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DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to increase understanding of discursive practices in organizational change. By approaching organizational change as a social construction, this dissertation examines how discursive practices are involved in organizational change through a qualitative case study.

Current organizational literature demonstrates a discursive turn in which negotiation, interactive meaning creation and tension exploitation through discursive struggles characterize the execution of organizational change. Compared to earlier decades, when change was treated rather mechanistically as a process to be executed in controllable phases, the discursive approach is more capable of examining the social aspects of organizational change in practice. Despite the recent tendency to study change within organizations through the lenses of social constructionism and social constructivism, few scholars have approached discourse directly through practice in the context of organizational change. This study examines aspects that are often taken for granted, such as talk. Discursive practices in organizational change are analysed with a case study method through the practice lens, which views practice as a combination of change practices, change praxis and change practitioners.

The narrative analysis of this research in the context of a public university hospital indicates that discursive practices play a role in organizational change through discourse phronesis, the context-dependent practical wisdom of talk, and more specifically through the discursive practices that apply discourse phronesis. Four examples of discursive practices were identified in the case study: field practices, mandate practices, priority practices and word practices. In addition, the agency of the strategy text in translating change was analysed, with the conclusion that while a strategy text is material in nature, it is also a discursive practice which reflects collective identities and their power positions during and as the result of organizational change. The study also suggests that permanent tensions in an organization can be harnessed for the benefit of change through discourse. The dynamic contradiction between permanent tensions and change in an organization is termed the renewal paradox.

Keywords: change, discourse phronesis, discursive practice, organizational change, renewal paradox
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Tiivistelmä
Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä diskursiivisista käytännöistä organisatiomen muutoksessa. Väitöskirjassa lähestytään organisatiomen muutosta sosiaalisena konstruktiona ja tutkitaan laadullisen case-tutkimuksen avulla, kuinka diskursiiviset käytännöt liittyvät organisatiomen muutokseen.


Asiasanat: diskurssinivinen käytäntö, diskurssin phronesis, muutos, organisatiomen muutos, uudistumisen paradoksi
To the memory of Kaarina and Wille Kaipainen
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I have dedicated this thesis to the memory of my grandparents. Mummu and Tuffa, you taught me courage, ability to focus, and the meaning of stories in life, all of which were helpful in writing this thesis. Even in your absence, your legacy is vividly present.

19 June 2014, Merikarvia

Noora Jansson
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1 Introduction

Ce sont ces règles mises en œuvre par une pratique discursive à un moment donné qui expliquent que telle chose soit vue (ou omise); qu'elle soit envisagée sous tel aspect et analysée à tel niveau; que tel mot soit employé avec telle signification et dans tel type de phrase. Par conséquent, l'analyse à partir des choses et l'analyse à partir des mots apparaissent dès ce moment comme secondes par rapport à une analyse première, qui serait l'analyse de la pratique discursive.

Michel Foucault 1969

1.1 Background of the study

The activities and events happening in an organization and the co-occurrences of its past, present and future actions, such as changes, constitute an organization (Schatzki 2006). More than 70% of organizational change efforts fail (Beer & Nohria 2000, Burke 2011, Cinite et al. 2009). Research by the Gartner Group has shown that although 90% of the companies surveyed had experienced major organizational change within the last two years, only 5% had avoided remarkable disruption and achieved their goals within the given time (Johnson-Cramer et al. 2007). Given the poor success rate along with the constant pressure of productivity and other transformation requirements for organizations, it is easy to understand that organizational change is a highly interesting topic for both scholars and practitioners (Battilana & Casciaro 2012, Burke 2011).

Scholars offer a rich spectrum of analysis on organizational change. Dominating research themes in the context of organizational change are tensions, discourse, processes, leadership, execution and change reception (Bryant & Higgins 2010, Farjoun 2010, Grant & Marshak 2011, Rouleau & Balogun 2011, Schreyögg & Sydow 2011, Van de Ven & Sun 2011). Topical reviews focus on, for example, recipients' reactions to organizational change (Oreg et al. 2011), duality characteristics in organizing (Graetz & Smith 2008), and sustaining organizational change (Buchanan et al. 2005).

Discourse has an important role in organizational change as a mechanism of communication and sensemaking (Bisel & Barge 2011, Thomas et al. 2011). While current research recognizes the importance of discourse in organizational change (Cox & Hassard 2010, Schwarz et al. 2011), surprisingly little attention
has been given to discursive practices as a contextually constructed phenomenon. Organizational change theories would benefit from complementary research that analyses discourse as a practice in its social context (Crawshaw & Bunton 2009, Grant & Marshak 2011, Thomas et al. 2011). Hence, the purpose of this qualitative research is to increase understanding of how discursive practices are involved in organizational change.

Organizational change may happen without planning or active decision-making (Plowman et al. 2007), but in most cases change is initiated by the management’s intentional decisions, and it is these planned changes that are the focus of this dissertation. Organizational change involves people and is thus a social change. This means that if we want to advance our understanding of change, we ought to concentrate on human behaviour in a social context. My approach, thus, is social constructionism, in which practice and context are valued elements (Gubrium & Holstein 2009).

In this dissertation I investigate organizational change and discursive practices through a qualitative case study. The qualitative context of this research is a health care organization in Finland, the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa (HUS). HUS is Finland's largest specialized health care organization, a public university hospital with more than 20,000 employees. Organizational change in the health care sector is an important subject, as the field is under pressure for drastic changes in many countries (Hyer et al. 2009, Naranjo-Gil et al. 2008, Salmela & Fagerström 2008). Since organizational change is especially challenging in public organizations which involve highly specialized professional employees, political interests and several stakeholders (Kan & Parry 2004, Ramanujam & Rousseau 2006), a public university hospital is a suitable qualitative context for exploring these challenges.

I have chosen to approach the qualitative material with narrative analysis, because systematic study of narrative is the key to understanding change and human action in context (Brown et al. 2009, Riessman 2008). The narrative approach is used in this study both in data collection and as the method of analysis. The main purpose of this dissertation, described next in more detail, is to increase understanding of the role of discursive practices in organizational change.
1.2 The purpose of the study

Organizational change is a socially constructed, complex phenomenon which influences itself through interaction, discourse and interpretations (Castel & Friedberg 2010, Detert & Pollock 2008, Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007). The aim of this dissertation is to enrich our knowledge of this complex phenomenon by focusing on discursive practices. The study is guided by the following research question:

*How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?*

The dissertation consists of four separate articles, each of which contributes to its overall conclusions. The first article is a conceptual research paper based on previous research, and the other three articles are qualitative research papers based on a case study of a public university hospital in Finland. Each article has a specific role in meeting the purpose of the study.

The role of the first article (Section 5.1) is to introduce and analyse relevant theories as the basis for the research. This article sets the scene of organizational change theory through a practice lens. In conclusion, the article points out some possible future research avenues. These proposals include, among others, focusing on taken-for-granted practices and utilizing the narrative analysis method, both of which I have taken up in the subsequent articles by examining discursive practices through narratives. Although the dissertation includes this conceptual paper as the first article, this research can be described as inductive, because the research conclusions are mainly derived from the qualitative case study, that is, from observed facts (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002), presented in the following three articles.

The second article (Section 5.2) examines how discursive practices are involved in organizational change. It is consequently central to the dissertation, since it responds directly to the research question. The second article focuses on practices, especially discursive practices, and is methodologically qualitative. The aim of the third article (Section 5.3) is to examine one discursive practice in more detail and thus to offer an example of the role of discursive practices in organizational change. This article examines discursive practices in organizational change by focusing on the agency of strategy texts and the related translations in change discourse.

The role of the fourth article (Section 5.4) is to examine the case study context and its practitioners in more detail and to suggest complementary
explanations for the findings of the second and third articles. The fourth article examines the relationship between permanent tensions and organizational change through the following research question: “How can change practitioners harness permanent tensions in the context of organizational change?” Instead of approaching tensions as temporary problems, I treat them as a natural part of organizational reality. In combination, these four articles seek answers to the main research question of this study: “How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?”

1.3 Key concepts of the study

This study utilizes and refers to several conceptual phenomena, mostly derived from theory, but also emerging out of the research. Therefore, it is useful to explain and define the key concepts of the study. Each of the key concepts is also discussed separately in relevant contexts in this dissertation.

Discourse phronesis

Discourse phronesis is the first of two novel concepts introduced as part of the results of this study. Discourse is phronetic when the practices it captures are socially constructed within a particular context. Hence, I define discourse phronesis as the practical wisdom of talk.

Discursive practice

In this dissertation, a discursive practice is a socially constructed discursive activity that reflects power positions. Discursive practice denotes not only socially learned ways of using spoken or written language, but also socially constructed practices which influence observation of the discourse objects and the position of discourse subjects in relation to its objects (Alhanen 2007).

Organization

The term “organization” in this study is defined as a functioning and legitimized organizational entity with an identifiable management and employees or members. A formal organization includes a clear hierarchy, makes decisions about membership and rules, and has the right to monitor compliance with its rules and
to decide on possible sanctions (Ahrne & Brunsson 2011). An organization is externally acknowledged as an actor by other actors in society; it exhibits purposeful and intentional behaviour; it influences its own existence and environment; and it can thus be described as a social actor (King et al. 2010).

**Practice**

Practice in this dissertation is defined as *an activity that is socially constructed within a particular context*. This definition is rooted in the definitions found in the practice literature, such as the following: “Practices are accepted ways of doing things, embodied and materially mediated, that are shared between actors and routinized over time” (Vaara & Whittington 2012: 287). Practice in this study does not refer to medical practice.

**Practitioner**

The term “practitioner” in this study refers to the actors involved in an organizational change. In the qualitative case study analysed in this dissertation, the practitioners are case organization employees and the key decision-makers of the organization, including some who are not directly employed by the organization.

**Praxis**

Praxis is one of the three cornerstones of the practice approach, the other two being practices and practitioners. Praxis means the everyday actions that take place in an organization, the events and happenings, and derives from practices (Vaara & Whittington 2012). For example, talk, sensemaking and resistance all constitute praxis.

**Renewal paradox**

The renewal paradox is the second new concept introduced by the results of this dissertation, and it denotes *the dynamic contradiction between permanent tensions and change in an organization*. 
1.4 The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into two main parts: the introductory part and the articles. The introductory part consists of a theoretical overview, a description of the practice lens, an explanation of the research design, the case analysis, findings, discussion, and conclusions. The articles part contains the four published or forthcoming articles.

I begin by introducing the theoretical foundation for this dissertation (Chapter 2). The theoretical overview surveys organizational change, leading to a justification of discursive practices in organizational change as an interesting research topic. As a continuation of theory and an introduction to methodology, I then introduce the practice approach (Chapter 3). Because I use practice theory as an analytical lens in this research, it has both theoretical and methodological characteristics.

The introductory part goes on to explain my research design, including the qualitative material of this study, the method of analysis and the personal research process (Chapter 4). In this chapter I also introduce the underlying philosophical assumptions relevant to this study. I then provide summaries of the articles and explain how they compose a logical entity for the dissertation (Chapter 5).

The introductory part ends with discussion and conclusions (Chapter 6). This chapter summarizes both the theoretical and practical implications of this dissertation. It also proposes a future research agenda and outlines the limitations of the study.

Overall, the introductory part, rather than being a mere summary of the articles, directly addresses the role of discursive practices in organizational change, guided by the primary research question of the study. This conscious choice of focus enables a well-defined introductory formulation that is supported by the findings of the individual articles.
2  The theoretical overview

In this chapter I introduce the theory of organizational change in order to set up the academic discussion in which this study takes part. The theoretical material in this chapter relies largely on the literature review on organizational change which I conducted in 2011 and which resulted in the first article of this dissertation (Section 5.1). That article is a conceptual paper that takes a critical view on the taken-for-granted assumptions in the literature, and its limited length does not permit a full survey of the literature. Consequently this chapter complements the article by providing an introductory discussion of organizational theory, without the critical analysis.

Before the theoretical discussion, the following section describes how the relevant literature was identified and how the articles were analysed. This methodological explanation is located in the present chapter for two reasons. First, this chapter introduces the theory of organizational change, and it is thus a logical place for discussion of the theoretical literature; and second, treating the theoretical framework in this chapter allows the methodology chapter (Chapter 4) to focus solely on the case study and the related methods, in reflection of the important role of qualitative data in this study.

2.1 Identification and analysis of the relevant literature

Two key criteria drove the identification of relevant literature for the review: quality and actuality. The high quality of the review material was ascertained by using the Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports®, which offer a systematic way of critically evaluating peer-reviewed journals with statistical information based on citation data. The actuality of the review material was ensured by focusing the search on the most recent five-year period, that is, 2007–2011, as the primary time window. In this way the synthesis provides novelty value and can truly be described as contemporary and fresh. The prevailing principle of academic publication, that new knowledge is based upon and builds on previous published and peer-reviewed knowledge, means that publications from before 2007 are acknowledged in and constructively built into this review. The clear time frame was also supportive of handling the material systematically, since the topic of organizational change is extremely wide in scope.

Conducting electronic searches for the term “change”, I looked for articles that discuss organizational change, including, for example, strategic change,
organizational transformation, mergers, organizational design, institutional change, change implementation and change management. I conducted this search for each journal in the 2010 Journal Citation Reports on business and management that has an impact factor greater than or equal to 1.0 (n = 118). For the searches, I used the Business Source Complete database accessed through EBSCOhost. “Organizational change” and “organization change” were initially tested as additional search terms, but a comparison of the results showed that inserting the additional words in the search actually limited the number of relevant articles found. This initial search, using the primary search criteria, yielded 1,340 articles published during 2007–2011. The review search did not cover books or book chapters.

The article selection was based on a systematic process (Kitchenham 2004), and comprised two rounds. To make sure I would not miss any important and valuable articles, I chose to conduct the article selection process manually, rather than through electronic filtering. This first round sought to exclude articles which did not actually address organizational change as described above. I reviewed the abstract of each of the 1,340 published articles yielded by the electronic search and made a decision to include or exclude it. The majority of the articles were quickly discarded after the abstract revealed that the article did not address organizational change as such (e.g., articles on climate change). Other groups of articles that were discarded dealt, for example, with information technology integration, because this study concentrates on planned, non–technology-based changes that affect the whole organization, such as mergers, management system renewals and strategic changes. This search round also revealed that of the 118 journals included in the electronic search, several did not include any articles about organizational change as a key topic, as they focused, for example, on law, advertising or logistics. As the result of this first-round article selection process, 136 possible articles were identified to be considered for the review. Next, in the second round, I read the remaining articles to ascertain whether they would be helpful in identifying currently prevailing views about organizational change. This round led to the rejection of a further 34 articles based on the fact that they did not address organizational change as their main research topic.

I also wanted to ensure that I was not overlooking any other highly relevant material, so I conducted electronic searches on the same database without preselections related to the journals or publishing year. This extension, using the secondary search criteria, resulted in the selection of six additional articles to be included in the review. In the end, 108 articles from 38 top journals met all the
described criteria, and they form the basis of my review. A list of the journals is
given in the original article (Article 1) at the end of this dissertation. To make sure
that the number of articles was appropriate for a reliable literature review in the
field of management studies, I compared it with the numbers used in published
literature reviews in high-quality journals and concluded that more than 100
articles is an adequate basis for a review (Graetz & Smith 2008, Oreg et al. 2011).

The coding of the material followed the main principles of content analysis
(Greenhalgh et al. 2004). I coded the articles according to their research focus.
Review articles were coded separately. I coded the articles manually according to
the particular topic or issue they addressed within the realm of organizational
change, primarily looking for major categories or themes that would be helpful in
identifying dominant discourses on organizational change. During the coding
process, it became clear to me that scholars approach organizational change
through a range of perspectives which concentrate on, for example, the dual
nature of change, the process nature of change, the role of discourse in change,
the execution of change, and the human aspects relating to change, such as
identity, culture, emotions, ethics, and resistance. The coding process drew out
three primary topics: change as a phenomenon, change execution and reactions to
organizational change. These three interrelated topics have been the most popular
among organizational change researchers during 2007–2011 in the top journals of
the field, and they form the structure of the theoretical overview of this study,
presented next.

2.2 The essence of organizational change

This section synthesizes the essence of organizational change as presented and
proposed among academic researchers, and it represents the first of the three
relevant dimensions of organizational change, the others being change execution
and change reception. The word essence is used here to denote the most
fundamental and authentic characteristics of an issue, that is, organizational
change.

The literature review revealed the following approaches as the leading lines
of contemporary enquiry on the essence of organizational change: the duality
approach (Graetz & Smith 2008, Farjoun 2010, Nasim & Sushil 2011, Sutton-
Brady 2008), the process approach (Castel & Friedberg 2010, Schreyögg &
Sydow 2011, Tyler & De Cremer 2005) and the discourse approach (Buchanan &
Dawson 2007, Grant & Marshak 2011, Jian 2011, Schwarz et al. 2011, Whittle et
al. 2010). To provide a holistic picture of the essence of organizational change, I will now introduce these three different but interdependent perspectives and then discuss the relationship among them.

**Organizational change as a duality**

According to the dialectical theory school, an organization is a scenario in which competing events, forces and values have a simultaneous influence, and where change occurs in the confrontation of these opposing elements, leading to a shift towards the mobilizing power and disturbing the status quo (Van de Ven & Poole 1995). The academic discussion continues to focus on the duality approach for the benefit of a deeper understanding of organizational realities, such as organizational change. Coexisting, opposing elements tend to create paradox, which also applies to organizational situations (Farjoun 2010, Graetz & Smith 2008, Lüscher & Lewis 2008, Nasim & Sushil 2011, Sonenshein 2010).

The most frequently used paradoxical opposing element pairs in contemporary discussion are “continuity and change” and “stability and change”, which ultimately refer to the same paradox, because continuity in this context means “continuing as before in contrast to changing”, and stability in this context means “stabilizing the current state, i.e. continuing as before as opposed to changing”. Graetz & Smith (2008) propose that even though contrary features, stability and change coexist in organizations, their relationship may be treated as a paradox. Farjoun (2010), on the other hand, suggests that stability and change are not paradoxical, and rethinking their relationship may help in recognizing some of the threats dualism may pose to the way in which organizations are studied and guided. In the end, although the perspectives from which the terms duality and paradox are presented in these two studies are different, their main message to researchers and managers is uniform: stability and change are not necessarily separate or opposite; instead, their twofold character can be described as a duality, where the interdependency of two essential elements is in focus. Sonenshein’s (2010) findings support this view, demonstrating that change unfolds in sets of simultaneous processes which are realized in a balance of change and continuity. Research also shows that time as a proxy variable for stability is only conjecture, and there are other variables that may be crucial in balancing stability and change, such as location, product or service quality, technology, cooperativeness, adaptations and cost (Sutton-Brady 2008).
**Organizational change as a process**

Another commonly applied perspective on organizational change is its tendency to evolve as a process (Butler & Allen 2008, Castel & Friedberg 2010, Jian 2011, Schreyögg & Sydow 2011). Organizational change is a complex, dialectical process, where the motor of change develops and is developed by the process itself, and where the old and the new intertwine, cumulatively building an innovative dynamic (Castel & Friedberg 2010). The process approach was comprehensively described by Van De Ven and Poole in 1995, in an analysis that they called the life-cycle approach. Life-cycle theory treats change as an evolving phenomenon (Van de Ven & Poole 1995). The change process can take place in both progressive and retrogressive ways (Ambos & Birkinshaw 2010), retrogressive change being a kind of re-development towards the original state before regression occurred (Lewin 1951). Schreyögg and Sydow (2011) propose that following the logic of systemic processes characterized by self-reinforcement, a process view of organizational path dependence is useful in evaluating specific forms of organizational stability and institutional persistence.

Countering the commonly held view that change provokes more change, Beck et al. (2008) argue that change processes are driven by deceleration; thus, change propensity decreases if changes accumulate. Change frequency decreases through organizational learning, where experiences from prior changes help to refine organizational procedures, so the need for further changes diminishes (Beck et al. 2008). People try new things and other ways of doing them and consequently learn from the process, and these learning processes are in themselves heterogeneous. Schema development and routine development are linked through qualitative learning, where changes in one may trigger changes in the other (Rerup & Feldman 2011). So change does not just happen; it is interactive by nature (Castel & Friedberg 2010) and can be described as a two-level process, where the first level is more traditional and mechanismic, including leadership, politics, implementation and vision, whereas the second level, the possibility space, includes novel and creative management processes (Butler & Allen 2008).

**Organizational change as a discourse**

In addition to the duality and process perspectives, organizational change can be viewed as a discourse or as a combination of many discourses. The linguistic turn
in the social sciences happened in the early 2000s, when interest in organizational
discourse clearly escalated (Oswick et al. 2010). The development of discursive
research has been linked to organizational change research, producing many
fruitful insights into the area of organizational change management (Grant &
Marshak 2011, Whittle et al. 2010). Organizational talk is the discursive action
that constitutes change, and talk-in-interaction is essential to the change process
because the meanings of organizational circumstances, identity and practice are
constructed through various discourses (Jian 2011).

Diverse levels of discourse, as well as the social, historical and political
contexts of the change taking place, influence change processes and outcomes
(Grant & Marshak 2011). The discourse actualizes in a funnel of interests, where
the nature and meaning of change are debated and modified, usually deviating
from and further developing the original plans (Whittle et al. 2010). In addition to
taking place in formal organizations, discourse also evolves through partial
organizations and networks (Ahne & Brunsson 2011). Networks are similar to
partial organizations in that their formal managerial line structures are either
missing or relatively complex. Managers who lead change should thus use various
communication channels, consider inviting change agents from both formal and
informal organizational networks, and thoroughly explore the organization’s
intergroups and the way they talk among themselves (Schwarz et al. 2011).

The credibility of an organizational change is dependent on the process
through which employees formulate their understandings of common sense
(Moon 2009). Employees reconstitute the meaning of change through discourse,
and this process should be accepted and facilitated by the management (Jian
2007). Instead of seeking shared clarity within the organization about change,
managers tend to balance the need to promote change with the minimization of
uncertainty, resulting in simultaneous processes that guide the overall
implementation of organizational change (Sonenshein 2010). Discourse may be
directed, for example, with the support of myths. Organizational change may be
impelled by mythically coloured stories via management rhetoric, so mythology
can be used as a tool in communication and organizing (Bathurst & Monin 2010).

The final results of an organizational change is difficult to predict and
impossible to fully predetermine, because it is a product of multiple local
discourses involving reinterpretation, recitations and interests constructed during
and through the discourse (Whittle et al. 2010). The result of any organizational
change depends on how tensions are managed and whether the participation of
different employee groups is allowed (Jian 2007). Discourse can also be a signal
of failure in organizational change, and it is demonstrated, for example, through organizational membership experiences in which individuals often participate informally (Schwarz et al. 2011). To conclude, discourse is the key place, reality and process through which organizational change is made sense of, judged, developed, formulated and finally instituted.

*The social construction of organizational change*

The three perspectives presented above – the duality, process and discourse approaches to organizational change – all emphasize the importance of context and social construction in understanding organizational change. In fact, it is fair to say that these perspectives are overlapping and interdependent to a greater extent than they are independent. Organizational change requires time and discussion and hence is a discursive process. Organizational change is realized through talk about different options, that is, dualities. Organizational change is a transformation from one to another, between one and another, and thus, a process involving both tensions and common sense formulation. Figure 1 illustrates how organizational change can be viewed as a dynamic, context dependent relationship between dualities, process and discourse, in other words, as a social construction.
2.3 Organizational change as a discourse among participants

In view of the social construction of organizational change, I now focus in more detail on the activities and actors in the change process. The literature indicates that management usually pursues change through discourse, to which the personnel responds (Grant & Marshak 2011, Oswick et al. 2010, Thomas & Hardy 2011). In accordance with the discourse-centred understanding of organizational change, I seek to explain who participate in this discourse and what is important to them. Hence, the theoretical overview continues by introducing organizational change from the point of view of the change executors and the change recipients, viewed as the participants in the overall change discourse.

The management as participants in the discourse

Those in charge of organizational change execution are often referred to as the management. But who exactly are they? In order to analyze the discourse process, we need to understand the nature of the participants involved in the discourse.
Most current writings about change execution agency focus exclusively on a certain management group, such as the board (Fields 2007), the CEO (Ndofor et al. 2009, Zhang & Rajagopalan 2010), the top management (Clark & Soulsby 2007, Greve & Mitsuhashi 2007), the middle management (Battilana et al. 2010, Cinite et al. 2009, Lüscher & Lewis 2008, Plowman et al. 2007, Rouleau & Balogun 2011), or the change agents (Raineri 2011, Schwartz et al. 2011, Stensaker & Langley 2010, Thomas et al. 2011). The terms used in the present study follow the logic of managerial roles and responsibilities in discussions of organizational change: the top management is primarily described as responsible for leading the change, the middle management is mostly appointed to both lead and implement, and the change agents are mainly assigned the responsibility of facilitating and implementing the change in the most operational way.

Top management covers the board, the CEO, and the top management team. Top management may be conceptualized as management regimes, which change over time and are, thus, processual in nature (Clark & Soulsby 2007). In organizational change, top management actions are linked to the organizational context and affected by the values and strategies that the team espouses (Clark & Soulsby 2007). The power is not always distributed evenly in top management. For example, some top management members may possess excessive power that originates in either formal or informal structures, and teams with such concentrated power are more likely to start a strategic change if it is on the agenda of the powerful few rather than the will of a wider audience (Greve & Mitsuhashi 2007).

Most of the contemporary discussion related to CEOs and organizational change concentrates on CEO turnover (a new CEO vs. the same CEO) and CEO origins (outside CEO vs. inside CEO). CEO turnover may significantly increase the probability of discontinued operations (Barron et al. 2011). In the early years after a CEO change, the relationship between the organization’s performance and the magnitude of the change is the same for inside and outside CEOs, but later on outside CEOs are not as successful in implementing high-level strategic changes (Zhang & Rajagopalan 2010). Leader successors who are drawn from different cognitive communities are likely to execute more change right from the start compared with new leaders originating from the same cognitive community (Ndofor et al. 2009). Fields (2007) suggests implications for the board’s role in organizational change: the board should assess the organization’s capacity for change, including the change agents’ willingness to take responsibility, the organization’s ability to facilitate the change, and the resources available. Change
may also require the board and top management to adopt new and different cognitive approaches (Fields 2007). The role of top management in any organizational change is crucial in many senses, but above all in deciding to pursue organizational change in the first place.

Middle management in this analysis comprises all managerial levels from senior to immediate managers, excluding the top management. Middle managers play an important role in organizational change implementation and simultaneously represent a special interest group as they are required to exert influence both upwards and downwards (Rouleau & Balogun 2011). Middle managers often experience confusion, because while they should be implementing and credibly communicating the changes, it is not necessarily clear to them what the changes mean for various counterparts and for themselves (Lüscher & Lewis 2008).

The middle managers’ principal tool is their discursive competence, which is central in influencing others. According to Rouleau and Balogun (2011), middle managers engage in two main discursive activities, namely, performing the conversation and setting the scene. While executing these discursive activities, management has a crucial role as the “sensemaker” in broadening collective understanding of the change by using words and symbols in a repetitive and descriptive manner (Plowman et al. 2007). Managers emphasize different activities, such as communicating the need for change, mobilizing others to support the change, and evaluating the implementation of change, depending on their leadership competencies (Battilana et al. 2010). Managers usually perform well in analytical tasks which support the change preparation phase, but competencies related to implementation practices, such as communicating or managing various groups, are distributed less evenly among management (Raineri 2011). Middle managers are often also immediate managers, and they therefore set a cascading example to lower levels of the organization as to how to deal with change in the role of the immediate manager. The behaviour of the immediate managers, i.e. the superiors, creates the organization’s image in the minds of its employees and thus deserves special attention (Cinite et al. 2009). To conclude, middle management forms the group that is perhaps the most influential during an organizational change because of middle managers’ “mediating” role between the top management and the employees. This influence is twofold: if the middle managers are able to first make sense of the change themselves (Lüscher & Lewis 2008), they may be able to increase collective understanding of the change within the organization (Plowman et al. 2007, Rouleau & Balogun 2011).
Change agents usually refer to those managers or employees whose role includes promoting and facilitating change, and they can thus be found at any managerial or employee level in the organization. In some organizational changes a change agent group, sometimes also referred to as “the change champions”, might be specifically designated, but in others all managers, for example, may be expected to embrace the change agent role. Liu and Perrewé (2005) propose that change agents adjust their communication in a way that promotes employee acceptance of change and takes into consideration the process nature of the emotional development which occurs during organizational change. Stensaker and Langley (2010) suggest that change management decisions are only partly dependent on the change context and content, and change agents develop alternative approaches based on their subjective view of the need for change (substantive concerns), the need to satisfy the corporate office (political concerns) and the need to preserve their relations with employees (relational concerns).

Change agents, as well as other managers, have a challenging role in navigating between corporate demands, employee requests and their own views, so change management involves the dynamic balancing of various concerns (Stensaker & Langley 2010). These challenges may result in unintentional bias in the change management process; for example, the change agents may report greater use of change management practices than actually executed in order to satisfy their superiors, or the change agents may focus more on the change preparation stage than on the actual implementation stage (Raineri 2011). Thomas et al. (2011) offer some criticism of the term change agent, pointing out that organization and change happen at the interstices of power-resistance relations among all employees, which is why using terms such as change “agent” and change “recipient” sets up an unproductive, one-way process duality.

Scholars also offer some practical advice to the management for the complex task of implementing organizational change. For example, executing change in organizations calls for rewarding innovators, encouraging job rotation, ensuring continuous improvement and fostering constructive debate (C Martin et al. 2009). Change management that is based on values, emphasizing employee participation and ethical conduct, can lead to higher levels of learning as well as support change implementation (Alas 2009). In terms of implementing an organizational change, the change process and the influence of micro-organizational social processes need to be considered simultaneously (Bercovitz & Feldman 2008). In addition to executing the change itself, the organization needs to assess its performance in strategy execution, achieve consensus within the strategic
leadership team on the need to improve strategy execution capabilities, determine and assess the critical elements, and create a change portfolio to improve the strategy execution capabilities (Franken et al. 2009).

The discrepancies between the planned change process outcomes and the actual change process outcomes represent breakdowns in implementing models of organizational change (Van de Ven & Sun 2011). According to Van de Ven and Sun (2011), such breakdowns tend to trigger two kinds of strategies: (1) the action strategy that attempts to correct the difficulties and control the events so that the original change plan remains valid, and (2) the reflection strategy that reflects on feedback by revising the original plan and that requires high expertise and capabilities from the change agents to apply different conceptual change models. In addition, it is important to have an understanding of the organization’s overall change management history and consequent employee beliefs regarding change. In case a belief in poor change management history already exists, cynicism should be reduced and trust enhanced through different communication practices (Bordia et al. 2011). Organization leaders tend to strive to focus on the positive future instead of confronting the problems of the past, even though looking back on past mistakes and crises would be useful in terms of learning and changing (Diamond 2008). An organization’s history of success in the substance of change, the implementation process and the temporal dimensions significantly affects the sustainability of any change effort, together with the cultural, political, individual, managerial, financial and leadership elements (Buchanan et al. 2005).

To summarize, I have introduced the management who participates in the change discourse and given some examples of the change management activities proposed by the current literature. Clearly, discourse has a central role in change execution activities from the management perspective.

**Change respondents as participants in the discourse**

The change initiative and the organization may, through individuals’ responses, increasingly interact with and affect each other over time (Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007). In this section, I introduce change respondents as participants in the change discourse. “Change respondents” refers to those employees of an organization who are not driving the change but rather constitute the target of official change communication and an important actor in the dialogue about the change (Cox & Hassard 2010, Stensaker et al. 2008, Whittle et al. 2010).
In discussing change reception, organizational scholars mostly focus on organizational identity, culture, emotions, ethics and resistance, each a very demanding topic for an open dialogue with the management. Regarding identity, Nag et al. (2007) propose a strong connection between work practices and organizational identity, pointing out that how employees identify themselves as an organization needs to be analysed simultaneously with what those employees do collectively. Collective identities may gradually drift between past and future beliefs and thus can be supported with the desired image during the change process (Ravasi & Phillips 2011). In response to organizational change, employees may create transitional identities, which are supportive of building new identities, or they may split the prevailing identities, select the elements they value and combine those with new identity elements (Clark et al. 2010, Gutierrez et al. 2010). Kodeih and Greenwood (2014), in their study on the role of identity in responding to institutional complexity, emphasize that changing organizations seem to embrace the old and new logics simultaneously, that organizational responses are shaped not by identity alone but by identity aspirations, and that high-status organizations are less motivated to accept dramatic changes.

During change, organizational culture is under enormous pressure and requires robust management attention. Organizational culture can reflect various aspects, such as sub-organizations, country of origin, field of activity or type of profession, among many others. Informal structures and organizational culture significantly influence the success of change discourse, but they are unfortunately very difficult to diagnose and confront (Johnson-Cramer et al. 2007). The challenge is to be aware that an individually experienced culture may not be the same as the culture of the organization as a whole, that the formal organizational structures and values may not be as strong as we would like to believe, and that some key actors may have been ignored (Johnson-Cramer et al. 2007). Professions may also determine an organization’s cultural orientation, especially in organizations where certain professions dominate. The challenges of organizational change are aggravated when the organization is highly institutionalized, such as in academic settings (Bercovitz & Feldman 2008).

Organizations consist of human beings, and change is thus also about emotions. For example, frustration, anger and fear are some of the negative emotions that organizational change discourse may provoke in employees (Liu & Perrewé 2005). As responses to an organizational change, negative appraisals cause employee withdrawal via a mediated process, where coping and emotions are involved (Fugate et al. 2008). Klarner et al. (2011) point out that the emotions
of employees and various groups evolve over time during sequential and simultaneous changes and thus are not static in nature. At times of change, some people remain silent out of fear of negative personal or professional consequences. Employees, seeking to avoid the unpleasant characteristics of fear, may develop fear-based silence behaviour (Kish-Gephart et al. 2009). Perlow and Repenning (2009) propose that creating cultures of speaking up calls for addressing relational and task dynamics, which are deeply intertwined. Other forms of emotional response to organizational change are cynicism and embarrassment. Active orientation towards employee involvement is a significant moderator when aiming to reduce organizational change cynicism, which involves frustration, disillusionment, and negative feelings towards the organization (Brown & Cregan 2008). Embarrassment is both a social-relational and a moral emotion that can be viewed as resulting from a sanction (e.g. a communication of disapproval) and may lead to recalibration of moral judgement with the hope of re-establishing congruence with the group identity (Warren & Smith-Crowe 2008). Emotions play a central role in organizational change, and even though emotions are discussed here in the context of reception, it is essential to note that not only the recipients but also the management have and may show emotions (Klarner et al. 2011).

Analysis of ethical issues in organizational change discourse considers, for example, how employees feel about organizational issues affecting their welfare and rights (Sonenshein 2009). During organizational change the recipients’ perceptions of the ethical appropriateness of institutional logics influence their attitudes towards and support of the change (Sonpar et al. 2009). Rapid organizational change may create such confusion that it becomes difficult to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate behaviour, and because of power relations, managers have an advantage in labelling people as “deviants” or “troublemakers” regardless of whether norms have been violated (Bryant & Higgins 2010). The conditions that result from organizational change may provide a fruitful platform for corruption, which may occur on either the individual or the collective level and typically involves the pursuit of individual interests or self-interests by working against organizational goals or management (KD Martin et al. 2009). Most organizational wrongdoing, that is, behaviour that is judged to be illegal, unethical or socially irresponsible, requires coordination among participants (Palmer 2008). Overall, in addition to ensuring the perceived ethical appropriateness of new logics, leaders should generate trust through discourse, since it will aid the success of the new logics (Sonpar et al. 2009). The challenge,
however, is that employee uncertainty provoked by change reduces employees’
general level of trust, which in turn prompts the management to react with
negative interpretations, creating a downward spiral of trust dynamics that is
difficult to turn around (Sørensen et al. 2011). Poppo et al. (2008) argue that the
logics of the past and the future are intertwined as explanations for trust; prior
history plays a facilitating role in building trust through its interaction with
continuity, and expectations of continuity have a central role in generating trust.
Trust in the supervisor mediates with affective commitment to change and work
outcomes so that the greater the commitment, the greater the trust placed in the
supervisor and the better the perceived performance of the employee (Neves &
Caetano 2009).

Resistance to change denotes employees’ undesirable attitudes or behaviour
in response to the management’s change efforts as the employees try to maintain
the status quo (Danışman 2010). Change resistance is not something that may
emerge; it most definitely will (Stensaker & Langley 2010). Social learning and
local context are important factors for an individual in deciding whether to
approve of change initiatives and to participate in them (Bercovitz & Feldman
2008), which highlights the importance of discourse among individuals.
According to Kotter and Schlesinger (2008), the four most common reasons for
resisting change are parochial self-interest (fear of losing something personally),
misunderstanding and lack of trust (not understanding the implications of the
change), belief that the change makes no sense for the organization, and low
tolerance for change (fear of the unknown, need to save face, peer pressure).
Resistance to change tends to have a cultural base in the way in which change
efforts that are incompatible with the cultural understandings that characterize the
organization may produce resistance from employees (Danışman 2010).
Sacrilege, defined as deeds that are perceived by institutional actors as extremely
heinous because such deeds contradict the values and beliefs of the organization,
fosters strong normative control by generating a set of unique structural
relationships among individuals in the context of an organization or an institution
(Harrison et al. 2009). Overcoming resistance is a somewhat outdated perspective
on change, as it is a one-sided concept that ignores sensemaking by the change
agent and the agent-recipient relationship, and looks down on the recipient’s
potential contribution (Ford et al. 2008). Because resistance is thoughtful, Ford et
al. (2008) propose that resistance can be seen as a valuable asset for change since
it may generate scrutiny and well-considered counterarguments to the change
discourse and thus in some cases provide a positive impulse to the change
discussion. Thomas et al. (2011) share this view, stating that resistance can be a positive element in organizational change, facilitating the process by conceptual expansion, combination and reframing. Erkama (2010) highlights the power of different discursive contexts and the potential for resistant groups to transform discourses.

In sum, organizational identity, culture, emotions, ethics and resistance are all complex elements that need careful consideration in the communication of organizational change. Organizational change reception may vary in type and degree, resulting in, for example, acceptance and change, symbolic moves, reconstruction of the change for a better match, or corruption with regard to the change and reinforcement of the status quo (Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007). In the next section, I present a summary of the theoretical overview on organizational change.

2.4 Summarizing the theoretical overview

In this chapter, I have explained my collection method and procedure for theoretical data and then introduced the theory of organizational change in two sections. First, in Section 2.2, I discussed what scholars say about the essence of change, that is, what change in an organization is all about. The essence of change was approached from three distinct but strongly interrelated angles: duality, process and discourse. Based on the relationship of these three elements, I proposed a model of organizational change as a social construction. Second, in Section 2.3, I focused on what scholars say about change execution and change receptivity. I presented this theory from a discourse-based perspective, so the change participants, both management and other personnel, were introduced as participants in the overall change discourse in an organization in the roles of management and respondents. Interestingly, when sharing results on the management side, scholars focus on the pursuit and implementation of the change through execution, while the literature about responding to change largely focuses on identity, culture, emotions, ethics and resistance, that is, non-executive issues. What is common to these two streams of literature is the shared dialogue, organizational change discourse. Figure 2 illustrates the discourse-centred social construction of organizational change, involving both the management and the respondents in shared discourses.
Fig. 2. The discourse-centred social construction of organizational change.

“Rather than seeing discourse simply as a set of statements which have some coherence, we should, rather, think of a discourse as existing because of a complex set of practices which try to keep them in circulation and other practices which try to fence them off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation (Mills 2003: 54).” While theory emphasizes the importance of discourse and its role in the sensemaking process of the change participants, it would be interesting to understand in more detail how, in practice, discourse is involved in organizational change. What does it mean that discourse is at the centre of organizational change? Following the proposal of Grant and Marshak (2011: 221), who say that it is important to “consider questions such as how, precisely, do discourses construct social reality, especially regarding organizational change”, I have chosen to examine discourse in organizational change in more detail.

Because the current literature on organizational change has paid relatively little attention to discourse and practices in comparison to, for example, strategy scholars (Vaara & Whittington 2012), and because discourse is strongly tied to practice (Fenton & Langley 2011, Hardy & Thomas 2014), I approach discourse through the practice lens. The practice lens will add value because it is capable of
understanding context, social constructs and human intervention simultaneously. The focus of this study is, therefore, to understand how discursive practices are involved in organizational change, illustrated in Figure 3.

Fig. 3. The research question: How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?
3 The practice lens

3.1 Introducing the practice approach

The practice approach is becoming a popular lens to analyse organizational realities in the managerial discipline, because it links management research to other disciplines within the social sciences (Vaara & Whittington 2012). While there are many streams of research under the heading of the practice approach, also labelled “practice-based studies”, their common characteristic is the ability to analyse human (practitioners) action (praxis) within societal constructs (practice) (Orlikowski 2000, Whittington 2006).

Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni (2010) meritoriously synthesize “ten good reasons for assuming the practice lens in organization studies”, summarized as follows: Practice-based studies will continue to be an important epistemology offering a non-rational cognitive view on knowledge. The practice approach has the ability to analyse real action and practices that contain information on learning, working and innovating. Practice-based studies allow for addressing personally, collectively or aesthetically accumulated tacit knowledge while taking into account the materiality of the social world. Practicing is viewed as a knowledgeable activity, where coordination becomes intrinsic to action, enabling analysis of the situational context. The practice approach enables micro- and macro-level analysis simultaneously. Above all, the practice approach reverses assumptions regarding how organizations can be studied rationally.

Because practice theory is capable of analysing organizational action and sociological theories of practice concurrently (Vaara & Whittington 2012), it is a suitable lens for analysing discourse in organizational change from the practice perspective. Given these valuable capabilities of practice-based studies I have chosen the practice lens, as my intention is to discover a new understanding of discursive practices in organizational change. In this dissertation I have utilized the practice approach in each of the essays in a systematic manner, as a guiding lens and a way to understand the social world, in search of explanations for how discursive practices are involved in organizational change.

Because practice is a commonly used term with different meanings and schools of theory (Corradi et al. 2010), it requires a suitable definition for this dissertation, a definition that expresses the ontological standpoint adopted in this study. First of all, the term “practice” in this study refers to the way in which
something is done or happens, not to an occupational practice, such as medical practice. Schatzki (2001: 2) defines practice as “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding”. Vaara & Whittington (2012: 287) define practice as “accepted ways of doing things, embodied and materially mediated, that are shared between actors and routinized over time”. Corradi et al. (2010: 3) state that “practice is a processual concept able to represent the ‘logic of the situation’ of a context. The study of practice, or better ‘practising’, yields important insights into how practitioners recognize, produce, and formulate the scenes and regulations of everyday affairs”. My interpretation and definition of practice, and therefore the definition that covers this dissertation, is that practice is an activity that is socially constructed within a particular context.

Within practice-based studies, there are several branches of study that specialize in certain perspectives of practice, such as communities of practice, practices of the community, science-as-practice, knowing-in-practice, practice-as-methodology, or strategy-as-practice (Corradi et al. 2010). Among organizational scholars within the management discipline, a strongly growing stream of research is the stream of strategy-as-practice (SAP) (Vaara & Whittington 2012).

Drawing on Whittington’s paper “Strategy as Practice” (1996), scholars such as Jarzabkowski, Samra-Fredericks, Balogun and Chia have continued to develop SAP research (Corradi et al. 2010). SAP is now gaining more recognition among scholars, although it remains marginal in comparison with mainstream research on strategy, which is still dominated by economic thinking (Jarzabkowski & Spee 2009). My intention is to utilize SAP to construct the key concepts needed for the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Therefore, a brief introduction to SAP is justified.

SAP can be seen as “a critical understanding of everyday strategic practice and the interactional constitution of power effects” (Samra-Fredericks 2005: 806), and it is generally considered to include three core dimensions: practice, praxis, and practitioners (Fenton & Langley 2011, Whittington 2006). An analysis of these interdependent dimensions makes it possible to understand strategy in the situational context, as it happens. This understanding is created through practices, which refer to the tools and methods of strategy work; through praxis, which reveals how strategy work happens; and through practitioners, who are the people involved in the strategy work (Jarzabkowski & Spee 2009, Vaara and Whittington 2012). Hence, these three elements of practices, praxis and practitioners are the key concepts in SAP.
I have chosen SAP as a conceptual reflection point for my dissertation for three main reasons. First, strategy as a phenomenon is very close to organizational change in the sense that strategy is about renewal and change. The following definition of strategy has been proposed by Jarzabkowski & Spee (2009: 70): “strategy is “a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity”. This widely accepted definition is not far from organizational change, explored in detail in Chapter 2.

Second, the principal concepts of SAP (practice, praxis and practitioners) are highly relevant to organizational change (Vaara & Whittington 2012), because organizational change happens through discourse and action among the participants (Jian 2011). Third, and most importantly, SAP is an approach which recognizes the small detail in praxis, the particular among the universal in social interaction (Spee & Jarzabkowski 2011, Vaara & Whittington 2012, Whittington 2006). It is this ability to spot and appreciate particularity in complex social contexts which offers the key added value of SAP to this dissertation. Next, building on the previously presented organizational change theory and practice approach, I introduce the research lens of this dissertation.

3.2 Introducing the research lens

Practice-based analyses are increasingly adopted by organization and management scholars because of their capacity to study human action (change, practice) within a social context (organization) (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011, Jarzabkowski & Spee 2009, Vaara & Whittington 2012). Therefore, my chosen lens for investigating how discursive practices are involved in organizational change relies on the key concepts of practices, praxis and practitioners. In addition, I will now introduce two philosophically similar concepts which are valuable in explaining practice.

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) regarded practice as dependent on a society’s traditions and as the result of a social group’s interaction (Bourdieu 1977). To Bourdieu, the practice lens offered a tool to explain action in varying social constructs. An especially useful concept to understand particularity that he proposed is habitus. Habitus, driven by socialization, is a system of tacit knowledge within a particular group of individuals (Bourdieu 1990, Vaara & Faÿ 2012). Habitus, “the key to the cultural codes of professionalism and authority”
(Alvesson 1994: 539), derives from cultural history developing in local social structures and is thus a useful concept to understand localized action (Crawshaw & Bunton 2009). Habitus is realized in behavioural practices, deriving from the person’s social world, and is also able to recognize different positions between actors (Sherrard 1991). Hence, habitus is helpful in examining, for example, power relationships, an important element in organizational change (Bourdieu 1990, Vaara & Faÿ 2012, Vaara & Tienari 2011).

Another widely utilized concept which has similar capabilities for understanding particularity within social constructs is the originally Aristotelian (384–322 BC) virtue of *phronesis* (Gunder 2010, Flyvbjerg 2001, Schatzki 2002). To Aristotle, phronesis was “a virtue of practical intellect rather than of theoretical, and its closest analogue is therefore not wisdom but craft” (Moss 2011: 38). Using practice approach vocabulary, phronesis to Aristotle was the intellectual feature of praxis (Schatzki 2002). In contemporary social sciences literature, phronesis mostly refers to “practical wisdom” (Flyvbjerg 2001, Gunder 2010, Johannisson 2011). One special characteristic of phronesis is that it develops over time (Gunder 2010) and thus involves the presence of the participants.

Habitus and phronesis are very close to each other, because both offer the potential of understanding the particular wisdom of action within a social context, that is, in practice. Since the main goal of this dissertation is to understand how discursive practices are involved in organizational change, these concepts are valuable. However, for the sake of simplicity, I decided to use the concept of phronesis broadly, covering both Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and Aristotle’s concept of phronesis. The definition of phronesis in this dissertation is thus “the practical wisdom of social context”.

To summarize, the practice approach offers this study on organizational change discourse a useful lens with four key concepts: practices, praxis, practitioners and phronesis. These concepts are utilized in this research in order to increase understanding of the role of discursive practices in organizational change. The four key concepts are also relevant to the research lens of this dissertation, illustrated in Figure 4. The research lens synthesizes the epistemological (organizational change), ontological (practice lens) and conceptual (practices, praxis, practitioners and phronesis) orientations central to this study.
Fig. 4. The research lens to examine discursive practices in organizational change.
4 Research design

In this chapter, I discuss the research philosophy, methodological choices and the qualitative case study process, including data gathering and analysis.

4.1 Research philosophy

Organizational researchers can take inspiration from many different schools and thinkers, constructing philosophical assumptions which are useful and legitimate while being “intersubjectively produced” (Fairhurst & Grant 2010, Gioia 2003: 189). My main research philosophy is social constructionism, which values the interplay of practice, context and human involvement (Gubrium & Holstein 2009). The purpose of this section is to explain further the philosophical assumptions that have guided my research under the umbrella of social constructionism. Through these explanations I hope to justify my choices as a researcher, as well as to facilitate the reading of this dissertation.

A widely used concept to explain the different philosophical assumptions among organizational scholars is a paradigm (Hassard & Cox 2013). Paradigms are defined, for example, as “different perspectives for the analysis of social phenomena” (Burrell & Morgan 1979: 23). To be able to explain my personal philosophical assumptions, I reflect on the paradigm model proposed by John Hassard and Julie Wolfram Cox (2013), for three primary reasons. First, their model is a development of the classic model of Burrell and Morgan (1979), which is one the most-utilized paradigm models in the social sciences (Hassard & Cox 2013). Second, the model of Hassard and Cox is able to locate post-structuralism within the social science agenda not in a competing but in a complimentary way. Third, their model is the most up-to-date analysis of paradigms in social science and hence has novelty value. Adding to Burrell and Morgan’s original meta-theories of ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology, Hassard and Cox propose that paradigms can be divided into the categories of structural, anti-structural and post-structural. Hassard and Cox have added post-structuralism to Burrell and Morgan’s original model, classifying it as ontologically relativist, epistemologically relationist, methodologically reflexive and deconstructionist regarding human nature. The ontological home of this research lies in social constructionism, and within the paradigm model of Hassard and Cox (2013), the ontology of this study can also be identified as post-structurally relativist social constructionism, allowing objectivity to truth and subjectivity to meaning.
(Gubrium & Holstein 2009, Hassard & Cox 2013). Following the path of Michel Foucault (1926–1984), this study places practices diffused in society at the focus of research, approached as determinants of human action. Foucault proposes that the core of his research concerns “how a man as subject has become an object to himself” (Alhanen 2007: 22). As organizational change in this study is analysed through practices, human nature and action are at the very centre of this research. In this view, power is central to discourse and practice (Hardy & Thomas 2014).

The epistemology of this research, organization theory, mostly looks at change as a contextual phenomenon and is relationist in the sense that the researcher can never be completely separated from the subject of the research and the underlying assumptions that inform the research.

4.2 Case study design

Both organizational change research and practice-based studies often draw on qualitative methodologies because of their ability to analyse contextual factors (Corradi et al. 2010, Gubrium & Holstein 2009). Because case studies increase understanding of organizational situations and events (Gummesson 2000, Yin 2003), the case study method is utilized in this research to understand the involvement of discursive practices in organizational change. The role of the case in this research is to provide an actually occurring phenomenon in a bounded context (Miles & Huberman 1994) and hence to serve as a reflection point for discussion and theory development. This study is primarily about discursive practices in organizational change, and secondarily about the case study organization.

A single case study can accommodate multiple levels of analysis embedded in the research design, when several changes are studied in a single organization (Eisenhardt 1989). In this research, the studied case is the role of discursive practices in organizational change. A single case study method is utilized by focusing on one organization and its three major changes.

The case study process started in 2010 with the definition of the research question and the selection of the case. As is characteristic to a case study, the research question evolved during the process (Eisenhardt 1989). During the research process, the research question has evolved from more broad options into a more narrow delineation, as follows: How can we enhance our understanding of organizational change? Why is organizational change so difficult in practice? How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?
The selection of the case is central, as the chosen population “defines the set of entities from which the research sample is to be drawn” (Eisenhardt 1989: 537). Organizational change is said to be especially difficult in public organizations which involve highly specialized professional staff and are politically influenced (Kan & Parry 2004, Ramanujam & Rousseau 2006). University hospitals are contexts where personnel are highly dedicated to patient care and to science, and where professional (socially constructed) cultures are strong (Choi et al. 2011, Kinnunen & Lindström 2005, Kukkula et al. 2009). Hence, in seeking answers for the question of how discursive practices are involved in organizational change, a public university hospital offers a suitable case study context because the number of highly specialized professionals is higher than in a regular, privately owned company (Choi et al. 2011, Kan & Parry 2004, Ramanujam & Rousseau 2006).

4.3 Description of the qualitative context

The qualitative context for this dissertation is a public university hospital, the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa (HUS). The data are dated to 2012, the time of the last interviews. The research setting involves three major organizational changes that HUS has recently undergone: (1) the change of 2000, when HUS was founded through the merger of three smaller hospital districts; (2) the change of 2006, when an internal unit called the Helsinki University Central Hospital (HUCH) Hospital Area was formed by merging three autonomous hospitals under one management; and (3) the change of 2008, when a new management system was launched. These represent the most substantial changes in HUS management (structure and personnel). It is important to acknowledge that these changes actually contain several linked, smaller change events, and conversely that together they form a holistic, continuous organizing process and development path of an organization (Weick & Quinn 1999).

The HUS organization has many definitions, which are all valid and used in different contexts: (1) HUS is a municipal federation (as defined in the HUS Base Contract); (2) HUS is a hospital district (by name); (3) HUS is a university hospital district (a commonly made distinction, as in Finland there are 20 hospital districts, of which 5 are university hospital districts); (4) HUS is a group (its organizational form contains 11 business enterprises); and (5) HUS is a public university hospital (a commonly used organizational type), often simply referred to as a university hospital. In this research, HUS is primarily defined as a public
*university hospital*, because this label is the closest to how organizational scholars define similar organizations, and because it best describes the nature of the organization to a wider audience. Ultimately HUS is an organization characterized by professional brilliance, dedication, high ambitions, politics, open decision preparation, taxation-based funding and, most of all, human tragedies, birth, life and death.

HUS is a municipal federation owned by 26 member municipalities and is in charge of the specialized healthcare of 1.5 million people in Finland’s capital region. With approximately 2,650 physicians, 12,000 nurses, and 5,500 other employees, HUS is the largest specialized health care organization in Finland. The international brand of HUS, founded in 2000, is led by Helsinki University Central Hospital (HUCH), founded in 1958, which also represents more than 80% of the total HUS patient volume. HUS is responsible for providing specialized healthcare services on behalf of its 26 members and the district (defined by law) and for fulfilling the other responsibilities that are prescribed by law for a university hospital district. The municipal federation and its members are expected to cooperate to create a plan for organizing these healthcare services. The HUS Base Contract officially ties together 28 individually legitimate organizations, that is, legitimate organizational stakeholders: 26 member municipalities, HUS, and the University of Helsinki.

### 4.4 Data collection

According to Eisenhardt (1989), researchers who strive to develop theory typically utilize multiple methods of data collection, because triangulation strengthens theory construction. The data collection methods I have used in this study are interviews for the primary data and archival sources for the secondary data (Eisenhardt 1989, Ghauri & Gronhaug 2002). In addition to field notes taken during the interviews, I have also kept a running commentary diary throughout the research process, because data collection and data analysis overlap (Eisenhardt 1989).

*The primary data*

To collect the primary data, I “entered the field” (Eisenhardt 1989: 538) in September 2011, when I had a planning meeting with a HUS management representative. Based on my research plan, we drafted an original list of possible
interviewees. Particular attention was given to identifying individuals who were in leading positions or held key roles during the three identified changes. Neither gender nor age was considered in the selection criteria. We also agreed that during the interviews, I would show the list of names to the interviewees and ask whether they thought other people should be added. The basic idea was to interview the leaders of the organization so that both doctors and nurses were represented, as well as other employee groups beyond care personnel, such as legal and communications representatives.

Based on these criteria, the respondent population included three groups of interviewees: first, the top management of the organization during 2000–2011, that is, the CEOs (3), the board chairmen (4), the chief medical officers (3), the administrative medical officers (2) and the chief nursing officers (3); second, the key managers at the time of interviewing in 2011–2012, such as the HUCH area head (1) and its key unit leaders (4), the dean of the medical faculty (1), the research director (1) and the legal director (1); and third, certain individuals who held a variety of important leadership positions during the studied changes but who did not directly fall into either of the two previous categories. These interviewees proposed 15 additional individuals as potential interviewees. However, after interviewing seven of these additional people, I realized that I was approaching data saturation; the same narratives were shared repeatedly (Riessman 2001). These seven interviewees held the positions of hospital area director, strategy director, communications manager and four clinic heads. Altogether, the areas of the hospital represented in the interviewee population were the group-level management, the HUCH area, and another hospital area.

As a result of the process described above, the qualitative material of this dissertation consists of 30 personally executed face-to-face interviews. I personally contacted all interviewees and proposed an interview, and everyone I approached accepted the invitation. My double role as the interviewer and a former employee of HUS is explained in more detail in Sections 4.6 and 6.3. The majority of these interviews (28) were conducted in November and December 2011. Two more interviews were conducted in March 2012. The interviews took place in various locations, chosen by the interviewees: 17 interviews in the interviewee’s personal work office in the hospital, 6 interviews in the meeting room of the organization, 3 interviews in a cafeteria and 4 interviews in the interviewee’s home.

As is characteristic of narrative analysis, the interviews were semi-structured according to generic themes (Gubrium & Holstein 2009). I asked the respondents
to describe freely the changes of 2000, 2006 and 2008, depending on whether they had been involved with all or some of these changes. To support the interviewees’ recollection and preparation for the interview, I provided them beforehand with an interview guide (Appendix), which consisted of two supporting pages: (1) an overall timetable of HUS history with the key events and top management of each year from 2000 to 2011, and (2) a simple list of four very generic themes to support the storytelling in a processual manner. Under each of the themes I also listed two to four generic keywords to ease the start of the storytelling, but these were not highlighted or promoted in any way. My purpose in sharing these documents before the interviews was to help the interviewees to start thinking about the events and happenings around the three changes. The first three themes were mostly aimed at guiding the respondents to approach each change in chronological phases, rather than attempting to guide the content of their speech. These processually guided themes were (1) the background of the change, (2) the execution of the change, (3) experiencing and responding to the change. The fourth theme sought to identify what, if any, the respondents felt were the special characteristics of a public university hospital, because social constructionism, the case study method and the practice approach all value context. My intention, accordingly, was to collect narratives of the organization’s context. The interviewees’ reactions to receiving the described material ahead of time were either positive or neutral; some people commented that they had started to think about “those times”, and some had even retrieved supporting material, such as e-mails or journals, for the interview meeting.

At the time of the interviews, I would start the discussion by referring to the overall aim of the research to study organizational change, and then I would invite the interviewee to explain his or her personal background related to HUS. Through the personal connection and the bigger picture, I would then refer to the material I had sent prior to the interviews, pointing towards the three predetermined changes of 2000, 2006 and 2008 and the four generic themes to support the interviewee’s personal storytelling about those changes. My interview guide was the same material I had provided the interviewees beforehand (Appendix). I encouraged the interviewees to share their personal stories and examples of the organizational changes as characteristic to narrative interviews (Hyvärinen 2009). I would ask them, for example, “Please tell me about this change; you may use the themes to support your progress, but you are not obliged to do that.” I believe the pre-defined themes were helpful for the interviewees to
capture the change in a structured manner, that is, to proceed with their narratives in a logical flow of events.

In the first interview, I structured my progression as follows: I started by asking the interviewee to share his experiences of the first theme, namely, the background of each of the three changes; then moved to the second theme on my list, the execution of the change; and so on. The themes were the same for each change. I had thought that this way I could easily spot any differences between the changes. It quickly became evident that this approach was not very pragmatic, because the interviewee could not concentrate on one change, that is, one story, at a time in depth. During the first interview I accordingly changed the questioning logic to focus on each change individually. This meant that each interviewee covered all of the themes first for the change of 2000, then for the change of 2006 and finally for the change of 2008. This was logical also because any changes that an interviewee had not experienced personally could simply be left out of the discussion. Through individual storytelling (Riessman 2008), the interviewees shared the examples they personally wanted to share.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour each, ranging from 40 minutes to 2.5 hours, depending on the interviewee’s style of responding and interest in storytelling. Of the 30 interviews, 27 were electronically recorded, and I took manual notes during all interviews. Two individuals indicated that they did not want to be electronically recorded. One person initially agreed to be recorded but after a few questions found it too distracting, so I stopped recording that interview. Overall, the data collection process was flexible and inductive.

As described in the previous section, the research material of this dissertation consists of qualitative interview data, so-called personal narratives (Riessman 2001) and the consequent grand narrative (Hyvärinen 2009). In other words, the role of stories as research material is important. I personally transcribed all of the recorded interviews, because I wanted to capture all possible data by going through each interview situation and comment sentence by sentence. The interviews produced a total of 202 pages of research material (approximately 90,000 words in Finnish). To enhance the credibility of the research findings, the interviewees were asked to verify the overall narrative of the events in the interview guide.
The secondary data

The secondary data of this dissertation, collected by and available from sources other than the researcher personally, are presented in Table 1. The documents used in this research are the organization’s base contract, governance rules, annual reports, academic studies and published histories. The secondary data were mainly used to verify the narrative data and to construct a reliable grand narrative of the organization’s development path; some were also used as reflection material during the research process or as references. The primary data and the secondary data support each other in that the interviews increased understanding of the documented events, and the documents verified the interviewee narratives’ main trajectories, so there was a convergence between the primary and secondary data.

Table 1. The secondary data of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Document name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D01</td>
<td>HUS base contract (2000, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D04</td>
<td>Joutsivuo &amp; Laakso (2008): Sairaanhoidon ytimessä, HYKS 50 vuotta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D05</td>
<td>Kinnunen &amp; Lindström (2005): Rakenteellisen ja toiminnallisen muutoksen vaikutukset HUSin johtamiseen ja henkilöstön hyvinvointiin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D06</td>
<td>Kukkula et al. (2009): Stakeholder perceptions of strategic change at HUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D07</td>
<td>Laitinen (2010): HUS siunatkoon: Kannanottoja terveydenhuollon johtamisesta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D08</td>
<td>Laitinen (2011): HUS pomo: Onko lääkäristä toimitusjohtajaksi?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5 Data analysis

The choice of data analysis methodology in this dissertation is narrative analysis. The narrative methodology is widely accepted among organizational researchers because stories value human experience (Riessman 2008). Practice scholars use narrative analysis in exploring the socially constructed and the contextually dependent (Fenton & Langley 2011). Narratives, stories, are useful in studying organizational change in many ways. For example, change can be approached as the story of stories, narratives may reveal competing accounts of change, and narrative analysis is a useful lens to understand power, which is central to change (Brown et al. 2009, Buchanan & Dawson 2007, Vaara & Tienari 2011). As
Brown, Gabriel and Gherardi (2009: 325) put it: “Stories are key to our conceptions, theories and research on change”.

The advantage of narrative analysis compared to “simple” content analysis lies in its capability to capture how people experience things and what these things mean to them, because “compared to non-narrative texts, stories are richer and thicker, more compelling, and easily memorable” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 210, Riessman 2001). Narrative analysis values language practices in relation to reality construction, and hence it is suited to increasing understanding of the role of discourse practices in organizational change (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). As Clandinin et al. (2010: 88) propose, “tensions are integral to narrative inquiry, because tensions are central in understanding how people experience relationships”; therefore, narrative analysis is supportive of this study also because one of the articles included in it focuses specifically on tensions.

In this research a narrative is approached from two different perspectives. First, a narrative is data, that is, the personal narratives (Riessman 2001) and small stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008) told by the interviewees and captured in the data. Second, a narrative is a methodology, the systemic study of narrative data (Riessman 2008). Put together and placed in context, these two approaches constitute the narrative analysis of this dissertation.

I will now explain the analytical process of this study and how I reached the conclusions presented in Chapter 6. The analysis took place through multiple subprocesses. As Eisenhardt concludes (1989: 546), “While an investigator may focus on one part of the process at a time, the process itself involves constant iteration backward and forward between steps.”

My ontological standpoint of social constructionism partly explains why I think that the analysis of the material started very early in the course of my PhD studies. The discussions I had with my supervising professor and other people influenced my thinking, as I was eager for hints that would help me with the important choices I faced in this study. One of these choices was to conduct the interviews before selecting a theory. This choice did not mean that I could not study the various theories. In fact, prior to the interviews, I carried out a literature review on organizational change. Having done that, I had more confidence in conducting the interviews. I had chosen to study organizational change right at the beginning and before the interviews, but at that point I did not yet understand that it would form my theory, as evident as it seems afterwards. I think that the fact that I had no specific theoretical framework in my mind during the
interviews, just a very general overview of the field, meant that the research was guided by the interview data.

When I conducted the interviews, I realized that some interviewees presumed that this dissertation would reveal details or events that had gone wrong in the case organization’s change processes. However, as a researcher, I had no special interest in attempting to demonstrate which individuals at any one point in time in the case organization had been right or wrong. Instead, my interest lay in understanding how discursive practices are involved in organizational change as a phenomenon. Stories, that is, narratives, are relevant to this research in so far as they increase our understanding of discursive practices and their relation to organizational change.

I started my analysis by transcribing the interviews. This step was simultaneously onerous and interesting, because listening to the personal storytelling of the interviewees brought me back to the interview situations in quite a realistic manner. This phase also prepared me mentally for analysing the data later on. The second step, partly overlapping with the transcription work, was to conduct a literature review on organizational change. This analysis eventually resulted in the first article of this dissertation (Section 5.1). The review was helpful in exposing what contemporary scholars say about organizational change. As a result of transcribing and reading the interview data, I was able to identify some interesting topics as candidates for further examination for the purposes of this dissertation. These topics at that point were discourse, practices, identity, tensions and strategy. After reading the transcripts a few more times and checking the literature for research gaps, I was able to narrow possible research topics down to discursive practices and tensions.

The third phase in my analysis of the material consisted of the application of the narrative analysis method. I started to track systematically any narratives about discursive practices and tensions in the data. “Personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse. They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories, rather than reproduce the past as it was” (Riessman 2001: 705). The way I chose to employ the small stories in the data is as “tellings of events” that inform “slices of experience” within a social context (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008: 381). Through the personal narratives of the interviewees on these topics, I was able to construct stories that represent the world of the interviewees as members of a shared social context.

As the result of this lengthy and iterative analytic process, three interesting stories emerged from the data: (1) the story of discourse as a locally learned
practice, (2) the story of a particular strategy text, and (3) the story of a public university hospital as a social context to plural stakeholders. These narratives were clearly important to many of the respondents, and they were inviting also for me as a researcher to examine in greater detail. The stories did not emerge at once but rather came to light during a two-year period while I drafted the articles, which influenced each other. Hence, the narrative data analysis proceeded inductively, so that the story of discourse as a locally learned practice pointed in the direction of the story of a strategy text, and the results of these two analyses in turn prompted me to look for explanations in the social context.

Largely overlapping with the preceding phase, the fourth step in my data analysis process was the writing of the four articles: the theoretical article based on the literature review (Section 5.1), the two qualitative articles on discourse derived from the interview data (Sections 5.2 and 5.3), and the qualitative article on tensions also derived from the interview data (Section 5.4). The publication process of three articles (Sections 5.1, 5.2, and 5.4) included two rounds of blind review and revision.

In sum, my analytical process started with a literature review and interviews, which together brought to light interesting information on organizational change. I then went on to examine the phenomenon through qualitative evidence using narrative analysis. Alongside the data analysis process, I was continuously reflecting on the various pieces of information and planning how to bring them logically together into a dissertation. The practice approach with its three clear dimensions offered a suitable solution. In the next section, I explain how I experienced the material collection and analysis as a personal research process.

### 4.6 The personal research process

From a personal perspective, the research process has been both more difficult and much more interesting than I originally presumed it would be. When I started my PhD studies in the fall of 2010, my personal work plan included three main phases: (1) supporting studies, (2) data collection and analysis, and (3) writing. I did start my work in this order, but soon these research activities were happening in parallel. My main personal discovery from the research experience is that a dissertation is not a mechanical process; rather, it is a process of context-dependent personal growth.

My personal research process also involved discovery of the competitive world of science. I have learned how lengthy and complex review processes can
be, and how difficult it is to get research funding. I think that some choices I made very early in the research process, partly intuitively, were very important and helped me through the difficult times. These choices were my subject (organizational change), the style of my dissertation (article form) and a decision not to change these choices. By firmly sticking to my subject and proceeding article by article, I began to see also the positive sides of the research process: I received encouraging feedback from blind reviewers, and my papers were accepted to international conferences and journals. Most importantly, I found my own style and voice in writing.

The research process prompted me to think carefully about the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. The reason I think this issue is especially relevant in this study is the fact that I had been an active member (development director) of the case organization management from 2008 to 2010, and during 2010–2012 I was still officially a HUS employee, although first on maternity and then on study leave. As I noted earlier regarding my philosophical assumptions (Section 4.1), social constructionism accepts that the way we look at the world is constantly constructed in relation to the social context in which we operate. The philosophy of social constructionism and my personal connection to the case organization support the choice of the narrative analysis method, because it is not irrelevant in what setting a narrative takes place. Taking this analogue further, a specific stream of narrative methodology, narrative ethnography, deserves closer attention. Narrative ethnography is a method of analysis which focuses on social situations, their participants and action related to the narratives (Gubrium & Holstein 2008). In other words, narrative ethnography takes into account all the key elements of practice theory: practice, practitioners and praxis. The better we understand the social context of the narratives, the better we understand the narratives. As Gubrium and Holstein (2008: 250) propose: “Narratives are not simply reflections of experience, nor are they descriptive free-for-alls. . . . Narratives comprise the interplay between experience, storying practices, descriptive resources, purposes at hand, audiences, and the environments that condition storytelling.” Corradi et al. (2010: 23) continue: “When the dimension of situated ‘doing’ by people is studied, practice-based theorizing must necessarily adopt a methodology that supports this specific research interest. Thus ethnography is the key methodology with which to observe social and situated practices and simultaneously to participate in them.”

Case studies often combine different data collection methods, of which observation is one (Eisenhardt 1989). Because of my work history within the case
organization, I had “observed” the organizational context before knowing that I would carry out this research. Hence, this research analysis can also be viewed as a retrospectively ethnographic narrative analysis. I believe that my former role in the organization was supportive of the interviews, in that I was at least partly familiar with the context, people and sub-organizations mentioned in the narratives. I think that the ethnographic flavour in this research is useful for understanding organizational change in practice, which is always realized within a social context. As Gubrium and Holstein (2008) conclude, if the circumstances of the storytelling are neglected, the meanings of stories may be misunderstood.

But I also recognize the danger of bias in my analysis, as my personal connection to the case organization might have influenced the research process in the form of prejudice or subjectivity. Thus, my association with the case study is a limitation on the objectivity of this study.
5  Summaries of articles

In order to explain how the four individual articles respond to the main research question of this dissertation, “How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?”, I now present short summaries from this perspective. In responding to the research question, each article plays a particular role.

The first article (Section 5.1) is a conceptual paper about organizational change. The role of the first article is to give an overview of the current organizational change literature and to propose some future research directions. The second article (Section 5.2) examines discourse from the practice perspective guided by qualitative data. The role of the second article is to respond directly to the research question of this dissertation. The third article (Section 5.3), also qualitative, investigates the strategy text as an example of a discursive practice. The role of this article is to deepen the understanding of how discursive practices are involved in organizational change by examining one discursive practice (the strategy text) in more detail. The fourth article (Section 5.4) strives to understand the case study context better by examining different stakeholder groups and the permanent tensions between those groups. Its role is to offer additional, context-related explanations for the findings of the second and third articles about discursive practices. Together, these four articles form a logical entity for the dissertation, illustrated in Figure 5. Next, I outline the main conclusions of the four articles.

![Diagram](image)

*Fig. 5. The four articles constructing a logical entity for the dissertation.*
5.1 Article 1: Organizational change as practice: a critical analysis

The first article in this dissertation is a critical analysis of organizational change literature. The purpose of the article is to set the theoretical scene for the dissertation and in this way to act as a sounding board for the other, qualitative articles of this dissertation. While the first article summarizes what scholars currently say about organizational change, it also offers a critical analysis of the literature. More specifically, the article critically analyses some of the taken-for-granted assumptions in organizational change literature related to practice and evaluates how these mundane assumptions condition organizational change as practice.

The literature review of the first article indicates that organizational change is indeed very difficult in practice. The difficulties are revealed by, for example, employee stress (Dahl 2011), employee resistance (Ford et al. 2008) and outcomes that deviate from the original plans (Jian 2011, Whittle et al. 2010). In order to better understand these difficulties of organizational change as practice, the essay proposes that we should look more closely at what we already see. We should challenge some taken-for-granted practices related to organizational change in order to understand how organizational change as practice is conditioned by the prevailing assumptions.

The practice approach (Whittington 2006) is well suited to studying organizational change as practice because it acknowledges the importance of human action within social structures. The practice approach values particularity and context (Baxter & Chua 2008) and hence is helpful in finding these virtues even in what is taken for granted. Building on the practice approach, the essay proposes that certain assumptions seem to dominate the contemporary discourse on organizational change: (1) managerial practices with universal characteristics can be applied to context-dependent changes, (2) change resistance is about resisting the planned changes, and (3) change practitioners act upon their organizational hierarchy groupings. I would like to explain the first assumption in more detail. While scholars do communicate clearly that organizational change is a context-dependent phenomenon and that this fact should be taken into account when implementing change, the practical advice or implications in the literature are presented in a way that implies universal applicability. So the first assumption points towards a contradiction in the literature: since change is context dependent, why do so many scholars offer universal advice?
Overall, the article shows that certain taken-for-granted assumptions can be identified in the organizational change literature and that the complexity of organizational change as practice is much deeper than mainstream research indicates. This article proposes that organizational change in practice is a manifestation of particularity.

The theoretical implications of the first article are as follows. The finding that contemporary literature contains certain assumptions that are taken for granted indicates the need to identify these assumptions and to analyse how organizational change practices are conditioned by them. For future research this finding could raise interest in studying sociality and social structures in the context of organizational management. It could be fruitful to study the relationship between universal and particular practices and to consider how a focus on the particular instead of the universal might affect research methods in the future.

The first article also offers some interesting practical implications for practitioners. The analysis suggests that human action and social interaction, rather than the change mechanisms used by the management, are at the centre of change. This suggestion explains the practical difficulties that easily arise in the course of an organizational change, but it can also alarm practitioners because controlling an organizational change may seem impossible. The key message to practitioners, then, is that context matters and universal rules may not apply. To summarize, the first article proposes that some of the currently dominant assumptions about organizational change might not be universally applicable; rather, they could be particular to their contexts.

The first article concludes by recommending that future research take a critical stance towards both assumptions and practices that are taken for granted in the field of organizational change. Following this proposal, I turn in the subsequent articles to discourse as one of these possibly taken-for-granted practices, because organizational change is a strongly discursive phenomenon (Grant & Marshak 2011, Jian 2011), and because while talk is considered an important and central element in change, there are not many studies that explain how, in practice, it is important. This is why the next article of this dissertation analyses the role of discursive practices in organizational change.
5.2 Article 2: Discourse phronesis in organizational change:
 a narrative analysis

While discourse analysis has increased our understanding of organizational change (Buchanan & Dawson 2007, Cox & Hassard 2010, Grant & Marshak 2011, Jian 2011), combining this analysis with social practices can be fruitful (Vaara & Whittington 2012). The second article in this dissertation seeks direct answers to the research question of this study: How are discursive practices involved in organizational change? The second article is a qualitative analysis of organizational practices, in particular discursive practices, highlighting the importance of organizations’ societal practices and context dependence (Crawshaw & Bunton 2009, Grant & Marshak 2011, Thomas et al. 2011).


The main objective of the article is to demonstrate that discourse is a practice constructed socially through phronesis. This originally Aristotelian concept can be helpful in understanding discourse as practice, as a socially learned pattern, especially when methods for understanding the unconscious, particular and subjective are required.

Drawing on practice theory, the concept of phronesis and narrative analysis, the article indicates that discursive practices are involved in organizational change through discourse phronesis, the practical wisdom of talk. This finding is demonstrated through four examples of particular discursive practices derived from the narrative analysis: field practices, mandate practices, priority practices and word practices. Organizational change unfolds through these discursive practices, which are dependent on discourse phronesis. By focusing on discursive practices in organizational change, the article shows that discourse phronesis may advance understanding of organizational change challenges in practice.

The theoretical implications of the second article concern the usefulness of studying discourse as practice, the conceptual value of discourse phronesis and the importance of human interaction in change. Despite the increase in studies that take a discourse approach, discourse as a practice has attracted surprisingly little interest among organizational scholars. Discourse phronesis is a concept that
helps to understand the intellectual particularity in events, putting emphasis on the uniqueness and complexity of human interaction. Discourse phronesis also provides an alternative to the existing discourse approaches. Although focusing on local context might threaten the ability to see the forest from the trees (Vaara & Whittington 2012), it could still be useful in leveraging the understanding of universality within particularity and vice versa.

The practical implications of the second article concern the recognition of particularity in talk. Discourse phronesis in practice could be a powerful tool for managing change, as well as for making sense of change. On the other hand, a lack of knowledge about discourse phronesis or a lack of means to use it to one’s benefit could lead to difficulties in implementing change. Following this line of thought, organizational change practitioners should view discourse phronesis as an intellectual virtue worth pursuing.

To summarize, the second article answers the research question by proposing that discursive practices are involved in organizational change through discourse phronesis, the local wisdom of talk, and by offering four practical examples from the case study. While these four examples (field practices, mandate practices, priority practices and word practices) are informative examples of how discursive practices are involved in organizational change and what discourse phronesis can mean in practice, more qualitative research is still needed. Therefore, to further investigate the role of discursive practices in organizational change, the third article of this dissertation examines another discursive practice in more detail.

5.3 Article 3: The strategy text as a discursive practice in organizational change

The strategy text, especially in relation to identities, has attracted the attention of very few scholars thus far, even though strategy texts are a known translator of strategy among personnel (Fenton & Langley 2011, Spee & Jarzabkowski 2011, Vaara et al. 2010) and identities are a central element in organizational change (Clark et al. 2010, Nag et al. 2007). The third article of this dissertation approaches the research question “How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?” through a qualitative analysis seeking understanding of what actually happens in the process of creating a strategy text. Employee sensemaking and the change process influence each other (Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007), as do the strategy text and employee sensemaking (Fenton & Langley 2011). In this light, a strategy text is a material artefact that should
interest organizational scholars but for some reason is not yet a very popular research topic (Jarzabkowski & Spee 2009, Oreg et al. 2011).

The analysis demonstrates that the strategy text not only translates the goals of the change in an organization but also acts as an agent in the negotiation of collective identities. Because a strategy text is the result of a discursive process, namely, negotiations among change practitioners, it is also a symbol of the negotiation result. My narrative analysis indicates that while a strategy text clarifies the shared goals to the organization members, it simultaneously has the role of a discursive practice regarding different identities and their internal power dynamics.

In conclusion, the third article points to the often invisible power dynamics of strategy texts. These power dynamics of practice, praxis and practitioners are woven together in the discursive struggles that take place between different identities in the process of crafting a strategy text. Thus, this article increases our understanding of the role of discursive practices in organizational change by directing our attention to the agency of a strategy text as the translatative intersection of collective identities and their internal power positions.

As the second and third articles have demonstrated, discursive practices are involved in organizational change through discourse phronesis and through identities, both highly context-dependent phenomena. In order to provide some explanations for the findings of these articles, the fourth article of this study focuses on exploring permanent tensions in relation to change discourse.

5.4 Article 4: Permanent tensions in organization: an obstacle or an opportunity for the change discourse?

The fourth article of this dissertation approaches the research question “How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?” through a qualitative analysis of organizational practitioners, especially stakeholder groups. The approach chosen is the paradox approach, because it is suited to analysing tensions and because tensions in some form are relevant to most publications on organizational change. In fact, Smith and Lewis (2011: 394) note that “tensions are at the core of organizational research”, and Jian (2007) concludes that the results of organizational change depend partly on how tensions are managed.

Tension in organizational change can be approached either as a contradiction waiting for resolution (Thomas & Hardy 2011, Rouleau & Balogun 2011, Van de Ven & Sun 2011) or as a complementarity waiting for exploitation (Smith &
Lewis 2011). The latter approach is more suitable in situations where tensions are a result of different stakeholders’ legitimate goals (Choi et al. 2011). Instead of approaching tensions as problems that need to be solved, I have chosen to focus on the permanent nature of the tensions, because the interview data suggested that these tensions play an important role in organizational change. In particular, the article investigates how change practitioners can harness permanent tensions in the context of organizational change.

The fourth article adds an important dimension to the dissertation: the dimension of the practitioners. The practitioners of the case study represent three different fields, defined by the missions of each of these groups: the hospital, the university and the municipality. The permanent tensions in the case study arise from the conflicting missions of these fields and their legitimate goals. According to the interviewees, these tensions are mostly seen as a natural characteristic of a public university hospital. In the context of organizational change, I propose to call the coexistence of plural permanent tensions a renewal paradox, illustrating the dynamic contradiction between permanent tensions and change in an organization. The definition of paradox in this study is derived from paradox theory, in which organizing and contradiction are intertwined. A paradox involves “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith & Lewis 2011: 382).

In comparison to the other articles of this dissertation, the fourth article focuses more on explaining the nature of the case organization and its stakeholder groups. These explanations are useful in answering the research question “How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?” in two ways. First, by showing that the organization consists of distinct fields reflecting different backgrounds and collegial identities, my analysis offers an explanation for differentiated talk practices in the context of a planned organizational change. Second, the results of the article suggest that organizational change offers an organization’s stakeholders a context in which their permanent tensions can be influenced and harnessed with discursive, negotiative methods.

In conclusion, discursive practices are involved in organizational change through the permanent tensions between the collegial identities of different stakeholder groups and their particular, socially constructed discursive practices, which, when provoked by organizational change, may collide.
6 Discussion and conclusions

Through this final discussion, I will conclude this study and answer the research question “How are discursive practices involved in organizational change?”

Because discourse phronesis is socially constructed among peers, it can vary between the different stakeholder groups within an organization. The lack of shared discourse phronesis may disturb the sensemaking process, as those who talk are misunderstood or not listened to. This conflict can be traced back to the sensemaking match or mismatch among stakeholder groups who participate in the same change discourse through one or several discursive practices. Figure 6 illustrates how the lack of shared discourse phronesis among different stakeholder groups may result in a sensemaking mismatch and hence may hinder the organizational change process.

![Fig. 6. The sensemaking match and mismatch in discursive practices in organizational change.](image)

The main argument of this study is that discursive practices are involved in organizational change through the context-dependent practical wisdom of talk, that is, discourse phronesis (particular knowhow), and more specifically through
the discursive practices that apply discourse phronesis (implementation of the particular knowhow). Discourse phronesis is like a local dialect of meanings among those who have constructed collective identities and values.

The first article (Section 5.1) proposes that some practices in organizational change might be overlooked because of their everyday, tacit character. In this research, I have chosen one such practice for closer scrutiny in order to test current, taken-for-granted assumptions. In this dissertation, I examine discourses as a practice in organizational change, and I propose that while discursive practices are important communication tools for making sense of an organizational change, they are also unique codes of power and identity understood and used by those who share the context. In the second article (Section 5.2), I define the local logic of talk as discourse phronesis. This dissertation demonstrates that a discursive practice, such as a strategy text (Section 5.3), plays a role in organizational change through the collective identities that serve as home bases for discursive practices, and through the power battles that take place between those identities at times of change. I have sought some explanation for the tensions at the centre of these discursive struggles by examining the different legitimate stakeholder groups within an organization and by identifying their conflicting missions (Section 5.4).

Hence, the results of this study indicate that discursive practices conceal meanings of power and identities through phronetic discourse. As an illustration of the conclusions of this study, Figure 7 lays out how discursive practices are involved in organizational change. It is simultaneously an illustration of my development of the theory in comparison with the theoretical overview in Chapter 2 and Figure 2.
6.1 Theoretical implications

This study proposes two new theoretical concepts: discourse phronesis, the practical wisdom of talk, and renewal paradox, the dynamic contradiction between permanent tensions and change in an organization. As both are new additions to theory, they would certainly benefit from further development and critical analysis.

Approaching discourse as a practice constructed in social interaction opens new possibilities for scholars to further understand organizational change and discursive practices. In this research, I have focused on discursive practices and their involvement in organizational change. My findings show that the challenges related to discursive practices can be partly explained through discourse phronesis, because discursive practices are local constructions that require cognitive knowledge. Since the concept of discourse phronesis remains fairly abstract in explaining the involvement of discursive practices in organizational change (in effect, it establishes that there is a code), it could fruitfully be
augmented by other clarifying concepts or findings (to show in greater detail how the code works).

The second new theoretical concept introduced in this research is the renewal paradox. The renewal paradox is, in fact, the duality between an organization’s ability to renew itself and its inability to do so, the inability being closely related to the permanent tensions within the organization. In addition to these two theoretical concepts, I would also like to share some more general theoretical implications of the results of this study.

First, while studying organizational change through practice theory is not a radical choice, it is a surprisingly novel approach. As practice theory is currently gaining interest among strategy and management researchers, this dissertation proposes that practice theory, especially approached as strategy-as-practice, does advance our understanding of planned organizational change and the related discourses, which in the end are all about practicing strategy and strategizing practice. Second, placing organizational change at the centre of research through the practice lens actually reveals how much practice, and especially strategy-as-practice, is about change. The dimension of change thus widens the scope of practice theory, which then enters the zone of dualities and tensions, opening up many possibilities through, for example, paradox theory (Smith & Lewis 2011).

Third, the results of this dissertation indicate that social constructions and human action are central to organizational change and its success. In the realm of theory, this social dimension needs to be embraced also by those who rely on economics or resource-based theories. The fourth theoretical implication that can be drawn from this dissertation is that narrative analysis is a fruitful methodology for understanding organizational change and discursive practices.

To conclude, with strategy-as-practice (SAP) constituting an interesting and emerging branch in practice research (Whittington 2006), organizational change-as-practice (OCAP) could be a complementary stream of research on the overall phenomenon of organizing. If SAP is defined as “a critical understanding of everyday strategic practice” (Samra-Fredericks 2005: 806), I define, based on my research, organizational change-as-practice analogously as “a critical understanding of organizational change in practice”. I believe that organizational change research could benefit from this complementary stream of focused research from the practice perspective. This dissertation proposes that organizational change and the related discourses are particular phenomena and as such deserve close examination through alternative lenses, such as that of practice. One interesting avenue for future research is to study the relationship
between particularity and universality, and how they reflect on and are reflected in practices, praxis and practitioners in organizational change.

Another possibility for advancing understanding of organizational change through future research is to focus more on change in SAP research. This avenue of research may not only serve scholars studying change; scholars of SAP might also be positively surprised. For example, paradox theory and research on tensions could be an interesting approach to combine with the traditional SAP framework. The ultimate tension related to change is that between stability and change (Graetz & Smith 2008, Farjoun 2010). For SAP research, this tension could be worth studying, for example, among the different dimensions of practice, praxis and practitioners or within one dimension at a time. Another interesting paradox is the tension between consensus and conflict (Flyvbjerg 1998), providing many intriguing opportunities to study change in the context of strategy-as-practice.

Future research focusing on organizational change in SAP could also include pluralism in the research agenda. Glynn et al. (2000) define the term “pluralize” in opposition to the term “organize”, and it is relevant especially when change concerns plural stakeholders (Denis et al. 2001). The pluralistic approach is interesting also because the results of this dissertation indicate that the practical complexities of change are numerous. Perhaps pluralism could offer some explanation for the multidimensional challenges that organizational change raises. In conclusion, if SAP researchers were to experiment with placing organizational change at the centre of their research, they might benefit both streams of research: change and strategy. In addition, combining SAP theory with the paradox approach could be especially advantageous for understanding organizational change, which ultimately is about dualities in the process of strategizing.

The proposal to look critically at the taken-for-granted is not novel; it has been proposed, for example, by Garfinkel in 1967, Bourdieu and Wacquant in 1992, and by Vaara and Whittington in 2012 (Vaara & Whittington 2012). For example, as concluded in Section 5.2, discursive practices are particular to context and thus require experience of the context. Scholars have studied how, for example, CEO origin influences the success of an organizational change, and they have found that cognitive community does matter (Barron et al. 2011, Ndofor et al. 2009). However, for future research, the proposal of this dissertation is to go beyond the most evident tensions, such as those between leaders and personnel or between different professions. Novel research avenues could follow social actors as persons and individuals instead of following social actors as members of an
organization. Since organizational change is actually about people making sense of things, people talking to each other and people behaving in different ways (Jian 2011, Stensaker et al. 2008), allowing human nature, personal histories and individual inclinations of thinking to become the centre of study might increase our understanding of the phenomenon. Such an alternative approach would greatly challenge current research methodologies, because engaging with practitioners’ lives outside of work and entering their thoughts requires circumstances, agreements and research skills that may be very difficult for researchers to acquire. This development thus opens new opportunities also for the methodology research agenda, in narration and in other methodologies.

To summarize, the future research agenda inspired by this study could include at least the following avenues: (1) critical search for and analysis of possible taken-for-granted practices in relation to discourse and change; (2) studies on discourse phronesis and discursive practices in different contexts; (3) studies on practice phronesis more widely, that is, how certain practices are locally particular and how this is important for organizational change; (4) research on strategy text translations in different contexts and in relation to power, identity and strategy; (5) exploring the strategy text evolution in context and universally; (6) studies on permanent tensions outside the health care context; (7) studies that focus on the exploitation of permanent tensions in organizational change for resisting purposes; (8) research on discourse phronesis and the renewal paradox in varying contexts; and finally (9) research on the relationship between discourse phronesis and the renewal paradox and development of these and other helpful concepts to increase our understanding of organizational change and discursive practices.

6.2 Practical implications

Studying discursive practices in organizational change is especially interesting for practitioners, such as managers who wish to pursue a planned change. The practical implications of this dissertation can be summarized in four key messages derived from the articles of this study.

First, the change literature may have overlooked some taken-for-granted practices regarding organizational change, such as talk, so practitioners should pay more attention to the “already known”. For practitioners, this means that universal methods and practices may not always apply. Organizations are socially constructed contexts, which are simultaneously the definers and the results of human action bound to that particular context. What makes managing a planned
organizational change especially challenging is the fact that social interaction develops continuously, so circumstances are constantly changing. In other words, even if the management is familiar with the contextual particularities of an organization at one point in time, this understanding may not serve them at another time. The dynamic nature of social organizing challenges managers who plan and execute organizational change. The message to practitioners is, thus, to value context in human interaction. The best advice is, in fact, to consider carefully before initiating an organizational change.

Second, the key finding of this dissertation is that organizational change is realized through the practical wisdom of talk, that is, discourse phronesis (particular knowhow), and more specifically through the discursive practices that apply discourse phronesis (implementation of the particular knowhow). Examples of these discursive practices include field practices, mandate practices, priority practices, word practices and strategy texts. Discursive practices are not always “just talk”; they conceal local meanings and power relations, so practitioners should learn about these local meanings and be able to use them. As discourse phronesis is an intellectual virtue that is learned in a social context over time, it could be seen as an “internal behavioural code”. This “code” challenges organizational change by creating unnecessary obstacles to the change process, such as misunderstandings, disrespect and disbelief. Management should thus acknowledge the power of talk and seek to master that power.

Third, this dissertation shows that a strategy text is a discursive practice that reflects collegial identities, so practitioners should understand and prepare for battles when intervening in these power positions. The third essay of this dissertation (Section 5.3) demonstrates that in addition to describing an organization’s goals, the strategy text is a mirror to values and identities. For practitioners, the key takeaway from this finding is that a strategy text is a crucial culmination point of the whole change process, because while strategy shapes power relations in an organization, power relations also shape the construction of strategy. “Discourses are collections of interrelated texts and practices that ‘systematically form the object of which they speak’” (Foucault 1972: 49, cited in Hardy & Thomas 2014: 8). In other words, crafting a strategy text means simultaneously crafting the future identities of those concerned, the objects of the discursive practice.

Fourth, change is not free of tension, so practitioners should be aware of the organization’s permanent tensions and their internal relations and historical roots before adding new tensions to this internal equilibrium by initiating a planned
change process. The fourth essay (Section 5.4) analyses tensions between fields, plural stakeholders and their diverging goals. An interesting finding is that the fields with their divergent goals can coexist as long as they find consensus. But organizational change may disturb this consensus, and tensions may emerge. Without tension change would not be possible, as there is also tension between stability and change (Farjoun 2010, Sutton-Brady 2008). The key implication for practitioners is that tensions should be expected in a changing organization and that they only wait to be revealed. Those in charge of managing a planned organizational change might want to try to use these tensions for the purposes of change, instead of denying or avoiding them. In this maneuvering, discourse phronesis could be helpful, as could understanding the power dynamics among different practitioner groups and fields.

To close this section on implications to practitioners, I would like to quote Hardy and Thomas (2014: 36), whose research adopts a Foucauldian approach: “By understanding how discourse also incorporates practice, we can see how the practices that bring strategies into being are disciplined by the discourses in which they are situated. Foucault’s more radical view thus forces attention on discursive and material practices and, in so doing, reaffirms the importance of practice to the ‘doing of strategy’.”

6.3 Limitations of the study

Doubt is necessary to prompt the researcher to question the nature of the conducted research: intellectually it provides a possibility for alternative explanations, and emotionally it reminds the researcher of his or her personal instincts and biases (Berg & Smith 1988). This study has some limitations, which I will now describe. The first limitation is that my research addresses a single case study. Certainly, since discursive practices are involved in organizational change through the locally learned social wisdom of talk or discourse phronesis, as the results of this dissertation suggest, a single case is justified. However, with a wider spectrum of case contexts it would have been possible to study discursive practices in organizational change more universally. The second limitation of this study arises from researcher bias. Because I had personally worked in the case study organization, it is possible that my personal experiences and attitudes influenced my analysis of the narratives. The third limitation of this research concerns the narrative methodology. Through interpretation of multiple stories, the researcher may unconsciously or unwittingly affect the overall testimonial
narrative (Beverley 2000). Furthermore, multiple narratives may compete with each other, mainly because they could be personally self-serving or politically motivated or capture only partial information of the occurred events (Buchanan & Dawson 2007). To summarize, doubt can never be entirely erased, especially where the researcher’s personal understanding and conclusions are involved (Berg & Smith 1988).
References


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Appendix

The interviews were structured according to specified changes and themes. The specified changes were the following: the founding of HUS in 2000, the formation of HUCH Hospital Area in 2006, and the launch of the new management system in 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Business Units</th>
<th>HUCH Hospital Area</th>
<th>Management System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>HIS lab, HIS, IT and the Health informatics unit</td>
<td>Formed</td>
<td>Management System: new strategic goals, new organisational units, new business units, new management system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Formation of HUCH Hospital Area</td>
<td>New business units, new organisational units, new management system</td>
<td>New hospital area</td>
<td>New management system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Launch of new management system</td>
<td>New management system</td>
<td>New management system</td>
<td>New management system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. The HUS timetable in the interview guide.

The interviewee was encouraged to narrate examples and reflections connected to the specified changes above with the help of the following themes:

Theme 1: The background of the change
e.g. reasons, justification, reasoning

Theme 2: The execution of the change
e.g. execution in practice, the practitioners

Theme 3: Experiencing and responding to the change
e.g. identity, culture, ethics, emotions

Theme 4: Special features of a public university hospital
e.g. politics, university, professions
Original articles


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Original publications are not included in the electronic version of the dissertation.
52. Ainali, Saara (2011) Alueiden työllisyyden rakennus et ja kehivis tavarantautamone ja palvelujen vuorovaikutuksesssa
53. Juho, Anita (2011) Accelerated internationalisation as a network-based international opportunity development process
55. Orjasniemi, Seppo (2012) Studies on the macroeconomics of monetary union
56. Kauppinen, Antti (2012) The event of organisational entrepreneurship : disrupting the reigning order and creating new spaces for play and innovation
59. Pernu, Elina (2013) MNC making sense of global customer relationships
60. Lehtimäki, Tuula (2013) The contextual nature of launching industrial new products
62. Lim, Cheryl (2014) What’s in it for me? : organizational commitment among faculty members in UAE business schools
63. Almarri, Jasem (2014) Social entrepreneurship in practice : the multifaceted nature of social entrepreneurship and the role of the state within an Islamic context
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