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015, p.14). These cycles of sensemaking involve the seven key properties of sensemaking outlined by Weick (1995).

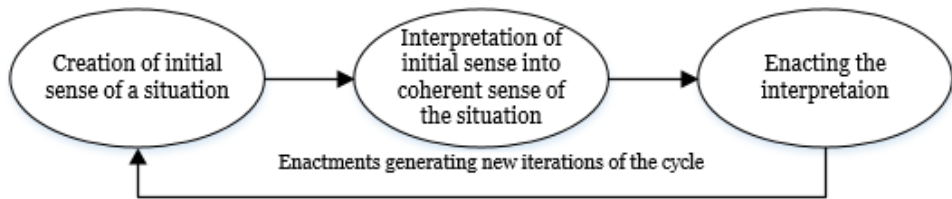


Figure. 2. The sensemaking process cycle as described by Tsoukas and Sandberg, 2015.

The following example illustrates how the seven key properties are involved in iterative cycles. A group of people encounters an organizational change which involves structural redesign and attempts to develop new management methods. The change is unexpected, confusing, and entails several ambiguities. Each involved person’s understanding and subsequent actions in response to the suggested changes will vary according to their *identities* and who they believe themselves to be. Moreover, the new structure and methods are discussed and processed over time with the involvement of several individuals, which makes sensemaking an *ongoing* and highly *social* activity in which perceptions and stories are shared. As people discuss and share their stories, they *enact* the context that they face as they verbalize their experience of the events.

Whilst these enactments can help individuals to understand a situation, they also influence others' sensemaking of the situation. During these processes, participants draw on *cues* from the environment to gather information which seems relevant and *plausible*. They may, for instance, draw on their own experiences of change work or receive new ideas from the manager who is responsible for implementing the change. Through *retrospection*, cues can be taken from different points in time, which affects the references that individuals use to make sense of the situation. Overall, this example illustrates that each property of sensemaking is involved when people attempt to understand an ambiguous or confusing event and thus how their understanding of organizational reality shape the organizing that occurs during change.

The social perspective of sensemaking applied in this dissertation differs ontologically from the more cognitive-oriented sensemaking literature, which mainly focuses on individual frameworks, mental models, and schemata (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). By contrast, the social perspective focuses on conversations and social practices through which organizational members construct and reconstruct meanings related to ambiguous and uncertain events, which may involve text (c.f. Gephart, 1993), discursive competence (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), and narratives (Brown et al., 2008). The social perspective of sensemaking was chosen as a starting point because major change initiatives are commonly debated, involve the politics of interpretation, and are influenced by multiple actors with conflicting interests (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). To understand influence in processes of sensemaking it is crucial to analyse these debates, interpretations and conflicting interests.

2.2 Sensemaking in Organizational Change

Organizational change is relevant to the study of sensemaking, as situations and contexts characterized by change can advance our knowledge of the mechanisms of sensemaking. First, it should be mentioned that organizational change and change management in themselves are broad field of research and practice. The related literature is rich, divers and debated in many ways. Examples include ongoing discussions regarding the conceptualization of change, when it occurs, and how and why it should be studied (see Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2014; Rosenbaum et al., 2018; van de Ven & Poole, 1995 for overviews). Within this literature, one distinction that should be clarified for the purposes of this dissertation is the difference between a

‘tool’- or rationalist approach to change, and a processual approach to organizational change.

One stream of literature on change corresponds to the tool perspective, in which organizational change is commonly considered inevitable, desirable, and manageable and its outcomes are considered predictable and controllable (Morgan & Sturdy, 2000; Sturdy & Grey, 2003). This perspective is based on a technical knowledge interest (c.f. Habermas, 1972) and can be traced to early writings about organizational change, such as Kurt Lewin's (1947) three stage model. Although popular in organizational practice (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), the tool perspective is commonly criticized for overlooking the impact of multiple organizational members' influence on change (see Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Bartunek et al., 2006) and dividing individuals into proponents and opponents in ways that are unfavourable for some organizational members (Erwin & Garman 2010).

Other critiques target the belief in providing universal recipes for change, as it underestimates cultural, political, and historical circumstances and is based on the weak argument that change occurs for a limited period of time (Heracleous & Langham, 1996; Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). Some authors have argued that universal recipes for change reduce complex processes of change to trivialities with little relevance for research (see for instance Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2014). Adding support to the critique of a rationalist approach to change is the observation that change processes have proven to be very difficult to steer and control (Collins, 2005; Dawson, 2003), and that, statistically, many change initiatives fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000).

Based on these arguments, this dissertation takes an overall cautious stance towards the tool perspective and specific recipes for change and consequently towards the idea that it is appropriate for a group of individuals (e.g., managers or leaders) to unilaterally define organizational reality from which they attempt to steer change, even if they are provided with a particular opportunity to influence others' sensemaking through their roles (c.f. Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

As an alternative to the tool perspective, this dissertation departs from a processual perspective in an attempt to capture and understand the complexity and messiness that underlie labels such as “major organizational change” or “reform.” Specifically, it focuses on the sensemaking that occurs in micro-processes of change, which may originate from a major organizational change but are triggered by all of

the smaller informal and formal change initiatives that follow a major change. From a processual perspective, change is considered as an ongoing and relational process in which individuals engage in sensemaking and influence each other's sensemaking with regard to change initiatives (c.f. Weick and Quinn, 1999; Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The processual perspective is supported by findings that show that change agents are found at many levels in organizations (Denis et al., 2001; Plowman et al., 2007). This perspective emphasizes managers' reliance on employee support to implement changes, and challenge "top-down" and "bottom-up" models of organizational change since these are considered to restrict the understanding of different change roles (c.f. Heyden et al., 2017). Rather than the needs, plans, and strategies of change, the process perspective focuses on individuals' understanding of organizational reality, communication, and the ways in which humans experience and make sense of the world (Thomas et al., 2011). It is also concerned with attempting to comprehend the complexity involved in change initiatives, which encompass ambiguities, resistance, and negotiations between organizational members at different hierarchical levels (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). Finally, a process perspective acknowledges the existence of a pluralism of interests between various actors and their ways of pursuing these interests through different means of influence (Pfeffer, 1992).

Research has produced detailed accounts of the relationship between sensemaking and organizational change. For example, planned change interventions frequently generate ambiguities, uncertainties, and confusion despite rigorous preparations, which triggers processes of sensemaking amongst participants (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). These planned change initiatives may begin with structural reorganizations that violate present understandings of the organization and generate confusion, uncertainty, ambiguity, and feelings of disorientation amongst organizational members (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).

In other cases, the initiatives directly target meanings and conceptions of organizational culture and identity, which trigger sensemaking around these issues (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Mantere et al. 2012, Vaara, 2000). It is also possible for both of these sensemaking triggers to simultaneously occur. One stream of literature is particularly concerned with organizational change driven by planned change initiatives such as decentralization and the development of team-oriented organizing (i.e., Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Yu et al., 2005). This stream is based on the

idea that changes to structures, responsibilities, and roles create contradictions which lead to sensemaking amongst organizational members about their work and working conditions (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).

Individuals make sense of a situation and current conditions based on factors such as their identity, what they believe to be plausible, and whom they interact with when new meanings are constructed (Weick, 1969, 1995). Depending on how they make sense of a change initiative and their assumptions about its impact and consequences a variety of explicit reactions (e.g., affective, cognitive and behavioural reactions) emerge (c.f. Bartunek et al., 2006; Oreg et al., 2011). Accordingly, research has shown that the failure of sensemaking processes can also lead to the failure of an organizational change initiative (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). It was within this line of thinking that Kraft et al. (2018) emphasized leaders' need to engage in dialogue and "formalized reflection" with other organizational members. In stressful situations caused by change, the researchers argued that leaders tend to hold on to plausible explanations that first come to mind. Thus, reflection is seen as an antidote to uncritical sensemaking.

This dissertation draws on a processual perspective of change and the premise that major organizational change initiatives trigger processes of sensemaking at all levels throughout the organization. This does not necessarily mean that all sensemaking occur as a direct result of or in close relation to a major change initiative. Rather, much sensemaking takes place in micro-processes of change triggered by both planned and unplanned events that unfold in the wake of a major change initiative. These micro-processes transpire in organizations as multiple actors buy into, challenge, negotiate, or reject meaning as they make sense of ambiguous and uncertain events. The division of change into plans, strategies, implementation, objectives, and assessments is thus considered to be of lesser importance. These do not always provide meaningful insights about what occurs during change processes in which individuals attempt to give and make sense of ambiguous situations. In this dissertation, the focus is on micro-processes of change which involve various groups of organizational members, the different ways in which they make sense of change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Brown et al., 2008), and how they influence the definition of organizational reality (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). Although several studies have been conducted on sensemaking in times of change, only a few have closely examined the dynamics of sensemaking when different individuals simultaneously engage in activities of influence and

struggles over meaning (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Schildt et al., 2019). I now turn to examine the concept of influence more specifically.

2.3 Influence and Sensemaking

Since people work at various organizational levels and have different backgrounds, actors understand actions and events differently, which results in discrepant sensemaking (Brown et al., 2008). Based on different sensemaking positions, individuals also engage in political struggles over meaning (Weick, 1995) in which they actively work to make some interpretations legitimate, whilst others are disregarded and disappear (Brown, 2005; Gephart, 1993). It is within these struggles over meaning that *influence* becomes central.

The literature on sensemaking offers a number of concepts that has made important contributions to the understanding of how influence shapes sensemaking in organizations that undergo change. Sensegiving is perhaps the most common concept in this respect and refers to “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p.442). Since the introduction of sensegiving, additional concepts of influence have emerged; they provide further insights on the forces that shape others’ sensemaking, such as sensebreaking (Pratt, 2000), sensehiding (Monin et al., 2013; Vaara & Monin, 2010), and sense-censoring (Whittle et al., 2016). These are outlined in the following section. Moreover, the concept of episodic power and how it has been used in research to describe and understand influence in sensemaking thus far is introduced.

2.3.1 Sensegiving and Related Influence Concepts

The concept of sensegiving stems from research on change management. It was originally coined to describe how leaders attempt to influence others’ perceptions towards a preferred redefinition of organizational reality during change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Thus, sensegiving is occasionally described in terms of “the management of sensemaking” (Will & Pies, 2018, p.292). Regarding variations in the extent of influence, Maitlis (2005) provided detailed accounts of sensegiving that ranged from high to low levels of animation (author’s interpretation: *liveliness*) and control, each with a varying impact on processes of sensemaking. Maitlis (2005) work demonstrates that particular forms of sensemaking (i.e., guided, restricted, fragmented, and minimal) are

outcomes that depend on the level of animation and control exerted in sensegiving efforts by either leaders or stakeholders.

An emergent critique of sensegiving is that it is based on the assumption that one part first makes sense and then gives it on to someone else like an object (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). This critique is derived from the notion that making sense is an activity to engage in, and in which “givers” and “makers” cannot be fully separated. Thus, sense is not an object that can be easily transferred from one person to another. For instance, Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) argued that, when an employee reacts to a change initiative communicated by a manager, they influence others sensemaking through their reaction (c.f. enactment).

While this critique is important, many studies of sensegiving draw on nuanced conceptualizations of sensegiving that does not presuppose that sense is transferred like an object between actors. For instance, Kraft et al. (2015) described different modes of influence in terms of receptive, participative, compensating, and evaluative sensegiving. Each mode relates to different change phases: exploration, preparation, implementation, and evaluation. By responding with reassurance, orientation, balance, or acknowledgement, leaders meet various employees’ sensemaking needs and thus support co-construction of common understandings of organizational change. In this way, the concept of sensegiving is developed to include different types of influence in sensemaking. Kraft et al. (2015) linked all types of influence to managerial efforts to manage meaning.

Since the introduction of sensegiving, additional concepts have emerged to describe other manifestations of influence. Sensebreaking, for instance, refers to “the destruction of breaking down of meaning” (Pratt, 2000, p.464) and is a form of influence that disrupts current understanding by questioning its underlying assumptions (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2014). Sensebreaking is commonly explained as an activity that precedes sensegiving since it opens up space in the current understanding of reality, which can be filled with new meaning and courses of action (Pratt, 2000). Thus, sensebreaking becomes manifest when contradictory evidence undermines previously constructed senses (Giuliani, 2016).

Some studies have outlined how different expressions of influence manifest in concert. For instance, in a study of justice in postmerger integrations, Monin et al. (2013) explained that sensegiving can be understood in terms of three sub-forms of influence, one of which is

sensebreaking. In addition, the authors introduced the concepts of sense-hiding (i.e., the act of deliberately avoiding certain senses) and sense-specification (i.e., the act of providing specific meanings). Their analysis demonstrated that these forms of influence are essential components of sensegiving but that the effects of influence efforts largely depend on organizational members' reactions, which may range from distancing to resistance or acceptance. In this way, they highlighted the relational and political dimensions of sensemaking and showed that agency of influence also involves individuals outside the management team. Furthermore, Whittle et al. (2016) contributed the concept of sense-censoring, which refers to the act of diluting, hiding, or restricting senses. This form of influence becomes manifest when actors in a subsidiary organization censor sense from the headquarters to transform the headquarters' course of action into inaction.

A common denominator in the abovementioned concepts is that they involve activities that aim to influence which cues for sensemaking other individuals notice (or do not notice), how they interpret and make sense of these cues, and how they enact them. Moreover, the concepts are mainly related to the managerial use of influence, with little attention paid to how other organizational members influence processes of sensemaking. As all concepts encompass how individuals attempt to shape others' sensemaking, I consider them to have complementary purposes in increasing the understanding of influence in sensemaking during organizational change. In addition to these concepts, I believe that a closer integration between power and influence could contribute further insights on influence in sensemaking. Control over cues has been recognized as an important source of power (Weick, 1995). Accordingly, it has become increasingly common for studies of sensemaking to consider aspects of power (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Weick et al., 2005). However, questions about how power operates in sensemaking remain largely unexplored (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sonenshein, 2010). As previously mentioned, I consider that bridging these gaps can help generate important contributions to the literature on sensemaking.

2.3.2 The Relationship Between Influence, Power and Resistance

Power is considered endemic in organizations; as soon as individuals gather to undertake a task together, power manifest itself (Fleming & Spicer, 2010). Organizational research commonly differentiates between episodic and systemic power (S. Clegg et al., 2006; Fleming & Spicer,

2014). Episodic power refers to visible acts of influence, often in terms of various expressions of manipulation and coercion, as originally described by Bachrach and Baratz (1963) and Dahl (1957), respectively. For example, manipulation may involve attempts to ensure that discussions and actions take place within specific boundaries by setting agendas and shaping the rules of discussion. Moreover, coercion refers to the direct mobilization of power that occurs when certain individuals are given formal positions with a mandate or capacity to, for instance, distribute valuable resources and reduce uncertainty (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

Systemic power, on the other hand, refers to knowledge structures and less visible forms of influence and manifests through attempts to shape the sense of identities, emotions, and experiences and to make power relations appear natural. Systemic forms of power are traditionally described in terms of domination (Lukes, 1974) and subjectification (Foucault, 1977). In organizational studies, both forms are considered central to the process of organizational change, as they contribute to the implementation of changes in daily organizational routines. Furthermore, both forms legitimize changes made or future changes through convincing statements about certain ideas and values (Lawrence et al., 2012). From this viewpoint, systemic power facilitates episodic power to initiate change by appealing to certain values (e.g., ideas about a more democratically governed organization), whereas episodic power can be used to institutionalize change when the changes made are legitimated by key actors and their skilled use of language (Lawrence et al., 2012).

In this dissertation, the main focus is on episodic power and acts of influence that target others' sensemaking. This delimitation is based on my research question and interest in increasing the understanding of influence in sensemaking during micro-processes of change (e.g., meetings and workshops) at different organizational levels. However, systemic forms of power, such as institutionalized ideas and knowledge about leadership, organizational culture, and identity, are still considered to be essential due to the ways in which they provide certain conditions for sensemaking. Systemic power is thus seen as the contexts, within which individuals act and use episodic power. Conversely, episodic power is understood in this dissertation as ways of shaping the discourses that becomes dominant respectively toned down. Thus, systemic and episodic forms of power are seen as two parts of a mutually constitutive relationship that shapes the conditions under which individuals make sense of and enacts the world (c.f., Clegg et al., 2006;

Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Torfing, 2009). Furthermore, in this dissertation power is considered having both enabling and restrictive potential (c.f. Van Baarle, 2022). This means that power is considered as having potential to both improve and impair organizations and their practices.

Thus, the definition of power used in this study focuses on episodic forms of power. Power refers to *the capacity to influence other actors with specific interests in mind towards a certain course of action* (Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Clegg et al., 2006). As this definition indicates, influence is central to the concept of power and relates to actors' activities. This definition also highlights the close relationship between episodic power and the ways in which influence has been described in the sensemaking literature. In fact, recent research has described both sensegiving and sensebreaking as concepts that "provide insights into the managerial use of episodic power" (Schildt et al., 2019, p.2).

In studies that illustrate power in sensemaking, power is generally equated with episodic forms of power and thus acts of influence (Schildt et al., 2019). From this viewpoint, power is related to shaping or controlling the preferences and perceptions of others (Hardy, 1996). Thus, power targets meaning and is achieved by influencing what information is produced and distributed, to whom, and how. Weick et al. (2005) concluded that power involves influence in at least seven dimensions of sensemaking (cf. Figure 2). For instance, some cues for sensemaking are highlighted whilst others are downplayed, some identities are encouraged whilst others are discouraged, certain social relations are accepted whilst others are discredited, and the definitions of what is considered accurate respectively plausible can be modified (p.418).

In the sensemaking literature, power is commonly described using the concepts of sensegiving, sensebreaking, and sensehiding (Hope, 2010; Schildt et al., 2019). For instance, Filstad (2014) have underscored the close relationship between power and sensegiving by arguing that sensegiving actions can either shut down or normalize alternative interpretations by steering participation in and the shaping of sensemaking processes. Schildt et al. (2019, p.16) further illustrated how episodic power in sensemaking can take different forms and outlined four distinct sensegiving and sensebreaking practices. "Suppressive" and "authoritative" sensegiving were described as expressions of episodic power that constrain and shut down others' sensemaking. These practices aim to reduce doubt and provide coherent understanding and

fixed solutions. “Inspirational” and “expansive” sensegiving, on the other hand, are considered expressions of episodic power that “open up” others’ sensemaking. In contrast to constraining forms of episodic power, these forms provide actors with deviating ideas and work to induce the doubt and creativity needed to create richer understandings of a situation.

By illustrating how individuals (mainly managers) intentionally use means of imposing ideas onto others and break down, hide, or censor meaning, studies of power in sensemaking have highlighted the political dimension of the process of defining reality. In this context, politics can be understood as power in action (Hardy, 1996) and are concerned with the legitimization of some ideas and values and the delegitimization of others (Pettigrew, 1977). The political dimension of sensemaking takes place in collective settings when individuals are offered an arena for argumentation upon which various efforts of influence can be manifested (Weick, 1995). This point is central to this dissertation, as the study was founded on empirical data that were mainly gathered from observations of such arenas, such as conferences, meetings, and group work. Emphasizing the political dimension of sensemaking also highlights that “sensemaking is not about truth and getting it right” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415). Rather, it concerns the ongoing construction of a story to make it comprehensible and plausible; as a result, it can serve as motivation for further action. As Weick et al. (2005) highlighted, a definition of reality that is plausible for one group may be implausible for another group.

Maitlis and Lawrence (2007), described sensegiving in terms of political activity, specifically how it influences the sensemaking of others. However, although interest in politics and power in sensemaking has increased in recent years, the understanding of how episodic power transpires and shapes meanings in and of the organization, promoting certain cues and perspectives whilst destabilizing others, remains limited (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Schildt et al., 2019; Strike & Rerup, 2016). Thus, further integrating influence in sensemaking through the concept of episodic power could contribute fruitful perspectives on deliberate attempts to influence others’ sensemaking during organizational change.

Power must be understood in relation to resistance, as these concepts are intimately related. Studies on how power and resistance work separately and in concert have seen a surge of interest in the sensemaking literature and in research on organizational change and

power (see, for example, Clegg & Hardy, 2006; Courpasson et al., 2012; Fleming & Spicer, 2008; Mumby, 2005). Like power, resistance is a broad concept and is often used to describe “anything and everything that workers do which managers do not want them to do, and that workers do not do that managers wish them to do” (Davidson, quoted in Piderit, 2000). In change literature with a rationalist perspective, activities labelled as resistance are commonly regarded as disturbing and unwanted elements and as dysfunctional, irrational, and pathologic reactions of the change recipients (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Ford et al., 2008; Thomas & Hardy, 2011) and exercised by employees who operate as “foot-dragging saboteurs” (Balogun, 2006, p.30). Resistance is viewed in this context as either individual or collective and grounded in political, cultural, or psychological reasons (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015).

Other researchers view resistance as an important contribution to change work. Courpasson et al. (2012), for instance, discussed productive resistance and how individuals who oppose a change initiative can contribute to shaping decisions and the unfolding of change initiatives by providing alternative viewpoints. Similarly, Thomas et al. (2011) concluded that resistance plays a facilitative role in change work and can contribute to both generative and de-generative dialogues as individuals negotiate meaning. Whilst the generative element of resistance can lead to innovative and synergetic change based on the transformation of knowledge, the de-generative element of resistance tends to produce demarcation and conceptual closure, as it stems from the knowledge held by a particular group. Yet, as Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2015) highlighted, much of the literature on organizational change entails the underlying assumption that employees are *against* change and managers work *for* change overall. One problem with this view is that it tends to portray those who are in favour of change in positive terms, whilst those who oppose change are described in negative terms (Erwin & Garman, 2010). Such portrayals indirectly support management teams, even in situations in which there are strong reasons to be sceptical of change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2014).

In addition to the abovementioned accounts of resistance, a processual perspective of organizational change provides an alternative view of resistance. In this context, resistance can be considered a natural element of change in which the relationship between change agents and other employees and how they make sense of change is of central importance. For instance, actors who receive change proposals from change initiators are, like managers, considered coproducers of change, and managers who refuse to engage in alternative discussions may well

be seen as the reason why change initiatives do not unfold as intended (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). From this perspective, resistance can be understood as an expression of the need for time to make sense of change amongst organizational members (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Viewing all employees as coproducers of change rather than conformable supporters or potential resisters implies attention to individual experiences and the sensemaking that takes place amongst those who participate in change work (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2014), and how this sensemaking work serves as a basis for further action on the part of individuals (c.f. Weick, 1995).

These two different perspectives of resistance have implications for the understanding of influence in sensemaking. For instance, when applying rationalist conceptions of resistance to change, employees' efforts to challenge and influence the meanings imposed by managers can be easily considered and categorized as illegitimate resistance. Applying a processual view of change, on the other hand, facilitates a more nuanced conceptualization of resistance in terms of influence that can be both "facilitative" and "oppositional" and provides conditions for both "generative" and "de-generative" dialogues (Thomas et al., 2011, p.22-23).

The processual view also has implications for the relationship between power and resistance, which has become a central theme in the study of power in organizations (see Fleming & Spicer, 2010, 2014; Morgan & Spicer, 2009). A central argument is that power and resistance are so deeply intertwined that they should be viewed as "a singular dynamic called struggle" (Fleming & Spicer, 2008, p.1). Fleming and Spicer (2010, p.58) defined struggle as a "dynamic that animates the interface between power and resistance," which can involve struggles around *actions* and *inactivity* (what should be and should not be done), *interests* and the goals of action, and *identity*. It is within these struggles, they argued, that different accounts of meaning compete. Whilst some meanings are downplayed or disappear, others gain traction and prevail. Similar to other research on power and resistance during change, the view of resistance as an element of ongoing struggles over meaning emphasizes that resistance can be disorganized and indirect and manifest as subtle or invisible expressions of subversion that undermine power relations within organizations (Clegg & Hardy, 2006; Fleming & Sewell, 2002).

2.3.3 Actors of Influence

Whereas the previous two sections mainly concerned *what* influence is and how it has been previously conceptualized and described in the sensemaking literature, the following sections focus on *who* expresses influence and through which *means*. Although sensemaking is generally understood as a multi-actor process that takes place at all organizational levels (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), most research on influence in sensemaking focuses on strategies and means used by leaders, senior managers, and middle managers. Thus, research on influence in sensemaking tends to be leader- and manager-centric. Kärreman et al., (2006) underscored the managerial dimension of influence by describing sensegiving as “direct, interactive and expressive activities for providing a preferred and preformed interpretation of an event or an object” (p.346). The focus on managers and leaders is perhaps unsurprising given that these individuals are commonly given a mandate and a role as change agents and possess the means required for the task, such as control over resources and formal decision-making authority, which are supported by the organizational hierarchy (Denis et al., 1996; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). However, studies have also shown that there are differences in the influence strategies used by actors in leader and manager positions, which result in various sensemaking outcomes (e.g., Kraft et al., 2018; Maitlis, 2005). Other studies have indicated that the importance of employees’ understanding and influence in sensemaking during change is underestimated (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2005) and that these actors also have the capacity to engage in efforts of influence similar to, for instance, sensegiving (Vlaar et al., 2008).

Studies that highlight the importance of leaders and managers as main actors to control overarching issues and drive sensemaking often describe sensegiving as a form of “restricted sensemaking” (Maitlis, 2005; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 1994; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Mantere et al., 2012). For instance, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) demonstrated that senior managers attempt to shape others’ sensemaking by outlining the strategic vision, questioning the status quo, and building commitment to change. Related literature has largely described influence in sensemaking as a top-down process in which resistance is weak and sensemaking a fundamental aspect of leadership (Monin et al., 2013; Shamir, 2007). Similarly, Hope (2010) showed that middle managers exert a high level of control in targeting both subordinates and superiors’ sensemaking. This influence is not necessarily convergent with organizational change goals; in fact, it may

be mobilized in a direction that diverges from the plan for the change initiative. It has also been shown that leaders who engage in high levels of sensegiving that generate restricted sensemaking occasionally single out specific individuals whom they find resourceful for the issue discussed. In private meetings, these individuals' knowledge can then be used to make sense of an issue (Maitlis, 2005). Therefore, although a few employees are sporadically selected to participate in the meaning construction process, managers' overall strategy is to achieve strict control over the sensemaking process.

Other research has highlighted how managers can engage in influence efforts with a reduced level of control and by synthesizing meanings from various groups (Beck & Plowman, 2009). This influence is commonly understood as exerted by middle managers who do not aim to control or organize the discussion to the same extent as senior managers, which generates a more fragmented form of sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005). By relinquishing control and inviting other organizational members to raise issues and exert influence, middle managers can play an integrative role in sensemaking. Middle managers' capacity to engage in sensemaking is considered critical for several organizational practices, including the initiation and implementation of organizational change (see Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Hope, 2010; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Smith et al., 2010; Teulier & Rouleau, 2013). Kieran et al., (2020), for instance, highlighted the importance of these actors' sensegiving across the organization and beyond the initiation of organizational change.

Whilst the importance of leaders, senior managers, and middle managers' influence on processes of sensemaking during organizational change has received significant scholarly attention (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Hope, 2010; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Smith et al., 2010), other actors' influence on sensemaking has not been studied to the same extent. Frontline employees are by far the largest group in most organizations and, as highlighted by Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010), are often responsible for implementing the suggested stages of a change initiative. This makes them an important factor of influence to consider in the study of sensemaking throughout organizational change processes. A few studies have indicated the importance of employees' influence (see Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Huy et al., 2014). They highlighted the finding that the outcome of planned organizational change is highly dependent on how employees interpret and enact change initiatives. In addition, Sonenshein (2010) argued that, whilst leaders attempt to impose a certain view of reality, employees draw on

their own experience to make sense of organizational reality and its practice, which they can use to either support or subvert leaders' views.

The sensemaking perspective occasionally attracts criticism for its focus on actors in formal positions of power and for not paying sufficient attention to the ways in which various groups attempt to shape meaning, which promotes certain cues and perspectives whilst destabilizing others (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Similar criticism can be found in the field of leadership; the focus on actors in positions of power (either formal or informal) and theoretical conceptualizations of leadership are considered to glorify leadership (see Alvesson, 2019; Alvesson et al., 2017; Alvesson & Blom, 2019). For instance, it has been argued that contemporary leadership research is excessively positive and prescribes overambitious leadership, which creates expectations of managers to influence followers in several positive ways (see Alvesson & Blom, 2019; Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2019). According to Einola and Alvesson (2019), the current trend of positivity in leadership studies may backfire, as followers who are overreliant on the capacity of leaders creates a dynamic of immaturization amongst those who consider themselves followers. Since many employees are more interested in working autonomously and finding support in networks and other horizontal relationships, such overambitious leadership is problematic and does not help organizations to efficiently use employees' skills and resources. Beyond generating "plenty of leader-wannabees but few follower-wannabees" Alvesson and Blom (2019, p.35) argued that leader- and manager-centrism also obscure the development of equally important forms of organizing, which they defined as "ways of providing direction, advice, support, coordination, encouragement, inspiration and feedback in order to make people work productively together or autonomously" (Alvesson & Blom, 2019, p.2).

Instead, Alvesson et al. (2017; 2019) advocated for a reflexive approach to organizing and between different types of leadership. Through reflexivity and dialogue, actors can develop flexible combinations of vertical and horizontal forms of organizing. Vertical refers to hierarchy-based, asymmetric, and top-down forms of organizing, such as leadership, management, and power. Horizontal, on the other hand, involves more equal forms of organizing, such as networking. Instead of relying on the unrealistic ideals of leaders and managers, balancing leadership with alternative forms of organizing can help organizations make better use of different individuals' inherent capacities and use time and resources more productively. Similarly, Cunliffe and Jun (2005) advocated for forms of organizing in which employees at various

hierarchical levels can exercise greater influence within the organization. They proposed the use of self-reflexivity and critical reflexivity to reshape hierarchical organizations. Through such reflexivity, individuals in public organizations can transform their understanding of the world in ways that create opportunities for individuals to make new sense of themselves and their emancipatory and creative potential.

Despite the dominance of a leader/manager perspective in empirical studies of influence in sensemaking, influence in organizations does not merely need to be considered a top-down and leader/managerial process. As indicated by Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015), sense is not an object which can be transferred to others, and managers as well as employees construct their own sense, upon which they base their actions and influence change processes and outcomes. On this subject, Bartunek et al. (2006) stressed that employees commonly interpret and enact change interventions differently from managers. Similarly, Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) showed that employees' sensemaking is critical, as it may feature competing enactments of an organizational change initiative and lead to struggles over the meaning of events within the organization.

In summary, a dominant perspective on influence in sensemaking has focused the activities of managers and leaders, who attempt to regulate how sensemaking unfolds with varying degrees of control and diverse outcomes. According to Gordon (2011, p.199), a significant challenge for modern leaders is "how to differentiate themselves from their followers, maintaining their identity and 'voice' as a leader, whilst at the same time nurturing the ever-increasing empowerment of their followers." Whilst this section focused on broad patterns amongst those who influence sensemaking in times of change (e.g., high to low control), the next section outlines research that has examined the means of influence used to shape meaning.

2.3.4 Means of Influence

In times of organizational change, actors draw on a wide range of means to influence other actors' sensemaking. As noted by Weick (1995 and Sonenshein (2006) sensemaking is closely tied to language, which individuals use to comprehensively explain situations and thus provide a springboard for action. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that considerable research on influence in sensemaking focuses on language and how it is used to shape others' sensemaking and the direction of organizational change. In the literature, there are various examples of how narratives, storytelling, rhetoric, and discourse are used as means of

influence. For instance, Sonenshein (2010) described a narrative as a discursive construction and a tool used by managers to implement change; moreover, employees tend to beautify these narratives to make sense of and narrate their own responses to change (i.e., resistance or acceptance). Similarly, Brown et al. (2009) outlined that stories involve efforts of influence in terms of power and the creation of knowledge in times of organizational change. These stories can serve various purposes, such as triggering, blocking, or defining change. With regard to rhetoric, Jarzabkowski and Sillince (2007) showed that rhetorical practices can be used to influence commitment to multiple goals. In addition, Cornelissen et al. (2012) illustrated the ways in which metaphors can be used as rhetorical device to influence how individuals make sense of their own ideas and construct social identity.

Another strand of research has highlighted how language can be used to draw on discourse and shape others' meaning constructions (Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). For example, Rouleau and Balogun (2011) demonstrated that individuals' "discursive competence" is crucial for their ability to influence others' sensemaking. By drawing on relevant sociocultural and verbal systems, managers with high discursive competence are capable of "setting the scene" and "performing the conversation," which is crucial for involving stakeholder groups in their agenda. These examples illustrate the centrality of language in organizational life and that the ability to tell persuasive stories, draw on relevant narratives and discourses, and prepare a setting in which language can be expressed (e.g., a meeting or conference) accompany the capacity to influence others.

However, it is not only language use per se that determines the capacity to influence others. Another way to consider means of influence in sensemaking is to focus on authority. Authority can be expressed through, for instance, the suppression of ambiguity and an authoritative voice to impose certain interpretations of an event whilst preventing other interpretations from being considered (Kärreman et al., 2006). Authority can also involve reciprocal sensegiving efforts that aim to persuade employees to quickly acquiesce to strategic change initiatives, a technique described by Hensmans (2015) as a Trojan horse mechanism. Similarly, authority can be expressed as a means of influence when individuals use a position of authority to divide a change initiative into smaller parts as part of a strategy to shape others' understanding of the change process (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2017). Using authority as a means of influence is a vivid example of episodic power in sensemaking. Schildt et al. (2019), for instance, used the expression "authoritative

sensegiving” to describe how an articulated goal, narrative, or discourse can be imposed onto sensemaking whilst discrediting competing understandings.

Another body of work has demonstrated how material arrangements can be used as means of influence. Guette and Vandenbempt (2017), for instance, showed that posters could be used to facilitate a change process by helping individuals to unpack and make sense of organizational change. Thus, whilst authority exemplifies a means of influence with a high degree of agency, material arrangements are also a means of influence but are enacted by less visible actors.

Studies of sensemaking during change have mainly illustrated how actors in formal positions of authority utilize one or two modes of social interaction (e.g., speech and body language) as means of influence to shape plausible views of organizational change. These modes all work, in one way or another, to mobilize different resources that aim to control which cues for others sensemaking that becomes highlighted and toned down (Weick, 1995). In addition, some studies have highlighted the importance of recognizing that the construction of meaning occurs through the simultaneous utilization of multiple modes of communication. While not discussing sensemaking per se, Van Leeuwen (2005) discussed means of influence in terms of multimodality in communication. He argued that modalities and modes, such as speech, space, actors, embodiment, and imagery, are concurrently used to influence the construction of meaning. Consequently, to grasp complexity more thoroughly in efforts of influence, a multimodal perspective of means of influence can be productive. In their analysis of sensegiving in business media, Höllerer et al. (2018) identified multimodal compositions that shape specific narratives by relating verbal text with visual text. Another set of studies have indicated that communication technology can be used as means to influence others’ sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Korica and Molloy (2010), for instance, exemplified how individuals make sense of their professional identity because of the influence of new technology. Given ongoing digitalization and the increased prevalence of video (both recorded and instant) as modes of communication, there are reasons to pay careful attention to how communication technology and video in particular can be used as means of influence. Video has a high potential to simultaneously communicate through multiple modalities and thus a high potential as a means of influence in sensemaking during change.

3. Empirical Context: Swedish Police Reform

This chapter introduces the empirical context of this dissertation. First, the changing police force is generally discussed, including a description of the Swedish Police Authority and recent macro-level changes to reform police forces in several European countries. After this the perspective is then narrowed down to the latest Swedish police reform that took place in 2015.

3.1 Changing police forces

Police authorities are often considered societal guarantors for the maintenance of order (Nyzell & Larsson, 2016). With the rise of industrial society in the 19th century, what we know as modern police forces developed in Europe. These were based on the idea that these were given powers by a public authority (Nyzell & Larsson, 2016). With time, the connection between public authorities and local communities has varied and taken on different forms. Recently, a trend has been that public authority has become more centralized (Fyfe & Terpstra, 2013) and, to a larger extent, privatized through the involvement of security companies (Nyzell & Larsson, 2016).

According to Granér and Kronkvist (2016), the complexity of the police's social mission and the variety of tasks that employees must manage place great demands on independence and flexibility amongst organizational members. At the same time, it is crucial for the government to ensure that the police's powers and independence are not abused. This, the researchers argued, makes the police force a difficult organization to govern and police organizations into something that is officially described as machine bureaucracy but in practice functions as a profession bureaucracy. Granér and Kronkvist (2016) based this description on the fact that the police officially conform to the characteristics of a strictly hierarchical organization with a clear chain of command but police officers in everyday practice are expected to act with a high degree of autonomy and discretion in their professional mandate.

Since the 1980s, the public governance of police organizations has been influenced by new public management (NPM) with the overall aim of

strengthening the quality of work whilst cutting costs (Pollitt, 2017). This has led to high pressure on police organizations to change and continuously transform in order to become more effective (Eklund, 2013). Globally, efforts to develop controllable police forces with room for autonomy and flexibility and that constantly improve quality and reduce costs are highly visible. The last few decades have been marked by reforms of public police organizations that target various aspects, such as police leadership, restructuring, and procedures and policies (Chan, 2007).

Police organizations around the world have undertaken macro-level changes to transform policing, and several countries in Europe, such as England, Scotland, and the Netherlands, have implemented reforms as strategic developments related to broad societal changes (Fyfe et al., 2013). Reforms have largely targeted the centralization of police forces, which means shifting from local and regionalized systems to more uniform national police forces. This centralization has also taken place in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, although changes in these countries were presented as decentralization reforms (Granér, 2017). Upon closer inspection, however, it is not a question of centralization *or* decentralization, but both. For instance, features such as districts, governmental control and management, and performance indicators are centralized, whilst local policing and responsibility for budgetary are decentralized (Holmberg, 2014). Overall, the reforms reshaped formal structures, the relationship between the police and government authorities, and the values, norms and purposes of policing (Fyfe et al., 2013).

Research on police reforms has identified several motives behind changes in police organizations. For example, Holmberg (2014) identified five reasons for such changes: to increase police capacity to prevent and manage crime; to adapt to the ideas of NPM and its aim to measure and account for results; police organizations' poor overall functioning, with corruption and incompetence; to impact the public's sense of security; and to reduce costs. With regard to the Scandinavian countries, Holmberg (2014) concluded that the reforms mainly seemed to target the reduction of costs, the increase of uniformity, and the facilitation of government control despite being rhetorically presented as decentralization initiatives that focused on local communities and citizens' needs. Similarly, Fyfe et al. (2013) specified several motives behind the reforms, including innovations in technology which challenge police work, changes in ideas about how the police should be organized and managed, and shifts in power relations and how different societal

actors participate in struggles to support, resist, or transform police reforms. In terms of actual results, Granér (2017) concluded that the Scandinavian reforms were based on an excessive belief in greater uniformity and management as means to combat organized crime and implement organizational change. Contrary to intentions, Granér (2017) argued, the reforms meant that central organs gained increased influence over the police, important experiences derived from practical police work were neglected, and organizational cultural assumptions were ignored. According to Granér (2017), these results led to broad resistance to the reforms amongst police officers and decreased trust in the police.

3.2 The Swedish Police Reform

In 2015, the Swedish police reform involved the merger of 21 self-directed county police authorities into a single police organization with eight national departments, one office to support the national police chief, seven subordinate regional authorities, and three independent units for special investigations, support, and monitoring. The new organizational structure featured a new chain of command and new managerial conditions, such as five managerial levels.

The reform was primarily based on the findings of a parliamentary committee that investigated conditions and opportunities to reform the Swedish police force (Official Reports of the Swedish Government, 2010). Their report indicated a lack of clarity in the division of responsibilities between national and local police units, difficulties in pooling resources, and smaller police departments' challenges in maintaining the skills needed for a broad range of activities (Cameron, 2017). The parliamentary committee concluded that these obstacles should be managed through centralization, which the government accepted and acted upon. The aims of the reform were primarily to increase efficiency, the uniformity of administrative powers, flexibility, quality, and to work more closely with citizens (The Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2017). However, the reform also aimed to increase heterogeneity and adaptation in local policing (Björk, 2018). It aimed to provide more decision mandate to police officers at the far end of the organization to facilitate more rapid and accurate decisions (The Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2016a). To this end, the new police organization would strengthen local police work and adopt a new management model in which the concept of employee-driven development was central.

The reform involved approximately 28,000 organizational members. One aspect that was considered necessary for the success of the change initiative was a broad understanding of the need to create a unified and coherent police organization. Therefore, the implementation committee's communication strategy aimed to be transparent about the change process and facilitate the broadest possible participation amongst managers and employees. To achieve this aim, many resources were channelled towards meetings, informational texts, presentations, and posters (Official Reports of the Swedish Government, 2015). To ensure transparency, the implementation committee hired consulting support to produce of campaign-like informational videos. In total, 44 short videos (around three to five minutes each) were produced to frame and communicate the reform. The target audience for this campaign consisted of police managers and employees, and one of the motives for using videos as a means of communication was to strengthen change managements' capacity to lead change. Along with other news and change material, the 44 videos were released on the police intranet and a public information website build to communicate information about the reform.

When the new police organization was launched at the beginning of 2015, there was still a lack of staff to fill managerial positions, and directives about how to allocate mandates between executive levels were not fully expressed or developed. Reactions to the new organization from 2015 to 2017 was dominated by negative press reports, complaints from rank-and-file officers, and criticism from the police union. These conveyed the image of a police organization in crisis, with divided specialist teams, impaired decision making, and officers fleeing operational policing (Cameron, 2017).

Contemporary police research confirmed the impression of substandard implementation and an organization in disarray following the reform. Björk (2016, 2018), for instance, described the implementation process as a largely top-down process characterized by a narrow focus on coherence and hierarchy. Similarly, Wennström (2014) and Granér and Kronkvist (2016) portrayed the implementation as overly technocratic and conducted by change agents and consultants with little regard for the specifics of policing. The motives behind the reform were also called into question. Holgersson (2017) argued that assumptions and optimism about a more rational future organization – rather than systematic analysis – led to the reform. Moreover, Björk (2018, p.3) reasoned that the organization was driven by a “rationalistic reform culture” characterized by centralization and romantic expectations of future

organizational conditions. Reform advocates, he argued, wrongly believed that structural uncertainty would disappear with organizational reform. In a literature review on police reforms, Granér (2017) came to a similar conclusion, claiming that the reform was a failure which can be partly explained by an overreliance on management theories and uniformity and little regard for the nature of police work and organizational culture.

In terms of results, the Swedish Agency for Public Management (2016b, 2017, 2018) conducted three public evaluations of the police reform process and its outcomes. The first evaluation, which focused on the implementation process, reported a gap between expectations of the reform and its outcomes, which resulted from an overemphasis on uniformity, structure, and central management. This report emphasizes increased “employee-ship” (c.f. The Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2016b) to implement employee-driven development and local adaptation – core ideals in the new management model that were to be integrated into the new organization.

The second evaluation focused on the impact of the reform and reported positive progress in many respects. Nevertheless, several challenges remained and needed to be addressed to achieve the goals of the reform. For instance, the aim of providing more mandate for police officers to make own decisions through “employee-driven development” was not yet an adequate part of the reform, and no reported activities were conducted to achieve this objective (The Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2017).

The third and final evaluation concluded that the reform was more difficult to implement than expected and emphasized that it was too early to form far-reaching conclusions about the long-term effects of the reform, such as changes in behaviour and culture (The Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2018). This evaluation made clear, however, that the reform had not made resources available to the extent expected by the implementation committee. In addition, the new management model and the aim of increasing the employee perspective through employee-driven development were only briefly mentioned. Moreover, the final evaluation did not specify the meaning of employee-driven development or how it was conducted or evaluated. It only commented that a survey showed progress in issues related to development work – more precisely, 67% of employees fully or partially agreed that managers were open to proposals for change in the spring of 2018, compared to 50% in the autumn of 2015 (p.30).

3.3 Focus and Scope of this Dissertation

Overall, the new organizational structure was fully implemented when formal reform work ended at the beginning of 2015. However, several aspects of the organizational change were associated with a lack of clarity and ambiguities. To shed light on these and increase the understanding of influence in sensemaking during organizational change, I focused my research on micro-processes of change as they unfolded at different organizational levels subsequent to the formal police reform.

At the strategic level of reform and the change management team, I focused on how videos were used as a communication strategy to frame and promote the organizational reform of the Swedish police in 2015. This involved an examination of their content and the way they were communicated. At the middle management level, I focused on several leadership conferences in which managers attempt to establish and promote a new management philosophy for the Swedish police force. At the change agent level, I observed conferences in which a few employees were given the role of moderators, which allowed them to implement the component of the new management philosophy known as “employee-driven development.” Finally, at the employee level, I examined the conferences in terms of how groups of individuals made sense of and enacted the concept of employee-driven development.

Thus, the main focus was on regional and local micro-processes of change that unfolded after the new organizational structure was instituted. These initiatives concerned cultural elements of the change in which the meaning of concepts that were central to organizing, such as “leadership,” “management philosophy,” “employee-driven development,” and “police identity,” was ambiguous and open to individuals to make sense of and enact in different ways.

4. Methods

In this chapter, I introduce my overall approach and research design, including preconceptions and choice of topic, ontological and epistemological assumptions, applied methods, and data collection. Methods are further described and explained for each paper.

4.1 Preconceptions and Choice of Subject

Based on my experiences with work and organizational change in government authorities and studies on management and organization, I am well-versed in the practical challenges of organizing and organizational change processes. Organizations spend considerable time implementing changes to develop forms of organizing that suit their needs and purposes. Yet, despite large investments and the vast literature on organizational change management, change work often seems to result in unexpected, unintended, and undesired outcomes. This is interesting from both a theoretical and practical perspective, as society requires government authorities with the capacity to change and meet complex challenges.

With these preconceptions in mind, I joined a research group at Umeå University that focused on the Swedish police force and their major organizational reform, which was implemented from 2013 to 2015. The police organization in Sweden shares similarities with my previous workplace, the Swedish county administrative board. Both are public organizations with similar regional divisions (at least before the reform) and a highly important social mission. They also both face major challenges in developing forms of organizing that can address major societal issues related to increased social unrest and organized crime, crises caused by climate change, and a deteriorating international security situation in Europe. With this point of entry, my choice of topic became the change work that is currently taking place within the Swedish police organization due to the major organizational reform of 2015 and that will continue to impact the organization and policing for a long period.

Given my academic background in social psychology and organization studies, focusing on individuals' understanding and enactment of organizational reality was a natural starting point. In this respect, the sensemaking perspective provided a suitable theoretical point of

departure. Combined with the lens of power, the sensemaking perspective facilitated a view of organizing and organizational change as processes influenced by organizational politics and struggles over meaning. My background also influenced my choice of sites for observation and data collection. For instance, in my experience, meetings, workshops, and conferences are arenas for discussion in which various individuals participate in shaping the meaning of social phenomena in organizations. Therefore, I focused on sites where individuals met to discuss and debate issues related to organizational change. My experience with change work in both management groups and various working or employee groups also indicated that discussions about the same topic often dramatically vary depending on the setting and participants. For example, change work in senior management settings commonly focuses on vision, long-term goals, budgets, and how to “sell” change, whereas discussions amongst other groups of employees often revolve about whether to trust the management’s motives for change, the credibility of the proposed benefits, and what the change will mean for daily work (if anything).

4.2 Core Assumptions About the Research

This dissertation is based on ontological and epistemological assumptions about qualitative research, as outlined below. Moreover, the overall abductive approach explains how this study relates to and includes methods that originate from both inductive and deductive research traditions.

4.2.1 Constructionist Ontology

In this dissertation, I consider the ways in which individuals interpret and enact issues and actions related to change initiatives at various organizational levels, which are central aspects of organizational change and subsequent change work. The change process is affected by the understandings and actions of individuals who work at the national, regional, and local levels and may thus generate a range of outcomes. This is related the ways social reality can be interpreted and enacted differently by organizational members, how it is shaped and contested, and in a state of constant revision (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This dissertation is based on these assumptions and thus a constructionist ontology where social reality is considered closely related to language and individual consciousness (c.f. Burrell & Morgan, 1979). A constructionist ontology implies that social reality is under constant revision, that social phenomena and their meanings are continually

constructed by social actors, and that social reality is produced through social interactions. From this it follows that organizational change can be viewed as ongoing and therefore difficult to control through, for example, planning and communication efforts. To determine what happens in organizations that undergo change, it is crucial to understand the emergence of meanings created as people individually and collectively work to make sense of their organizational reality.

4.2.2 Subjectivist Epistemology

This dissertation departs from a constructionist ontology and is mainly connected to a subjectivist approach to social science (c.f. Morgan & Smircich, 1980) and situated within an epistemology that engages with the ways in which individuals attempt to create order and meaning in a largely disordered society (i.e., Garfinkel, 1967). Thus, working from a subjectivist epistemology means studying the ways different individuals make constructions of social reality. In this dissertation, I am particularly interested in how social reality is socially constructed, including the meanings that various individuals attach to key concepts such as “leadership” and “management philosophy.” Therefore, I focused on how individuals interpreted and made sense of, for instance, expectations and perceptions in their social interactions and how they used language and other means to influence others’ sensemaking of organizational reality (c.f. Watson, 2001). To capture struggles over meaning, which are central to this dissertation, I focused on actions and understandings amongst participants (c.f. Bryman, 2003). In practice, this means that the emphasis was on the study of “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 3), which is why I observed participants as they made sense of and enacted the organization’s various change initiatives.

From a constructionist approach it is also important to recognize the political nature of social phenomena, and that social reality is influenced by individuals with various interests. When conducting research, I attempted to pay special attention to the political aspects of social reality; in other words, I considered that different individuals can portray the same social phenomena differently (Alvesson, 2011). This epistemology entails attempting to capture of multiple layers of meaning that occur amongst groups and individuals; moreover, social setting, individual interests, and the ambiguous nature of language influence what is said, how it is said, and by whom it is said (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011).

Following this line of argumentation, the constructionist perspective also means considering the role of the researcher (i.e., myself) and the definitional power that accompanies it. That is, there is a distinction between first-order constructs, which are founded on common-sense thinking and daily work-life activities amongst participants, and second-order constructs developed by researchers (c.f. Schutz, 1962). Researchers are in a position to connect common-sense constructs and second-order constructs from the theoretical world (Aspers, 2009), which provides them with authority vis-à-vis research participants. Hence, a research position encompasses the authority to define situations, such as by limiting the description of reality to a number of selected topics, to include and exclude certain interpretations, or to favour particular motives underlying the choice of study (c.f. Goettlich, 2011). This also applies to this dissertation, which should be seen as a limited collection of perspectives based on a limited selection of information.

4.2.3 Abductive Approach

As regards to how social phenomena can be explained and understood, it is common to separate inductive from deductive approaches to research. Here, inductive approaches typically assume that theory can be developed based on accumulated empirical observations, and deductive approaches strive to test developed theories. This dissertation bears elements of both of these approaches through the use of abduction (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). As such, the overall research approach is abductive, even though the degree of induction and deduction varies between different phases of the research process, and between different part studies and articles.

In this dissertation, abduction involves alternating between these two approaches throughout the research project, which means that I inductively approached an empirical phenomenon and iteratively returned to my theoretical understanding of it to form an interpretation. The inductive approach typically entailed beginning the collection of empirical data before the research problems were clearly defined or completed. The deductive approach, on the other hand, typically involved taking current theory into consideration during the analyses (see the heading 4.5 processing and analysis, below), to develop new theoretical ideas and concepts which can better explain the studied social phenomena (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). During problematization, the empirical data served as input for theoretical reasoning (Sutton & Staw, 1995) and as a means to open up and inspire new interpretations of the

social phenomena (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012). This reflects a view of data as fused with theory (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Kuhn & Hacking, 2012) and as a resource that can challenge ideas about organization and its' practices, such as organizational change being inherently good, or leaders being people with extraordinary abilities (Alvesson, 2019; Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Hence, in this dissertation, data are considered to be inextricably linked to and influenced by my theoretical background, identity, and preconceptions, as well as by my relationship to the object of study and how I select, order, interpret, analyse, and report my findings (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2012).

Using an abductive approach and ethnographic methods require a theoretical openness when entering the empirical setting. Although I had an idea of what I was interested in before the data collection, I encountered unexpected information when I began to speak to participants, which influenced my initial thoughts about areas that were of theoretical interest and those that were not. For example, at the beginning of my research, I had not specified what the research would focus on beyond an overall interest in processes through which individuals made sense of and influenced situations in which change issues were discussed. It was with this mindset that I entered the field; it was necessary to be sensitive to what could be interesting from a theoretical, practical and methodological perspective, and avoid an overly narrow focus at an early stage of research.

4.3 Research Strategy and Overall Case Selection

To approach the Swedish police reform, which was the empirical point of entry for the dissertation, I used a qualitative research strategy with ethnographic methods. This choice of strategy was based on the idea that organizational change commonly involves sensemaking amongst organizational members (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). It involved close examination of people's actions in everyday contexts in which data are gathered in the field from a range of different sources, such as participant observations and informal conversations. To facilitate in-depth study of sensemaking in situations in which individual must face ambiguous, unexpected, or confusing issues, the study focused on several settings and events in which such phenomena took place. One aim was to identify settings and events that were unique and atypical in some way and that represented the forefront of a specific change trend within the police organization. This aim inspired theoretical

developments and produced knowledge with explanatory value for other organizations and can thus be transferable (c.f. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The Swedish police reform was extensive, involving a total of approximately 28,000 people and a range of change initiatives and subsequent micro-processes of change at all levels of the organization before, during, and after formal implementation in 2015. Therefore, a clear delimitation of the overall empirical setting (i.e., the Swedish police reform) was required. This was achieved by examining four micro-processes of change that were linked to overall reform work but unfolded amongst groups of individuals at different organizational levels (strategic level change management, middle management, moderators and employees). Together, the micro-processes that unfolded on these levels constitute the phenomena that are the focal point of this study.

The research strategy involved gathering data from participants at different organizational levels to ensure explanatory value for processes of sensemaking through a breadth of perspectives (c.f. Flyvbjerg, 2006). This is important from a critical viewpoint, as the perspectives and interests of elite groups typically have much higher representation in research than those of less privileged groups (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). As outlined in chapter two, the literature on sensemaking has shown a tendency to emphasize the importance of leaders and managers' influence on processes of sensemaking at the expense of other actors' capacities to influence. To include multiple organizational levels of the police organization and other groups of employees, the research strategy placed a greater weight on other actors' participation in processes of sensemaking.

4.4 Access to the Swedish Police and Data Collection

Before entering the field, I aimed to gain general knowledge about the official communication and portrayal of the police reform, such as its purpose, goal, actors, and processes. This information was copious and was available from several sources, such as newspapers, police union's written reports, and the Swedish police research community. Once I developed an overall understanding of the reform, I performed a search of data on change work at the strategic level of the reform. This was a challenge because my research project began at the end of 2015, which was nearly one year after the reform's formal implementation was

completed. However, on the police website dedicated to the reform, I encountered 44 short videos about different aspects of the reform. Together, these videos contained comprehensive material about the change work, with detailed information about the strategic level of reform and the change management team's endeavours. Although the videos were available to the public via the police website, I had to contact several departments within the Swedish police to obtain final approval to use clips from the videos in my research; this process took several months.

Whilst the videos facilitated insights at the level of the change management team, I also needed data from other organizational levels. However, conducting ethnographic fieldwork within a police organization entails several challenges with access and sampling. Significant data are sensitive for reasons of either integrity or security, which complicated access and required time for meetings, drafting agreements, ethical considerations, and back-and-forth communications (see Rantatalo, et al., 2018). However, my research team was granted access to one of Sweden's seven police regions after a dialogue over access that began in April 2014, before I joined the team, and lasted over two years in total.

Once formal access to the Swedish police organization, and to the particular police region, was secured, I needed to identify specific empirical settings with data sources that were relevant to the research questions. This method is called purposive sampling (Bryman, 2011). My aim was to collect data from managers and groups of employees engaged in change work. Seeking out people in different positions (e.g., management, administration, and policing) was a way to ensure that processes of sensemaking at multiple levels would be represented in the analysis. Thus, once access to the Swedish police organization was secured, the applied sampling strategy had elements of both convenience and snowball sampling (Bryman, 2011).

The police region comprises police districts with approximately 2,000 employees and a wide range of work activities. Identifying and gaining access to settings within this context required an active search for change work and being responsive to data collection opportunities during informal conversations with organizational members. Through this strategy, I soon realized that the police region in question differed from other regions in one respect: the ways in which a few managers at the upper echelons worked to develop alternative forms of organizing. For example, this police region actively worked on concepts and issues such

as “leadership,” “police identity,” and “trust-based management” to develop a new “management philosophy” within the region. Moreover, the police region intentionally used reflection as a method, called “reflections in daily work”, to raise, problematize, and debate the above and other concepts and issues as part of a collective exploration of new and more efficient ways to organize work. The use of reflection as method was a result of a pilot project within the Swedish police, involving about 1600 employees, which aimed to develop employees' ability to develop their work and to solve problems in everyday life (see Petersson, 2020). A redistribution of power was at the core of these debates; the idea was that increased decision-making power amongst employees would strengthen individual and organizational ability to operate in an increasingly complex world.

Although I became aware that similar work and discussions were occurring in other police districts and regions, several people within the police organization told me that this region was at the forefront of such work in a national context. This was confirmed by a person who worked with cultural change issues, such as formulating the meaning of “employee-driven development” at the national level. Thus, the organization worked with strictly hierarchical modes of organizing (i.e., direct control, command management, and power), but one district within a particular region actively attempted to develop more horizontal forms of organizing (i.e., autonomy and team work) by collectively exploring these forms (see Alvesson & Blom, 2019 for modes of organizing). Thus, I considered the region and district as a suitable overall setting for investigating sensemaking around concepts. To capture processes of sensemaking in these settings, I decided to use ethnographic methods such as observations and ethnographic interviews (“series of friendly conversations” during observations, see Spradley, 1979) to examine ongoing change work. These would enable me to directly encounter actual and ongoing sensemaking in real time.

To identify suitable sites for collecting data on ongoing change work, I searched for meetings in which concepts and issues were raised and opened to discussion to broad groups of employees and in which multiple perspectives and understandings would be represented. I focused on meetings as sites to observe sensemaking and sensegiving based on literature which claims that meetings “operate as sense-making devices” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2001, p.80) and provide an arena for debate in which efforts of influence manifest (Weick, 1995). These claims are also consistent with my own experience with meetings in which the

inherent meaning of concepts such as “leadership” and “management” are raised and debated.

At an early stage of my research on the police, I learned of four planned “leadership conferences.” These were arranged by managers for managers from several organizational tiers and were part of a development programme and a larger series of similar conferences that all aimed to create a new “management philosophy” in the police region. I asked the responsible managers for access to these conferences to collect data on the process through which the region’s new “management philosophy” emerged; this request was granted.

During one of these conferences, I was informed of ongoing plans for nine additional conferences with a focus on “employee-driven development.” These were also part of the development programme to create a new “management philosophy,” of which “employee-driven development” was a central component. Therefore, I asked the same managers whether I could also attend these conferences. Whilst the initial access granted by the region’s managers was enough to attend the leadership conferences, further efforts to gain access were needed to attend the employee conferences. I had to directly contact the person in charge and ask her and her team for their permission. This process took time since the question of my participation had to be addressed at several levels. By being neither too pushy nor too passive and by communicating who I was and why I wanted to participate in the conferences, I gradually gained access to more conferences, observations opportunities, and contacts. To obtain data on regional and local change work, I also conducted structured, in-depth interviews with four participants, with each lasting one to two hours. The choice of informants was based on whom I considered could share knowledge about the overall case that I aimed to study and key representatives of micro-processes of change (see Alvesson, 2011, and choice of interviewees).

4.4.1 Visual Materials

The 44 short videos were released between March 2013 and January 2015 and produced as part of the change management communication strategy to develop employees’ understanding of the need to unify the Swedish police organization (as expressed in the public investigation, SOU, 2010). Thus, they contain detailed information about how change management “sells” specific views of reality, organizational change, and future prospects both internally and externally. The videos share many

similarities with documentary films; animations, pictures, texts, and organizational charts provided viewers with insights on a range of issues related to the organizational reform. These included organizational culture, police identity, the reform change process, efficiency, and current challenges and needs. The videos were professionally produced by a consulting company and commissioned by the committee responsible for implementing the reform (Official Reports of the Swedish Government, 2015).

The incorporation of visual materials has gained attention in research as newer digital technologies have emerged. To capture the complexity of sensemaking processes, video materials are now viewed as an opportunity to complement and extend more traditional ethnographic studies (Brown et al., 2015; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In particular, they enable the consideration of multiple modes of human and nonhuman interaction (e.g., bodies, language, artefacts, and space) when analysing complex social phenomenon such as power and leadership (Alvehus & Crevani, 2022).

In this study, the short videos were indeed a valuable data set that represented work at the strategic change management level of reform. Especially since my research began when the formal implementation was already complete; therefore, I could not follow the change managements work in real time. As a data set, the videos provided me with detailed information on the multiple modes (e.g., body language, voice, language, and actors) used as resources by the change management team in their efforts to influence others' understanding of the organizational change. The videos served as a broad overview of the Swedish police reform by providing me with both broad and in-depth information about the background and practical implementation of the reform. As materials associated with a top-down effort to influence others' understanding of the organizational change, the videos offered unique and detailed visual and audio records that were helpful in making sense of how participants used objects, spaces, and their voices and body language in various environments (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Thus, the videos provided an opportunity to integrate the strategic level of reform and change managements' work into a fuller ethnography of influence in sensemaking in the Swedish police reform. A particular challenge that arose in connection to the short videos concerned the amount of data in them. This affected the time required for transcription and analysis, which became very extensive. Section 4.5 outlines how this challenge was addressed.

4.4.2 Participant Observations at Conferences and Meetings

Four leadership conferences were held over a total of seven days and involved around 115 managers at various hierarchical levels (see Table 2 under heading 4.4.6 below). Three of these conferences were led by two middle managers, Martin and Roger (fictitious names), who work at higher levels within the organization. The fourth leadership conferences were led by William (fictitious name), a manager who worked at a level below Martin and Roger. Although these conferences varied in terms of structure and target group, the discussed issues mainly revolved around the same theme: developing a new management philosophy. In all but two conferences, I participated as the sole observer from the university. In the first and second conferences, one of my supervisors also participated. Other invited guests included two representatives from the Finnish police (Conference 2), one representative from the police force's human resources department (Conference 2), and a researcher of psychology and personality traits (Conference 4).

Additionally, nine employee conferences were held and involved a total of approximately 650 people from around a particular district within the region. The employee conferences were more streamlined than the leadership conferences in terms of structure, programming, group division, and size. I participated and gathered data from four employee conferences, which involved approximately 280 people in total and were conducted over eight days. Beyond the conferences, three planning meetings were held by the “moderators” of the nine employee conferences. This small group (ranging from four to 10 people) consisted of employees who volunteered to arrange and facilitate the conferences; therefore, they acted as change agents for the concept of “employee-driven development.”

The leadership and employee conferences began with coffee and mingling in the lobby outside the conference hall. During these periods, I approached and spoke to as many people as time allowed before entering the conference room. The participants were organized into smaller groups of six to eight people; and I approached one of the tables, introduced myself and asked the group members if I could join them during the conference. Since I had already made some social contacts in the lobby and spoken to quite a few people, this strategy worked well, and I felt welcomed into the groups. On some occasions, I chose to sit near the group tables to listen to the discussions from a distance. This facilitated detailed notetaking and developing a sense of the overall atmosphere in the conference room (i.e., positive, relaxed, or tense).

When the leadership and employee conferences began, I was given the opportunity to introduce myself to all participants in a large group setting. I shared information about myself, my research, my role as an observer, and the fact that the data gathered during the conference would be depersonalized to prevent participants from being identified. This provided a platform to clarify who I was and reassure participants that their personal integrity would be respected. Since many participants were meeting for the first time (they came from different parts of the region), I did not feel as though I stood out. In fact, I felt welcome and was invited to participate in open dialogues on the topics discussed. On the contrary, I perceived a curiosity about my participation, as shown through questions about my research and my perspectives on research and practical issues related to organizing and change. I also noticed an openness towards me in dialogues; I often felt that I was seen as a neutral party who was not part of the organization. Thus, individuals openly shared with me their thoughts about the organization in general and ongoing changes in particular.

At all employee conferences, one person in each group was tasked with keeping track of time during group assignments, whilst a second person was given the role of spokesperson when the discussions shifted from small groups to the larger group. Spokespeople were chosen in advance by moderators based on their assessment of individuals' comfort with speaking in large group settings and ability to do so in a manner that the moderators sought (i.e., "constructive" and "positive").

During all conferences and meetings, I took thorough notes on my laptop. These were both direct transcripts of people's remarks but also notes about *how* remarks were said (i.e., expressing joy or irritation), *who* said them (e.g., a manager with a high status and rhetorical skill, administrative personnel, etc.), and *when* it was said (i.e., in a large or small group setting). Using a laptop enabled me to take quick and detailed notes about what was said. Verbatim notes were marked as such in the transcripts. This was a crucial aspect of the data collection, as it facilitated analysis of direct quotations.

4.4.3 Ethnographic Interviews

The ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) consisted of conversations with attendees during coffee breaks, lunches, group work, and dinners. Although these were not formally structured, I focused on the same areas as in the semi-structured interviews, such as the participant's personal background, the reform process, results, and change management.

However, in the ethnographic interviews, I was also very open to other topics to enable unexpected findings. The conversations were partly documented, although these were the most difficult to transcribe because they took place in relatively informal and relaxed settings where the climate of open dialogue was at risk of being lost if I suddenly took out a notebook or digital recorder. Overall, the ethnographic interviews were an important part of the data since I was provided with detailed information about topics such as emotions, difficulties, conflict of interests in different issues related to the organization, and the organizational change. Moreover, I gained insights on these aspects from different perspectives as I spoke to many individuals who occupied positions at multiple levels of the organization. To capture as much of these conversations as possible, I periodically sought out a quiet place to write down what was said or speak into the digital recorder. Overall, the many ethnographic interviews were a source of data that provided me with in-depth insights on various individuals' perspectives of the ongoing change work within the organization.

4.4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

For the longer interviews, the interviewees played key roles in planning and decision making about the structure and content of the conferences. They put significant effort into assembling and communicating underlying ideas broached in discussions about the development of the new “management philosophy.” Every interviewee was engaged with the formulation and implementation of the reform and expressed beliefs and hopes about the new management philosophy, which they represented and advocated for. They were also in position to provide detailed information about how they personally made sense of the overall national police reform and planned to further adapt, implement, and develop it at the regional and local levels.

Each in-depth interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes, was conducted face-to-face, and was semi-structured (i.e., a number of questions were prepared). For each in-depth interview, I used the same structure, with primary questions that had the highest priority, secondary questions directed at each interviewee's area of expertise and position, and follow-up questions (see Appendix 1). For instance, the primary questions regarded the reform and focused on *process*, *outcome*, *leadership*, and *police identity*. The secondary questions concerned issues that I knew the respondent had engaged with; therefore, the questions could be related to a particular quotation or event. For instance, I asked, “At one conference, you mentioned that the ‘decision mandate should be moved

forward in the organization.’ Can you describe what exactly this means and why it is important?” In this manner, I could explore issues in greater depth through advance preparation based on previous observations or small talk had caught my attention. Each interview was transcribed and imported into the data analysis programme NVivo, where it was also further processed and analysed (see 4.5 Process and Analysis section below).

4.4.5 Secondary Data

To gain an overall understanding of the empirical setting, I also collected secondary material (Silverman, 2013) in parallel with the observations and interviews. For instance, I gathered PowerPoint presentations, posters, brochures, books, documents, moderator manuscripts, and whiteboard notes related to the Swedish police reform. Some of these materials were used by the conference facilitators, and others were available from the police website or other public organizations’ websites. PowerPoint presentations used at conferences and planning meetings were emailed to me, whereas I gathered books (social theory literature) and documents (public reports) referenced at the conferences on my own. I also took photos of whiteboard notes during the events. This information provided knowledge about current conditions related to the reform and facilitated a better understanding of the data gathered in the observations and interviews. The posters and brochures also revealed information about the ways in which managers, conference organizers, and employees working with communication sought to portray regional and local change initiatives.

4.4.6 Overview of Study Design and Empirical Material

Table 1 describes the research design and how each paper involves different organizational levels, empirical foci, and research methods applied.

| Paper | Organizational level and empirical focus | Data collection methods |
|--------------|--|---|
| 1 | Top-down communication strategy by the change management team | Recorded video material |
| 2 | Middle managers' work to understand and drive change | Ethnographic methods (observation, ethnographic interviews). Semi-structured interviews. Documents (i.e., PowerPoint, pictures, posters) |
| 3 | Employee moderators' work as change agents | Ethnographic methods (observations and ethnographic interviews) Documents (i.e., PowerPoint, pictures, and posters) |
| 4 | Employees' engagement in driving change and development issues | Ethnographic methods (observations and ethnographic interviews) Documents (i.e., PowerPoint, pictures, and posters) |

Table 1. Overview of Research Design

Table 2 provides an overview of the all the empirical data collected and used in this dissertation.

| Type | Setting | Duration | Paper |
|---|--|---|--------------|
| <i>Participant observations</i> | | | |
| Leader conference 1 <i>5 April 2016</i> | 25 middle and section managers (leader tiers 3–4). Led by Martin and Roger. Observed by two authors. | Two days (16 hours), including overnight stay and dinner (four hours) | 2 |
| Leader conference 2 <i>27–28 May 2016</i> | 30 group leaders (leader tier 5). Led by Martin and Roger. Observed by two authors. | Two days (16 hours) | 2 |
| Leader conference 3 <i>14 Dec 2016</i> | 18 group leaders (leader tier 5). Led by William. Observed by first author. | One day (eight hours) | 2 |
| Leader conference 4 <i>1–2 February 2017</i> | 40 strategic managers (leader tier 3). Led by Martin and Roger. Observed by first author. | Two days (16 hours) | 2 |
| Planning meeting 1 <i>9 March 2017</i> | Four appointed moderators (employees). Observed by first author. | Two hours | 3 |
| Planning meeting 2 <i>24 March 2017</i> | Three appointed moderators (employees). Observed by first author. | Two hours | |
| Planning meeting 3 <i>28–30 March 2017</i> | Eight appointed moderators (employees). Observed by first author. | Three days (16 hours) | 3 |
| Employee conference 1 <i>2–3 May 2017</i> | Around 60 people (leader tiers 2–5 and employees). Led by moderator group. Observed by first author. | Two days (16 hours), including overnight stay and dinner (four hours) | 3,4 |
| Employee conference 29– <i>10 May 2017</i> | Around 60 people (leader tiers 2–5 and employees). Led by moderator group. Observed by first author. | Two days (16 hours), including overnight stay and dinner (four hours) | 3,4 |

| Type | Setting | Duration | Paper |
|--|---|---|--------------|
| Employee conference 3 <i>3–4 October 2017</i> | Around 60 people (leader tiers 2–5 and employees). Led by moderator group. Observed by first author. | Two days (16 hours), including overnight stay and dinner (four hours) | 3,4 |
| Employee conference 4 <i>28 November 2017</i> | Around 60 people (leader tiers 2–5 and employees). Led by moderator group. Observed by first author. | Two days (16 hours), including overnight stay and dinner (four hours) | 3,4 |
| <i>Ethnographic interviews</i> | During breaks at leader conferences and employee conferences. Conducted by first author. | Around 14 hours | 2, 3, 4 |
| <i>In-depth interviews</i> | Johan, Martin, Roger (two occasions): managers at tiers 2 and 3. Maria: administrative manager. All interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim. Conducted by first author. | Five interviews, one to two hours each. | 2 |
| <i>Videos</i> | Multiple settings. Recorded and distributed based on the change management team’s mission. All videos were transcribed by the first author. | 44 short videos (3–6 minutes each) | 1 |
| | Multiple settings. Videos used by moderator group at conferences. | Six short videos (3–6 minutes each) | 3, 4 |
| <i>Documents</i> | Material used before and during various conferences. | Plans, investigations, PowerPoint presentations, moderator manuscripts, and books | 2, 3, 4 |

Table 2. Overview of Empirical Data

4.5 Processing and analysis

With the previously described abductive approach as a basis, analysis was not a separate phase of the project, but rather an ongoing process that began before the fieldwork itself. In fact, it began as soon as I started to think about and formulate the research problem, read reports about the ongoing Swedish police reform, and attempted to use ideas from the literature to make sense of the information that I encountered. Whilst this informal analysis began in the very earliest stages of the research project, more formal analysis was initiated when I started to take analytical notes about observations and subsequently reflected on them. These notes provided data about more abstract social aspects, such as atmosphere (e.g., tense, relaxed, joyful, positive, or irritated), and ideas about how my observations and experiences could be interpreted.

These notes were occasionally related to my theoretical understanding; thus, they formed an early stage of analysis and abductive approach. Usually, this was a process that I undertook on my own. However, at leader conference 1, in which one of my supervisors also participated, we discussed and compared our perceptions after the conference to avoid misunderstandings, clarify open questions, and share experiences. This was a good way to strengthen the data since we made observations from different parts of the conference hall and with different groups of participants. It also enabled us to deepen our initial understanding of the empirical field. On other occasions, I also thoroughly reported my observations and early thoughts to my supervisors via email and the Slack application to capture and describe my initial analyses and prepare my supervisors for upcoming discussions about the results. For instance, after one of the conferences, I described a case of what I called “postmodern leadership” due to the ways in which managers created space for alternative interpretations of reality and forms of organizing. This initial analysis later became the “reflexive sensegiving” referenced in Article 2.

Thus, the analysis was an abductive process where theory influence the development of research strategy, design and data collection, and the collected data influence the understanding of current research and so on in continuous iterations between the empirical material about the Swedish police reform, and ideas mainly from sensemaking, sensegiving, and power literature (c.f. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Coding was at the core of these analyses’ formal and systematic phases. To manage and process the empirical data, which consisted of field notes, video and

interview transcripts, and images and texts from documents, I used NVivo, a software that was specifically developed for qualitative analysis.

The formal analysis process involved three levels of thematic coding within the data: first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregating dimensions that aim to construct a data structure (c.f. Gioia et al., 2013). Typically, the process began with open coding and a focus on change-related issues, particularly issues that involved ambiguities or uncertainties to varying extents. These issues could range from salary, social theory, police identity, roles, goals, and public trust to change strategy, police culture, intra-organizational tensions, and scarce resources.

Transcribing and coding the videos was much more time-consuming and challenging than the other data sources. This process began with a transcription of all spoken language from the videos. In parallel, I took notes to document my initial interpretations. To transcribe and code semiotic resources, mainly for the work of article 1 (i.e., spaces, actors, embodiment, and imagery), the video annotation software ELAN was used. Whilst the transcription of spoken language provided insights on the issue-content involved in the videos, coding in ELAN facilitated the identification of how semiotic resources were organized to mobilize certain portrayals of the police reform.

In terms of the interview data, it was mainly senior managers who were given the opportunity to frame themselves, the organization, and the organizational change through in-depth interviews. Hence, from a critical perspective, it is possible to question whether this limited sample resulted in a representation imbalance in the analysis. However, since individuals at all organizational levels were represented in the observations and ethnographic interviews, which constituted much of the data, a wide variety of truth claims were included in the data set.

Once the data were coded, I grouped them into first-order concepts, by comparing, relating, and reflecting on the broad range of codes. For example, if several codes were associated with texts that contained statements and discussions about trust or leadership, these were grouped into a common folder in NVivo. Thus, the codes and first-order concepts were data-driven and remained very close to the ideas and opinions expressed by various informants on topics such as the role of the police, leadership, management, working conditions, change work, resources, and salaries. The only cases in which empirical data were not

coded and grouped was when they had no connection to the organization, working practices, or the organizational change.

After the initial coding, the degree of interpretation in the analysis was still low, and my overall understanding of the material remained rather fragmented and unclear. Nevertheless, the codes and first-order concepts provided a more comprehensive overview of the material and, as I iteratively reviewed them, a deeper understanding of the questions that people attempted to make sense of. They also generated insights on differences between how individuals ascribed meaning to the same issue. For example, there were considerable differences in how attendees described and enacted their understanding of identity and the kind of management that motivates employees.

The insights derived from coding and constructing first-order concepts enabled work with a second level of interpretation in which I allowed myself to be guided by ideas and theories found in the literature on sensemaking and power. Thus, whilst constructing second-order themes, the analysis became more abductive as I used theoretical constructs from research to facilitate further consideration and interpretation of the codes and first-order concepts. These constructs included, for instance, multimodality (Article 1), reflexivity (Article 2) and episodic power (Article 4). Moreover, during this phase of analysis, I used the empirical data as a resource to question and problematize theory. This provided a way to begin developing and reshaping theory. Hence, I moved beyond my initial interpretations of the first-order concepts by infusing theoretical breadth and variation and scepticism towards current theory into the analysis. At this level of interpretation, I constructed second-order themes to describe and explain the data at a higher level of abstraction. I also examined the data through “mystery construction” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011); in other words, I tried to identify which initial interpretations of the data did not align with my previous understanding of the sensemaking and sensegiving literature. For example, mystery construction inspired me to question assumptions about senior managers and middle managers as the main “sensegivers” and influencers of meaning and employees as the recipients of meaning. This analytical move made me place a higher focus on employees as potential influencers of meaning and horizontal facets of sensemaking during change. Another example is that the empirical data inspired the view of sensemaking as a process through which complexity can be intentionally increased rather than decreased, as is often described in sensemaking literature.

Based on first-order concepts and second-order themes, I aggregated theoretical dimensions. The latter connected the findings to the sensemaking framework and provided me with a better understanding of the larger narrative within the data. Moving back and forth between the three levels of interpretation outlined in this section enabled me to generate the results presented in this dissertation. From early descriptions and field notes to interpretations, reinterpretations, and problematizations, the process aimed to develop knowledge in the field of sensemaking during organizational change. During this process, which was primarily inspired by reflexive methodology as described by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) and Gioia et al. (2013), the data were viewed as arguments that either supported or opposed certain theoretical viewpoints in sensemaking research and thus served as the driving force in my attempts to develop theory.

4.6 Ethics

Ethnographic research raises ethical issues which need to be considered and addressed, such as facilitating informed consent and privacy, and avoiding exploitation and harm. In this research project access to the Swedish police organization has been negotiated recurrently. On each such occasion, I have informed about my project in several ways, both formally through presentations and more informally when gathering the different kinds of empirical information. Before each interview I have informed about my project and research interest, and asked for consent to interview about the police reform and subsequent change work. Similarly, at observations, the participants have been informed about the research, and I have asked for their consent to participate. Regarding the video material, I contacted both personnel within the police with responsibility for the video, and the consultants who produced them, to inform them about my research as well as to ask for their consent. Concerning confidentiality, no personal or sensitive data (such as trade union affiliation, or research participants' sexual orientation) has been collected. They have spoken in their professional role. The collected data has been handled with care, and I have followed the prevailing practice regarding the storage and handling of research data.

Providing individuals with an opportunity to consent to research on the basis of comprehensive information was mainly a challenge when attempting to join working groups and conversing with participants during breaks, group work, and dinners. In this context, the potential benefits of participating in specific groups had to be weighed against the

risk of not providing attendees with enough opportunities to decline my invitation to participate in the study or provide their individual consent. Since the leadership and employee conferences had a total turnout of 650 people and the groups were mixed in ways that I did not have information about in advance, the practical solution was to ask for consent from members of a particular group at each conference. In subsequent, sporadic conversations during the conferences, I was alert to the ways in which people reacted to my presence and attempts to start a dialogue. Once I began talking to potential informants, I noticed rather quickly whether they were open to conversation and adapted my behaviour accordingly. In some cases, this meant ending the conversation; in other cases, I began the conversation with regular, general topics, then went a bit deeper on issues regarding the Swedish police reform. Sometimes, my interlocutor took the initiative and moved straight to issues that included vivid descriptions and insightful analyses.

An overall reflection that can be made in relation to my ethnographic methods is whether individuals and group members truly felt that they opportunity to decline the presence of a researcher at their meetings, at their working tables, and as company during breaks. Again, I handled these issues by informing them about myself, my role and mission as a researcher. I did this as thoroughly as possible within the constraints of the time and setting, and was prepared to finish my observation if the expressed disapproval of my presence. In terms of personal privacy, the large number of individuals who participated in the conferences was a factor that helped to ensure the integrity of participants. The number of conferences and participants makes it difficult for the articles' readers to deduce where the data came from. In addition, respondents' privacy was actively protected by avoiding the identification of specific individuals in the papers and the use of quotations from the ethnographic interviews. To ensure participants' privacy after the data collection, the data were stored on a digital platform that only my supervisors and I had access to. Another measure was avoiding the use of any stills from the short videos in which specific employees could be identified. This has been an increasing concern in ethnography research based on internet sources (Markham, 2005), and was therefore handled with care. In the semi-structured interviews, ethical issues were easier to manage due to the relatively small number of interviews. Moreover, I could ask for consent ahead of time. The interviews were recorded, which was approved by the informants, and the material was transcribed, depersonalized, and saved according to the same procedure as the other data.

Sometimes, ethnographic research has been criticized for exploiting participants, as the researcher can develop interpretations which place them in a disadvantageous position without receiving anything in return (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the current study, this issue was addressed through a number of measures. Overall, the objective was to behave as ethically as possible whilst considering both my own research interests and the integrity of participants, as described above. One way to view the research is that it *does* provide value to participants in return. For instance, many of the ethnographic interviews had the character of a dialogue in which my interlocutor provided information about the change work and gained knowledge about a range of other topics, as I shared information about research methods, research areas (e.g., organizational change and sensemaking), and my own experiences with change work.

Moreover, there was a positive attitude overall towards my supervisor and my participation, which I believe was attributable to two factors. The first was general interest in research and its potential contributions to the police's daily practice amongst participants. This interest has also emerged in the context of evidence-based work in other areas of policing. The second factor could be described as satisfaction at being noticed, seen, and heard. I believe that this satisfaction emerges when researchers make efforts to understand what the members of an organization feel and experience. Thus, I hope and believe that participants considered the research project to be characterized by mutual exchange.

4.7 Research Quality

To ensure that the applied methods meet required criteria for qualitative research, they must comply with certain quality measures related to credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, an overall source of guidance consisted of literature that advocates for a reflexive, creative, and critical approach to research and qualitative methods (see, for example, Alvesson, 2011, 2014; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, 2012; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). This was exemplified by attempts to create a broad theoretical repertoire for the dissertation (see Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018) in terms of, for instance, power, multimodality, and reflexivity, and problematize current research to generate innovative analyses and interpretations of the empirical data.

To ensure credibility, the project was designed to allow ample time in the field to observe social settings, speak to various groups of people, and understand the overall police reform context. This was mainly exemplified by the considerable time spent at conferences and the number of ethnographic interviews conducted during these gatherings. Moreover, the videos played an important role in this regard, as they contained thorough descriptions and in-depth explanations of various aspects of the reform. Thus, they contributed to nuanced portrayals of the change content, process, and management.

Another way to achieve credibility was to illustrate how the theoretical results of this dissertation were derived (Denzin, 2017). This involved the description of the research process and moving back and forth between the codes and empirical first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregated dimensions. This overall process is described in this *kappa* and more precisely outlined in each paper. The descriptions show how the results were derived from a co-construction of meaning between myself as the researcher and the empirical data, which aligns with the constructivist approach.

To strengthen the confirmability of the material, I gathered data from different sources and involved other analysts and multiple theoretical perspectives (Denzin, 2017; Patton, 1999). The data sources were collected from different people, in different settings, and at different points in time. This approach enabled information about the same change processes to be obtained at different times from a range of people who worked at different hierarchical levels. It generated multiple perspectives and thus highlighted differences in how individuals made sense of the police reform and subsequent change work. The most prominent example is that several employee conferences with the same programming generated a multifaceted view of how individuals made sense of and enacted change in different ways (see Article 4). Therefore, gathering information from different people at various levels and positions generated “richness in points” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p.305), which provided me with ideas for reflexivity and understanding the complexities of police reform and the issues that were subject to change (i.e. the meaning of “leadership”, “employee-driven development” and “police identity”).

In terms of other researchers’ involvement, there were two observers at the first and second leader conferences and two analysts for Articles 1 to 3. The presence of two observers at the first two leader conferences was a rewarding way to enter the field, as I received methodological advice on

ethnography from a senior researcher and was able to compare our initial observations and interpretations at an early stage of the research. Furthermore, the use of two analysts for Articles 1 to 3 involved several iterative phases. Typically, I began by coding the data as first-order concepts and initial second-order themes. Then, I communicated these results with my supervisors and/or coauthors, which provided me with new insights about the material. This approach facilitated multiple interpretations of the same data, which helped me to identify new understandings of the material. Finally, access to an interdisciplinary research team (i.e., my supervisors and coauthors) and guest lecturers and professors with different areas of expertise (e.g., policing, management, and pedagogy) provided me with a broad theoretical repertoire. This made the analysis much more reflexive and complex, as a richness of interpretations was often suggested, which I needed to consider.

At times, other people's theoretical perspectives helped me to identify my own assumptions and forced me to strengthen arguments that I considered important but initially lacked support for. This was the case with Article 2 and the concept of "reflexive sensegiving." At first, this concept received criticism from other researchers during internal seminars at the university and through feedback from academic journals. However, moving back and forth between the empirical data and different theoretical perspectives, and problematizing dominant assumptions in current sensemaking literature enabled the article to make strong theoretical contributions. Thus, engaging with multiple theories facilitated reflexive-interpretive research in which different interpretations generated richness in points (c.f. Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018) and understanding beyond the first-order concepts. This work would have been difficult to accomplish without theoretical dialogue partners, namely supervisors, coauthors, guest lecturers and scholars, and academic journal reviewers.

To strengthen transferability, and to allow for others make apply the research findings in other studies and contexts, thick and detailed descriptions of the studied settings, people, situations, and aspects of time was sought (i.e., chronologies and duration of conferences) in the *kappa* (i.e., Chapter 3) and in each article. Quotations and thorough accounts of unfolding events (e.g., statements and dialogues in conferences) provided insights on field experiences and thus knowledge about micro-processes of change and the contexts within which these processes unfold. Moreover, the videos presented in Article 1 can be viewed, interpreted, and analysed by anyone, which enables other

researchers to evaluate whether the conclusions drawn in this dissertation can be transferred to other contexts. Importantly, the thick descriptions based on the empirical data are not claims that mirror a particular “truth” or used as evidence for a specific perspective. Rather, they are used to envisage how multiple perspectives emerge and coexist when an organization undergoes change. Hence, in this dissertation, the descriptions are considered perspective-dependent interpretations that serve as arguments for or against particular theoretical understandings of organizational reality (c.f. Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Regarding whether and how the results can be transferred to other organizations, they can be seen as arguments for certain perspectives and interpretations. For example, the sensemaking positions and enactments outlined in Article 4 could be further investigated in other organizations currently undergoing change – not to prove whether or not these positions exist but rather as arguments for the assumption that these positions and enactments also occur in other organizations.

Finally, a number of measures were taken to establish dependability. The first consists of internal seminars in which drafts and initial findings were presented and discussed. These were continuously arranged at Umeå University and involve colleagues from different units at Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics, and academics from other institutions, who examined the work and provided feedback. Moreover, my research was presented and discussed at several external events, such as international conferences (e.g., Nordic Police Research Seminar, 2016; British Academy of Management Conference, 2021) and doctoral courses (i.e., “Reflexive and Creative Methodology,” Lund, 2017). Reviews were conducted in various seminars that were arranged as part of the dissertation work, and when submitting the articles to academic journals. These processes provided opportunities for other researchers who were not involved in my research project to examine the study and evaluate whether it qualified for publication. These audits generated feedback that I consider to be highly important for the progress and quality of this dissertation.

5. Results

This dissertation is based on four articles which collectively fulfil the overall purpose of this research; to increase the understanding of sensemaking and efforts to influence others’ sensemaking during organizational change. In Article 1, me and my co-author provide an overview of the change content, we also investigate how the short videos were used by the change management team to provide meaning to the Swedish police reform. Article 2 focuses on how middle managers attempted to influence the sensemaking of others without outlining a change path or goal that was decided in advance whilst engaging their subordinates in change work. Whilst Articles 1 and 2 focus on change work initiated by individuals at the upper levels of the organization, Article 3 explores how employees influenced others’ sensemaking in the role of change agents (moderators). Additionally, Article 4 explores the diversification of meaning amongst employees as they worked to make sense of change and how differences in sensemaking provided the basis for various expressions of episodic power that targeted others’ sensemaking.

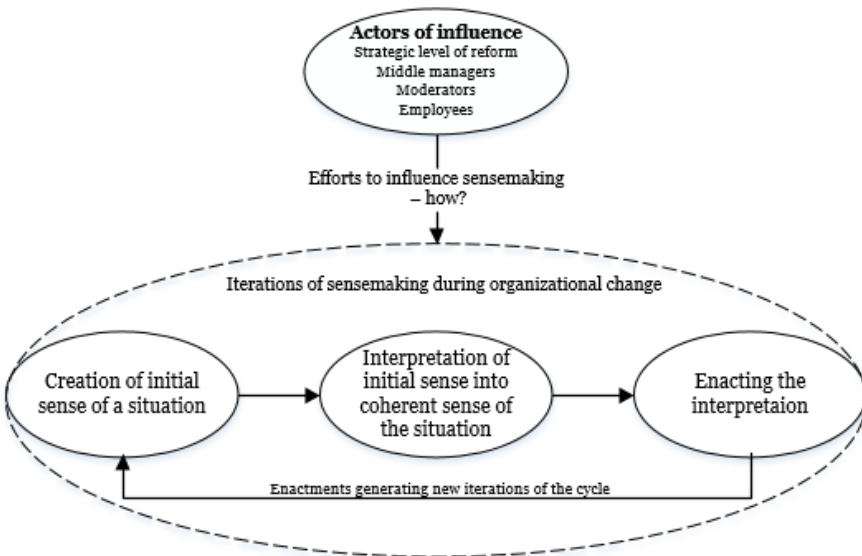


Figure 3: Actors and Efforts to Influence Others’ Sensemaking in Micro-Processes of Change

Thus, the articles examine efforts to influence others' sensemaking in micro-processes of change at four organizational levels. Figure 3 illustrates the involvement of various actors in influencing sensemaking during micro-processes of change.

5.1 Article 1

“Motivating Police Reform Through Multimodal Sensegiving: How Change Was Promoted Through Videos in the Swedish Police Reorganisation” (Kihlberg & Rantatalo, 2022)

During the Swedish police reform, communication was considered a central aspect of successful change implementation, and the aim of the change management team was to involve as many employees as possible in the process. Although the reform has been examined from various perspectives in the Nordic scholarly community, little focus has been placed on how the organizational change was initiated and internally promoted. Thus, the purpose of this article was to address this gap by examining how the Swedish police reform was communicated within the organization. To meet this purpose, we analysed how change was promoted through visual media.

We conducted a multimodal analysis of 44 short videos that contained comprehensive information about the Swedish police reform. The videos were produced as part of a communication strategy to frame and promote the organizational reform in 2015. The findings show that the change was motivated by descriptions of the Swedish police organization's contexts (situating), problematization of the present situation (problematizing), detailed prescriptions of the change process (prescribing), and forecasts of an ideal future for the Swedish police (forecasting). Whilst these findings relate *what* change themes the change communication focused on, our analysis also revealed *how* communication efforts were reinforced. This was accomplished through the layering of stereotypical image of the police, as well as of change. *Stereotyping* refers to the ways in which individuals were given expert roles as descriptors, confirmers, or explainers in relation to various messages that were communicated. The use of stereotypes created compelling but simplistic portrayals of the organization's internal practices and external contexts. The stereotypes also demonstrated a separation between rank-and-file police officers and administrative experts, as the latter were portrayed as the leaders of the reorganization. Furthermore, multimodal *layering* refers to how multiple modalities

(e.g., actors, speech, space, embodiment, and imagery) are “layered” to either downplay or reinforce messages about a change. This layering was rhetorically effective, giving the impression all perspectives were equally important and that issues arising from the change were addressed and given full consideration. We concluded that multimodal communication through visual media is a powerful tool in sensegiving that has the potential to construct credible but not necessarily accurate accounts of organizational change. Article 1 contributes to the dissertation by demonstrating central tenets of the change-initiative, how the change was communicated, and on a detailed level, how visual media functioned to layer meaning and construct stereotypes in attempts to influence how the sensemaking of change would take place.

5.2 Article 2

“Reflexive sensegiving: An open-ended process of influencing the sensemaking of others during organizational change” (Kihlberg & Lindberg, 2021)

Attempting to influence others’ understanding through sensegiving efforts is a key activity for the outcome of change initiatives. Previous sensegiving studies have primarily focused on managers’ ability to influence others’ sensemaking through various means. However, the literature provides little insight on how sensegiving unfolds in situations in which managers strive to reduce top-down influence and support individuals’ own creation and understanding of the organization and its practices. Therefore, the purpose of Article 2 was to understand how managers reduce top-down influence and engage subordinates to question and shape the meaning of organization and practice. We asked how managers engaged in efforts to influence the sensemaking of others without prescribing a specific redefinition of organizational reality.

Through observations of leadership conferences and interviews, we follow attempts to develop a new management philosophy within the Swedish police. In this context, managers aimed to empower employees and foster independent coworkers in a less hierarchical organization. The results show that managers engaged in what we called reflexive sensegiving – a multivocal process that aims to influence how the sensemaking and construction of meaning evolves. Reflexive sensegiving has four distinct features that distinguish it from traditional forms of sensegiving: open-endedness, low control over cues given, several sources of cues, and the encouragement of complexity and ambiguity.

Article 2 expands the construct of sensegiving by incorporating related variations of influence, such as sensebreaking, sensehiding and sensespecifying. Reflexive sensegiving transcends a focus on leaders by inviting other actors into the process of influence. Therefore, it also transcends the sensegiving and sensemaking dialogue model, which typically divides individuals into leaders or managers and followers or employees. The aforementioned finding warrants a reconsideration of how sensemaking processes are influenced within organizations in which strict hierarchical structures prevail but independent coworkers with little need for support are necessary.

Moreover, Article 2 contributes to the overall purpose of this dissertation by providing alternative understandings of influence in sensemaking in which managers use reflexivity as a means of empowering and influencing others. At the same time, they separate themselves from subordinates and maintain their identity and voice as leaders. Figure 4 illustrates the differences between traditional sensegiving and what I define as reflexive sensegiving.

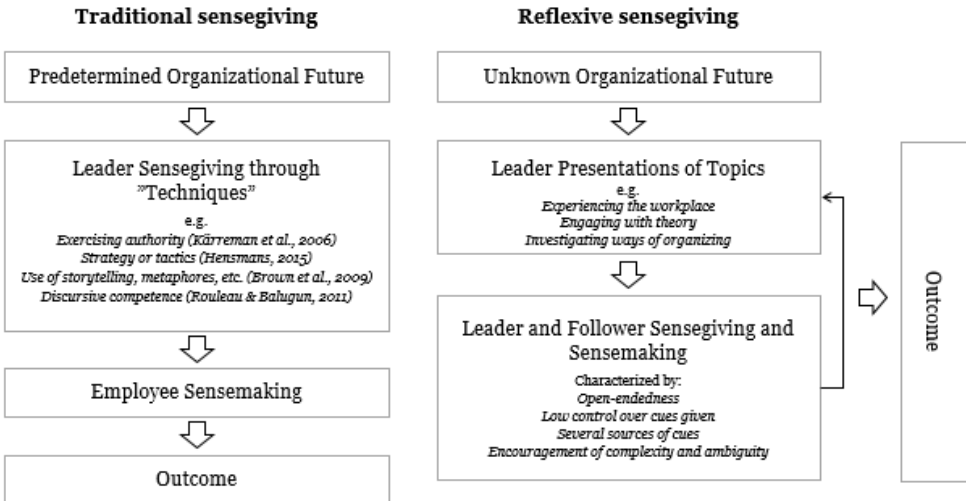


Figure 4: Traditional and Reflexive Sensegiving

5.3 Article 3

“Change agents in the Swedish Police reform: A sensemaking perspective on employee-driven development” (Kihlberg et.al., 2022).

Some studies have highlighted the advantages of using employees or rank-and-file police officers as agents of change. However, few studies have ascertained how change driven by rank-and-file police officers can be achieved. In Article 3, we sought to advance the understanding of the role of employees as change agents in the context of a large-scale police reform. Through observations of planning meetings and conferences, we investigated how a small group of employees made sense of their roles, enacted them, and exerted influence as change agents in an initiative resulting from the Swedish police reform. As “moderators,” these employees acted as change agents and proponents of a change initiative called employee-driven development. The findings show that moderators exerted influence on others’ sensemaking through three ways: drawing on positional power, acting powerless, and giving power away. Figure 5 illustrate the three ways of exerting influence.

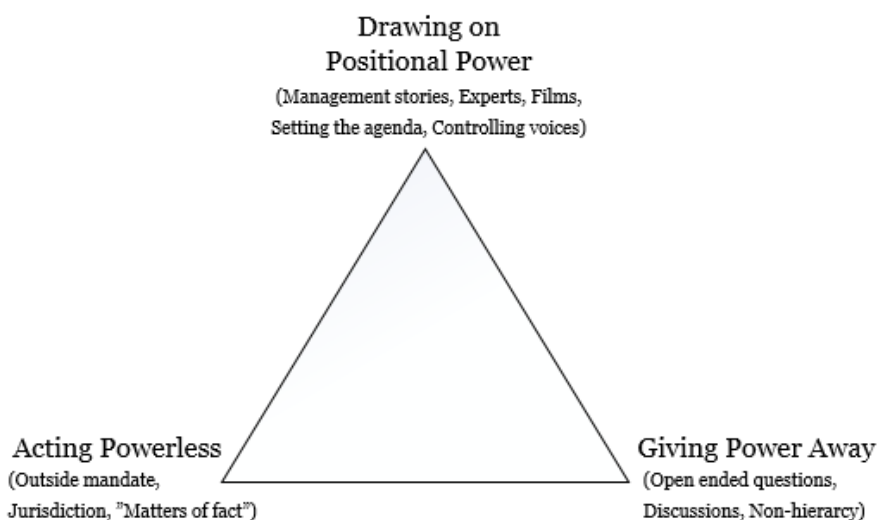


Figure 5: Moderator Exerting Influence Before, During, and After the Conferences

Drawing on positional power means referring to higher authority (e.g., experts and senior managers), setting the agenda (e.g., determine programme content and discussion questions), and working to control voices (e.g., encouraging, toning down, silencing, guiding, and directing statements made by others). Acting powerless refers to the ways in which moderators steered away from issues by claiming that they had no mandate or ability to influence or control them (e.g., salary, staffing, and laws). Finally, giving power away involves creating space for other

conference participants by asking open-ended questions, downplaying hierarchy, and providing others with time to reflect and express their opinions.

Article 3 contributes to research on the role of rank-and-file police officers as active agents of change in a major police reform. It also contributes to the overall purpose of this dissertation by providing insights on the ways in which employees attempt to influence processes of sensemaking when assigned the role of change agents. Despite their limited formal power, moderators developed means of influence based on others' power, their own powerlessness, or the empowerment of others.

5.4 Article 4

“Power from below: Employees’ agency and influence on sensemaking in the reform of the Swedish police” (Kihlberg, 2022).

The influence of power on sensemaking is recognized as a key component in the unfolding of organizational change interventions. However, how power operates in sensemaking largely remains unexplored. In particular, the ways in which actors with less formal power exercise power in sensemaking has been overlooked. The purpose of Article 4 was to increase understanding of the influence of employees’ episodic power on processes of sensemaking during organizational change. Hence, I investigated the following research question: What sensemaking positions can be constructed as responses to a change intervention, and how is each position enacted in ensuing struggles over meaning?

I used ethnographic observations and interviews to study a set of employee conferences. The conferences were an intervention within the Swedish police and focused on changing forms of organizing by reconsidering organizational responsibilities and mandates (e.g., police identity, leadership, and autonomy). The findings, illustrated in Figure 6, show that individuals took six different sensemaking positions, from which they enacted change the issues raised. Each enactment involved episodic power which influenced collective sensemaking during change to varying degrees (from high to low). Each enactment involved either support or opposition in relation to the particular issue discussed.

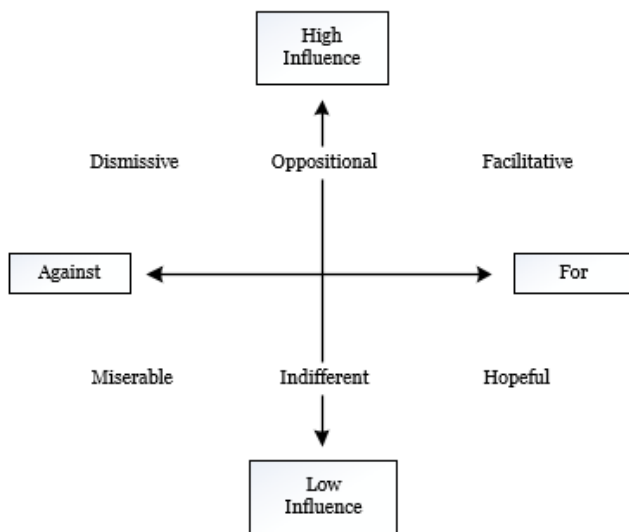


Figure 6: Employee Power Enactments

The article provides insights on how employees' different enactments of a change involve episodic power, which influence the sensemaking process to varying degrees and towards diverse ends. Article 4 demonstrates that employees became active influencers of sensemaking when they engaged in struggles over meaning during the micro-processes of change that followed a major organizational reform. The results suggest that employees have more influence in processes of sensemaking during change than previously recognized. These finding raises questions about agency in power and resistance, as well as about distribution of responsibilities during change.

5.5 Overview of Results

Figure 7 provides an overview of this dissertation's results and illustrate how each article contribute to explain influence in sensemaking at different organizational levels and the means through which individuals attempted to influence the sensemaking of others. The model is nonlinear and illustrates how the latter targeted ongoing processes of sensemaking. That is, different actors continuously engaged in attempts to influence the sensemaking of others during micro-processes of change.

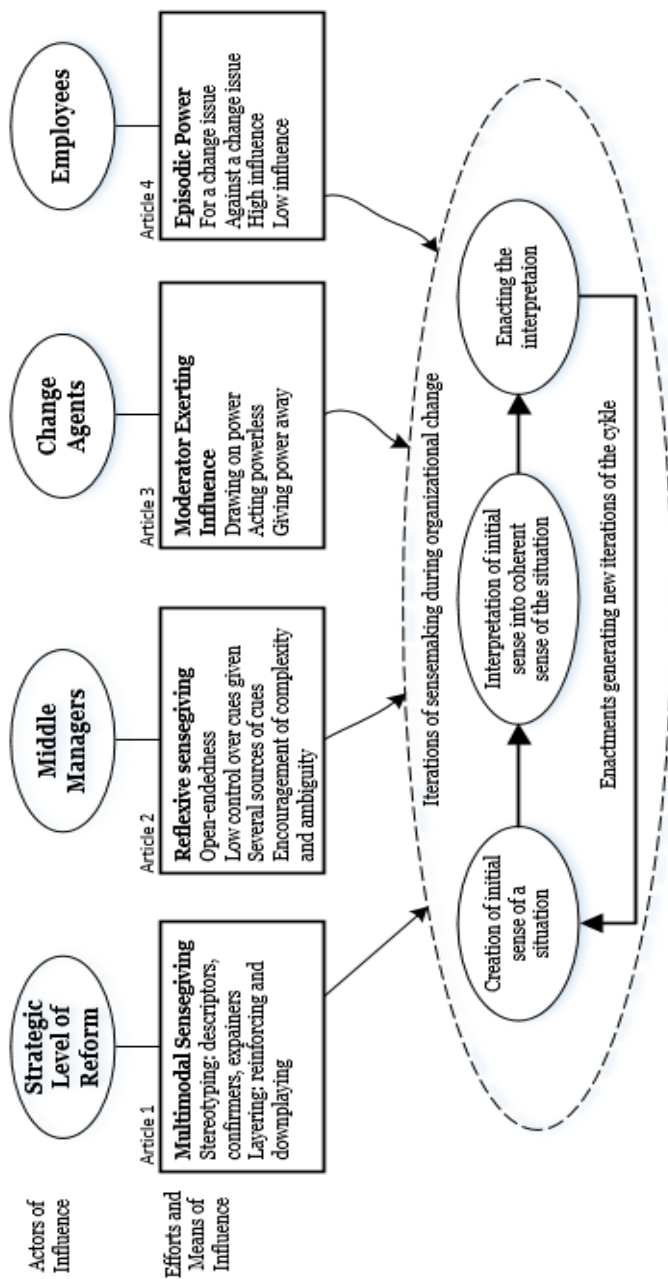


Figure 7: Actors, Means and Efforts to Influence Others' Sensemaking During Micro-Processes of Change

6. Discussion

As conceptualized in this dissertation, influence in sensemaking refers to activities with capacity to shape or control organizational members preferences and perceptions, as they attempt to make sense of ambiguous issues or situations. Reviews of sensemaking research have shown that the understanding of influence in processes of sensemaking remains limited (Brown et al., 2015; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2014). Whilst there is research on sensegiving, sensebreaking and sensehiding, few studies take a broader perspective and directly engage with the influence concept in relation to sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). For example, Schildt et al. (2019) demonstrated that the variety of interests amongst different organizational actors is largely downplayed, as is the exercise of episodic power by actors outside the management team.

The sensemaking perspective has been frequently applied in the area of organizational change. In this context, it is mainly major planned change initiatives, such as organizational restructuring, that have received attention. By contrast, studies of sensemaking that depart from minor planned and unplanned micro-processes of change are less common. Micro-processes include meetings in which individuals discuss issues from different perspectives and unresolved dissatisfaction and misunderstandings between organizational actors (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). It is against this background that the current dissertation aims to increase the understanding of influence in sensemaking during organizational change. To this end, two research questions were answered: “How can efforts to influence sensemaking at different organizational levels be understood?” and “By which means do actors attempt to influence the sensemaking of others?”

Both research questions are answered in sections 6.1-6.3 and explains how influence in sensemaking can be understood as: a top-down effort, reflexive interactions, and responsive enactments. Influence as a top-down effort encompasses change managers on the strategic level of reform, middle managers, moderators, and the ways in which these actors engage in vertical efforts to influence other people. Meanwhile, reflexive interactions (influence that occurs in shape of horizontal and multilateral dialogues between managers and employees) and responsive enactments (influence that occurs in shape of responses to various change initiatives) encompass actors at all levels except the strategic levels of the reform. In reflexive interactions and responsive enactments,

the horizontal aspects of middle managers' sensegiving, moderators' exerting influence, and employees' power enactment are emphasized.

6.1 Influence as Top-Down Effort

With regard to the first research question, this dissertation's findings confirm the top-down and managerial features of influence efforts, as is commonly the case with sensegiving efforts (c.f. Kärreman et al., 2006). Top-down influence mainly occurs at the strategic change management, middle manager, and moderator level. It is particularly prominent in Article 1, although it is well-hidden by the large number of actors (i.e., multiple employees and citizens) in the short videos and a strong emphasis on anchoring decisions and showing broad participation. However, there were also clear signs of top-down influence in Articles 2 and 3, as managers and established moderators were in positions of power that enabled them to set the agenda and guide discussions, thus facilitating their influence over others.

The first three articles showed that strategic level of reform (Article 1), middle managers (Article 2), and the change agents called moderators (Article 3) attempted to influence others' sensemaking to build commitment to and legitimacy around certain issues, prevent and overcome potential resistance, and control emergent definitions of organizational reality. Influential actors at these organizational levels communicated preferred organizational realities (c.f. sensegiving, Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), while undermining (c.f. sensebreaking Pratt, 2000) and omitting potential alternatives (c.f. sensehiding Monin et al. 2013), such as centralizing within the existing structure instead of structural reform. Thus, the results largely aligned with previous accounts of influence in sensemaking.

However, one aspect of influence in sensemaking stands out in this dissertation's results: how change managers, middle managers, and moderators rhetorically sold "top-down" change efforts as "bottom-up" change approaches during micro-processes of change. For example, the multimodal sensegiving presented in Article 1 demonstrates that change managers relinquished control and invited other actors to contribute to the reform by presenting broad and diverse representations of reality. However, opportunities for employees to actually change the reform's direction or process was highly restricted by early political decisions to construct a coherent organization (c.f. Official Reports of the Swedish Government, 2015; Police Organizing Committee, 2012). Similarly,

Articles 2 and 3 demonstrate that managers and moderators emphasized the role of employees as central change agents in their efforts to influence others' sensemaking. Yet, as long as actors in higher positions are mainly responsible for prioritizing change, an aspect of top-down influence will be present despite managers' efforts to empower subordinates or delegate responsibility. Even when employees were assigned the role of moderators, top-down influence manifested in how they set the agenda and shaped emergent discussions (see Article 3).

By providing a large amount of information, layering meaning, and showing how different groups of individuals negotiate change issues, top-down influence communicates transparency and participation, whilst perspectives that do not align with the reform agenda are downplayed, problematized, or hidden. In particular, the videos communicated a pluralism of interests amongst actors (Pfeffer, 1992) and ambiguities, opposition, and negotiations between various actors at different levels (c.f. Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). However, in Article 1, the top-down influence exerted by the change management team was clearly inspired by a tool approach to change (c.f. Morgan & Sturdy, 2000; Sturdy & Grey, 2003) to rapidly implement the politically decided reform.

Top-down influence as described in this dissertation is similar to exercise of power in terms of manipulation, or the exercise of setting the agenda and shaping issues to portray them as either irrelevant or important (Fleming & Spicer, 2010). Additionally, top-down influence involves episodic power, which both constrains and obstructs others' sensemaking, similar to activities that Schildt et al. (2019) defined as suppressive and authoritative sensegiving. At the same time, it would be misleading to understand top-down influence merely as an expression of managers' sensegiving, with elements of manipulation. Rather, it is better understood as one small part in a broader change context in which current conditions (i.e. political decisions governing the police organization, present management ideals) shape efforts of influence at different organizational levels. For instance, in the case of the Swedish police reform, decisions about structural change and implementation were based on public investigations and governmental assessments on aspects that the police organization rapidly needed to change to maintain a well-functioning society. Thus, the top-down influence can be understood as a campaign to broadly inform managers and employees about the current state of the police organization, the need, purpose and process of the reform, and why the particular reform is a wise way forward. To construct convincing portrayals of reality and enable reform

at the pace decided by politicians, manipulation may be difficult to avoid. Another contextual condition is that other and more varied forms of influence occur alongside the top-down influence described in Article 1 here (see section 6.2). Thus, although influence at different organizational levels has top-down features, other types of influence simultaneously occur.

Regarding the second research question and the means used to achieve top-down influence, the results of Articles 2 and 3 align with the means commonly described in studies on sensemaking and sensegiving. Namely, that language is key (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) and manifests in narratives, stories, rhetoric, and techniques that draw on relevant discourses constructed by individuals to shape others' sensemaking. For example, narration (c.f. Sonenshein, 2010), storytelling (c.f. Brown et al., 2009), and discursive competence (c.f. Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) are used by change managers, middle managers, and moderators to portray reality, problematize the current situation, and make forecasts about the future.

However, in the top-down influence examined in Article 1, means of influence diverge from previous findings. Messages of change were visually reinforced by using *stereotypical* images and by *layering* multiple modes of communication. Individuals were mobilized as stereotypical representatives to describe, confirm, or explain a situation or event from specific perspectives, such as a "crime victim," a "trustworthy police officer," or a "change management expert." By showing how groups within and beyond management positions were stereotyped to direct and convey certain perspectives, Article 1 contributes to the understanding of how experts and expert knowledge are used to influence others (c.f. Degnegaard, 2010; Fyfe et al., 2018; Granér, 2017) by focusing on change managers' efforts to influence others' sensemaking.

The study also demonstrates that *multimodal layers* of meaning are arranged to legitimize change and downplay paradoxical tensions, such as those between local and centralized policing (c.f. Lindberg et al., 2017). Through the use of gestures, actors, spaces, and images, layers of meaning are arranged and communicated to either reinforce or downplay messages of change. In this respect, the results not only emphasize that layering meaning is rhetorically effective (c.f. Höllerer et al., 2018) but also contribute theoretical insights on *how* the layering is constructed to achieve different objectives related to change management. For example, the article demonstrates that a multi-layered

message convincingly created the impression that various organizational members' perspectives are equally valued. A more critical interpretation is that the many layers of meaning and perspectives are powerful means of influence that serves the logics of change management by enabling, for example, the legitimization of transformation, the prevention of resistance, and the implementation of a rapid change.

The means of influence identified in Article 1 largely depended on the capacity to produce and organize influence efforts into a material arrangement consisting of 44 short videos. This underscore economic (i.e., financing film production) and structural (i.e., position and mandate to set the scene) aspects of top-down efforts. That is, actors with the resources to portray and communicate change through videos had a potent opportunity to create plausible and persuasive accounts of organizational change, which gave them advantages with regard to defining reality and selling change.

Based on the finding that top-down influence efforts appeared to be a bottom-up process through measures such as the change management team's use of videos, I think that it is worthwhile to reflect on the long-term consequences of this approach. In other words, whilst top-down influence as it is described in Article 1 may be an effective means to "sell" change, this does not necessarily mean that it is appropriate or leads to the desired results.

6.2 Influence Through Reflexive Interactions

Whilst top-down influence is a common theme of influence in sensemaking, this dissertation also contributes knowledge on how influence develops more horizontally at different organizational levels. In these efforts of influence, vertical hierarchy and formal positions (e.g., leader and follower or manager and subordinate) are less pronounced and deliberately downplayed. Different individuals are given more space to influence meaning in relation to change initiatives in ways that not only look like but actually involve more fragmented sensemaking (c.f. Maitlis, 2005). In these efforts, individuals at different organizational levels engage in sensemaking activities and attempt to influence each other as they interact (or "intra-act," as described by Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

The results in Article 2-4 show how multiple actors engage in interactions in which reflexivity is a prominent means in efforts of

influence at different organizational levels. Hence, the label “reflexive interaction.” Reflexive interactions influence processes of sensemaking in three distinct ways: *they generate open-endedness* rather than limit definitions of reality, *they encourage initiatives to “complexify”* rather than “simplify,” and *they are imbued with agency that transcends dichotomous conceptualizations of organizational members*, such as leadership and followership, management and subordination, or power and resistance.

Influence through reflexive interactions is multilateral and mainly concerned with discussions of cultural issues (e.g., identity, occupational roles, organizational culture, and overall management philosophy). Thus, this type of influence contrasts with top-down influence, which is mainly unilateral, exerted by actors in positions of power, and aims to impose ready-made sense onto others. Instead, reflexive interactions involve exploration, analysis, and reflection on potential interpretations and enactments of reality. However, it is not a matter of all interpretations being equally “true” or “good” but rather different interpretations being possible and in themselves advantageous; that said, they need be accommodated within certain frames and supported by plausible – and preferably scientific – arguments. Within this dissertation’s empirical data, these frames consist of judicial, structural (e.g., chain of command), cultural (e.g., management philosophy), and teleological (e.g., statutory purposes and goals) conventions within the Swedish police organization. The portrayal of influence as reflexive interactions contributes knowledge on how influence in sensemaking can assume horizontal forms despite the context of vertical organization structures.

Concerning open-endedness, the results of Articles 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate that influence in sensemaking can take horizontal, non-hierarchical forms. This occurs when managers do not provide a specific redefinition of organizational reality or indicate the way forward during the ongoing change. Instead, they facilitate reflexive interactions through open-ended dialogues in which multiple individuals are encouraged to contribute cues (e.g., arguments, stories, and knowledge) for others’ sensemaking. To enable informed and plausible accounts of reality, participants were tasked with watching short videos and reading scientific literature before engaging in dialogues on topics such as police identity and management philosophy. Whilst this meant that their thinking was prompted to a certain extent, the participants were also encouraged to form and share their own interpretations. The dialogues that emerged were multilateral, reflexive, and creative exchanges of

ideas rather than the unilateral provision of information (sense) and expectations of others to make sense of it in a particular way.

A commonality between reflexive interactions and “generative dialogue” (Thomas et al., 2011) is that questioning and problematization are considered resources for change rather than resistance. Reflexive interactions also share similarities with formalized reflection (Kraft et al., 2018) and attempts by managers to exert influence in ways that meet different employees’ sensemaking needs, such as reassurance, orientation, balance, or acknowledgement (Kraft et al., 2015). However, reflexive interactions are distinguished by the ways in which managers clarify that there is not a fixed or decided meaning related to, for instance, “leadership” or “management” constructs.

Although reflexive interactions related to issues of “structure” and “salary” were relatively close-ended and not subject to negotiation, dialogues about meanings related to “culture” and “management philosophy” were explicitly open to exploration. The open-endedness facilitated by managers, in which others were invited to fill sensemaking gaps with meaning (c.f. Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), also bore the traits of “inspirational” and “expansive” sensegiving (Schildt et al., 2019) because it offers insights on how divergent situational framings (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012) and competing ideas are provided to increase reflexivity (Strike & Rerup, 2016) and shape others’ sensemaking. However, whilst these forms of sensegiving are closely related to the influence exerted by managers, the results of this dissertation concern how managers facilitated interactions that created space and empowered other actors to influence collectively discussed meanings. The findings provides one potential answer to the question of how managers can retain their voices as leaders and differentiate themselves from other organizational members in times when they are also expected to continuously empower others (posed by Gordon, 2011). That is, to facilitate conversations where multiple individuals are encouraged to influence the process through which new meanings of organizational reality evolves, as a way to utilize the total competence of the organization’s personnel more effectively.

A second prominent feature of reflexive interactions is that they encourage initiatives to “complexify” rather than “simplify.” The transitive verb “complexify” underscores that meanings about change were deliberately problematized and made more complex than they first appeared. This result diverges from previous studies of influence in sensemaking, which typically involved efforts to simplify or normalize a situation or impose a particular narrative through, for instance,

suppressive and authoritative sensegiving (Schildt et al., 2019) or restricted sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005a). On the one hand, complexification is more related to sensebreaking (Pratt, 2000) because it does not settle on a particular interpretation. On the other hand, it still differs from sensebreaking because it does not exclusively undermine previous sensemaking (c.f. Giuliani, 2016) but sometimes substantiates it by revealing more information about the issue.

One example is how New Public Management could sometimes be broadly criticized, then become more nuanced and recognized as having certain strengths vital for the police organization (i.e. statistics of importance for follow-up and improvements). Engaging in reflexive interactions by contributing increased complexity is an expression of influence mainly seen in Articles 2 and 3. This is partly a result of the previously described open-endedness but also a strong conviction amongst managers and moderators that the complexity of reality must be acknowledged and managed by every organizational member to achieve the organization's full potential. The underlying rationale was that when reality is simplified, it is impossible to find solutions to complex problems. Moreover, to rely on simplifications was also considered to entail a risk that the police organization would rely on a few individuals to solve problems that in fact needs to be solved collectively using multiple competencies from different organizational levels. Based on this rationale, the recognition of complexity was considered inevitable and desirable. To address complexity, "connecting brains" (c.f. Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012) by sharing and exploring ideas was declared necessary by the middle managers studied in Article 2. Similar to Schildt et al.'s (2019) description of expansive sensegiving, embracing multiple individuals' viewpoints (as presented in Articles 2, 3, and 4) involved efforts of influence that provided participants with intellectual resources (e.g., literature, videos, and informational material about the reform) to facilitate complex understandings of organizational reality.

Acknowledging complexity rather than simplifying issues and concepts has also been encouraged outside the sensemaking literature. For example, Alvesson et al. (2017) argued that the concept of leadership would be improved if its inherent complexity was acknowledged rather than dismissed. Similarly, Cunliffe and Jun (2005) called for the reflexive questioning of assumptions that serve as a basis for organizational decisions to develop more responsible, ethical, and critical actions in public organizations and to facilitate organizational transformation. Additionally, the ability to reflexively manage different interpretations without falling into the trap of "anything goes" is a

demanding task (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018; Weick, 1999). Although encouraging complexity in sensemaking may enable individuals to understand and manage complex realities, Articles 2, 3, and 4 also demonstrate that this approach involves confusion, frustration, and considerable intellectual work both with social theory and with a large set of perspectives represented from different groups within the police organization. In contrast to top-down efforts, which require resources to construct and communicate through videos, engaging with complexity in interactions as described in this dissertation demands other intellectual and rhetorical resources that can be used to influence others onsite.

The third feature of influence through reflexive interactions concerns the actors of influence. The results of this dissertation demonstrate that, when managers encourage open-endedness and complexity, agency in sensemaking is less connected to formal positions based on organizational hierarchy (e.g., managers). Specifically, as interactions between individuals become more reflexive, the relationships between individuals becomes more horizontal and equal. This affects how dialogues take shape and unfold, which is particularly evident in Article 2. The results show that influence in sensemaking is as little reserved to the leaders as it is to the employees when the process of influence becomes reflexive. Paradoxically, managers used their positional authority to encourage reflexivity and thus increase opportunities for agency amongst employees.

The results of Articles 3 and 4 provide further insights on the horizontal feature of influence in sensemaking. They demonstrate that actors other than managers are significant for the sensemaking process due to the ways in which they enact their roles as moderators (Article 3) and employees (Article 4). The main takeaway is that since multiple actors exert influence in processes of sensemaking, the dichotomies of leader and follower and manager and employee become blurred. More precisely, it may be misleading to make such conceptual distinctions between organizational members in reflexive interactions. This is because the exercise of influence widely varies between different individuals; thus, it is impossible to link it to one person or a small group of individuals (e.g., managers). Instead of position- or leader-centrism, the interactions focus on the quality and value of the arguments proposed to make sense of ambiguous and confusing situations.

These results widen the understanding of agency in sensemaking. The sensegiving/sensemaking dialogue model commonly found in sensemaking research (see for example Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kraft

et al., 2018; Rouleau, 2005) show that influence in sensemaking takes place in dynamic relation between individuals. Yet, in empirical studies of sensegiving, it is still mainly leaders and managers that are portrayed as key sensegivers and influencers (c.f. Hope, 2010; Kieran et al., 2020; Teulier & Rouleau, 2013). The results in article 3 and 4 highlight the importance of other actors' influence in sensemaking, and how employees' influence is taken into account when they are engaged in change. Furthermore, by downplaying the importance of formal position and inviting employees at different organizational levels into the influence process, the results of Articles 2, 3, and 4 contribute to the discussion of how to involve employees in authorship in organizations (Gorli et al., 2015). This may function as an antidote to leader-centrism and seductive and ideological conceptions of leadership described by Alvesson (2019). In addition, it may facilitate the emergence of other forms of organizing such as autonomy and teamwork, as advocated by Alvesson and Blom (2019), and reinforce activity and motivation rather than passivity amongst employees who do not occupy management positions (c.f. Alvesson & Spicer, 2010, 2012). Therefore, the dissertation answers the call for empirical studies that capture the perspectives of all parties in leader–follower relations.

With regard to the second research question and specific means of influence used in reflexive interactions, language plays a key role. Managers (Article 2), moderators (Article 3), and employees (Article 4) were found to shape others' sensemaking through narratives and stories and by drawing on relevant discourses. For instance, the latter was frequently used by middle managers to provide a plausible account of a new management philosophy grounded in the scientific discourse and recognized working experience amongst employees within the police organization (Article 2). Furthermore, moderators and employees used narratives and stories to provide others with their own understanding of a change-related issue, such as the narrative that the new management philosophy was non-hierarchical and ahead of private sector or stories about how the reform created new barriers between departments.

Rhetoric was also frequently used as a means of influence by middle managers to promote multiple goals (c.f. Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007), such as centralization *and* de-centralization or hierarchic management *and* autonomy (Article 2). Particularly in Article 2, several metaphors were used as a “rhetorical device” (c.f. Cornelissen et al., 2012) to influence others' understanding; for example, people were portrayed as flowers that blossomed when they were given a higher mandate and descriptions of how the change did not provide a clear path forward were

circulated. Metaphors were also frequently used by moderators and other employees (Articles 3 and 4) to evoke a variety of feelings in support of or in opposition to change-related issues. For instance, at one point the development of a new management philosophy within the police regions was described in terms of a revolt against New Public Management. These results demonstrate how language is used in interactions to influence others' sensemaking and how employees outside the management team used these means of influence.

In addition, another set of means of influence revolved around *reflexivity* and three ways in which employee change agents related to episodic power. Reflexivity was mainly deployed by managers (Article 2) and sometimes by employee moderators (Article 3), who used it to facilitate open-endedness, low control over cues and multiple sources of cues and encourage ambiguity and complexity. Whereas studies on influence have commonly illustrated how the content of sensemaking is first constructed (e.g., visions, values, or operating procedures; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kärreman et al., 2006) and subsequently communicated, Article 2 demonstrates that reflexivity is a key means of shaping a *process* in which content is undetermined and open to discussion. Thus, the content of change also becomes open to influence from actors other than managers or moderators.

Another example is that the use of reflexivity differs from the notion of sensegiving as “silencing alternative senses and suppressing ambiguity” (Kärreman et al., 2006) and sense-hiding (Monin et al., 2013). As seen in this study, reflexivity produces multiple cues for others' sensemaking, some of which are coherent and others incoherent. At first sight, the use of reflexivity appears to undermine the very process of sensemaking, which aims to create “coherent understandings through interlinked observation (‘extraction of cues’), interpretation and action (enactment)” (Schildt et al., 2019). The ways in which reflexivity created space and provides a foundation for ambiguity and confusion initially appeared to be more similar to activities that trigger sensemaking and break down meaning (c.f. Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). However, although means of reflexive influence initially increased confusion, the multiplicity of cues helped individuals to bridge present dichotomies in the long term, such as “good or bad,” “obsolete or necessary,” “centralize or decentralize,” or “autonomy or control.” Hence, whilst organizational members were at first exposed to confusion, reflexivity generated the cues and intellectual support that they needed to make sense of ideas and situations in a more complex manner. In this way, reflexivity facilitated a deeper understanding of the content of change. Thus, the results contribute

insights on how reflexivity can be used as a means of influence to emphasize various individuals' competences and perspectives, regardless of hierarchical position. This insight may help to prevent what Einola and Alvesson (2019) called the "dynamics of immaturization," as it dismantles the illusion that "leaders" have all the answers. Reflexive means of influence also shed light on how change work can be conducted without drawing on "ideological" and "seductive" conceptions of leadership (Alvesson, 2019). Instead, methods commonly found in qualitative research can be applied, such as defamiliarization (i.e., not viewing the social world as self-evident) and problematizing assumptions and developing alternative interpretations (c.f. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018).

In reflexive interactions, another set of means of influence was observed amongst employees who were given the role of moderators (Article 3). Their activities during the police reform focused on (1) interpreting the meaning of their mission and (2) influencing other groups and individuals based on their sensemaking of this mission. Thus, their role was similar to that of middle managers in the sense that they were well-positioned to enable, combine, and synthesize meaning constructions produced by a range of individuals (c.f. Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Beck & Plowman, 2009). However, in the absence of a formal managerial position, they adopted a specific influence triad (see Article 3).

The first way to exert influence, *drawing on power*, involved telling stories that originated from management, referring to expert knowledge, setting the agenda, and controlling who speaks in large group debates or singling out specific statements as good or bad examples of, for instance, development work or professional routines. This is distinct from restricted sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005) because a lack of positional power led moderators to develop other means of influence. For instance, in the absence of their own authority, they made several references to others' authority by showing videos with leading experts or paraphrasing other managers. The ways in which moderators set the agenda (e.g., singling out specific issues) to emphasize specific voices and keep discussions within certain limits closely aligned with the manipulation techniques described by Fleming and Spicer (2014). However, as open-endedness was also encouraged in the ensuing discussions, this way of exerting influence served to trigger creative discussions rather than restrict and control them towards a specific end.

The second way to exert influence, *acting powerless*, was used to avoid or manage certain issues. This was achieved by claiming that an issue (e.g., salary or staffing) was beyond the moderator's responsibility, jurisdiction, or power to influence; instead, the discussion was directed to issues that they had the power to influence in the current situation. Like means of influence used in sensehiding (c.f. Monin et al., 2013), acting powerless partly encompassed efforts to avoid some issues but without denying either their existence or significance. On the contrary, these issues were acknowledged as very important. Instead, acting powerless was used to create the impression that some issues were out of the moderator's scope of responsibilities and thus not relevant to the current meeting. Finally, the third way to exert influence, *giving power away*, involved giving participants the space to express themselves by asking open-ended questions and letting others steer the discussion, at least within certain frames. This influence aimed to downplay the formal hierarchy and emphasize all employees have different but equally important perspectives.

Together, the influence triad contributed to the debate on how individuals outside the management team shape the sensemaking of others (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Related means of influence aimed to create legitimacy for some values and ideas whilst avoiding others; they contribute to the discussion on sensemaking, organizational politics (Pettigrew, 1977), and power (Schildt et al., 2019). For instance, to distribute power to moderators so that they in turn can carry out development work, can be interpreted in different ways: (1) to empower subordinates or (2) to avoid problematic issues (e.g., salary) whilst achieving development work and create the impression of a willingness to share power. An additional interpretation is that the designation of moderators implied a means of influence that involved both empowerment *and* a way to shift focus from issues laden with tensions to issues with a higher chance of success. Regardless of interpretation, the practice of influence through reflexive interactions is cognitively demanding work for managers and employees alike.

6.3 Influence as Responsive Enactments

In the context of this dissertation, influence took place in regional micro-processes of change in which cultural issues (e.g., identity, working methods, and management philosophy) were raised and discussed. Some of this influence occurred through activities within groups of employees outside the management team and as responses to various change

initiatives launched by national and regional managers. From a structural perspective, these responses can be understood as bottom-up influence, whereby employees further down the organizational hierarchy exert influence on the organization and its practices. These responses also exemplify that much influence in micro-processes of change occur without regard for structures, hierarchies, and managers' plans and strategies. Instead, it unfolds more organically, without the supervision and control of managers, and involves episodic power, in which emotions and credible descriptions of reality appear to play as central a role as managers' ideas and objectives in change initiatives.

The results of this dissertation demonstrate that employees' responses to different change issues encompass a wide variety of influences, which shape the sensemaking process in different ways. I label this influence "responsive enactments" for two reasons. First, it is responsive in the sense that it mainly occurs as an immediate response to another party's initiative, such as when ideas about a new police identity are raised for debate. Second, these responses are also enactive in that they involve both "sense" and "action" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p.19) in ways that generate new iterations of the sensemaking cycle. Thus, responsive enactments also influence how sensemaking in micro-processes of change unfolds. The responsive enactments identified in this dissertation are *diversified*, *changeable*, and *unpredictable*. Together, they illustrate the challenges associated with attempting to foresee the consequences of a change initiative. Specifically, potential alternative responses are generally too numerous to fully predict for both managers and employees. Ambiguous and rapidly changing responses make it virtually impossible to assess in advance which direction of a change initiative an enactment supports.

Influence labelled as responsive enactments demonstrates that employees may take diametrically opposed sensemaking positions, from which they enact change issues that are open for debate (c.f. Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, and competing enactments). Although this influence was mainly observed amongst employees outside the change management team, it also occurred amongst managers in sensemaking and enactment on feedback that they received from other actors' enactments (c.f. Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, and iteration of sensemaking cycles). For example, this was visible in Article 2, as managers were sensitive to employees' enactments to such an extent that they influenced the content, direction, and results of the conferences. The variety of responses in sensemaking and enactments has been noted in previous studies. Balogun and Johnson (2005), for instance,

demonstrated that meanings arise from informal inter-recipient processes in the form of jokes, gossip, stories, and discussions. Furthermore, Sonenshein (2010) illustrated that employees' responses varies on a supportive respectively subversive dimension. This dissertation further contributes to the literature through the perspective of influence as responsive enactments. More precisely, this perspective illustrates how micro-processes of change involve multiple responsive enactments, which collectively constitute struggles over meaning.

The perspective of influence as responsive enactments and how these constitute struggles over meaning were constructed based on all four articles. However, they were most evident in Articles 3 and 4, in which I closely followed how individuals took sensemaking positions that either opposed or supported particular change issues and exerted episodic power in line with their positions. Sensemaking positions varied amongst individuals within and between different groups that participated in the change work. Depending on the affective (e.g., hope or indifference) and behavioural (e.g., verbal communication, body language, or tone of voice) actions related to positions for and against a particular change issue, each sensemaking position was connected to a specific responsive enactment. Thus, the enactments were *diversified*.

Apart from being notable as diversified positions for and against specific change issues, there were also differences in the extent to which enactments influenced other individuals. For instance, enactments against a change issue, such as the ones based on the sensemaking positions misery and dismissal, seemed to have a different impact on the ongoing debate. Whereas enactment based on the misery position did not seem to influence others sensemaking of change issues to any larger extent, the enactments based on the dismissal position did. The results demonstrate that a meaning communicated by managers or moderators diverged in multiple directions as soon it reached other individuals, which underlines the problem with thinking of sense as an object that can be transferred from one person to another (c.f. Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Thus, the results provide further insights on how individuals influence others' sensemaking towards different directions and objectives through different sensemaking positions and various enactments. They build on the concept of fragmented sensemaking (c.f. Maitlis, 2005), which previously focused on middle managers and their role in facilitating less controlled processes of sensemaking. Instead, responsive enactments focus on employees and their roles as active influencers of meaning.

Apart from a diversified range of sensemaking positions and enactments, the findings from this dissertation also show that individuals rapidly change positions; for example, they may move from being hopeful about an issue to becoming dismissive about the same issue a short period later. This changeability was closely related to group dynamics, as one individual's enactment of a change issue influenced other individuals' positioning and further enactments. A parallel can be drawn to "emotional contagion," (Hatfield et al., 1993) as enactments encompassed expressions of emotions, such as misery or hope, which clearly shaped how other individuals participated in the discussion by, for instance, either withdrawing or engaging.

Furthermore, I also consider changeability to be closely related to the complexity of analysing and understanding what happens in organizations during organizational change. This complexity was exemplified by the discussions amongst participants as they tried to make sense of ambiguous concepts such as "trust-based leadership" or "management philosophy." Due to complexity, change work becomes particularly sensitive to cues for sensemaking that seem plausible (c.f. Weick, 1995). In other words, if it is difficult to assess what is plausible or not plausible, a person with the ability to provide cues for plausible explanations of complex issues has a high potential to influence others' sensemaking. Complexity as an explanation for the changeability observed in this study also provides insight on why a dialogue can rapidly shift from generative to degenerative (c.f. Thomas et al., 2011; Gergen et al., 2004). For example, a single individual's responsive enactments during change work can lead a dialogue on the meaning of a change issue to shift from conceptually expansive and generative of new knowledge to conceptually restrictive and reproductive of existing understandings of the change issue discussed (or vice versa).

Due to the diversity and changeability of sensemaking positions and enactments amongst employees, influence as responsive enactments is unpredictable. In line with findings by Balogun and Johnson (2005), this dissertation contributes knowledge on how a change initiative may develop in multiple directions and lead to a range of unexpected consequences through different understandings and enactments of an issue or event. Moreover, this dissertation further demonstrates that unpredictability is not only a matter of managers' difficulty in anticipating how employees' responses will influence the construction of meaning in change work; it is also present amongst employees who interact and are both surprised and influenced by their colleagues' ideas and enactments and their own reactions to a change issue. Overall, the

results support the idea that employees have a greater influence in sensemaking during processes of change than usually considered in the sensemaking literature. Thus, they contribute to theory by attributing greater agency to employees in efforts to influence the sensemaking of others.

With regard to the second research question, language plays a central role in the means of influence used in responsive enactments. Individuals who work at different levels respond to others' narratives (c.f. Sonenshein, 2010), stories (c.f. Brown et al., 2009), and metaphors (c.f. Cornelissen et al., 2012) with similar means that either support or oppose various issues and statements. Thus, means of influence work in similar ways but can be complemented with adjectives, such as *supportive* and *contesting* narratives, stories, and metaphors. In the context of the current study, employees contributed narratives, stories, or metaphors that either substantiated or opposed those told to them. Apart from similarities between means of influence defined as top-down efforts and reflexive interactions, two aspects of responsive enactments supplement previous findings on means of influence in sensemaking: *they are imbued with employees' episodic power and charged with emotion.*

The results contribute further insights on how employees, like managers, engage in influential activities by drawing on episodic power. In Article 3, for instance, moderators used episodic to construct an agenda in which some issues and certain voices were emphasized, whilst others were downplayed. On the one hand, these are common strategies in meetings and natural means of fulfilling the organizations objectives. Furthermore, the moderators encouraged open-ended discussions and multivocality during the conferences, a strategy which may not at first appear to be directly associated with the exercise of episodic power. On the other hand, the means of influence closely aligned with sensegiving (c.f. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), sensehiding (Monin et al. 2013), sense-censoring (Whittle et al. 2016), and the use of discursive competence (c.f. Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) to "set the scene" and "perform the conversation." Thus, the moderators' activities covertly and overtly imposed ideas and premises onto the sensemaking of others – activities that were closely related to episodic power (c.f. Schildt et al., 2019). Similarly, the findings in Article 4 illustrate that episodic power occurs when employees enact various change issues. In this study, it was clear that employees' episodic power could be used to influence issues in different directions (i.e., either for or against the discussed issue) and that this influence varied from high to low. Thus, employees' episodic

power shaped emergent meanings about the organization and its practice, and either legitimized or delegitimized the direction of certain change issues.

Using the language and framework suggested by Schildt et al. (2019, figure 2, p.16), the participants in this dissertation engaged in various forms of sensegiving and sensebreaking, and episodic power, to influence others' sensemaking and mobilize certain meanings to emerge. However, whilst this framework outlined different forms of episodic power in sensemaking (e.g., suppressive, authoritative, inspirational, and expansive), the results of this dissertation highlight the relational dimensions of this influence. For instance, whilst enactments based on rejective positions, such as dismissal, can initially be considered equal to suppressive sensegiving due to the ways in which they dampen discussions and silence voices, they can also be considered to have element of inspirational and expansive sensegiving. An explanation of this apparent paradox is that enactments based on dismissal encourage alternative responses and understandings amongst individuals who agree with the dismissive allegations.

The discussion of employees' episodic power as a means of influence in sensemaking raises two specific concerns; the first is related to agency, and the second is related to resistance. Episodic power in sensemaking is traditionally related to means of influence amongst leaders and managers and thus to individuals in positions of authority who provide content for others' sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Schildt et al., 2019). The perspective of employees' episodic power expands on prior critiques of influence in sensemaking as a largely managerial activity and of the manager sensegiving–employee sensemaking model common in sensemaking literature. Whilst managers are central agents in processes of sensemaking, this dissertation's results highlight the need to expand the conception of influence as an activity undertaken by multiple employees. That is, employees enact ambiguous issues and exert episodic power – activities which become part of struggles over meaning. Therefore, employees also become important agents of influence in sensemaking. To avoid establishing and reinforcing a dichotomy in which individuals in positions of authority (i.e., managers and leaders) are considered key agents in the evolution of sensemaking processes, one alternative would be to move away from language that portrays managers as sensegivers and employees as recipients and instead use terms such as sensemakers. This shift would entail a more integrated view of agency in sensemaking during change in which

multiple actors are recognized as influencers in sensemaking and thus coconstructors of change.

Regarding resistance, I found it problematic to categorize any responsive enactments in Article 4 as expressions of resistance. While an individual's behaviour could initially appear to be resistance to a change issue, it could later turn out to be an expressed need for empathy and understanding due to a difficult work-related or private issue. Hence, to categorize enactments that align with the *against* position as resistance, would risk to reinforce the adversarial relationship between opponents and proponents of change rather than explaining the underlying rationale behind the enactments. Instead, the complexity in responsive enactments need to be considered, as it may simultaneously encompass a positive view of a particular change issue; a strong critique of how the change management; and disappointment based on the individual's experience of not being seen, heard, or validated.

As regards to emotions in influence as responsive enactments Article 4 indicate that several of the employees' enactments are charged with emotion, such as misery, hope, irritation and curiosity. This finding resembles previous studies that have emphasized the role of emotional arousal (c.f. Steigenberger, 2015; Vuori & Virtaharju, 2012) and emotional contagion (c.f. Hatfield et al., 1993) in processes of sensemaking. In addition, this dissertation's results emphasize the role of emotions in processes of sensemaking, which manifest when individuals enact change issues. These emotions tend to reinforce a message, and in turn increase the likelihood that the message will influence others sensemaking around an issue. The dynamics that unfold within a group as a result of emotionally charged enactments causes fluctuations between sensemaking positions, which, as previously mentioned, make sensemaking processes changeable and unpredictable.

The results indicate that a sensemaking process may develop either generative or degenerative (c.f. Gergen et al., 2004), and open-ended or restrictive (Kihlberg & Lindberg, 2021) qualities based on its emotional charge. These finding stress the importance of being aware of the mutually reinforcing and contagious relationship between emotions and their effects on others' sensemaking for both employees and managers. Moreover, these results indicate the importance of consider emotional dynamics amongst employees in studies on influential in sensemaking during change.

7. Conclusions, contributions, and ways forward

In the discussion, the research questions of this dissertation were in focus, as I discussed efforts to influence sensemaking at different organizational levels, and various actors' means of influence. Based on the discussion of the results from the four articles, I develop the overview (see figure 8) of actors and means of influence further, and turn to how the efforts of influence at different organizational levels can be understood.

Building on these insights, in this chapter I address the purpose of this dissertation – to increase the understanding about influence in sensemaking during micro-processes of change.

7.1 Three Understandings of Influence

Influence in sensemaking during change takes place in several sites on various organizational levels, and it is exercised by multiple actors involved. It is not merely a top down planned process but continuously iterated in micro-processes of change over time. In these micro-processes, people shape the flow of meaning through various means, and onto others processes of sensemaking. Influence in sensemaking during organizational change goes beyond the concept of sensegiving as it has been previously outlined, and it includes episodic power to an extent and through expressions not previously considered.

Influence in terms of top-down efforts is mainly reminiscent of traditional sensegiving (see Figure 4), and the most pro-active (planned on beforehand), coordinated and unilateral expression of influence in this study. Influence as top-down efforts has been given a prominent role in sensegiving and sensemaking research (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Similar to what this literature concludes, this dissertation also shows that management play a central role in conveying meaning about organizational change. As was shown in Article 1 regarding layering meaning and stereotyping, and in Article 2 drawing on several sources of cues, influence as top-down efforts is largely about setting a direction of change, convincing others that the direction is needed and adequate, and ensuring the continuation of the formal change process.

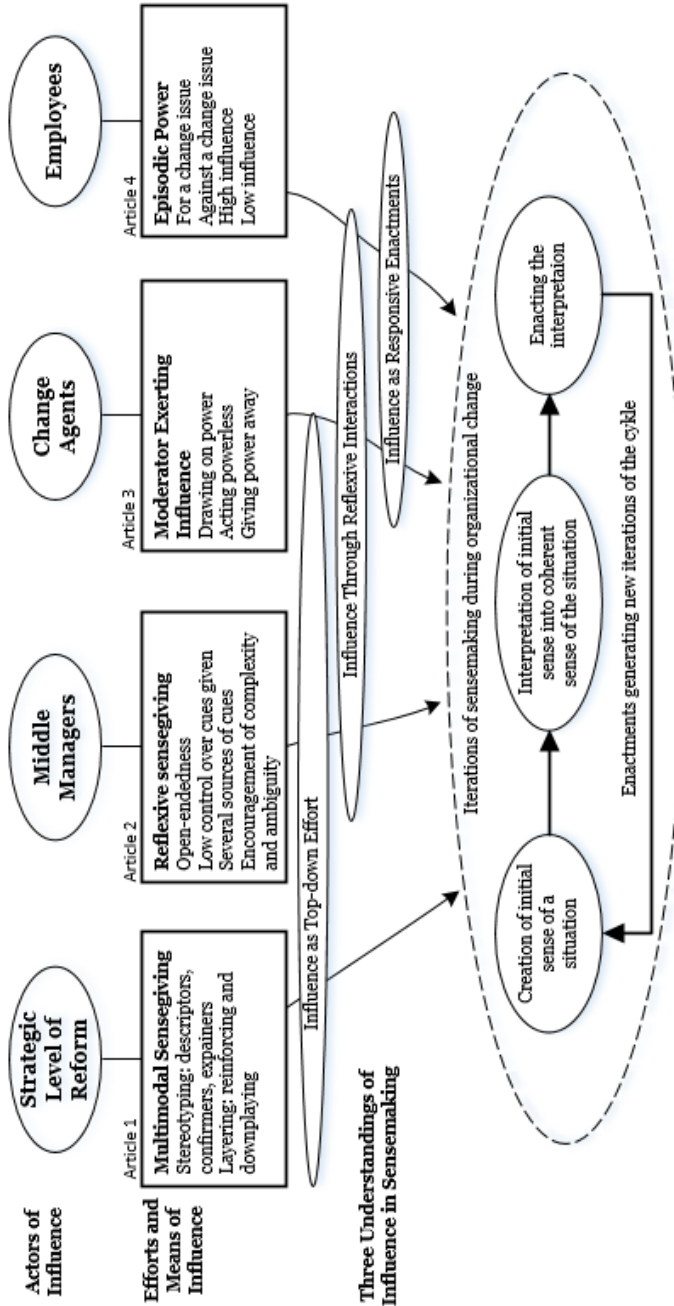


Figure 8: Three understandings of influence in sensemaking during micro-processes of change

These efforts rely on resources bound to structural position, such as management roles, information access, financial priorities, and mandate to gather meetings where the agenda is determined and rehearsed for future implementation. As such, agency of influence as top-down effort is essentially limited to persons working in managerial positions. However, as shown in Article 2 regarding the low control over cues given, and Articles 3 and 4, regarding giving power away and the influence of employee episodic power, top-down efforts are no guarantee for how sensemaking unfolds in subsequent micro-processes of change throughout the organization. Instead, the mentioned results in Article 3 and 4 indicate that top-down influence is contested throughout the change process, and decreases in importance as the change develops and become increasingly multi-authored. Thus, rather than shaping others preferences and perceptions throughout a long change process, influence through top-down efforts is considered as a way for management to facilitate the early implementation and overall direction of change.

Influence as reflexive interaction revolves around managers and employees appointed as change agents, with capacity to shape organizational members preferences and perceptions through means more democratic than the ones applied in top-down efforts. Through its interactive, inclusive and open-ended approach, influence as reflexive interaction tones down the power asymmetry which is built into the structure of the formal organization. Moreover, in reflexive interaction complexity is embraced by giving power away, as shown in Article 3, and by inviting more sources of cues into the dialogue between organizational members as illustrated in Article 2. Thus, in reflexive interactions, several sources of cues are not merely used as means to convince others (as in top-down efforts), but a way to explore new understandings and approaches to organizational reality. One conclusion that can be drawn from my empirical studies is that reflexive interaction constitutes an example of how influence in sensemaking can be made more democratic even though the sensemaking process occurs in a strictly hierarchical environment more prone to support non-democratic influence. Yet, based on the results in Article 2 and 3, with middle managers and change agents position to set the agenda and organize meetings, it cannot be ruled out that reflexive interaction is yet another way for managers to manage others sensemaking. Or more precisely, a way to manage others efforts of influence on each other's sensemaking.

This brings us to influence as responsive enactments, which focuses particularly on the responses which are taking shape when people are exposed to influence efforts of various kinds. As the term enactment

implies, these responses are important constituents of sensemaking as they feed back into new iterations of the sensemaking process (see Figure 2). This influence is to a large extent re-active (not planned beforehand) and non-coordinated due to the large number of actors, and the differences in the responses. Even among managers and appointed change agents, the responses lack coordination although managers prepare for making coordinated responses to various scenarios as a way to direct change in line with an overall change agenda. By analysing dialogues around change issues in Article 4, with focus upon the enactments of employees, I conclude that employees' responsive enactments play a decisive role for how the sensemaking process unfolds, and for what meaning is created. This conclusion emphasizes that employees are not only actors of influence, but also agents of episodic power. With this power, they can shape other organizational members' preferences and perceptions of issues of central importance for how a change process emerges.

Regarding means of influence in the aforementioned three understandings of influence, the main contribution of the thesis is that actors on different organizational levels utilize various means to influence others sensemaking. In Article 1, I show how strategic change initiative can be characterized as multimodal, furthermore, in Article 2, I illustrate how managers use reflexivity as a vehicle for how influence unfolds in micro-processes of change. While videos are at the centre of multimodal sensegiving, and facilitate stereotyping and layering of meaning, the rhetorical and discursive skills are at the core of what I call reflexive sensegiving. Furthermore, in Article 3 and 4 I introduce how influence involve other kinds of means when expressed by actors outside the management team. This influence is clearly distinguished from traditional sensegiving through the ways it is exerted with means that are not grounded on structural positions of power. Article 3, illustrates how appointed change agents (moderators) develop three different ways to relate to power, as a means to influence others sensemaking. Moreover, in Article 4 I demonstrate how employees use episodic power as a means of influence when they enact organizational change initiatives, and engage in struggles over meaning. This influence is more responsive in nature (individuals responding to change issues presented to them), compared to top-down efforts and reflexive interaction. The results in Article 4 show how episodic power as means of influence involve both "enabling" and restrictive" forms of power (c.f. Van Baarle, 2022).

In summary, based on these findings I suggest that research would benefit from increasing the focus on differences in various actors' means to influence others' sensemaking. Actors who operate in the top of the organization undoubtedly have greatest economic and positional means to plan and communicate influence efforts aiming to shape other organizational members preferences and perceptions of organizational reality. However, as shown in Article 2,3 and 4, middle managers and other employees can apply other means of influence, which evens out the hierarchical differences and opens up for more people to make their voices heard.

7.2 Power, Influence and Sensemaking

Regarding power, I add to literature about how episodic power operates in sensemaking. In Article 3 and 4, I clarify how employees outside positions of formal power have capacity to influence the sensemaking of others by drawing on episodic power (see Figure 5 and 6). When middle managers set aside the hierarchy of formal power, and promote reflexive interaction in open ended, complex change processes, multiple actors are encouraged to exert episodic power in sensemaking. The sensemaking processes that emerge through reflexive interaction and responsive enactments involve struggles over meaning, where the concepts of power and resistance are inseparable (c.f. Fleming & Spicer, 2010). Similar to the notion, that sensegivers (e.g. managers and leaders) are inseparable from sensemakers (e.g. subordinates and followers), the findings in Article 4 regarding employee episodic power, underscore that employee episodic power and manager episodic power have more in common than what separates them. As illustrated in Article 1, regarding which interests and issues were advocated by the strategic level, and in Article 4 concerning differences in enactments, the biggest difference lies in which direction the episodic power is exerted. If the employee episodic power is in line with the strategic level reform agenda, it has greater chance of being regarded as legitimate. On the contrary, if pointing another direction, the employee episodic power runs the risk of being regarded as illegitimate resistance. As illustrated in Article 1 and 2, efforts of influence exerted by the strategic level of reform and middle managers do not have the same burden of proof, and therefor runs less risk of being regarded as illegitimate. However, as the result in Article 2, 3 and 4 show, regarding the differences in understanding of the reform, the strategic level influence can still be contested. The debates and struggles that arise should not be dismissed as expressions of resistance. Rather, they could be regarded as expressions of democracy.

7.3 Engaging in Change – Taking Influence into Account

With focus on sensemaking during micro-processes of change, this dissertation touches upon the broader stream of literature engaged with organizational change which illustrates the problems with overlooking the influence of multiple organizational members' (i.e. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Bartunek et al., 2006), and relying on recipes for change (i.e. Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2014). Similar to what this literature concludes, Article 1-4 shows how microprocesses of change unfold on different organizational levels over time, and involve an increasing number of people adding new and contradictory interpretations and enactments. Accordingly, despite careful planning and implementation, the unfolding micro-processes of change makes predictability and control of an organizational change an unattainable ideal. As shown in Article 2, reflexivity, open-endedness, and relying on several sources of cues, can work as a way to engage multiple organizational members for purposes that lies beyond predictability and control of organizational change. Such as to facilitate for a larger group of employees to be part of influencing the process, understanding and outcome of organizational change.

By studying the micro-processes of change subsequent to the formal implementation, I contribute with knowledge on organizing within the context of policing. The ideas of reflexive interactions and responsive enactments contribute to calls for research that expresses problems with the prevailing over belief in vertical forms of organizing, and in particular leadership (i.e. Alvesson, 2019; Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2019). Building further on the idea that sensemaking can be equated with organizing (c.f Glynn & Watkiss, 2020), and on the results in Article 2 and 4, I suggest that reflexive interactions and responsive enactments are processes that support horizontal forms of organizing (i.e. team-work and autonomy) although the formal organization structure is vertical and, by tradition, mainly support hierarchical forms of organizing. Similar phenomenon and ideas have been explored through other theoretical constructs, such as inspirational and expansive sensegiving (Schildt et al., 2019), and generative dialogues (Thomas et al. 2011). In this dissertation, these ideas are inspirations for further theorization. For instance, with Article 2 the concept of reflexive sensegiving encompass how managers facilitate multiple cues for others sensemaking, and work with open-ended sensemaking processes to stimulate other actors to become engaged in change work. Moreover, the

findings in Articles 2-4 show that managers have an important role to play also in horizontal forms of organizing. That is to allow for and encourage complexity, letting go of cue control, give power away, and placing trust in other organizational members. When managers provide others with arenas for sensemaking, where traditional hierarchies and power relations are toned down, other actors can become more deeply engaged in change work.

7.4 Managing influence?

For management on different organizational levels, the results in Article 1-4 imply that employees' understandings and influence on sensemaking during micro-processes of change, is central for how the change process evolve. Thus, any manager who seeks to better understand why a change initiative evolves the ways it does, need to consider how various actors receive and enact change initiatives within the organization. To closely follow the ways organizational members makes sense of change, increase the chances for managers to get a better understanding of the change processes. While the opportunities for managing and controlling change may be poor, there can be great value in developing the ability to manage individuals' influence on the change process

The results in Articles 1-4 also imply that despite significant differences in means and resources, both managers and employees are active influencers and co-constructors of the emergent understandings of organizational change. The differences in means and resources is partly determined by how managers choose to arrange the sites and interactions where individuals discuss change issues. For instance, as shown in Article 1, top-down efforts leave limited space for others' than management to decide which meanings should be favoured or downplayed. On the contrary, as shown in Articles 2-4, meetings that encourage reflexive interactions and responsive enactments, provide significantly more space for other employees to influence and co-construct meaning. Thus, the results highlight managers' importance for determining to which extent the sites and interactions should be autocratic or democratic. Consequently, the results also point to the responsibility of managers on different organizational levels to be aware of what values and ideals they base their approaches on. Equally important is to be aware that different situations may demand different types of change processes, which means that managers must reflect upon which degree of autocracy or democracy may best serve the individual, group, and organization.

While management can determine sites and forms of interaction, other employees determine how to receive and enact the change initiatives. Thus, employees, also have responsibility for which understandings of an organizational reform that emerge, and how these understandings are enacted. The results in Article 4 particularly underscore that employees can have far-reaching influence on sensemaking during organizational change when given the opportunity.

This dissertation illustrates that employees also can exert power in times of organizational change. Although there are apparent differences in different actors' capacity for episodic power, no actor is omnipotent. Particularly not in situations where managers intentionally work to empower their subordinates, as it is done by the middle managers in Article 2 and the moderators in Article 3. Change management and managers are in position to use more episodic power in regard to decisions about organization structure, the design of working processes, and distribution of resources. Yet, as illustrated in Article 3 and 4, managers' episodic power is considerably less influential in regard to cultural aspects of the organization, discussed in smaller groups during micro-processes of change. How individuals *think* about organization structure and design of working process, or how employees *behave* and *communicate* within the structures and working processes, simply lies beyond the managers' episodic power to control.

This brings me to suggest that rather than trying to manage meaning, organizational members could focus more on how to understand and *manage influence*. This implies managing one's own influence on others, as well as managing the influence of others on oneself. Regarding managing one's own influence on others', this means trying to be aware of your cognitive and emotional perspectives in communication with others, around ambiguous change issues. Regarding managing the influence of others on oneself, this could involve both an openness, as well as a scepticism, to others' perspectives and understandings. This shift of focus – on managing influence rather than meaning – could be a way for organizational managers and employees to be open to change without being uncritical, to listen to others without judging, and to direct one's influence so that it is in line with the organization's overall mission without, for that sake, accepting all the changes that are proposed.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research

One limitation is that the articles of this dissertation is based on cross-sectional material collected during short periods. Thus, the results do not reveal how influence in processes of sensemaking unfold over longer periods of time, which could be an avenue for future research.

Furthermore, in this dissertation I have not studied the outcomes of the change, and the impact of the influence on the police reform over time. Future studies could examine how influence in sensemaking, such as outlined in this study, impacts the implementation and outcomes of change processes in organizations.

This dissertation also focuses on micro-processes in one particular organization which makes it important to explore how influence plays out in different types of organizations and change processes. The police organization is generally characterized by hierarchical relations. However, the case of this police reform was also about making it more democratic, and to distribute more decisional power to the lowest operational level. In particular I focus on a region with actors who take the notion of distributing mandate very seriously. As such the Police is a case where struggles over meaning between ideals of democratization and traditional hierarchal values become visible. Future studies could examine how reflexive interactions unfold in organizations where democratic ideals are not sought after to the same degree as by the studied managers in this dissertation.

Furthermore, although systemic power is prominent also within the Police, and provide certain conditions for influence in sensemaking, in this dissertation the focus is on episodic power and observable acts of influence. A fruitful avenue for future studies could be to investigate the relation between episodic power, as outlined in this dissertation, and systemic forms of power. Considering the enabling and restrictive potential in power, studies could, for instance, examine the systemic conditions which facilitates, respectively restricts, various actors use of episodic power in sensemaking, with potential to improve organizations.

This dissertation presents three understandings of influence in sensemaking. My hopes are that these understandings can inspire individuals to think, act, enact and organize with reflexivity, and to use their capacity to influence processes of sensemaking wisely.

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Appendix – Interview Guide

Organizational change – process, results, leadership

Normal text: prioritized questions

Italics: secondary questions, follow-up questions and checklists

Personal background

- Who are you? (Background, previous experience)
- Can you tell me about your work and workplace? (how many, how do you work, responsibilities, etc.)
- Your role and mission?

The organizational change – focus on the process

- Can you tell me about the reorganization process? (from 2013 and up to date)
- What are the biggest challenges that you are grappling with in regard to the reorganization?
- Have there been particular opportunities that come with the reorganization?
- Is there anything you would like to say about the balance between the national departments and the regions?
- *What do you think about/how do you value the reform as a change process as a whole?*
- *Would/should the reform be implemented in some other way?*
- *(Checklist: has the process been characterized by participation, democracy, transparency, communication, top-down/bottom-up)*

The organizational change – focus on the result

- Has the reorganization affected how the police work?
- In which ways have you been affected by the reorganization?
- Have the police achieved the goals of the reform that were formulated before implementation?
- *Has the new police organization become a more centralized or decentralized authority?*
- *Has the police organization become more efficient because of the reform?*
- *How have your closest colleagues been affected?*

- *How has your immediate boss been affected?*
- *(Checklist: has the police become unified, efficient, decentralized, clearer leadership through fewer levels)*

The organizational change – focus on leadership

- Please tell about the leadership philosophy and leadership in the police.
- Can you tell me more about the formulation of a new management philosophy in your region?
- Tell me about how you go about getting other managers and employees involved in the change work?
- It has been said that "Decision-making power must be moved forward in the organization" and "Policemen must have real room for action in the line". What does it mean and why is it important?
- What role models do you have?
- What values do you want your leadership to be characterized by?
- You use a lot of scientific literature - how is it selected and why?
- How are you evaluated as a leader in the police?
- *In the document - An employee-driven planning process - it is stated that "The new police authority must be built from below, based on local needs and work based on the conditions laid down in the form of long-term goals, strategic initiatives, police operative orientation, etc." Can you tell us about that work?*
- *What are the biggest challenges for police leaders?*
- *What is a good or bad leader?*
- *How do you see the leadership in the different levels of the organization? Strengths and weaknesses?*

The organizational change - focus on the new policeman/woman

- *What are the expectations of today's police?*
- *What is a good or bad police officer?*
- *How are you evaluated as a police officer?*
- *Has the degree of leeway and responsibility changed for police officers and managers?*