UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

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The Change Process Towards an Activity-Based Flexible Office

A Qualitative Study Regarding the Perceptions of Managers and Employees at Skellefteå Municipality

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Abstract

Change is a constant factor in today's society and an important factor in the success of organizations. As a result, it is highly important that organizations learn to manage change in order to stay competitive and keep up with the rapidly changing market conditions. Change Management has therefore been a highly emphasized area within Business Administration. As new trends arise on the global market, it is important for organizations to be able to adapt. One of these trends is the implementation of the Activity-Based Flexible Office (A-FO). An Activity-Based Flexible Office consists of different areas with closed, half-open or open zones. The areas are created in order to match employee needs and the requirements of each work activity that needs to be conducted. As a result, no one is assigned a personal workstation, instead the employees move between different areas depending on what type of work activity they need to accomplish.

Even though Change Management has been thoroughly investigated and A-FOs have been researched to some extent, no previous research has been found regarding the change process of implementing an A-FO. The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate the difference in managers' and employees' perceptions regarding the change process towards an A-FO. As a result, a deeper understanding of change management as well as of the effects of the A-FO will be provided from the viewpoints of managers and employees. This leads to the research questions: *"How does the perception of the change process concerning activity-based flexible offices differ between managers and employees? What do managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how do these perceptions differ?"*.

The Theoretical Framework mainly consist of previous research models and theories regarding change management literature, work environment and activity-based flexible offices as well as employee satisfaction. Communication has also been chosen as an important factor as it has been stated to be vital in both change management and within the A-FO. Furthermore, in order to fulfil the purpose of the thesis and answer the research questions, the chosen research method for this study is qualitative with an exploratory research design and an inductive approach. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven respondents from a department at Skellefteå municipality who were chosen based on a combination of a purposive and snowball sampling method. After the interviews were transcribed, the empirical findings were analyzed and presented by using a thematic analysis. The findings show that when conducting an A-FO change process, managers' and employees' perceptions often differ. Managers often focus on the practical aspects of a change, while employees emphasized on "soft values". Employees were also more skeptical towards the change in the beginning, compared to managers, and seemed more aware of possible disturbances in the A-FO. Furthermore, both managers and employees were highly satisfied with the change process and the implementation of the A-FO, but emphasized on different factors resulting in increased satisfaction.

To conclude, since managers' and employees' perception regarding the A-FO change process often differ, but can also coincide, it is important to take both aspects into consideration when conducting this type of change. By involving everyone in the change process, it is more likely to be successful.

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1. Introduction

The introductory chapter will start by presenting the problem background in order to explain why the chosen topic is relevant and interesting for a thesis in business administration. Then followed by the theoretical background that has provided the foundation for the thesis as well as the research gap will be presented. To conclude this chapter, the purpose of the thesis will be explained and the research questions will be stated.

1.1.   Problem Background

Change is a constant component in today's society and something that has an impact on all organizations (Todnem By, 2005, p. 378). The rate of change has never been greater than it is today, where markets and trends can change overnight (Moran & Brightman, 2000, p. 66). This makes it extremely important for organizations to be able to manage change in the best possible way. Moran and Brightman (2000, p. 66) explain change management as "the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers". Sirkin et al. (2005) state that implementing a change within an organization is often very difficult, since there is not a single way of creating successful change. The factors that are believed to affect the success of a change are often very subjective and different between organizations. As a result, it may be difficult to apply other organization's successful methods for implementing change, since it may not be suitable for another organization. Oakland and Tanner (2007, p. 1) describe how a large investment in time, resources and energy is needed in order to implement a major change in an organization and that many change programs, in fact 70%, never succeed (Nohria & Beer, 2000). Furthermore, Gill (2002, p. 307) states that a poor implementation of change may not only depend on weak change management, but may also be a result of ineffective leadership. In order for a change to be successful, it will have to be managed appropriately by thorough planning, organizing and control, but without effective leadership these change efforts may be in vain. Successful leadership is required in order to introduce the change to the organization in a suitable way that will decrease the risk of resistance to change.

Miller (2001, pp. 359-360) also claims that strong and effective leaders are vital for implementing a successful change effort in an organization. One of the main reasons for a failed change attempt is argued to be a failed execution of the change, which is a result of ineffective leadership. Leadership is confirmed to be crucial in order to prepare the employees for the upcoming change, and employee readiness is critical in order for the change to be successful. To facilitate a successful change process, it is highly important that the leaders show that they are able to adapt to the change themselves (Miller, 2001, p. 362). This requires that the leader shows an ability to react calmly under pressure, since a change process is usually very demanding for the whole organization. Moreover, the leaders who are the most successful when implementing change are often the ones who take a personal interest in the process and advocate and promote the change (Miller, 2001, p. 366).

Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 340) argue that organizations are often focused on integrating new techniques and practices that have been defined by existing organizational concepts and that have been established in society. By implementing these changes, according to different trends on the market, the organizations are able to increase their legitimacy and chances of surviving. The implementation of a specific office design can be considered as one of these trends (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017, p. 467). Makhbul et al. (2007, p. 50) states that a well-designed office environment with a good arrangement of furniture, tends to result in increased productivity, less stress and a higher morale when it comes to the employees. Furthermore, this has connections to ergonomics where the design has to fit the worker rather than forcing the worker to fit into the office design. Today, we live in a sophisticated society surrounded by technology. It is therefore important that the office is designed in a way that would suit the needs of today's way of working (Barling et al., 2005, p. 219). The physical working environment is highly important as it supports the requirements of the employees, providing a place where people can work, think and communicate in groups. A well-designed physical work environment can thereby optimize organizational performance. If an organization takes action and works towards an achievement, a poor physical working environment could have negative impacts and interfere with the work.

One increasingly popular type of office design is the activity-based flexible office (Hjalmarsson, 2019). An activity-based flexible office refers to a concept where the office is constructed around diverse working areas that match the needs of different work assignments. Not long ago, only a few people knew about activity-based flexible offices. Today, they have become increasingly more common and this development of office landscape can mainly be seen in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Australia as well as New Zealand (Hjalmarsson, 2019). The activity-based flexible offices enable more space and interaction between employees in comparison to a "traditional" one, where many employees have their own enclosed office space. This type of working environment was first tested in the US in the 1970s, and is now becoming increasingly more common and popular amongst different organizations in both the private and the public sector (Lidström & Bolter, 2017, p. 47).

According to de Croon et al. (2005, p. 119), activity-based flexible offices are defined based on three dimensions; Office location, Office layout and Office use. An activity-based flexible office consists of an open-office environment that in turn contains different areas with closed, half-open or open zones in order to match the requirements of each work activity that needs to be conducted (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017, p. 467). In this type of office, no one is assigned a personal workstation, instead the employees move around depending on what work activity they need to accomplish. Activity-based flexible offices will from now on be referred to as A-FOs. However, it is important to be aware that this type of office is also commonly referred to as an "Activity Based Workplace" (ABW) (e.g. Leesman, 2017). In our study we have chosen to only use the term A-FO since this definition has been used more frequently in the previous research and literature that we have found and to avoid confusion.

Furthermore, Rolfö (2018) conducted a case study on a company who have implemented an A-FO. She found that the perception of the A-FO is highly dependent on certain factors in the change process (Rolfö, 2018, p. 147). In order to create a positive perception of an A-FO, management needs to create meaningful objectives for the change as well as allocate sufficient time and financial resources to the process. It was also stated that the

management needs to communicate with and involve the employees in the process as well as empower them to contribute to the change and the successful implementation of the A-FO. It is thereby not only a question of changing the physical environment when implementing a new office type, but the management also needs to consider human factors in order for the implementation to be successful. Rolfö (2018, p. 142) argues for the importance of creating a functioning and appropriate social and organizational work environment, instead of only focusing on changing the physical.

The concept of A-FO became well known and popular around 2008 when Microsoft in the Netherlands implemented the new office type very successfully (Lidström & Bolder, 2016, p. 49). The implementation was based on Bill Gates' vision; *New world of work*. In 2005, Microsoft's CEO Bill Gates stated specific changes in office spaces that people could expect over the coming ten years (Weller, 2015), which became known as the *New world of work*. One of them was that offices will be designed to focus more on collaboration. With this he meant that the workspace would become increasingly shared and flexible and as we can see, this prediction has become reality. Furthermore, even though A-FOs have mainly been implemented in the private sector, public organizations in Sweden have also increasingly transferred to A-FOs (Edling, 2019).

Today, 41% of the employees that are working within activity based-flexible offices state that they often struggle with employee passivity (Leesman, 2017, p. 14). Furthermore, a problem that has been identified within many organizations is that there can be poor adoption from the employees and they thereby become a threat to the organizational benefits. For example, employees may not be able to adapt to the new working environment and as a result, the perceived benefits and goals of the implementation may not be achieved. However, today many companies want to implement flexible offices in order to improve effectiveness and productivity, increase employee satisfaction and reduce costs associated with "traditional" offices (e.g. cell-offices) (Ross et al., 2017, p. 6).

Based on the problem background explained above, the need to understand the theoretical background of A-FOs and the change process as well as the practical problem itself arose. This thesis will thereby continue with the theoretical background of relevant theories in order to detect and state possible research gaps that no previous research has addressed.

1.2.   Theoretical Background and Research Gap
1.2.1. Change Management

In a study made by Oakland and Tanner (2017, p. 5), they identified a few main drivers for change, both external and internal. Examples of external drivers for change are considered to be market competition, customer requirements and demand from stakeholders. This could thereby entail that companies feel obliged to adopt an A-FO if their competitors have already implemented it, in order to stay competitive. Internal drivers are considered to be the need for improved quality of products and services, improved processes and operational efficacy (Oakland & Tanner, 2007, p. 5). The external and internal drivers are believed to be connected, but the authors found that all the organizations in their research implemented change programs due to external drivers. This is also in accordance with Meyer's and Rowan's (1977, p. 340) study concerning how organizations implement change based on external trends. They argue, however, that

it is important to focus on both strategic and operational aspects in order to implement and manage a successful change process.

Moreover, Oakland and Tanner (2007, pp. 5-6) discovered that it is not only incredibly important to obtain leadership and management support for the intended change, but it is also vital that employees are included in the implementation. This entails explaining how the employees will be affected by the implemented change (Oakland & Tanner. 2007, p. 12). Project teams are also stated to be of great importance to implement successful change (Oakland & Tanner. 2007, pp. 5-6). The authors further claim that it is very common to use external support, such as consultants, for the implementation and that this support is often highly valued. Furthermore, the respondents of the study stated that it is important to consider how the change will impact the organization itself to be able to take appropriate action-steps (Oakland & Tanner, p. 8). Continuing, Oakland and Tanner (2007, p. 11) explained a few common practices that enables or hinders change. The results from their study stated that cross functional teams with appropriate skills and high ambition, structured and organized project management, communication, involvement of employees and a committed senior management were a few things that would enable a smooth change implementation. On the other hand, lack of communication, lacking commitment of top management and general issues regarding resistance to change were considered to be factors that made the implementation of change difficult.

According to E. F. Harshman and C. L. Harshman (1999, p. 5) it is critical during a change process that the communication is successful, mainly because good communication contributes to trust, value as well as honesty throughout the change implementation. Lippitt (1997, p. 19) also states that the employees will better support the goals of the organization if the internal communication is good. Therefore, it is important that there are clear communication strategies available before implementing the change, as this would increase the success of the change as well as increase trust in the management team and the organization (Elving, 2005, p. 690).

Furthermore, employee involvement has been found to be one of the major factors that contribute to and affect an organization's change process (Hussain et al., 2016, p. 126). The concept itself can be explained by using four elements; giving the employees *power*, providing the employees with *information, knowledge* and *skills* (Hussain et al., 2016, p. 124). These elements all promote the involvement of the employee. By providing the employees with the appropriate information and knowledge, the management will empower them to contribute to the change process (Gill, 2002, p. 315). It is thereby vital that the employees feel involved in order to make the implementation of the change as successful as possible. Furthermore, it is very important that employees are satisfied in order for the implementation of the change to be successful, since they might otherwise resist the change (Lidström & Bolter, 2017, p. 70). By creating an attractive vision of what the change will provide, employees may be more satisfied with the potential future than the reality of today (J. Ford & L. Ford, 1994, p. 775). Employees that are satisfied with the management's communication in the change process tend to be more open for the change itself (Osei-Bonsu, 2014, p. 142). Satisfaction with communication can in turn improve employee job satisfaction (Goris, 2007, p. 746). Also, employee job satisfaction has been proven to affect employee commitment to an organization (Elangovan, 2001, p. 163). Satisfied employees who are committed to the organization are more likely to promote and contribute to the change (Turner Parish et al., 2008, p. 36). Satisfied

employees thereby make the success rate of organizational change processes higher (Turner Parish et al., 2008, p. 36).

Moreover, Kotter's model of change became an immediate success when it was published in 1995 and it still remains an important theory within change management (Appelbaum et al., 2012, p. 765). It has been used in order to address central changes in the way that business is performed in order to ensure that businesses can manage a new and challenging market (Appelbaum et al., 2012, p. 775). Kotter's model of change consists of eight steps or phases which are; *(1) Establish a sense of urgency, (2) Create a powerful guiding coalition, (3) Create a distinct vision, (4) Communicate the vision, (5) Remove potential obstacles to the vision, (6) Create short-term wins, (7) Do not announce victory too soon, (8) Secure the achieved changes in the organizational culture* (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Kotter (1995) argues that it is highly important to follow all of the eight steps in sequential order to be able to create a successful change process.

According to Kurt Lewin, organizational change goes through three main stages (Robbins, 2003, pp. 564-565). He made a model called the three-step model of change, where the main critical factor of the change is communication. The three steps are: *Unfreezing, changing/remodeling and refreezing.* In short, this means that everyone first has to be informed about the change and understand the value of it, then the remodeling takes place where the actual change is implemented and lastly the refreezing stage occurs where the organization is set to work in the newly implemented organizational change. The model thereby shows the importance of communication within a change implementation.

1.2.2. Work Environment and Activity-Based Flexible Offices

Previous research has stated that it is vital that an organization creates a satisfying working environment that fulfills employee's wants and needs in order to minimize the risk of employees quitting their jobs (Wright & Davis, 2003, p. 71). It has also been proven that a satisfying and suitable work environment can increase employees' creativity (Amabile et al., 1996, p. 1155). In order to create a work environment that promotes creativity amongst employees, leaders play a crucial role and need to show support for their employees (Amabile et al., 2004, p. 16). Furthermore, if the work environment is designed according to employee needs, it can have a positive effect on the employees' work performance (Makhbul et al., 2007, p. 50). Therefore, it is extremely important that the employees are not forced to fit into the work environment, but rather the work environment should fit the employees. The previous research thereby emphasizes on the importance of creating a positive working environment, with a focus on both the physical and social needs of the employee.

Van Koetsveld and Kamperman (2011, p. 305) argue that the vision and goal of an A-FO is achieved by dedicating more focus to the employees and giving them more space and ability, within certain boundaries, to determine how, where and when they should work in the office. The office is designed to improve knowledge sharing, teamwork and personal responsibility. On the other hand, Meyer and Rowan (1977, pp. 340-341) state that the consequences of organizations blindly adopting new trends, such as an A-FO, could often conflict with the efficiency of an organization and the trends must thereby be adopted with care. Even though there have been studies showing that A-FO-based environments have positive impacts on companies and employees, there are also investigations showing the opposite. A significant problem that limits organizational

benefits is poor adoption of appropriate behavior in A-FOs, meaning that some employees have such simple work tasks that they would not benefit by moving to an A-FO (Leesman, 2017, p. 14). Thereby, these people would have a poor adoption of appropriate behavior. Also, a few industries that use A-FOs have shown a decrease by 53% in productivity in comparison to regular working environments (Leesman, 2017, p. 14). When implementing an A-FO, it is thereby very important to be able to manage the change appropriately in order to decrease the risk of encountering possible negative consequences. On the other hand, the occurrence of negative consequences may also be due to a non-fitting work design since one office type does not fit all (Hultberg, 2019, p. 3). It is therefore vital to also keep the needs of the organization and employees in mind when implementing an A-FO in order to decrease these risks.

On the other hand, according to the Leesman study (2017, p. 6), moving to an A-FO environment has often resulted in healthier, more engaged and motivated employees, higher self-determination and empowerment as well as more knowledge transfer and learning among the collaborators. Leesman (2017, p. 7) also states in their study that an industry that has a flexible physical infrastructure would have better opportunities to transform and adapt when the business is changing. Furthermore, van der Voordt (2004, p. 134) explains that companies want to implement flexible offices in order to improve effectiveness and productivity, increase employee satisfaction and decrease costs. Employee satisfaction can stem from the degree to which the working environment matches the needs of the employees (van der Voordt, 2004, p. 139). Since an A-FO is specifically designed to meet the different needs of all employees, an A-FO often increases employee satisfaction. Also, trying to improve satisfaction by changing certain job characteristics has been proven to affect an employee's commitment to the organization (Elangovan, 2001, pp. 163-164), which in turn can increase the success of the organization. Oakland and Tanner (2007, p. 5) also state that the reasons for changing to an A-FO environment are often based on financial aspects, but also on improving efficiency within the organization.

Due to an A-FO being a "needs-based environment", it is the work assignments and activities that control how, where and when one works (Lidström & Bolter, 2016, pp. 38-39). This requires that the office consist of the different areas mentioned above. It is also important to adapt the A-FO to the specific needs of the entire organization, which means that no A-FO will look the same since all organizations differ. The shape of the A-FO will also be affected depending on what the organization wants to achieve. For example, if the goal is to increase collaboration or if it is to increase productivity. Lidström and Bolter (2016, p. 42) also state that one type of A-FO is not suitable for all organizations, but that the concept is a good way to increase an organization's competitiveness and help them to adapt to our continuously changing society.

1.2.3. Research Gap

Change management has been thoroughly investigated and explored in many different studies and from different angles. A-FOs have also been researched to some extent, but then with an extensive focus on how the new office type has affected the employees in connection to ergonomics (e.g. Wohlers & Hertel, 2017). Although there are several research studies that have investigated the impact of A-FOs on employee satisfaction, motivation and productivity as well as the impact on the organization (e.g. Wohlers & Hertel, 2017; Van der Voordt, 2004; Van Koetsveld & Kamperman, 2011), no studies

were found on the A-FO change process. Furthermore, earlier studies had a perspective from psychological or ergonomic view points and no investigations that were found have had a business perspective which this thesis will provide (e.g. Makhbul et al. 2007, p. 50; Hultberg, A. 2019).

Also, according to Kalleberg (2011, p. 446), little has been researched regarding the understanding of the correlation between organizational restructuring and the individual and group responses to changes in the workplace. This area is broad and it is thereby not fully saturated, which means that there is still scope for investigation. Since there are few previous studies where researchers have investigated the change process concerning the implementation of an A-FO, as well as investigated both managers' and employees' opinions and perceptions of this change at a specific organization, this provides a research gap. The further investigation of the human side of change is strengthened by Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015, p. 254). This includes the understanding of managers' and employees' perceptions of the change process. Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015, p. 254) further state that organizational readiness for change is also an area that can be further researched. As previously mentioned, earlier studies show that some companies have not succeeded with the implementation of A-FOs, whilst others have been successful. Stanley et al. (2005, p. 457) argue that communication is key in order to reduce resistance and implement a change successfully. Therefore, we believe that it would be interesting to investigate how the managers experience and communicate the change towards their employees and how the employees have experienced this communication and the A-FO change process.

More specifically, we want to investigate the change process when organizations go from a "traditional" working environment to an A-FO. It has been argued by many researchers that the perceptions of the employees' when it comes to organizational change is important (Jones et al., 2008, p. 310; Grice et al., 2006, p. 528; Amiot et al., 2006, p. 568). These authors state that future investigations need to provide a complete picture with both positive and negative indicators regarding the outcomes of organizational change experienced by employees. Moreover, they argue that future research should collect information on actions within management and how employees perceive the communication practices. Also, Bordia et al. (2007, pp. 359-360) state that the reasons for change needs to be investigated further, but also that an examination of how employees experience and deal with uncertainty during the change process needs to be conducted. Thereby it is necessary and important to investigate how managers work to reduce uncertainty during the change process of an A-FO. This relates back to the importance of further researching the change process of an A-FO and how it is accomplished and perceived by managers and employees in order to fill these research gaps.

1.3. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the change management process when implementing an A-FO from two perspectives, managers and employees. This is done in order to be able to compare the two narratives and see how the perceptions differ. In order to be able to compare the views of managers and employees, semi-structured interviews will be conducted where the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the change process concerning A-FOs in one particular organization. By interviewing people at different levels in the organization, the goal is to acquire a comprehensive overview and deeper

knowledge of the change process itself. We also believe that the comparison of these two groups will provide a better and wider understanding of the results.

The choice of interviewing managers was made since they are often the ones who are advocating and implementing the change. Guth and Macmillan (1986, cited in Nielsen & Randall, 2013, p. 605) found that senior managers are the ones who decide to implement the change and middle managers are often responsible for the implementation of and communication regarding the change. We thereby find it crucial to obtain the managers' point of view on why and how they have implemented the A-FO and what they believe that the results of the change are. Since employees are the ones that are primarily affected by the implementation of an A-FO, we also believe that it is vital to receive their opinion on the change process and their perception of the new working environment. The results from the different interviews will then be compared with each other in order to examine how the perceptions differ between managers and employees. A deeper understanding of the change process in the eyes of managers and employees will thereby be obtained. We will also be able to examine if there are any connections between previous theories and the way this particular organization has managed their A-FO change process.

To conclude, the purpose of this thesis is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the A-FO change process from the perspectives of managers and employees, within one specific organization. Since change is continuous and something that affects both society, organizations and individuals, it is important to understand how organizations manage change (e.g. Todnem By, 2005, p. 378). By focusing on the change process in connection to the implementation of an A-FO, this research will contribute to previous studies since few others have looked at this particular issue. The purpose of this research will be examined by answering the two research questions stated below.

1.4.   Research questions

RQ1: How does the perception of the change process concerning activity-based flexible offices differ between managers and employees?

RQ2: What do managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how do these perceptions differ?

1.5.   Delimitations

A number of delimitations have been made in order to fulfil the purpose of this thesis. The delimitations will also facilitate the answering of the research questions. The time constraints of this thesis have also been taken into consideration and the delimitations help to ensure the thesis will be completed in time. Due to this time limitation, the scope of the thesis had to be narrowed down and the sample size had to be quite small. Since change management is a very broad subject, it would not have been possible to research the entire topic. Instead, a narrower focus was taken by concentrating on the change process of an A-FO. The scope was limited further by focusing on this change process from two perspectives, managers and employees, within one organization. As a result, the change process of an A-FO from the perspective of the entire organization or several organizations will not be investigated in this thesis. This focus is also in accordance with

the previously mentioned research gap, since few other researchers have investigated this specific topic.

As mentioned, the sample was limited to a single organization. This specific organization was chosen due to that previous contacts had been established and the organization had already gone through this type of change process. Consequently, other relevant organizations were not considered for this thesis. One possible drawback of only using one organization is that the result will only provide a one-sided view of the research topic. However, as mentioned above, increasing the sample to several organizations would not be possible due to the time constraint. Also, the respondents consist of people who have knowledge about the A-FO change process and experience from both implementing and working in this type of environment. As a result, the population of this research is quite small, but will still provide relevant and important knowledge. Moreover, the sample was limited to seven respondents, but this is believed to be enough in order to fulfil the purpose of this thesis.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will provide an overview and explanation of previous literature, theories and research. The theoretical framework and the concepts will be analyzed and used for this thesis. The theoretical framework will begin with an overview of change management literature, before moving on to literature regarding work environment and activity-based flexible offices as well as employee satisfaction. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the theoretical framework.

2.1. Change Management

Change management has been defined in many different ways (e.g. Moran & Brightman, 2000, p. 66). Hallencreutz and Turner (2011, p. 63) described change management "as a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams and organizations from a current state to a desired future state." Due to that the global business environment is continuously growing and developing, change has been determined as vital in order for organizations to maintain their success and chance of survival (Al-Haddad & Koutnour, 2015, p. 233; Moran & Brightman, 2000, p. 66; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340). Traditional change management concerns following a linear and logical model with a focus on having control over the change process by for example, using a guiding coalition (Graetz & Smith, 2010, pp. 135-136). However, research has shown that this traditional approach is limited since it considers change to be a single, passing occurrence that needs to be controlled. This approach disregards the fact that change is a natural and continuous phenomenon that defines an organization and its ability to grow. Therefore, understanding change as something that is continuous and something that an organization depends on in order to thrive has become a more popular approach.

For change to be successful, it is important that the management is able to clearly communicate what the change process will entail and what the vision of the intended change is in order to ensure that employees will support the change (Nelissen & van Selm, 2008, p. 313). One way of doing this is by making sure that the employees understand how the change will affect them (Oakland & Tanner, 2007, p. 12). As stated above, Oakland and Tanner (2007, pp. 5-6) found that leadership support for the change is vital for its success, but also that the involvement of employees in the change process was highly important. Morgan and Zeffane (2003, p. 60) argue that distribution of power and decision-making are two elements that are very important when striving for employee involvement in the change process. They claim that these two elements are interrelated since the possibility for decision making will be quite restricted if the employees do not have the power to implement decisions (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003, p. 60). It is thereby vital that the organization and management provide the employees with the right tools to make them feel involved in the change process. This will present the opportunity for a successful implementation of the change. Unfortunately, this means that if management is not successful in involving the employees in the change process, the attempt to implement the change will likely fail.

It is evident that change efforts have a tendency to fail when it has been mismanaged due to inadequate planning, control and know-how or because appropriate milestones do not exist that will boost the motivation of the employees (Gill, 2002, p. 308). The lack of clear communication can also obstruct the change process by creating confusion and

misunderstanding. It is thereby important to communicate the benefits of the change in order to convince all employees of the need for change and to create commitment to it. However, simply managing change is not enough. As previously mentioned, effective leadership is highly important in creating a successful change. In order for a leader to be effective, several different factors play a role (Gill, 2002, p. 312). To begin with, it is highly important that the leader is able to define and communicate a clear vision for the intended change. A shared organizational vision is needed in order for the change to be successful. Furthermore, for a leader to be effective they need to identify and endorse values, such as a change orientation, that can be shared throughout the organization (Gill, 2002, p. 313). In turn, these values will create and promote a stronger organizational culture focused on change that will result in more commitment amongst employees towards change efforts. Moreover, in order to realize the vision, the leader needs to develop relevant business strategies for the implementation of the future change (Gill, 2002, p. 314). The strategies must be viewed as significant for the change process in order to create more commitment and support amongst employees.

In order to facilitate employee contributions to the change process, an effective leader needs to empower the employees (Gill, 2002, p. 315). Providing the employees with the relevant knowledge, opportunities, independence and the confidence needed for them to be able to manage the change, can do this. Finally, Gill (2002, p. 316) states the importance of creating motivation and being able to inspire the employees. If this is successful, employees will be more likely to contribute to the change because they want to, not simply because they have to. In order to create motivation and inspiration, the effective leader will have to ensure that the goals of the change are aligned with the employees' needs and wants. Motivation can also be increased and sustained by creating short-term goals, which turn into short-term victories.

Furthermore, Gigliotti et al. (2018, p. 95) state that employee's trust in the management is very important when it comes to accepting change attempts. This means that employees who experience a trusting relationship with the management are more likely to accept and be ready to implement the change. Mayer et al. (1995, p. 712) define trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustee, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.". On the other hand, if trust is low within the organization, change may be difficult to implement due to that the change may raise suspicions (Neves & Caetano, 2006, p. 352). Due to the potential risks of an organizational change, employees' trust in managers and employees' control over the process of change is very important (Neves & Caetano, 2006, p. 354). If the employees perceive that their control over the change is low, the need for trust increases. In this case, a relationship between the manager and the employees that is built on trust will secure the employees commitment to the organization and the change throughout the process. Also, employees' readiness and willingness is extremely important when an organization wants to implement a change (Lofquist et al., 2018, p. 281). The management thereby needs to prepare them properly before starting the change process.

In order to gain a better understanding of change management it is imperative to review important models and theories within the area. Using relevant and credible research will enrich the content of the thesis and allow for the application and comparison of previous models to the results. The review of previous research regarding different important factors that has to be considered within change management such as Kotter's eight-step

model of change, Lewin's three-step model of change, the role of communication in change management as well as the Popcorn model of change.

2.1.1. Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change

As previously mentioned, Kotter created a model of change in 1995 that is still believed to be viable in today's society (Appelbaum et al., 2012, p. 765). The model is used in order to help organizations manage change in the best possible way on the ever changing marketplace (Appelbaum et al., 2012, p. 775). According to Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015, p. 250), the model could be used in order to avoid failing when implementing a change, and thereby increase the possibility of success. In the model, Kotter (1995) states a series of phases that every change process goes through. He argues that it is crucial to not skip any steps in order to try to implement the change faster, since this often results in a failed change attempt. In his article, he mentions eight steps that will increase the chance of a successful change process.

Kotter (1995) argues that the first step of implementing a change is to *create a great sense of urgency* in order to motivate people to begin the transformation. He continues by stating that over 50% of organizations fail in creating enough urgency due to impatience or lack of knowledge on how to motivate their employees. It is thereby important that the people who are trying to implement the change are not just managers or of high position, but also leaders. When an organization has a good leader who is able to see the need for change, the beginning of the change process is often more successful. Another way to ensure that the employees understand the need for change is to create urgency by having open discussions about, for example, increasing competition, decreasing market share or competitiveness. Armenakis et al. (1993, p. 689) claim that a sense of urgency can also be created by using sources that are external to the organization. By using reliable external sources, the credibility of the need and urgency for change may increase. The media, such as newspapers or television broadcasts, can have a great influence on employee knowledge due to its objectivity and can thereby help create readiness for organizational change. Buchanan et al. (2005, p. 202) also state that change is often more welcomed and sustained if the urgency message as well as the implementation of the change has a good timing, sequence and pace. Kotter (1995) concludes the importance of urgency by stating that about 75% of an organization's management needs to be convinced that there is a need for change in order for the change process to continue to be successful.

The second step is to *create a powerful guiding coalition* (Kotter, 1995). Kotter states that it is important to have a strong group of people who motivates the rest of the organization to implement the change. In order to create a guiding coalition that is strong enough, the head of the organization needs to be an enthusiastic supporter and the coalition needs to contain more people who share commitment to the change. How big the coalition depends on the size of the organization. The great sense of urgency mentioned above is extremely helpful when forming the guiding coalition (Kotter, 1995). If an organization fails to create a powerful guiding coalition it is usually because they have underestimated the difficulties of creating and achieving change. This will in turn eventually result in a failed attempt to implement the change. Lines (2007, p. 163) found that change agents that possess a large positional power have greater success when they are implementing a change, compared to change agents with lower positional power. This strengthens Kotter's (1995) argument concerning the importance of strong management support in order for the change to be successful. Self et al. (2007, p. 215) also mention

that initiatives for change are more likely to have support from employees if they are supported by the leader. Furthermore, Caldwell (2003, p. 291) states that the people who lead change should be members of the top management, such as executives or senior managers. These people should visualize, initiate, motivate or promote the change attempt.

Kotter (1995) also mentions the importance of the guiding coalition *creating a distinct vision* as the third step. This vision needs to be easy to communicate and attract customers, stakeholders and employees. After a clear vision has been created, which can take up to a year, a strategy can be developed in order to achieve the vision. If the guiding coalition fails to create a reasonable and well-defined vision, the change process is very likely to fail and result in the organization going in the wrong direction. By creating a clear and distinct vision, the likelihood of employees understanding and agreeing with the change increases. Whelan-Berry and Somerville (2010, p. 189) state that a change vision is extremely important in the process of organizational change. Once the vision has been established, it can be used as a driver for change, which can support the change process.

Moreover, the fourth step builds on the previous one and entails *communicating the created vision* (Kotter, 1995). The communication needs to be credible and understandable in order to convince the employees of the need for the change. It is important that the usefulness of the change is communicated in order to convince employees to make sacrifices in terms of, for example, time. Kotter (1995) argues that the vision needs to contain possibilities for growth and show that any downsizing in personnel will be managed fairly, otherwise this phase may be especially challenging. In order to properly communicate the vision, it is important to use all available channels, including communicating through actions of the guiding coalition that shows that they are also adapting to the change. Continuing, Bordia et al. (2007, pp. 360-361) state that clear communication is extremely important in order to decrease employee uncertainty, create a sense of control and increase job satisfaction during the change process. They thereby emphasize on the importance of creating communication programs in order to distribute information, create the opportunity for employees to be a part of the decision-making and increase employee empowerment. Communicating a convincing vision, before, during and after the change process will ensure that the employees have the necessary information about and feel included in the change process. Also, Nelissen and van Selm (2008, p. 313) found that employees that are satisfied with the communication of management are more likely to accept organizational change. This means that if the management is able to communicate the need and vision for change in a good and appropriate way, employees will be more positive towards the change.

Furthermore, the fifth step is to *remove potential obstacles to the vision* (Kotter, 1995). This can be individual obstacles or larger ones that are related to the structure of the organization. Even though it may be impossible to remove all obstacles, the organization must confront and remove the larger ones. Taking action to remove obstacles will help inspire and empower employees as well as preserve the reliability and dependability of the change process. The sixth step refers to the importance of *creating short-term wins* (Kotter, 1995). By generating small victories, the motivation of employees will more likely be maintained until the greater goal of the change is achieved. Without these short-term wins, the likelihood of people giving up or resisting the change will increase. This requires managers and implementers to be active by, for example, giving recognition to the people concerned and establishing small goals. If short-term victories are achieved,

the sense of urgency will more likely be maintained. The importance of creating short-term wins is also validated by Pietersen (2002, p. 37). Small victories throughout the change process may help increase confidence and make sure that employees will maintain their belief that the bigger, long-term change is possible. Moreover, short-term victories can also help increase motivation amongst employees to continue working towards the change (Gill, 2002, p. 316).

The seventh step states the importance of *not announcing victory too soon* (Kotter, 1995). If this happens, it is very likely that the implemented change will not last very long since the momentum of the change will slow down. This can in turn increase the risk of going back to old ways instead of maintaining the change. Instead, leaders should use the success of the short-term wins in order to confront other problems. Jansen (2004, p. 281) also argues that if commitment to the change is high, the change-based momentum will increase and be sustained. Finally, the eighth step mentions how vital it is to *secure the achieved changes in the organizational culture* (Kotter, 1995). Kotter (1995) argues that change becomes fixed when the new behaviors are rooted in the organization's norms and values. In order to incorporate the change in the culture of the organization, it is important to demonstrate how the change has improved performance. It is also important to make sure that the current and future top management understands the change and is able to personalize it. If this is not done, a decision that does not follow the new approach may be made, which in turn can undermine the change. Jacobs (2002, p. 177) confirms this statement by claiming that a change has become institutionalized once it is incorporated in the everyday actions and events of an organization. This means that a change is more likely to remain once it is a part of the organizational culture.

Even though Kotter's eight-step model has been widely accepted, it has received criticism since its publication. Appelbaum et al. (2012, p. 775) claim that all of the steps may not be suitable for all organizations or change processes, since certain changes may not require a specific step. They give the example of changes that require a lot of secrecy. It may thereby not be possible to, for example, create urgency for the intended change if the managers are not allowed to disclose information about it to their employees. Appelbaum et al (2012, pp. 775-776) also mention the important aspects of knowing how to combat resistance to change and create commitment to the change, which is not addressed in Kotter's eight-step model. They thereby recommend using complementary theories and models to fill this gap.

2.1.2. Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change

Communication is one of the most critical factors in organizational change and while implementing a change, a communication strategy should be considered (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1999, p. 295). Kurt Lewin made a model in 1947 involving three stages of change; *unfreezing, changing/moving* and *refreezing* (Hussain et al., 2016, p. 124; Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015 p. 248). In these stages, communication is the key. Organizational change happens due to different reasons, but no matter what change is implemented, the status quo of the organization will be challenged to a new direction.

Changing behavior is the first step to implement a change in an organization and this is done in the stage of *unfreezing* (Robbins, 2003, pp. 564-565). During this stage, communication is critical and employees have to be informed about the upcoming change, the logic behind it and how it will benefit them. This stage is often critical as employees

have to deal with strong emotions such as denial, doubt and uncertainty. The stage of *unfreezing* refers to the phase where forces that maintain current behavior and patterns are reduced and changed. This process will progress faster if the organization is transparent and let the employees be involved in the change. Also, people are more likely to accept the change if they believe that the change is necessary and urgent. Involving the employees in this stage could therefore be very beneficial since they will gain a better understanding of the change process.

The second stage, according to Lewin's model, refers to the *changing stage* (Robbins, 2003, pp. 564-565). He meant that it is only possible to make a change after the *unfreezing stage* is completed. This stage is recognized as the implementation of the change and is where most of the employees struggle with their new reality. The *changing stage* is one of the hardest steps to overcome, as people have to adopt new ways of thinking, behaviors as well as processes. The better the communication is during this stage, the easier the implementation process will be. It is therefore important to constantly remind and convince the employees about the benefits the change will result in. The third and last step refers to the *refreezing stage*, meaning that the group should stabilize and solidify after the implemented change. This is an important stage to ensure that people do not go back to the old way of thinking. Therefore, this final stage entails that the implemented change has to be merged into the organizational culture.

The three-step model by Lewin's was created in 1945 and has during the last decade received some criticism (Dent & Goldberg, 1999, p. 26). Scientists argue that this model is old and that today's businesses are faster paced compared to when the model was created. This means that it may be risky to rely on "old qualification" and that businesses today are "open-ended", meaning that they are constantly moving. Furthermore, the third step of *refreezing* has been criticized due to, as mentioned above, our fast paced world (Dent & Goldberg, 1999, p. 26). On the contrary, the model made by Lewin is viewed as something that would be more suitable in a world of a stable state. This means that the time for refreezing and settling down would not be manageable in today's society. It is important to keep this criticism in mind when using this model. However, this model has been and is still being used in organizations today. As this three-step model is broad and can be applied on all organizations undergoing a change, it can be used as a spine and a framework.

Since communication has been identified as a critical factor in successful change management, it is highly relevant for this thesis to further investigate the topic of communication. A deeper understanding of communication in the change process will provide important insights into the research topic. The role of communication in change management is investigated below.

2.1.3. Communication and Change Management

Communication is something that is not fundamentally evident nor is it always clear how the concept of communication should be viewed (Ruler, 2018, p. 367). As a result, there has not been an agreed upon definition of communication (Glare, 1968, p. 369). Going back to the 60s' and the language of Latin, communication has its origin in the word communicare, which was referred to as; "to share out", "to make general accessible" or "discuss together" (Glare, 1968, p. 369). Munodawafa (2008, p. 369) states that communication could involve both verbal and non-verbal messages which are transmitted

from a sender to a receiver through a channel of communication, for instance via Email, telephone or face to face. Communication could be classified into two main categories, the first one involves *mass media* and the second one *group media*. The intention of *mass media* is to reach out to a wider population, while *group media* is intended to target a specific group of characterized people. A critical factor in communication is in which context it takes place, this is seen as a major factor impacting the desired outcomes.

Yates and Orlikowski (1992, p. 299) state that communication has always played a vital role within organizations. This is in accordance with how communication is believed to underlie almost every part of an organization's actions and therefore vital for the organization's effectiveness (Snyder & Morris, 1984, p. 461). Communication is also believed to be important regarding the achievement of organizational goals (Hassan et al., 2011, p. 23). Iedema and Wodak (1999, p. 7) argue that "organizations are continuously created and re-created in the acts of communication between organizational members.". It is therefore important to not only use top-down communication, i.e. managers communicating to their employees, but include all of the organization's stakeholders in the communication (Jones et al., 2004, p. 741). Hassan et al. (2011, p. 24) state that the communication climate within an organization is extremely important in order to maintain its efficiency. If an organization has a supportive communication climate, workers will be encouraged to participate in the communication, information will be shared freely and openly, and it will often result in conflicts being resolved in a more constructive way.

Kitchen and Daly (2002, p. 47) further argue that internal communication is vital in order for an organization to survive and be able to grow. Communication is believed to be very influential regarding the performance of an organization due to it providing substantial evidence of its goals and values (E. F. Harshman, & C. L. Harshman, 1999, p. 5). In order for communication to be successful during a change process, it is important that it promotes values such as trust within the organization, being transparent and honest throughout the process and respecting employees. Promoting these values in the communication process will give the change itself more credibility and thereby increase trust between managers and employees. Lippitt (1997, p. 19) states that internal communication allows employees to better support the goals of the organization and help them to remain motivated. Communicating increasingly face-to-face will also increase trust within the organization.

Employees tend to understand the change process better if they feel that the information regarding the change is high in quality (Allen et al., 2007, p. 196). The quality of the communication was based on its timeliness, truthfulness and how useful it was. On the other hand, if the quality of the information was perceived as poor, employees usually experienced more uncertainty regarding the change. Furthermore, in the study conducted by Allen et al. (2007, p. 198), the employees stated the importance of a close supervisor providing the relevant information during a change process. This was due to that these supervisors often provided information that was more job-specific and that addressed questions that reduced uncertainty. It was also stated that trust plays an important role in how the employees assess information throughout the change process (Allen et al., 2007, p. 199). This means that the more trust employees place in their managers and supervisors, the more credible the information is perceived.

Stanley et al. (2005, p. 457) state in their study that communication is vital in the process of conquering resistance to change. This statement has also been confirmed by Kotter (1995) who argued for the importance of communicating a clear vision in order for the employees to understand the reasons for change. On the other hand, Stanley et al. (2005, p. 457) claim that the management themselves can become critical and disapproving of the change if they are unable to overcome the resistance to change amongst employees through communication. It is therefore important that the management is aware and understands that it will take time to overcome resistance amongst employees. This knowledge will in turn decrease the risk of the management becoming discouraged to implement the change.

The importance of top-down communication, both oral and written, has been stressed by Covin and Kilmann (1990, p. 238) since it has had positive effects on larger implementations of change. As mentioned earlier, almost 70% of the change initiatives do not succeed (Nohria & Beer, 2000). According to Elving (2005, p. 690) it is important to have a clear communication strategy, as this would increase the willingness to change as the employees have trust in the organization and the management. A clear communication process is thereby stated to increase the effectiveness of an implementation process of change.

2.1.4. The Popcorn Model of Change

 When preparing for a larger organizational change, it is important to get all of the employees on board (Lidström & Bolter, 2017, p. 70). It is critical to get all of the employees to understand the meaning and benefit of the change. However, this is usually easier said than done. The Popcorn model is said to give insights about people during the different phases of the change process. The model is based on the 20-60-20-rule, meaning that the first 20% of the employees are willing to change immediately or "pop" when the manager first introduces the upcoming change. The other 60% are reserved and need more time and information in order to be willing to undertake the change. This means that they "pop" later than the first 20%. The last 20% represent the employees who do not see the positive impacts of the change and are skeptical and dissatisfied with the change. These are the ones that may never accept the change and thereby never "pop". According to Edwards et al. (1998, p. 7) dissatisfaction is often a result of a mismatch between the environmental conditions and the personal psychological needs. This means that there are several aspects that have to be taken into consideration when implementing a new change. Peoples' habits have strong power, but they may not be possible to change, which may increase resistance to the process. In order to undertake change and break habits, trust has to be included. Studies have shown that trust is a major factor that has to be included in order to make people change their habits (Mayer et al., 1995. p. 710). Simons and Peterson (2000, p. 102) argue that the power of working in a social constellation has shown to increase trust if everyone is working towards a common goal.

In accordance with the Popcorn model, Lidström and Bolter (2016, p. 106) state that an organizational change should be made in three dimensions. These are; *human*, *technology* and *place*. However, there are pitfalls within these dimensions that have to be handled with care. The first challenge concerns the *human dimension*, which involves the managers and how they should guide their employees. It is hard to implement a change if the people are not willing to undertake the change full-heartedly. This means that not only the employees should undergo the change, but rather all the people in the

organization, including top managers, should go through the change. If the leaders clearly show the way by "walking the talk", the employees will be more likely to follow (Woodward & Hendry, 2004, p.171; Kotter, 1995).

The second dimension is *technology* (Lidström & Bolter, 2016, pp. 108-109). The pitfall within this dimension is how the technology should be used. In A-FOs, the technology is the central standpoint in order to gain the wanted change. It is important that there is a good Internet connection as well as that the employees have portable computers in order to maintain mobility within the A-FO. In order for the employees to trust their managers, the managers have to trust their employees and give them the opportunity to work properly within the new environment. The third and last dimension is *place* (Lidström & Bolter, 2016, pp. 110-111). Many organizations move to an A-FO in order to lower the costs for the workspace. However, Lidström and Bolter argue that this should not be the primary factor for change. Even though moving to an A-FO can significantly help reduce the office space, the key is to transform to an A-FO that would fulfill the working needs of the employees. It is thereby important to listen to the employees, but without taking all of their wishes into the new implemented office as that can result in losing the sense and logic of the transformation. The question that managers need to ask themselves is; "What should be done in order to make all the popcorn 'pop'?".

2.2.   Work Environment

Wright and Davis (2003, p. 72) explain that the work environment consists of two factors; the characteristics of the job and the context of work. The characteristics of the job explain the employee's tasks and obligations and how these can improve the meaningfulness of the job and increase the possibilities for growth and development. Work context concerns the characteristics of the organization, such as its goals or reward systems. These two factors are easily affected by the organization and are external to the employee. Wright and Davis (2003, p. 71) state that organizations need to create a work environment that satisfies their employees and keeps them happy in order for the organization to decrease turnover.

Many researchers argue that the perception of work environments can be assessed by using many different variables such as how challenging or how autonomous the job is, how supportive the leaders are, how cooperation works between groups and how uncertain one's role is (L. A. James, & L. R. James, 1989, p. 739). Leadership is believed to have an especially large impact on employees' perception of the work environment since they may have a direct influence on the individual's work tasks (Amabile et al., 2004, p. 6). Furthermore, Amabile et al. (1996, p. 1155) argue that an employee's creativity may not only stem from their individual characteristics, but can also depend on the work environment. In this aspect, support from leaders within the organization is believed to create a work environment that supports and promotes creativity (Amabile et al., 2004, p. 16). This support is displayed by including employees when making an important decision, providing emotional support and recognizing when employees have done something well (Amabile et al., 2004, p. 25).

Lee and Brand (2005, p. 324) state that if employees are continuously distracted, due to noise for example, their satisfaction with the physical work environment may decrease. On the other hand, if employees feel in control over the physical work environment, they are more likely to be satisfied with it (Lee & Brand, 2005, p. 330). By providing the

individual with more control over their workplace, such as in a flexible office, satisfaction with the work environment may increase. Increased control over the physical work environment is also stated to have a positive effect on job satisfaction. Moreover, Carlopio (1996, p. 339) argues that physical work environment satisfaction has a positive relationship with employee job satisfaction. Budie et al. (2019, p. 47) also found that work environment satisfaction is vital for organizations since it affects their productivity as well as their performance.

Researchers have shown that satisfaction, motivation, behavior and performance at work are variables that are affected by the physical work environment (Carlopio & Gardner, 1992, p. 580; Sundstrom et al. 1982, p. 379). A well-designed work environment promotes both the physical and mental strength of the employees in their daily work performance (Makhbul et al., 2007, p. 50). Factors that have a great impact on the working environment are seating and lighting, which play a major role in ensuring employees' welfare. Furthermore, the ergonomic factors are critical, as the seating for example, should fit the employee, rather than the employees fitting into the work environment. If these health factors are ignored the work stress levels tend to increase. According to Carlopio and Gardner (1992, p. 580) the openness in the office is an important factor within the physical work environment and the office design as a whole. Barling et al. (2005, p. 220) state that the future of the work is seen as the future of the office design. However, even though the physical work environment is highly important and requires consideration, the social and organizational work environment is also something that needs to be considered in order for employees to be satisfied with the entire work environment (Rolfö, 2018, p. 142).

2.2.1. Activity-Based Flexible Office Model

Today, poor work design can lead to increased conflict and thereby stress among the employees (Ross et al., 2017, p. 6). This has led to employees resigning and thereby the physical work environment is of great importance for an organization's continuous growth. As a result, A-FOs have become increasingly more popular in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Australia as well as in New Zealand (Hjalmarsson, 2019). The vision and goal of implementing an A-FO is achieved by giving the employees more space and ability to choose where and when to work depending on the task (Van Koetsveld & Kamperman, 2011, p. 305). The A-FOs are designed in a way to improve teamwork, personal responsibility as well as to increase knowledge sharing among the workers (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, pp. 340-341). However, when implementing an A-FO it is important to consider that different days involve different work tasks and thereby other needs. Therefore, A-FOs have to involve places with opportunity for the employees to isolate themselves, take important calls and discussions behind closed doors (Sundstrom et al. 1982, p. 390). Apart from this, there has to be areas allowing teamwork and interactions between different project groups.

Wohlers and Hertel (2017, p. 470) have made a model in order to illustrate the effects of A-FOs and its consequences on individuals, teams as well as the organization as a whole in both short-term and long-term perspectives. Figure 1 provides an overview of the *Activity-Based Flexible Office Model.*
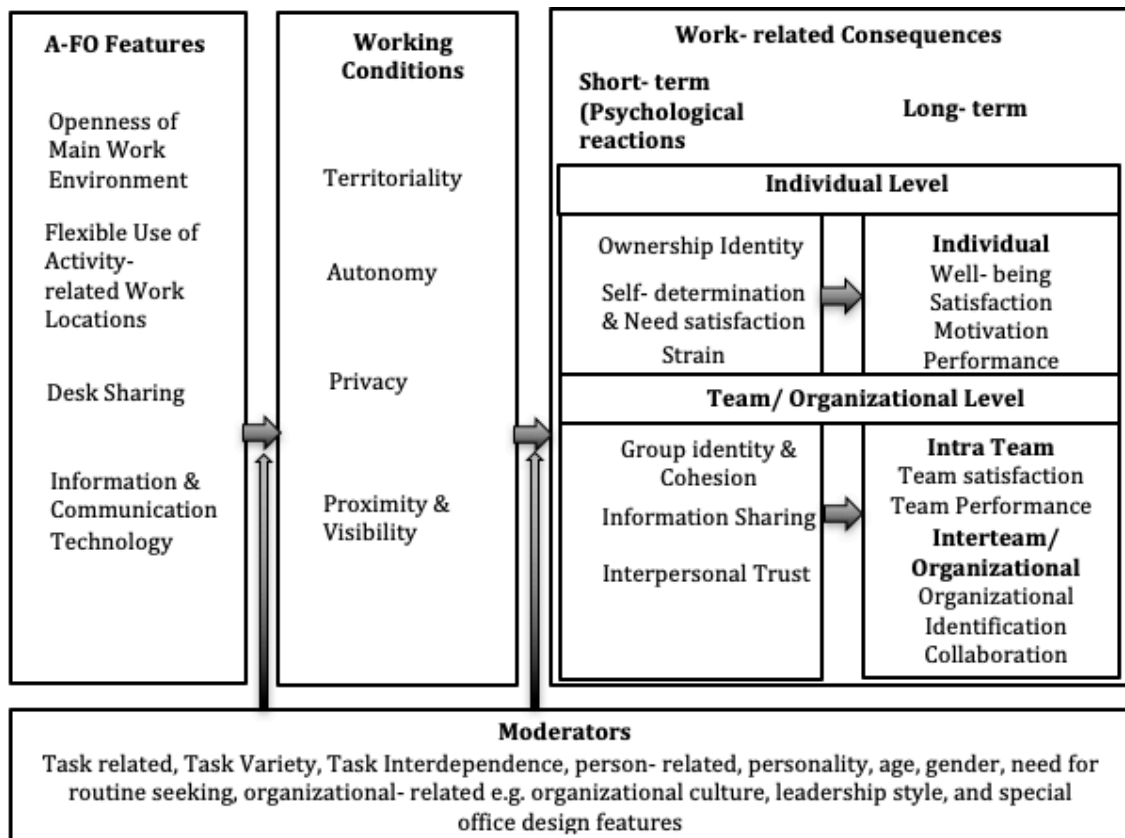
Figure 1. The Activity-Based Flexible Office Model (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017, p. 470).

When an A-FO is implemented, different features arise that will have effects on the working conditions (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017, p. 470). Four categories within working conditions that A-FOs have an impact on are: *Territoriality, Autonomy, Privacy* as well as *Proximity and Visibility. Territoriality* is explained by Brown (2009, p. 49) and is defined as "behavioral expressions of feelings of ownership towards social or physical objects". Brown states that employees express their feelings of ownership by personalization of the office environment through both physical and social boundaries, which A-FOs challenges in two ways. First, the employees will not have assigned working desks and thereby not be able to personalize their working environment (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 88). Second, individual desks do not exist in A-FOs, which means that employee ownership, and identity can be lost (Konar et al. 1982, p. 562).

Autonomy at work refers to the freedom of being able to choose where and when to work (Wohlers & Hertel 2017, p. 472). According to van der Voordt (2004, p. 134) the most frequently reported goals for implementing A-FOs is to increase the autonomy of the employees, regarding work scheduling as well as the choice of work environment. Employees that are working in A-FOs have high flexibility when it comes to where to work within the office, which enables them to match their task with the requirements needed. The theory of self-determination indicates that the need for autonomy is important as the desire to experience freedom and choice of action is highly valued and are considered as basic psychological needs that a human has (Deci & Ryan 1985, p. 74). It is important to satisfy these needs as it would affect the performance and behavior of the employees as well as their well-being. Therefore, it is essential that A-FOs feature the factor of *autonomy*. Furthermore, *privacy* in the work environment refers to employees being able to control disturbances as well as interruptions (Wohlers & Hertel 2017, p. 473). Employees sometimes experience low levels of architectural privacy as they

complain about noise, visual exposure, interruptions followed by unwanted interactions with others within the A-FOs (Charles & Veitch, 2002, p. 3), since these environments provide a lack of privacy.

Physical proximity and visibility of employees refers to being able to increase the possibility to communicate in the office environment (Wohlers & Hertel 2017, p. 475). *Physical proximity* refers to the office environment and the distance between the employees (Allen & Gerstberger, 1973, p. 2). As this affects the opportunities for the employees to communicate it is important that the office conditions within A-FOs take this into account. According to Mayer et al. (1995, p. 710), A-FOs reduce the *proximity and visibility* of team partners (intrateam) and therefore it is important to create trust in A-FOs, even though it might be difficult. Furthermore, Wholers and Hertel (2017, p. 475) meant that the visibility in A-FOs tends to be higher compared to the" traditional" office environments. Although the communication within certain teams tends to decrease, the intercommunication between teams tends to increase within A-FOs as a result of the increased visibility (Wohlers & Hertel 2017, p. 475). This shows that A-FOs support the communication and interactions among employees from other teams (inter-team processes) but could have a negative effect on the intra-team processes. These four factors within working conditions will, according to the Activity-Based Flexible Office Model, have an effect on the work related consequences.

Apart from this, there are moderating factors that affect the relationship between A-FO features and the relationship between the employees' attitude, behavior, satisfaction etc. and the working environment (Wohlers & Hertel 2017, pp. 476). Possible moderators could be; task variety which means that this should be optimal for people who work in A-FOs as they can switch workstation depending on their task. However, it could be less beneficial for people working with a low task variety. Moreover, personal-related moderator factors such as employee characteristics regarding age, gender, personality and individual needs also have an impact on employees' reaction towards the environment (Maher & Von Hippel, 2005, p. 220). Thereby this has an effect on the relationship between the design of the office and the outcomes. Other moderators that affect are the organizational characteristics such as the organizational culture and leadership behavior. As mentioned earlier, A-FOs are not suitable for all types of organizations nor all organizational cultures (Wohlers & Hertel 2017, p. 479). It is therefore important to keep the existing organizational culture and characteristics in mind before implementing an A-FO. On the other hand, the possible drawbacks of using this model is that it is not as widely spread as the model by for example, Kotter or Lewin. As a result, this model will be used as a complement to other theories as we believe that the model of A-FO contributes with a broad understanding. Furthermore, the overview of the effects of the implementation process of an A-FO will add value since it will later be used for reflection and for drawing conclusions.

2.2.2. Activity-Based Flexible Offices and Need-Supply Fit

Another model concerning A-FOs (see Figure 2) was introduced by Gerdenitsch et al. (2018), showing the importance of *need-supply fit* in this type of work environment. This means that the work environment must support the needs of the employees' work tasks (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 276). Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 274) state that the A-FO office should be designed in a way that supports the workers perceived fit regarding their workspaces and their daily work activities. The investigation was carried out during three

weeks, and performed by using a longitudinal study (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 273). They investigated the changes of *perceived need-supply fit, distraction, interaction between teams* as well as to what extent the employees felt *satisfied* with their work environment after the relocation to an A-FO. This study was carried out after one and eight months after the relocation.
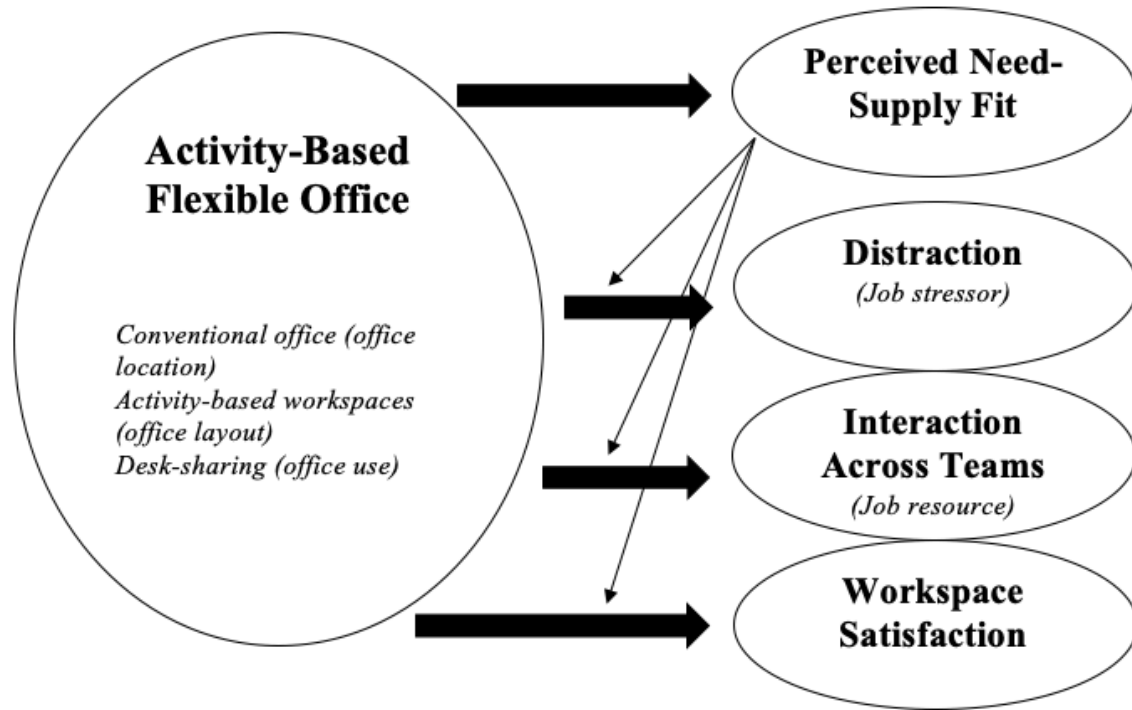
Figure 2. The Activity-Based Flexible Office and its Effects (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 275).

The four thick lines indicate the expected main effects of an A-FO implementation, which are *perceived need-supply fit, distraction, interaction across teams* and *workplace satisfaction* (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 275). The three thin lines imply that *perceived need-supply fit* may have an effect on the other three main effects. In their study, they found that the *perceived need-supply fit* increased when changing the office environment to an A-FO (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 284). This means that an A-FO is better designed in order to fit the employees' needs and their work activities.

According to Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 277) an A-FO redesign could have an impact on the *perceived need-supply fit*. This is partly defined in the Person-Environment Fit theory, showing that stress does not arise from either the person or the environment by themselves, but rather by their *fit* with one another (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 2). There are different types of literature that define fit and there are various forms of fit as well. The *need-supply fit* conceptualized by Cable et al. (2002, p. 875) states that there is a fit between the needs of a person and the environmental supplies. Furthermore, *need-supply fit* is a better concept to use in order to determine the relationship between the environment and the individuals. Also, individuals have different preferences when it comes to the working environment, as some individuals are able to perform well in a loud working environment, whilst others perform worse under these conditions (Seddigh et al., 2014, p. 4) According to Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 277), *need-supply fit* is therefore high when the employees' needs are satisfied and matches the working environment.

Apart from this effect, there are other effects of an A-FO redesign regarding *distraction* (Gerdenitsch et al. 2018, p. 277). Researchers have shown that open office landscapes have a negative impact on the concentrated work of individuals. A-FOs on the other hand, allow the employees to choose other working areas depending on work tasks and can thereby avoid noise to a greater extent. According to Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 277), distractions would decrease after an organization has implemented an A-FO. Other possible effects of an A-FO redesign are on the *interaction across teams*. Wholers and Hertel (2017, p. 475) state that the visibility in A-FOs are higher in contrast to the" traditional" office environments. As a result, the interactions among workers increases. Also, as everyone shares desks, the office layout is seen as a way of increasing conversations among workers (Appel-Meulenbroek, 2010, p. 200). Based on this, Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 277) believe that increased visibility and proximity among workers from separate teams would lead to increased interactions across the teams due to the implemented A-FO.

Another possible effect that an implemented A-FO work design has is on the *workspace satisfaction* (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 278). According to Hoendervanger et al. (2016, p. 72) studies have shown that satisfaction amongst employees can increase if they are encouraged to switch work places whenever they want. Within their model, Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 279) argue that a redesign to an A-FO would increase the workers' satisfaction for two main reasons. First, since the employees would perceive that the new working environment would suit their work tasks better than the traditional way of working, as the new A-FO has dedicated working areas made for certain tasks. Secondly, the employees have the ability to choose where to work depending on how crowded some working areas are, and also depending on what activity based workspaces they want to use. This means that they can avoid noise as this has been seen as a main source of dissatisfaction in A-FOs (Oldham, 1988, Sundstrom et al. 1982, both cited in Gerdenitsch et al. 2018, p. 279).

Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 287) established that an A-FO provides employees with the tools to create their own work environment, that is a better fit to their work activity. *Distractions* were also found to decrease in an A-FO compared to a "traditional" working environment (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 284). The authors stated that interaction between teams as well as the work environment satisfaction increased in the A-FO. Furthermore, it was also found that *perceived need-supply fit* has a minor positive effect on the *interaction between teams* as well as on *work environment satisfaction* in an A-FO redesign. This means that employees that perceive the *need-supply fit* as high, are more likely to be satisfied with the work environment and interact outside of their own team (Grerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 280). However, this effect did not exist between *perceived need-supply fit* and *distraction* (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018, p. 284). As a result, the study conducted by Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 293) clearly states that an A-FO increases the fit between the working environment and the employee's needs and decreases possible distractions. When a *perceived need-supply fit* is present, satisfaction with the work environment as well as interactions between employees will increase in an A-FO, compared to the "traditional" office.

Concluding, the process of designing and implementing A-FOs can be complex (Rolfö, 2018, p. 23). Although the physical factors are important, other aspects need to be taken into consideration in order for the implementation of the A-FO to be successful. As mentioned earlier, implementing an A-FO is not only a question regarding a change in

the physical environment, but also a question of focusing on the human factors (Rolfö, 2018, p. 142). This will ensure that the implementation will run as smoothly as possible, with support from both the management as well as employees.

2.3.   Employee Satisfaction

As mentioned by Gerdenitsch et al. (2018), there are several factors that may affect the success of the A-FO. These are all important to consider, but satisfaction or employee satisfaction seems to be a highly important factor since it has been mentioned by many previous researchers (e.g. Elangovan, 2001). Both in the change process and in the implementation of the A-FO. Therefore, this section will have a greater focus on employee satisfaction compared to the other factors mentioned by Gerdenitsch et al. (2018).

As previously mentioned, increased employee satisfaction has been determined as a reason for the implementation of an A-FO. Also, as mentioned by Lidström and Bolter (2017, p. 70), it is important to ensure employee satisfaction when implementing a change, since skeptical and dissatisfied employees often resist change attempts. Eisenbach et al. (1999, p. 82) mention a model that considers dissatisfaction with the status quo as vital for the implementation of a change. On the other hand, J. Ford and L. Ford (1994, p. 775) state that change can also occur through attraction. This means that it is important for leaders to create an attractive vision, which may be more satisfying for employees than the current state. Below follows previous research on employee satisfaction, but also on job and work environment satisfaction, which is believed to be strongly connected to an employee's satisfaction at work.

Van der Voordt (2004, p. 139) refers to employee satisfaction as the degree to which the working environment and the wants and requirements of the employees are matched. This can refer to specific requirements of the work assignments, the social environment in the workplace, the physical aspects of the office and a connection between these three factors. The private life of an employee can also affect employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction with the work environment, i.e. workspace satisfaction, was investigated by Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 273). As previously mentioned, the conclusion by this research was that employees seemed more satisfied in an A-FO. Schneider and Snyder (1975, p. 319) claim that job satisfaction can be explained as an individual's evaluation of certain conditions that are present on the job or specific results that occur due to having a job (such as salary and security). Job satisfaction can thereby be explained by an individual's view and opinion of their job, which in turn are influenced by the specific and distinctive conditions that exist in or is a result of a workplace.

It has been stated that employee satisfaction can increase if the job design combines the significance of the task, autonomy, variety of skills and task identity as well as with feedback about employee performance (Dale et al., 1997, Evans & Lindsey, 1996, both cited in Eskildsen & Dahlgaard, 2010, p. 1083). This means that it is important to create employee empowerment and involvement in their work assignment as well as providing the opportunity for the employees to feel ownership of their assignment and have the possibility to rotate between tasks. Furthermore, Matzler et al. (2004, p. 1179) claim that employee satisfaction is a significant driver when it comes to quality and productivity. This has been stated since satisfied employees are more likely to continuously strive for improvement and to increase the quality of their work. Satisfied employees are thereby

seen to improve organizational performance. It has also been stated that employees who are involved in satisfactory relationships where commitment and trust is high are more likely to be devoted to the strategies of the organization (Turner Parish et al., 2008, p. 36). This means that it is important for the organization to create these types of relationships in order to increase employee satisfaction and commitment to organizational goals. The study found that it is particularly important that managers take on the responsibility to create relationships that aim to improve employee commitment, trust and satisfaction (Turner Parish et al., 2008, p. 45). The level of commitment that satisfied employees feel will in turn affect the success of an organizational change (Turner Parish et al., 2008, p. 32).

Furthermore, Osei-Bonsu (2014, p. 142) claims that employees will be more positive to organizational change if they are satisfied with the communication concerning the change process itself. This statement is also strengthened by Goris (2007, p. 746) who found in his study that employees who are satisfied with communication will also experience improved job performance as well as increased job satisfaction. Also, work environment satisfaction is believed to positively affect employee job satisfaction (Carlopio, 1996, p. 339). This means that employees that are satisfied with the working environment often tend to be more satisfied with their job.

DiPietro et al. (2019, p. 143) claim that job satisfaction plays an important role in the process and likelihood of employee turnover. Elangovan (2001, p. 163) found that job satisfaction affects the commitment that an employee feels towards the organization and in turn, commitment affects turnover intentions. The study showed that if an employee's commitment was low, the probability of them leaving the organization was high. The conclusion can thereby be drawn that if an employee's job satisfaction is low, this will indirectly increase the probability of them quitting their job. Affecting satisfaction by altering certain job characteristics, such as implementing an A-FO, will not affect turnover intentions directly, but it will affect commitment and thereby affect turnover indirectly (Elangovan, 2001, pp. 163-164). However, an employee that has decided to leave will do so, even if the organization tries to affect job satisfaction by changing job characteristics. The study also found that stress negatively affects job satisfaction. Moreover, Wright and Davis (2003) conducted a study regarding job satisfaction in the public sector. The study found that organizations need to consider how the work environment can influence the insights and experiences of the employees if they want to increase job satisfaction (Wright & Davis, 2003, p. 84). It was also stated that the organization needs to have clear goals in order to avoid employee role confusion and maintain employee job satisfaction. Public organizations also need to increase the communication regarding employees' obligations on the job. If employees' knowledge of their work tasks improves, employee job satisfaction will in turn increase.

Van der Voordt (2004, p. 134) claims that forfeiting your own desk conflicts with an individual's privacy and ability to express one's status in a workplace. This may in turn affect employee satisfaction negatively. However, he argues that this can be reimbursed by having a good office design that satisfies different employee needs. De Been and Beijer (2014, p. 153) found in their study that employees in A-FOs are more satisfied with the design and outline of the office compared to employees working in a closed office space. This was mainly due to the increase in the freedom of choosing where and when you work. On the other hand, the study found that people working in A-FOs are less satisfied with the working climate. Van der Voordt (2004, p. 134) continues by

explaining that resistance to change may decrease and satisfaction may increase due to the possible advantages of an A-FO, such as increased flexibility.

Budie et al. (2019, p. 47) stated in their study that the indoor working climate is not particularly satisfactory for the employees who use the open areas in an A-FO. Satisfaction regarding personalization of the workplace or possibility to express one's status was also perceived to be lower in this type of office space. On the other hand, the study also showed that employees who used the enclosed areas in the A-FO perceived the working environment as satisfactory. Furthermore, employees who spend most of their day outside of the office were increasingly satisfied with the functionality and flexibility of an A-FO space. Since the job satisfaction of the employees seemed to differ depending on what type of job assignments they had, Budie et al. (2019, p. 47) stated the importance of researching the needs and wants of the employees before implementing the A-FO in order to secure satisfaction. As found by previous studies, Budie et al. (2019, p. 47) also saw a positive effect on satisfaction due to the increase of communication and interaction in an A-FO space.

2.4.   Summary and Discussion of Theoretical Framework

In this section, a summary of the theoretical framework will follow along with a discussion for why each theory and model was chosen. Kotter's model of change was chosen as one of the main theories for the theoretical framework chapter since it is viewed as one of the most important theories within change management until this day (Appelbaum et al., 2012, p. 765). Although it has received some criticism over the years, many researchers and organizations still use it in order to implement change. Since it plays such a vital role in explaining how organizations should address and implement change, we found it crucial to explain the theory further in order to be able to later apply it to our findings. The model is also extensive and takes many different aspects into account which provides a strong foundation to build arguments on while there is still some room for contributions. One key aspect of Kotter's model of change is communication, something that has been argued for by many other researchers as an important factor within the change process.

Lewin's three-step model of change further reflects the importance of having a communication strategy during a major organizational change (Robbins, 2003). This model gives a broader overview of the comprehension of an organizational change and how to involve and communicate the upcoming change to everyone affected. We are aware of the limitations regarding Lewin's model, as has been discussed above. However, this model will be used as a complement to models such as Kotter's and the Activity-Based Flexible Office Model, which are more elaborated and extensive. Furthermore, as communication has been shown to have an important role in both change management and the implementation of A-FOs, we felt that it would be necessary to elaborate more on the topic. Since this thesis will focus on the A-FO change process, deeper knowledge on communication is vital in order to fully understand the process. This is due to the fact that many successful change attempts rely on effective communication (e.g. Kotter, 1995; Gill, 2002). As previously mentioned, Rolfö (2018, p. 147) argues that communication is very important when implementing an A-FO in order to ensure that employees feel involved and can contribute to the implementation of the new working environment. Oakland and Tanner (2007, p. 11) as well as Nelissen and van Selm (2008, p. 313) also state that communication is vital for the success of the implementation of change and that

a lack of communication can increase resistance to change. The importance of communication in a change process can thereby not be understated.

The Popcorn Model was chosen since Lidström and Bolter, who are well-established researchers and implementers of the A-FO, created it. This fact gave additional weight to the importance and validity of the model. The model is focused on A-FOs but also has a large emphasis on the change process and how to get everybody in the organization on the same track. This emphasizes the same aspects as Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change, where Kotter (1995) states the importance of creating a guiding coalition which motivates and inspires the rest of the organization to contribute to the change. The Popcorn Model thereby also emphasizes on the importance of employee involvement and satisfaction when implementing a change, which has been mentioned throughout the thesis. As previously mentioned, the Popcorn Model divides the employees into 20-60-20, showing the spread of employee engagement and how they perceive the introduced change (Lidström & Bolter, 2017, p. 70).

Moreover, in order to fully understand the meaning and importance of an A-FO, it would be of significant value to first understand the importance of the work environment as a whole, not simply with a focus on A-FOs. By providing previous research on the topic of work environment (e.g. Lee & Brand, 2005; Wright & Davis, 2003; Amabile et al., 1996), we believe that a better understanding of the concept of A-FO can be gained. The previous research also shows the large impact that the work environment can have on both the employee and the organization as a whole as well as the importance of choosing an appropriate work environment for the organization. The literature continues by stating important factors in order to achieve a positive and effective working environment, which will be useful when drawing conclusions later on. Furthermore, as the focus of this thesis is partly on the A-FO, we believed that it was important to go further into its possible outcomes. Wohlers' and Hertel's (2017) model was thereby chosen in order to show the effects and consequences that an A-FO implementation can have on individuals and teams, seen from both a short- and long-term perspective (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017, p. 470).

Apart from the A-FO model mentioned above, another model concerning the A-FO concept was chosen. This research presented by Gerdenitsch et al. (2018) provides increased knowledge of the topic of an A-FO and its potential impact. This model relates to more general theories and concepts regarding A-FOs and the work environment as well as to employee satisfaction. Thereby further emphasizing the impact that an A-FO has on *perceived need-supply fit, distraction, interaction between teams* and *satisfaction*, which provides relevant insights for the following analysis. This model also has a focus on the importance of communication and satisfaction, which is emphasized in the frameworks and theories mentioned above, both regarding change management and the A-FO. As previously mentioned, if employees are satisfied with communication, employee job satisfaction may increase (Goris, 2007, p. 746). Throughout the thesis, the importance of employee satisfaction for both the implementation of change but also, more specifically, for a successful A-FO has been clearly stated. Due to several authors claiming the importance of satisfied employees in order for a successful change process as well as one of the main reasons for implementing an A-FO (e.g. Elangovan, 2001; Van der Voordt, 2004, Osei-Bonsu, 2014), we believed that it was important to elaborate more on this topic. By explaining the concept of employee satisfaction more thoroughly and stating what factors may affect it as well as what factors that satisfaction can affect, a deeper understanding for the topic has been gained. This was done in order to, later on, be able

to understand how employees' perceptions and satisfaction may have affected and been affected by the A-FO change process at a specific organization.

To conclude, it is important to be aware of the potential drawbacks of each theory and model that is being used. These have been taken into consideration, but have been determined to not affect the results of this thesis. Further discussion about the validity of theories and models will be discussed under the Literature Search. The models and theories were chosen since they are believed to add value to the thesis and many different researchers have assured their legitimacy. This thesis will use these models and theories as a framework for answering the research questions regarding how the perception of the change process concerning A-FOs differ between managers and employees.

3. Scientific Methodology

In this chapter, the scientific methodological choices of the thesis will be presented. To begin with, the choice of subject as well as the authors' pre-understandings will be reviewed followed by a discussion of the ontological and epistemological assumptions. Further, an explanation of the chosen research approach and design of the thesis will be presented. The chapter concludes with clarification of the method used for searching for literature and theories as well as criticism of the sources.

3.1.   Choice of Subject

We are two students currently studying the Service Management Program and the International Business Program at Umeå School of Business and Economics, with a focus on management. Throughout our four years of studying Business Administration we have developed a growing interest within the area of change management. This is an area where both of us want to increase and broaden our knowledge and something that is very relevant in today's global working environment. As mentioned in many previous studies, change is something that greatly influences organizations and people in today's society. Also, since both of us are currently applying for jobs, we found it interesting to investigate a change that affects the working environment. After conducting some research, we found that A-FOs are becoming increasingly common in Sweden, both in the private and public sector. It is thereby very likely that future employers would have such an office type and as a result, it is possible that we will work in an A-FO in the future. This fact has created an increasing interest in the topic, since we find it important to learn more about our potential future working environment. As previously mentioned, change management is especially important in today's fast paced society, which makes the topic relevant to investigate further. Gaining increased knowledge on change management would thereby contribute to overcoming future obstacles in our changing society.

3.2.   Pre-understandings

According to Gilje and Grimen (2007, p. 179) it is important for researchers to have a pre- understanding in order to be able to understand the world around us. This is one of the basic assumptions within scientific philosophy and pre-understandings would have an impact on how one understands and perceives things. In order to determine what previously obtained knowledge we had on the research topic, a discussion regarding our pre-understandings has been conducted in the beginning of this study. The chosen research area focuses mainly on change management and A-FOs, which we both have had some prior knowledge of, though somewhat limited, due to our previous studies. One of the authors has had a great focus on management throughout the fourth year of studying. During one semester, change management was addressed but to a rather limited extent. When the other one of us was on an exchange semester, global business and organizational change was in focus. Both of these previous experiences created an increased interest for the topic of change and a desire to learn more. We are both aware of the fact that change is a constant factor in today's society and we understand that it has a major impact on organizations. One pre-understanding that has later been confirmed by our literature search was that many organizations struggle with the implementation of change. We thereby believe that organizational change and change management is very complex and something that requires immense effort in order for it to be successful.

Furthermore, A-FOs are something that we both had heard of prior to conducting this study. We had mostly heard negative reports, where the implementation of an A-FO had not been successful. However, we knew quite little of what this actually entailed since none of us have worked at a company where they have had an A-FO structure. Due to this pre-understanding, we had a slightly negative view on the implementation of A-FOs and its effect on employees. However, when starting to research the area more thoroughly, we found that the implementation of an A-FO can often be successful. Also, both of us have worked as part time employees at a company where they have an open office landscape. Thereby, we have both experienced how it is to work without a specified, assigned seat as well as not having your own office. After we had worked at this company for a year, they changed their office location. We therefore had the opportunity to experience the change of moving to a newly built office with modern furniture, lighting and office design. We both believe that this experience could contribute to our study while holding the interviews as we can understand what the employees are going through to some extent.

Our previous knowledge has increased our interest in the chosen research area and will try extensively to not let these preconceptions affect our research in a negative way. We believe that our knowledge within management will help improve the quality of our study and our lack of knowledge on A-FOs in particular can help reduce the risk of prejudice that may affect our research negatively.

3.3.   Ontological Assumption

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, more specifically it is concerned with what the nature of social entities is. There are two orientations within ontology, which are referred to as objectivism (positivism) and constructionism (interpretivism) (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 32). The central concern is whether the social entities should be considered as objectivism, meaning that social reality is objective and external to the researcher. Or if it should be considered as constructionism, meaning that social reality is subjective and socially constructed (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 46).

When using an objective perspective, reality is viewed as something that is built by solid entities that can be tested and measured (MacIntosh & O'Gorman, 2015, p. 56). This means that things do not exist unless they are experienced. Objectivism also means that no matter who would conduct the test, the concerned entities would contribute with the same result. The subjective assumption (constructionism) within the ontological position views reality as something that can undertake multiple forms (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14). The social world consists of different social relationships, organizations and division of labor and the social world is not a given. Instead, reality and the social world are reinforced through interactions between humans. In contrast to the objective standpoint of positivism, reality can take multiple forms, which means that no one experiences the exact same reality (MacIntosh & O'Gorman, 2015, p. 57).

Since the aim of this study is to investigate how managers' and employees' perceptions differ regarding the A-FO change process, the results from the data collection is expected to be subjective. This is because the respondents seldom experience reality in the same way. Since reality and the social world that will be investigated is expected to be subjective due to the influence of the people that will be interviewed, the interpretivist perspective of constructionism was chosen. If instead positivism would have been chosen

as the ontological assumption, the aim of this research would not be able to be fulfilled due to the objectivity of this approach. The assumption of positivism would not allow for the investigation of how perceptions differ between people, since it assumes reality to be objective and the same for everyone. Positivism was thereby considered as unsuitable for this study due to its objectivity. Therefore, the interpretivist perspective of constructionism was preferred since it will allow for the gathering of a deeper understanding of the chosen topic and make it possible to achieve the purpose of this thesis.

3.4.   Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology addresses the analysis of knowledge and what it is believed to be acceptable knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 26). It thereby concerns the relationship between the researcher and the phenomena that is being researched (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 47). One of the main issues of this assumption is whether the social world can be examined in the same way as the natural sciences, using the same techniques and principles, or not (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 27). If it is believed that it is important to use the same techniques as when studying the natural sciences, the researcher has taken the position of positivism. Positivist researchers argue that reality is independent and the only acceptable knowledge concerns phenomena that can be observed and measured (Collis & Hussey, 2014, pp. 44, 47). They thereby try to conduct their research as independently and objectively as possible. As a result, positivist researchers often use quantitative methods to analyze acceptable knowledge. An example of such a study could be using a survey, since the researcher will not interact with what is being studied and can thereby be more objective.

On the other hand, interpretivism is a position within epistemology, which developed as a result of the criticism and believed insufficiency of positivism (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 44; Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 27). This position disapproves of using the same methods as the natural sciences when studying the social world. These researchers believe that the social world is highly subjective and thereby differs a lot from the world of natural sciences (Smith, 1983, p. 8). They believe that knowledge stems from the participant's subjective beliefs and the researchers are thereby more concerned with understanding human behavior and actions (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 46; Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 27). Instead of taking an objective stance, an interpretivist researcher is involved with what is being researched. Therefore, interpretivist researchers often rely on qualitative methods to analyze what is acceptable knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 45).

As previously mentioned, the goal of this research is to investigate the perceptions of different people within an organization, which means that the knowledge gathered from the research is believed to be highly subjective. The authors of this thesis therefore believe that reality is subjective and as a result, different between individuals. By gathering the subjective knowledge of the individual's perception of the change process, the aim of the thesis will be fulfilled and it will enable the gaining of a deeper understanding. We have thereby chosen to take an interpretivist position within epistemology. Furthermore, we believe that the researcher can be highly involved in what is being researched due to their own pre-understandings and actions. As a result, a qualitative method would be a suitable way of analyzing the knowledge provided by the respondents. Moreover, the reasons for not choosing positivism as the ontological assumption of this thesis also apply for the epistemological assumption. For example, our beliefs contradict with the positivist view,

such as reality being objective. Also, since the aim of this thesis is not to gather knowledge by performing quantitative methods such as observing and measuring a phenomenon, the positivist assumption would not be suitable. This assumption would also require objectivity from the researcher and ensure that they do not affect the research phenomena. The objectivity of this assumption would make it impossible to answer the research questions and disagrees with the nature of this study, which is another reason for why the positivist view would not be suitable. As a result, the interpretivist assumption was believed to be the most suitable for this study, since it fulfills the purpose of the thesis and allows for the comparison of subjective opinions and perceptions.

3.5. Research Approach

There are two types of approaches when conducting research, deductive and inductive (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 7). In a deductive study, the researchers develop, test and analyze a conceptual and theoretical structure by conducting empirical observations. This type of study is often referred to as investigating something broad and general and then drawing particular and specific conclusions. The researcher that uses a deductive approach creates different hypotheses that are based on a theory foundation (Bryman & Bell, 2015, pp. 23-24). In the beginning of the research, the researchers try to find different theories, which they can base their hypotheses on. When they have stated their hypotheses, the researchers begin to collect data followed by an analysis of the findings where they are able to determine if their hypotheses should be accepted or rejected. After this process is done, the researchers can draw general conclusions that can adjust the chosen theory in the beginning of the process.

On the other hand, an inductive approach is more or less the opposite of a deductive approach (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 7). This means that researchers that use an inductive approach develop new theory based on prior observation of an empirical reality, instead of testing hypotheses that are built on theory. In other words, inductive research can draw more general conclusions from previous subjective observations. As a result, theory is viewed as the outcome of the conducted research (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 25). An inductive approach is often associated with a qualitative research method, just like a deductive approach is associated with a quantitative research method, even though this does not always have to be the case.

As this study aims to investigate the chosen topic based on the ontological assumption of constructionism and the epistemological assumption of interpretivism, an inductive approach is seen as the most suitable. An inductive approach was chosen since the observations on which conclusions will be drawn are highly subjective. The purpose is also to gain a deeper understanding of the chosen research area and thereby be able to generate new theories. General conclusions will then be drawn based on the previous observations, which is in accordance with the inductive approach. Furthermore, since the aim is not to create hypotheses in order to draw specific and unbiased conclusions, a deductive approach would not have been suitable. Also, since this study will investigate a specific organization's change process to an A-FO, with a focus on managers' and employees' perception, a deductive approach would not be suitable since it originates from a general standpoint. Due to the subjective nature of this study, it would not be possible to generalize the results beyond the respondents, which means that possible and specific hypotheses cannot be accepted or rejected. As a result, an inductive approach was chosen as the most suitable for this thesis.

3.6.   Research Design

According to Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 49), research design presents an outline for how the researcher should collect and analyze data. Before conducting a research, it is thereby important to decide which research design to use. Research design can also be explained as the plan for how the research questions will be answered (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 163-164). The first step is to choose whether to use a quantitative, qualitative or mixed method for your research. A quantitative research aims to quantify the data collection and analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015, pp. 37-38). This often means that quantitative research takes a deductive approach in order to be able to test different theories. Also, since quantitative research believes that reality is objective, it often has a focus on positivism. Another way to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research is the use of numeric and non-numeric data, where quantitative research often uses numeric data, such as numbers, and qualitative research often uses non-numeric data, such as words (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 165). However, it is important to point out that both types of research often combine numeric and non-numeric data. Furthermore, quantitative research focuses on the relationship between different factors that can be numerically assessed and analyzed with statistical methods. Qualitative research, on the other hand, focuses more on words in the data collection and analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 38). This often results in an inductive approach in order to be able to create theories. Qualitative research frequently argues that reality is subjective and thereby often takes on a more interpretivist focus. The subjectivity of qualitative research means that researchers often focus on the meaning behind the respondent's words and the relationships between these meanings (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 168). As a result, a conceptual framework can be developed in order to contribute to existing research.

Since the research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the A-FO change process by examining managers' and employees' perceptions, there will be a greater focus on words and themes in our data collection and analysis and no emphasis will be put on testing different theories. As a result, a qualitative research design has been chosen for this thesis. A qualitative research design suits the purpose of the thesis as well as agrees with the chosen stances of ontology (constructionism) and epistemology (interpretivism). The choice of an inductive research approach has also been proven as suitable for qualitative research. Since the goal of this thesis is to investigate subjective views of the A-FO change process, in-depth interviews would thereby be more appropriate rather than performing different measurements as in quantitative research. Furthermore, when performing qualitative research, it may be easy for the researchers to become biased since they are highly involved with what is being researched (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 27). This would not have been suitable if the research design would have been quantitative, since it emphasizes on objectivity. It is thereby important to be aware of the risk of bias in order to try to remain as objective as possible and to not affect the results of the study negatively. Also, since the goal of the research is not to test different theories based on quantitative data, the results will not be generalizable beyond the focus group of this study. A quantitative research design would also not have been aligned with the chosen ontological and epistemological, as well as unsuitable regarding the inductive research approach.

Furthermore, the nature of the research can either be descriptive, evaluative, explanatory, exploratory or a combination of the four (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 164). Exploratory research is often used to gain insight about the chosen research topic and to acquire a

better understanding of a specific issue (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 174-175). Examples of exploratory research are literature reviews and in-depth interviews. The interviews in an exploratory research are typically somewhat unstructured in order to fully understand the perspective of the respondent. As the characteristics of an exploratory research design matches the aim of this thesis, it is viewed as an appropriate research design. This thesis does not aim to gain profiles of people or situations, establish causal relationships or research how well something is working by comparing events (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 175-176). This means that descriptive, evaluative or explanatory research designs would not be appropriate. As a result, an exploratory nature of the research is believed to be the most suitable due to the characteristics of this study and how well they align with the description of exploratory research. For example, exploratory research is seen as the most appropriate since the purpose of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic. Choosing another nature of research would not have been suitable since it would not be aligned with the purpose of the thesis or make it possible to answer the research questions.

3.7. Literature Search and Source Criticism

An extensive literature search was carried out in order to gain deeper knowledge about the area to be studied as well as obtain theories that could be relevant to investigate further and strengthen the potential findings of the research. As a researcher, it is important to not only choose theories that support the researcher's pre-argument, but also find different perspectives on the same topic (Patel & Davidsson, 2011, p. 69). There are several reasons for why it is important with comprehensive literature research. One of these reasons is that the researchers can avoid possible errors and pitfalls. Secondly, it guides the researcher to find possible methods and theories to use and elaborate and finally it helps to define and extend the research gap (Hart, 2001, p. 3).

It is of major importance that the literature is viewed objectively as well as critically. This has been done throughout the work, as the literature used are essentially scientific and peer reviewed articles. Furthermore, the gathered information is mainly from first hand sources. This was carried out in order to minimize the risk of losing the original sense of the literature, compared to if the information was taken from secondary references (Ejvegård, 2003, p. 63). However, secondary sources were used when it was not possible to obtain the first hand source. Furthermore, we have tried to view the articles in a critical way with as little bias as possible (Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 73-77). Viewing articles from different points of views accomplished this. For instance, we have carefully taken criticism of the theories and models into consideration. According to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 74), the literature should be reviewed critically in order to provide the study with reliable sources. Viewing the literature in a critical way will provide a deeper understanding and an insight in previous studies as well as an insight in the trends that have emerged from it. Therefore, source criticism is a method used to answer questions regarding whether a source is reliable or not (Thurén & Werner, 2019, p. 10). Source criticism refers to being able to answer what has happened as well as how and why it happened. According to Thurén and Werner (2019, p. 12) there are four principles regarding source criticism. These are *authenticity, time correlation, independence* and *tendency freedom*.

Authenticity refers to a source that is what it refers to and not a falsification (Thurén & Werner, 2019, p. 12). *Time correlation* refers to how old the source is and how long it

has been since the event took place. *The independence* states that a source should not be a transcript nor taken from another source. *Tendency freedom* refers to a person that has a political, economic or a personal interest in giving a false view of the truth. Throughout the literature search, we have ensured that the sources are authentic and independent. However, since the aim has been to use first hand sources in order to ensure authenticity, a few of the sources go far back in time. We are aware of this fact and have tried to complement these sources with ones that are up to date in order to ensure reliability.

The sources used are mainly scientific articles gathered from different databases from Umeå University Library such as Business Source Premier (EBSCO), Academic Search Premier and an external database, Google Scholar. All the sources used were peer reviewed articles which were checked for quality purposes in order to bring substance to our work. For the literature search the following keywords were used to ensure that relevant and appropriate sources for our study were gathered: *Change management, Organizational change, Activity-based flexible offices (A-FO), Activity-based work office (ABW), Employee satisfaction, Job satisfaction, Work environment, Communication.*

4. Practical Methodology

The purpose of the practical methodology is to present how the research has been conducted. This chapter will thereby begin with an explanation of the data collection method followed by the choice of sampling method as well as choice of organization and respondents. Thereafter, the interview structure will be discussed, followed by the interview approach, interview guide, pilot study, interview process, interview limitations and ethical considerations. This chapter will be concluded with the analysis process.

4.1.   Data Collection Method

The interview is the most widely used method within qualitative research (Alsaawi, 2014, p. 155). However, there are two types of data, primary and secondary (Saunders et al. 2012, p. 304; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 312). When collecting data for a specific purpose primary data is used. The data that has been collected previously for other studies is referred to as secondary data. Using secondary data is often not as time consuming as it is to collect primary data. However, the problematic part of using secondary data is that it is not outlined for that specific research question (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 320). Meaning that others previously gathered the data for another purpose than the actual investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 13; Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 196). Examples of secondary data are company reports, annual reports, public sector records etc. Primary data on the other hand, are gathered for the aim of a specific study. This data could be collected through interviews, surveys, focus group discussions etc. There are several different types of interview techniques (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 481). According to Magnusson and Marecek (2015, p. 6) interviews are methods that allow the interviewer to collect information about how the respondent sees the world and interpret things, this brings richness to the research and provides data specified for the area studied.

After examining different possible methods, it was decided that primary data would be collected through interviews, as it is believed that the research questions could not be answered by using secondary data. Also, primary data was decided as more suitable since the focus of this study is highly subjective and the relevant information could thereby not be gathered from previous research. As a result, interviews were chosen as the data collection method, with a focus on primary data. Further explanation of the methods chosen for this thesis is discussed below.

4.2.   Sampling Method

There are several different methods available when it comes to sampling. Sampling means that one takes a subset of respondents from a chosen population or frame of sampling (Taherdoost, 2016, p. 20). This is done in order to make a generalization about a certain population in relation to theories that already exist. There are two types of sampling techniques; probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 115). These two categories in turn consist of different types of sampling methods. Probability sampling is preferred as it is a random sample where everyone within a population has the chance to be selected. This technique is likely to produce a reliable sample and it is easier to estimate the accuracy of the sample as it is representative for the entire population and has a low risk of bias. However, this method is most commonly used within quantitative research designs.

Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, requires fewer resources and is therefore cheaper to carry out (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p.117). This method is necessary when the population to be studied is widely distributed. This technique is more commonly used within qualitative research designs since respondents must consent to being interviewed, which means that a random sample is difficult to attain (Alsaawi, 2014, p. 152). Non-probability sampling consists of four sampling methods; *Quota sampling, Convenience sampling, Purposive/Judgment sampling* and *Snowball sampling* (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p.117). *Quota sampling* refers to researchers systematically finding participants with specific characteristics. Examples of quotas could be age, sex, car ownership, household etc. *Convenience sampling* refers to researchers choosing participants because they are available (Maxwell, 2012, p. 235). This method is most commonly used among students as it is both cheap and easy to carry out, but has the drawback of not being fully reliable.

Purposive/judgment sampling refers to the researchers choosing participants based on an underlying interest in a particular group (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 117). This means that the participants are chosen based on their relevance to the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 429). This method is commonly used in order to provide important information that cannot be received from others (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). The drawback of this technique is that the sampling form might not be representative for the entire population (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 117). *Snowball sampling* is another common method to use when choosing a sample in a qualitative study (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 434). This sampling method consists of the researchers contacting a small group that suits the research topic. These people then suggest other relevant people who they think are suitable for the study, creating a snowball effect. Thereby increasing the sample size. One of the drawbacks of this approach is that the probability of the sample being representative is very low. However, since the aim of qualitative research is not to draw generalizable conclusions, this may not affect the results negatively.

For this thesis, a combination of *purposive* and *snowball sampling* has been chosen. The reason why a probability sampling method was not chosen was because the aim of the study is to investigate a specific organization with a focus on subjective opinions. Therefore, a random sample would not be appropriate as it provides the opportunity to generalize the results for the wider population, rather than providing an understanding of the complexity regarding human behavior (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Also, it may result in involving people who are not relevant to the purpose of the study. *Purposive sampling* was selected since a specific organization that had undergone an A-FO change process was a prerequisite to be able to answer the research questions. The participants were thereby chosen based on their relevance in regards to the research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 429). For example, the organization needed to have performed the change of transferring from a "traditional" office to an A-FO. This meant that it would not be possible to investigate an organization that was currently going through the change process since the respondents needed to be able to reflect over the finished process. Also, the organization needed to provide the perceptions of both managers and employees in order to be able to answer the research questions. *Snowball sampling* was also chosen since we only had one contact at the particular organization and had little prior knowledge on what other people within the organization would be suitable to interview. By letting our contact suggest appropriate participants for our study within the organization, this created a snowball effect when choosing the sample (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 434). These

two forms of sampling are also two of the most commonly used sample methods in a qualitative study, thereby proving their reliability.
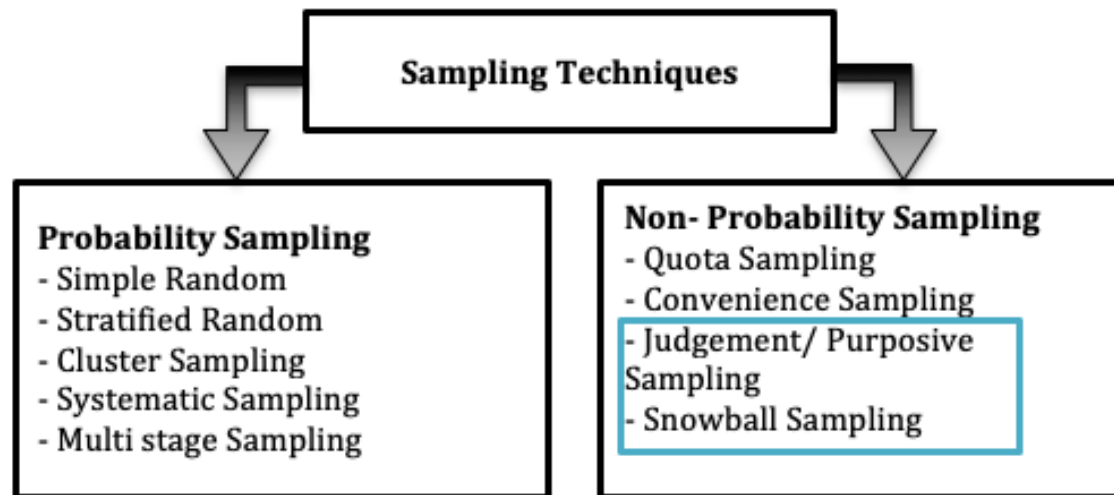
Figure 3. Sampling Techniques

4.2.1. Choice of Organization and Respondents

As mentioned above, the choice of organization is very important since the prerequisite for the choice of organization is that they have implemented an A-FO. The choice of organization was thereby limited to an organization which had conducted this type of change. Since we had a previously established contact at Skellefteå municipality, where a department had completed an A-FO change during 2017, they were chosen as the organization to be investigated. Due to the fact that it has been three years since the implementation was completed, we believe that the employees and the managers have been able to settle down in the new working environment. This will provide the thesis with relevant and significant insights and knowledge. Furthermore, we believe that it is the most suitable to only investigate one organization, since one A-FO change does not fit all (Lidström & Bolter, 2016, p. 42). This means that it would be very unlikely that two organizations would have performed the change in the exact same way, which may make it difficult to compare the results from the interviews. Also, only researching one organization provides the opportunity to investigate the A-FO change in depth. Investigating one organization would contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject in question, which correlates with the aim of qualitative research and will enable the answering of the research questions.

The respondents were chosen based on their knowledge on the specific topic of the A-FO change process. The sample consisted of managers and employees, both men and women, who had undergone the change as well as worked in the new environment. The managers as well as the employees had different positions and work tasks, which is argued to provide a broader understanding of the research topic. The different areas of expertise included facility management, communication, procurement and HR. Since the respondents have different work tasks, every respondent's experience and answer may provide new and relevant information that could not have been gathered from another respondent.

4.3.   Interview Structure

There are different types of interviews, such as *unstructured, semi-structured* and s*tructured interviews* (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 479; Alsaawi, 2014, pp. 150-151). *Structured interviews* are most commonly used in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 480). These interviews use standardized questions and the purpose is that the context will be the same for all of the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015, pp. 211, 481). The questions are often very specific and have a specific number of answers, which means that they are often closed ended, in order to discourage the respondent from getting off topic. The standardized structure is used in order to ensure reliability and validity of the results, where the focus is more on generalizability than on subjective opinions (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 480). In qualitative research the focus is, to a greater extent, on the respondent's point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 480). This means that there is no need to follow a strict schedule, but instead, the respondent is allowed to expand on different topics in order for the interviewer to understand what the respondent sees as important. The interviewer can also ask follow up questions that are not a part of any interview guide in order to capture relevant information from the respondent. These types of interviews are thereby often more flexible since they follow the direction in which the respondent chooses to go (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 481). As a result, the emphasis of the research may change due to new and relevant aspects that emerged during the interviews.

Within qualitative research, researchers often use *unstructured* or *semi-structured interviews* (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 479). During *unstructured interviews*, the interviewer barely guides the respondent, allowing them to respond freely (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 481). The interviewer may ask a few questions in order to let the respondent elaborate on their answers and may only ask a few follow up questions to topics that are particularly relevant. During *semi-structured interviews*, on the other hand, the researcher often uses an interview-guide in order to be able to ask fairly specific questions on topics that are relevant for the research (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 481; Alsaawi, 2014, p. 151). However, the respondent is still able to answer the questions freely in order to elaborate on topics that he or she finds important. The interviewer is also able to ask follow up questions that are not included in the interview-guide, but the interviews will be conducted in a similar manner, using the same questions, to a large extent.

The choice of interview type often depends on a set of different factors (Bryman & Bell, 2015, pp. 483-484). For example, the researchers should choose *semi-structured interviews* if they have a clear focus on what they want to investigate in their qualitative study, in order to address more specific aspects. Also, *semi-structured interviews* are considered to be more suitable if there are more than one person conducting the interviews, in order to ensure that the results will be comparable. Since we have a rather clear picture of what we want to investigate and thereby want to be able to ask more specific but still open questions, we found that a *semi-structured interview* would be the most suitable for this thesis. Also, a *semi-structured interview* will allow the results to be more easily comparable since two people are conducting the study. Collis and Hussey (2014, p. 135) state that it can be useful to be two interviewers since it will help to ensure that all questions are asked and make it easier to take notes, remember gestures and moods etc.

A *semi-structured interview* will allow us to keep an open mind about our research topic (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 13). This type of interview also provides the opportunity for

customization in order to make the respondent feel more comfortable and be able to discuss more sensitive issues (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). On the other hand, since the aim of this thesis does not require the reliability and validity of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 480), structured interviews were not determined to be suitable. If *structured interviews* would be used, the respondents would not be able to elaborate their answers or talk freely about certain topics. Since this thesis has a focus on the different perceptions of respondents, it is vital that they are able to give more extensive answers beyond the interview questions. This would not be possible in a *structured interview* since it often only consists of closed ended questions (Bryman & Bell, 2016, pp. 211, 481). As stated, *semi-structured interviews* were thereby seen as the most suitable choice of interview structure, since the factors for choosing a *semi-structured interview* method coincides with the purpose of this thesis.

4.3.1. Interview Approach

After deciding on what type of interviews to conduct, it is important to determine how these interviews should be performed. Interviews can be performed *online, via telephone* or *face-to-face* (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 134). By performing *face-to-face interviews*, more extensive data can be gathered since these types of interviews can be quite long, and it may be easier to ask sensitive questions (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 134). However, these interviews can often become quite expensive and time consuming due to the need for meeting the respondent in person, which sometimes can require traveling. Moreover, in order to reduce costs, *telephone interviews* can be conducted (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 134). This interview type saves both costs and time since it does not require traveling, and it still results in a personal contact with the respondent. On the other hand, the interviewer may lose vital information since it cannot interpret the respondent's body language or facial expressions. It may also entail an increase in costs due to the costs of telephone calls and the possible need to buy professional recording equipment. (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 134). By using an *online interview,* on the other hand, the interviewer and the respondents can see each other, making it possible to interpret body language etc., while at the same time reducing costs and is less time consuming since there is no need for traveling (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 675). However, these interviews can be difficult to perform if the interviewer or respondents do not know how to use the interview software (Collis & Hussey, 2014, pp. 134-135).

For this thesis, the semi-structured interviews will be performed through online-based methods. In the beginning of this research, the aim was to perform *face-to-face interviews,* since it is easier to ask more extensive as well as sensitive questions (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 134). The possibility to interpret body language and facial expressions were also determined to be easier when conducting these types of interviews. The need for travel was also determined as possible within the time and financial constraints of this thesis. However, due to Covid-19, restrictions to travel were imposed which made *face-to-face interviews* impossible to conduct. It was then decided that *online interviews* would be the best method, since it still provides the possibility to also interpret body language and facial expressions without the need for travel. *Telephone interviews* were discounted mainly due to the fact that the respondents and interviewer cannot see each other (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 134). It was thereby determined that vital information would be lost if *telephone interviews* would be conducted.

4.3.2. Interview Guide

As previously mentioned, an interview guide is often used when conducting semi-structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 481). This means that the researcher has a list of the questions that will be asked during the interview. However, the researcher is still free to ask questions outside of the interview guide depending on the answers from the respondents. Although, all questions in the guide should be asked in a similar way, using similar wording and tone in order to ensure comparability between answers.

The interview guides for this thesis were created in order to ensure that all of the essential aspects of the research would be covered during the interview, facilitating the data collection and analysis later on (see appendix 2 & 3). It has been based on the research questions and the themes within the theoretical framework. Before creating the interview guide, we ensured that we would have sufficient knowledge on the topics of change management and A-FOs by thoroughly scrutinizing previous research. The previous knowledge that we have gained on the topics will guarantee that the questions in the interview guide would be relevant. The knowledge will also enable us to have a greater understanding of the respondents' situation and what they have gone through, which will facilitate the analysis of the responses.

Due to the fact that the interview guide is based on the theoretical framework, the first step of the creation of the interview guide was to consider what theories and models had been chosen as suitable for answering the research questions. The main themes of the interview guide were thereby chosen to be: *change management* and *activity-based flexible offices,* with the sub-themes of *communication* and *satisfaction* throughout the main themes in accordance with the theoretical framework. Examples of frameworks that helped structure the interview guide were Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change, Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change, The Popcorn Model of Change, Activity-Based Flexible Office Model and Activity-Based Flexible Offices and Need-Supply Fit. For example, "Did the organization create a vision for the upcoming change?" was based on Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change. These frameworks helped formulate interview questions regarding change management and A-FOs. Theories that were used in the theoretical framework also assisted in formulating interview questions. For example, Van der Voordt (2004) and Budie et al. (2019) created a solid foundation regarding satisfaction in the workplace as well as Stanely et al. (2005) and Yates and Orlikowski (1992) providing relevant insights regarding questions about communication. By making the questions in the interview guide consistent with the previously used literature, the research questions would be able to be answered. The interview questions were carefully chosen to be open ended in order to facilitate for the respondent to answer freely and have the opportunity to elaborate on the topic (Kurasaki, 2000, p. 182).

Since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate how managers' and employees' perceptions differ regarding the change process of an A-FO, the decision was made to prepare two different interview guides - one for managers and one for employees. This would ensure that the research questions would be able to be answered. Previous research has shown that managers are often the people in charge of the implementation of the change (Guth & Macmillan, 1986, cited in Nielsen & Randall, 2013, p. 605). Since the managers were involved in the change process earlier on, they were more prepared and had more background information about the upcoming change. As this provides different starting points for managers and employees regarding the change process, we have

decided to use slightly different interview guides in order to capture the specific knowledge and expertise of the two groups. This is argued to contribute to a broader understanding of the research topic, since it is believed that the perception of the two groups will differ. If the same questions would be asked to both managers and employees, forcing them to answer questions they know little about, we may not be able to gain a deeper understanding of each group. This is since some questions may not be suitable to ask the employees because they may not have the background knowledge that a manager would possess. On the other hand, managers may not be able to answer questions that are more related to employee knowledge, such as how the employees feel when they work in the new environment. In order to capture the full potential of each respondent and be able to compare the different perceptions, enabling the answering of the research questions, the interview guides were adapted after the two targeted groups.

For example, one question that the employees will answer regards how they perceived their manager's commitment to the change. This question would not be suitable to ask the managers since it might be difficult for them to estimate their own commitment in hindsight as well as the risk of bias being high. It was therefore only important to gain the employees' perspective on this question. Another example would be that the managers will answer a question regarding how they motivated their employees to contribute to the change. This question would not be suitable to ask the employees since, according to previous research (e.g. Gill, 2002; Kotter, 1995), it is important for managers in particular to motivate their employees in a change process and not the other way around. The employee's answer to this question would thereby be irrelevant.

4.3.3. Pilot Study

According to Collis and Hussey (2014, p. 130-131), it is very common to perform a pilot study when conducting an interpretivist data collection. According to Bryman & Bell (2015, p. 272), it might not always be possible to conduct pilot studies with people with similar work experiences. However, as Sweden is one of the countries that has several companies and organizations who have implemented A-FOs, it is more likely to find people with knowledge and experience within this area (Hjalmarsson, 2019). As a result, a pilot study was chosen to be conducted in order to establish a high quality of the interview guide. It will also help in determining the feasibility of the final study (Connelly, 2008, p. 411). The pilot study will ensure that the interview questions will be relevant as well as ensure that the interviews will be conducted in a suitable manner and the results will be applicable. A pilot study is preferably conducted with a person who has similar working experience as the respondents of the actual sample (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 272). This in order to see if the questions are relevant and easy to answer.

The pilot study was conducted on one person that is comparable to the sample of this thesis that the primary data will consist of. The person in question also works at Skellefteå municipality and has previous knowledge on both change management and A-FOs. The choice of respondent would thereby provide relevant insights in how the interview guides could be improved. This person would also have valuable knowledge about how the respondents in the focus group would perceive the questions since they work closely together. Thereby, ensuring that the questions would be relevant and easily answered by the respondents. Also, the respondent for the pilot study was not a part of the focus group that was chosen for the primary data collection, in order to not affect the primary data collection negatively. The questions, including the information about the thesis, was first

sent to the respondent of the pilot study in order for this person to read them through carefully. The respondent was asked to look at the phrasing and grammar of the questions to ensure that the translation from English to Swedish had been done correctly. The feedback was gathered over the phone in order to save time for the respondent. The overall feedback from the respondent was positive and the questions were ensured to be relevant and understandable. After the pilot had been conducted, the interview guide was finalized.

4.3.4. Interview Process

The interviews were held with a total of seven respondents, three managers as well as four employees from Skellefteå municipality. However, all had different areas of responsibility. Due to the current pandemic of Covid-19, we were not able to perform *face-to-face interviews* as planned. Therefore, all of the conducted interviews were carried out through an online tool named "Teams". Also, since all of the respondents as well as the researchers are Swedish, the interviews were also held in Swedish in order to avoid any language barriers. The aim regarding the length of the interviews was around 45 minutes. When all the interviews were conducted the time length varied between 31 minutes to 50 minutes. As we handed out the interview guide beforehand, the respondents had the opportunity to prepare themselves and think back on the implementation process that was carried out in the year of 2017. We are satisfied with the time length of the interviews, as we believe that we got elaborated and extensive answers. We believe that the shorter interviews, in the aspect of time, could be due to the fact that the respondents had seen the questions beforehand and therefore would not require as much time to think about their answers. Another possible reason regarding the difference in length is the differences in the possibility to answer. Since the respondents all have different responsibilities and background knowledge of the change process, a few respondents could give more elaborate answers due to their extensive previous experience. Therefore, certain questions would engage some respondents more than others.

Both of the interviewers were present at all interviews in order to ensure the reliability of the results. However, one of us conducted the interview with the managers and the other one held all of the interviews with the employees. This was done in order to give people within the same position, such as managers, similar follow-up questions. This would therefore reduce the risk of missing questions that would be relevant and ensure that for example, all of the questions to the managers were asked in a similar way. The interview guide was used as a list of questions that would be asked during the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 481). As known, the researcher is free to ask follow-up questions depending on what the respondents' answer. During the interviews, the interviewers kept in mind that all questions in the guide should be asked in a similar way, using similar wording and tone in order to ensure comparability between answers.

Two interview guides (see appendix 2 & 3) were used, one was made for the managers and the other one was made for the employees. This in order to be able to answer our research questions; *How does the perception of the change process concerning activity-based flexible offices differ between managers and employees? What do managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how do these perceptions differ?* All the interviews were recorded to ensure that nothing was left out as well as to be able to go back and listen to *how* the respondents answered the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 494).

4.3.5. Interview Limitations

During the interviews, some limitations arose which might affect the results of this study and must therefore be recognized. First of all, the aim of this study was to conduct *face-to-face interviews* in order to gather as much relevant information as possible. However, as previously mentioned, the existing conditions due to Covid-19 made this impossible. *Online interviews* were chosen as a result, which still allows the interviewer and respondent to see each other. Even though facial expressions could be observed and analyzed, it was often hard to observe the respondent's body language since the camera was usually focused on the face. Also, during one of the interviews, the internet connection deteriorated which made a video interview difficult. In this case, the interview was conducted over the phone. Another respondent chose not to use the camera during the interview. During these two instances, it was also more difficult to find a suitable flow in the interview, which resulted in some interruptions when questions were asked and during the respondent's response. This is believed to be due to the interviewers and the respondent not seeing each other. As a result, it was not always clear when someone was done talking or when someone was beginning to talk. Also, the lack of video made it impossible to observe facial expressions and body language.

As mentioned above, the respondents were provided with the interview guide before the interview took place in order to be able to give as relevant and significant answers as possible. Even though the respondents succeeded in doing this, it also made it more difficult for some of them to elaborate more or to answer probing questions since they had already thought of a specific way to answer the questions in the interview guide beforehand. This may also be one of the reasons for why a few of the interviews were shorter than expected. By recognizing these limitations, their possible effect on the results of this study will be made clear and hopefully minimized. During the interviews and the later analysis of the results, these limitations have been and will be kept in mind in order to ensure that the results are as unbiased and realistic as possible.

4.3.6. Analysis Process

When the interviews have been conducted, the researchers should review the answers from the respondents by listening to the recorded interviews (Rowley, 2012, p. 267). This is done in order to take important notes as well as reflect and interpret what was said during the interviews. Furthermore, going through all of the interviews would result in the authors getting more familiar with the answers and understanding different perspectives that were brought up. Rowley (2012, p. 268) states that there are three main key components when analyzing data. These are *classifying the data set* and getting acquainted with it, the second component is *interpreting the data* and the third involves *writing up the data*.

There are different ways to analyze the data that has been collected, such as *template analysis, matrix analysis* and *thematic analysis* (King et. al. 2010, p. 222). *Template analysis* refers to the researchers choosing different themes in advance of processing the data, this is known as "prior themes". Researchers mainly use this approach when they want to relate the responses to certain theoretical frameworks used in the design of the study or relate it to the aim of the study. The drawback of using this method is that too many prior themes could result in a close-minded analysis. Another way of analyzing the collected data is through the *matrix analysis* (King et. al. 2010, p. 222). This analysis is

conducted by putting different units into different templates such as dividing individuals, groups, organizations etc. and analyzing these against key concepts. This way of analyzing the data makes it easy to compare the results across groups and it also makes the process transparent to the reader. The drawback of using *matrix analysis* is that it demands high degrees of cooperation across teams which can be tedious and time consuming.

Matrix analysis was disregarded due to its extensive time consumption. Also, *template analysis* was not seen as the most suitable since it may result in a close-minded analysis, something that this study tries to avoid. As a result, a *thematic analysis* was used. *Thematic analysis* is used to identify, analyze and determine patterns (or themes) within the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) argue that *thematic analysis* should be perceived as an initial and significant method for qualitative research that all researchers should understand and know how to use. *Thematic analysis* is considered to be very flexible and thereby not tied to specific theory or epistemology. This fact makes *thematic analysis* suitable to use for many different kinds of qualitative research. As a result, this type of analysis provides extensive and exhaustive data, though somewhat complex. Nowell et al. (2017, p. 2) also argue that a *thematic analysis* is independent of epistemological assumptions and can thereby be appropriate for different types of qualitative research. However, one of the disadvantages of this approach is the lack of extensive and significant literature (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). This may cause researchers with less experience to feel uncertain of how to perform the *thematic analysis* correctly. Also, it does not allow the researcher to draw conclusions about the use of language (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

Due to the flexibility of the method, it is important to strictly adhere to the procedures of the theory and method (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96). This means that the researchers need to clearly and explicitly communicate what they are doing during the process and what they communicate needs to be equivalent to their actual activities. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) state that there are six steps that need to be followed in a thematic analysis. These are shown in table 1 below.

Phases	Description of the process
1. Get familiar with the data	Transcribe and read the data.
2. Produce initial codes	Systematically code noteworthy features of the data and collect data that is significant for each code.
3. Search for themes	Organize the codes into possible themes.
4. Review the themes	Ensure that the themes are applicable in relation to the transcribed data and design a pattern.
5. Define and name the themes	Analyze the themes to enhance them in order to generate clear definitions for each theme.
6. Produce the report	Choose relevant and convincing examples and conduct a final analysis with relation to the research question and literature.

Table 1. Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis Process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

As mentioned earlier, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed immediately after the interview was finished. Going through the interviews once more made it easier to become familiarized with the answers and gain a clear overview of each respondent (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 550). Furthermore, it was a great way to gain a deeper understanding of what the respondents said, how they said it as well as how they acted. According to Rowley (2012, p. 267) this way of working would help the researchers to further develop the findings in the analysis. The coding took place when the transcription was finished. By doing so, it was possible to compare the data and find similarities and differences among the respondents' answers (Rowley, 2012, p. 689).

The authors transcribed each interview together by dividing it equally into two parts. This was done in order to save time as well as to provide the opportunity for both researchers to receive a deeper insight of each interview. The coding was carried out by both researchers by going through each interview and discussing different interpretations and finding potential key themes. As already mentioned, the interview guide was based upon the theoretical framework, where two main themes were stated; Activity *based flexible offices* and *Change Management*. The sub themes were *Communication* and *Satisfaction*. Furthermore, according to Rowley (2012, p. 268) it is suitable to use a *thematic analysis* approach since we have used predetermined themes based on the theoretical framework and emerging themes based on the conducted interviews. According to Braun and Clarke

(2006, p. 82) the quantity of the themes are not of relevance, rather it is important whether the themes that were found capture important aspects in relation to the area being studied.

4.3.7. Ethical Considerations

When conducting a qualitative study, there are several ethical aspects that need to be considered. In this type of study, ethical concerns are especially important since the nature of the research is detailed and profound (Binti Mohd Arifin, 2018, p. 30). For example, the respondents need to give their consent to participating in the study (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 35). The consent should be voluntary and the respondents should be informed of the purpose of the study (Binti Mohd Arifin, 2018, p. 30). In this case, the respondents' consent was given via email where the respondents answered the invitation to the interview and agreed to participate under the stated conditions in the invitation email. This email can be found in appendix 1. In the invitation and again during the interview, the interviewers informed the respondents of the purpose of the study (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 34). The respondents were also provided with an opportunity to ask follow up questions if something was perceived as unclear (Binti Mohd Arifin, 2018, p. 30). They were also informed of the fact that they had the right to withdraw their consent and not take part of the study, even after consent had been given. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to give consent to let the interviewers record the interviews. They were informed that this would be done only to facilitate the analysis and that these recordings would be deleted after their purpose had been fulfilled. Also, the respondents were informed that they had the right to stop the interview at any time as well as remove statements that they were not comfortable sharing in retrospect.

Before and during the interview, the interviewers stated that all respondents would remain anonymous and that it would not be possible to trace the answers back to a specific individual (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 33; Binti Mohd Arifin, 2018, p. 30). This promise was preserved by changing the respondents name and identity in the results and analysis sections. Not naming the respondents by name will provide the possibility to discuss and present the results from the interviews without compromising the respondent's identity. Moreover, as the respondents are aware of their anonymity, it may also have result in them being more open and honest when answering the interview questions. Also, by giving the respondents a fictive name instead of something less personal and relatable (e.g. numbers), it will facilitate for the reader to follow the results and the later discussion. Furthermore, none of the questions were leading or asked in a way that the answers could link back to a specific respondent. This further ensures the anonymity of the respondents of this study. To conclude, by following ethical guidelines, the credibility of the thesis as well as the safety and privacy of the respondents have been ensured.

5. Empirical Findings

The interview guide was divided into two main categories, change management and A-FO, and the design of the empirical findings is based on the interview guide. The first part of the empirical findings treats the category of "Change Management", looking at the managers' and employees' perception of the change process and what they believe is important when performing this type of change. The second part treats the "Activity-Based Flexible Offices" and the managers' and employees' attitudes and perception of the new way of working.

In this study, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted. All of the participants are listed in table 2 below, with fictional names in order to preserve the respondents' anonymity. Both men and women were interviewed, but in order to ensure that their identity will not be connected to their answers, we have chosen to use only female names. This can also be done since gender is not an important aspect for this study. The table is used in order to facilitate for the reader to easily follow the analysis and be able to distinguish between different respondents' answers.

Name for interviewee	*Title*	*Date*	*Duration*	*Type of interview*
Karoline	Manager	April 02 2020	40 min	Video
Lisa	Manager	April 03 2020	39 min	Video
Emma	Manager	April 07 2020	45 min	Telephone
Amanda	Employee	April 03 2020	35 min	Video
Sofia	Employee	April 06 2020	38 min	Video
Anna	Employee	April 07 2020	36 min	Telephone
Felicia	Employee	April 07 2020	55 min	Video

Table 2. Participating Respondents

5.1. Change management
5.1.1. Perceptions of Undergoing a Change Process

All of the respondents, both managers and employees, were asked about their perception about the upcoming change towards an A-FO. After analyzing the responses, it became clear that most of the managers were positive towards the change as they felt that this was something new and exciting. On the other hand, many of the managers also mentioned that they could see that employees were skeptical as some worked with classified documents and were not as positive towards the change as managers were. The employees also stated that they were somewhat skeptical towards the change in beginning since they did not know what the change would entail. This is also emphasized by one of the manager's statements below.

"Obviously this was not easy, many were worried about how it all would turn out… many said that 'I will not be able to work in that environment'… 'I will not be allowed to bring my own chair'…. 'I need a certain lighting in the environment etc.'…" - (Emma).

When conducting the interviews, the respondents stated what they believed is important when going through a change process. The perception of what is important seemed to differ somewhat between managers and employees. A common response from managers regarding the implementation process was that it is important to first prepare the change leaders and the managers within each working area on the upcoming change.

"… it is important to take the time and work with the managers (within the different working areas) so that they are on board and that they feel confident before reaching out and communicating to the employees" - (Emma)**.**

Karoline also stated that it is important to have a clear goal and a working path divided into short steps as well as a thought of what the organization wants to achieve by going through with the change. It was also stated that a needs assessment should be conducted beforehand since the needs must be adapted to the organization itself, because no organization is the same.

"… I think you have to start thinking of… all organizations have different needs and goals of where they want to see themselves in the future. Based on that, you build an environment that supports the needs" - (Karoline).

When the employees were asked to state what they believed was highly important in a change process, the responses were somewhat different. A common response was that they wanted a clear reason for why the change was necessary. Furthermore, Amanda stated that when going through a change it is important to be able to impact and share one's opinions. Sofia mentioned that being involved in the process was encouraging as some of their own aspects and viewpoints were taken into consideration. Therefore, the change became something which the employees could be more positive towards. Anna further says that many people were afraid of change and therefore it was important to allow them to talk about their fears. Therefore, she believes that being able to participate in changes like this is vital. Moreover, Felicia mentioned that it is important that top managers and the steering committee are highly committed to the process in order to promote and establish the change.

"...and when you look at Kotter and all of these people (researchers) within change management…you need to have a guiding coalition where you can feel that you support each other." – (Felicia).

Each of the respondents reflected on what they believed could have been done differently regarding the change process. However, most of the responses were that they did not remember anything specifically that could have been changed, and that they were satisfied with how everything had turned out. Some of the respondents mentioned that the technology could have been tested beforehand as it was a large step for some people to go from working by using traditional notebooks, to only working digitally. Furthermore, Felicia also stated that even though a project has to end at some point, this change process might have finished a bit abruptly after moving into the A-FO. This

respondent meant that it is necessary to keep working on the "new way of working" so that old and "wrong" ways of working will not be established.

5.1.2. Importance of Goals and Vision in the Change Process

When asked if Skellefteå municipality had created a vision for the upcoming change, Karoline stated that they did not create a vision per se, but focused more on overarching goals and determined what they wanted to achieve with this change. For example, some goals were to create a change in how they worked, increase digitization, cooperation and trust. In order to reach these goals, a clear plan was produced. Their goal was also that 90% of all of the employees would not want to go back to the old way of working after moving to the A-FO. The project plan that contained all of the goals was stated to be highly important for the change process.

"...I believe that if you are going to conduct a change process, you first need to identify where you are now and where you want to go." – (Karoline).

Lisa also confirmed the fact that the focus was more on overarching goals, rather than on a main vision for the change. This manager recalled that one of the goals was that the department should become closer, meaning that cooperation should increase. Lisa also claimed that goals are very important to improve people's perceptions.

"We need to know where we are going and why." – (Lisa).

Emma also stated that the goals were useful and facilitated the process of supporting and motivating the employees. Furthermore, the importance of clear goals was also emphasized by the employees. Felicia referred to Kotter and mentioned that a clear vision is very important in a change process.

"... it has to be sharp and clear (the goal)... I cannot be awakened in the middle of the night and think about what we should achieve with this (the change), it was a bit too leafy (too vague)" - (Felicia).

Felicia also mentioned that the process of creating clear goals for this change was iterative since the goals were not that clear in the beginning. This meant that there was no straight line in creating the goals for the change, but rather the process entailed going back from time to time to make appropriate changes. By using an iterative process, the goals became clearer and more motivating. The other employees that were interviewed agreed that the management of the change had created clear goals for what they wanted to achieve with the change. Something that helped create a better understanding of the process.

5.1.3. Managers' Ability to Motivate and Managers' Commitment

The managers reflected on how they motivated their employees to contribute to the change process. Karoline believed that the employees were motivated to participate since they always had the opportunity to affect the outcome of the change. The managers also perceived that they provided the employees with good support and prerequisites, such as education, to be able to participate in the change. Since the employees had the opportunity to affect the working environment by for example, discussing and determining the names for each area, Karoline believed that this motivated the employees to continue to

contribute to the change. Furthermore, Emma mentioned that a tool used for motivating the employees was to communicate with them and involve them in discussions. It was also stated to be important for a manager to be able to explain to the employees why the change was happening in order to create a feeling of security and motivation. Lisa also stated that it is important that the managers themselves promote the change.

"It is important <u>how</u> you communicate. If I am positive towards a change or negative towards the process, it is crucial to reflect on how this may affect others."- (Lisa).

The employees were asked to state what made them motivated during this change process. Sofia said that having a committed manager increased the motivation to contribute to the change. Anna, on the other hand, mentioned that it was motivating to be able to work more efficiently in a digitalized setting. Since this was a new way of working, Anna felt motivated to develop new solutions in order to be able to work as efficiently as possible. The employees were also asked how committed their managers were when they were first told about the change as well as how committed they were throughout the implementation process. Both Sofia, Amanda and Felicia elaborated on how their managers were committed in the process as well as how important it was to have people around them who promoted the change.

"He (the manager) was pretty committed. He believed in this (the change). So, maybe that was good...when it comes to this type of change process there are always people who will be for and against it and would a manager be against (the change), then it would have been pretty tough." - (Sofia).

The employees also stated that if they would have had a manager who was against the change, they would probably not be as committed and positive towards the change either. This was something that Anna had experienced. This employee mentioned that the team had one manager who did not promote the employees' opinions. Anna experienced the importance and difference of having a committed manager first when they changed to a manager who was both informative and listened to the employees' opinions. Anna therefore stated that having a committed manager is extremely important. Furthermore, Felicia stated that the main leaders of the implementation were successful in the way that the leader put the change towards the A-FO on the map as an important job. This thereby helped to engage employees and all of the managers in the change process. Another example of commitment was also brought up by Felicia who mentioned that the project group got to visit other organizations and companies who had already performed similar changes. This employee mentioned that this was a way to get to know how other people from the same project team were thinking regarding the A-FO and the change process, meaning that this was a way to get to know each other and elaborate on how they were about to undergo the change.

Another question that the respondents were requested to answer was regarding their perception of how many percent of the workforce was against the change and how many that were on board from the beginning. Most of the respondents had a hard time to estimate the proportion of people who were against the change and vice versa.

"...but let's say that...60% were positive and 40% were negative (towards the change) if I must guess." - (Amanda).

However, all of the respondents perceived that most of the employees and managers were excited to undergo the change while only a smaller portion was believed to be resistant to the change.

5.1.3. Communication within the Change Process

Communication was stated as a subtheme in the interview and the respondents thereby reflected on how the implementation was communicated before and during the implementation process. The overall perception from the respondents was that the communication throughout the process was well thought through. Furthermore, they all believed that good communication is important within a change process. This is well explained by Emma who pointed out three main factors that they tried to emphasize in the communication.

"... yeah, well I believe that cooperation was important and I believe....it was the cooperation, digitalization and trust that we emphasized a bit extra (in the communication)." - (Emma).

Karoline mentioned that the process of communicating the change occurred on different levels. First they began by equipping all of the managers within the department and informing them about what was going to happen beforehand. Then, they had a common kick-off with both managers and employees and an interactive theatre performance, followed by group discussions. This was in order for all of the people within the department to bond with each other and reflect upon the change. Apart from this, they said that the managers would work as "change leaders" and they therefore tried to prepare and equip them as much as possible. From that point onwards they communicated quite a lot through the managers in a "top down" approach. Furthermore, they had scheduled face-to-face meetings and a distinct communication plan. Karoline further states that they had a strong focus on undergoing the change together.

"... we talked a lot about... 'now we are going to do this change together and we need to help each other in order to shape this working environment'." - (Karoline).

Karoline further described that the change leaders did not know everything about the change and how everything would turn out in the end. However, Karoline stated that admitting to not having all of the answers turned out to be beneficial, since the employees appreciated the honesty. Other organizations had failed to move to an A-FO and therefore the concerns among the employees were present. Honesty in the communication was believed to be a strength that Skellefteå municipality had within this change process.

"... I think it was this; 'that we are doing this together', we tried to lift our process of change and that we did not have answers to all of the questions (that the employees and managers asked) and I think that was our strength." - (Karoline).

Emma mentioned that an external consultant was hired to assist and facilitate the change process and the implementation of the A-FO. This consultant was an expert in the area of A-FOs and in the change process of moving from a "traditional" office space. This consultant also helped communicate the change to the employees and ensured that the focus was not on the economic factors of the A-FO. Instead, the focus was on cooperation, the new ways of working and digitalization. Other consultants were also hired in order to

educate the staff regarding, for example, the new technology that they would use in the A-FO.

When asking the managers about what they believed was vital in the communication towards the employees, most of them answered that the most important factor that was communicated was *cooperation* and that *everybody is part of the change*. Furthermore, Emma stated that it is important to have trust in the employees and that it is also important that the employees trust their managers. The manager further pointed out the importance of emphasizing trust in the communication.

"...trust is about that 'we trust you as employees, that you take your responsibility for your assignment and that we believe that you have trust in us as your managers'." - (Emma).

The employees also believed that the communication process was well thought through and that it was a necessary and significant factor within the change process. Amanda stated that it is the managers and the communication that affects one's understanding of the change and one's attitude towards it.

"...it was openness and transparency (throughout the change process), you were involved in every step (of the change)." - (Amanda).

The employees also mentioned all of the different ways of communication that were used. Amanda and Sofia remember that the communication was both through mail and surveys, both individual meetings, smaller group meetings, meetings at the departmental level, at the administrative level and at the municipal level. Furthermore, Sofia stated that it is important to be able to get answers on one's questions when undergoing larger changes like this one. The employee meant that while you are in the middle of the process a small positive thing could be experienced as extremely positive while a small negative thing could upset everyone. It is therefore important to inform at the right time about the right thing. Questions that come up about certain things regarding the change process should be answered fairly quickly so that one does not have to wait several days for an answer which might raise concerns and confusion.

"... then you may start to think: 'are they afraid to answer this' or 'what is happening?'... or 'what is it?'." - (Sofia).

One of the employees, Felicia, mentioned that *the way of working* and *communication* were two main factors that were connected within the change process. They used a timeline for the entire implementation process, which was inspired by another company who had gone through a similar change. The approach began with an analysis phase to explore and investigate the possibilities of change, the second part of the change work involved learning new ways of working. Furthermore, Felicia mentioned that they used different basic models as a starting point together when working with communication and the importance of the change leaders.

"Therefore, it was extremely important to have meetings with the change leaders in order to secure their roles in the change process...that was extremely important." - (Felicia).

5.2.   Activity-Based Flexible Office
5.2.1. Reasons for Implementing the A-FO

All of the respondents, both managers and employees, agreed that one of the main reasons for moving to an A-FO was to decrease the office space used by Skellefteå municipality. In other words, Skellefteå municipality needed to become more efficient in the way they managed and used their facilities. As a result, they could also become more cost efficient. Lisa stated that a study was conducted regarding how much time each employee spent at their desk. Since it was found that most people used their desk very little during a day, since many spend their time in different meetings, the cost for each individual office became quite high.

"...it has been very efficient to decrease the office area since we do not need our own, personal office space in order to perform our work tasks." – (Lisa).

Karoline argued that the change to an A-FO started with Skellefteå municipality's change strategy; Skellefteå 2030. The goal of Skellefteå 2030 is to increase the number of citizens in the municipality. It was then stated that Skellefteå municipality occupied too many facilities that could be used more efficiently by other businesses. As a result, the starting point for the department's change process to an A-FO was based on managing their facilities more efficiently. Another reason, stated by Karoline, for moving to an A-FO was that Skellefteå municipality needed to be able to allocate more money to technology, since new technology was found to become more expensive as well as vital for future development. Even though the change was initially focused on efficient facility management, technology also became incorporated into the change process.

"The change was initially based on the need to use the facilities and capital more efficiently. Then, the change project itself (moving to an A-FO), had a great focus on finding cost efficient solutions by using modern technology." – (Karoline).

It was also the belief of a few employees that the reasons for moving to an A-FO, besides managing their facilities more efficiently, also included increasing cooperation within the department and creating new ways of working. It was stated that moving to smaller facilities, where nobody would have their own office, would promote more efficient work and result in co-workers being able to share work experiences more easily. Moving to an A-FO was also believed to improve digitalization.

"I believe that we moved to an A- FO in order to increase our cooperation...it was an experiment to see if the cooperation could increase. But also in order to see the bigger picture instead of only focusing on one's own work assignments. Furthermore, I believe that one reason (for the change) was to be able to accommodate more people in a smaller area, both from an economic perspective but also in order to allow other companies to use attractive facilities." - (Amanda).

5.2.2. Perceptions of the A-FO Before and During the Implementation

Many of the respondents, mainly employees, were quite hesitant and skeptical of the A-FO before the implementation process had begun. The majority of the managers that were interviewed, on the other hand, were very open and positive towards the implementation

of the A-FO. They saw mainly advantages in the new way of working, even though they were aware of what others had struggled with during their implementation which caused some insecurity. These managers were also highly involved in the change from the beginning. Karoline had been highly involved in the design of the A-FO and was said to be driving the change process. This manager was a part of the steering committee for the change and participated in conducting both an internal and external analysis. This entailed study visits to other municipalities and businesses who had already conducted the change to an A-FO as well as conducting internal pilot studies.

"I have been very involved (in the design and implementation of the A-FO) of course. I have been a somewhat driving force in this process." – (Karoline).

Emma was also a part of the steering committee regarding the A-FO implementation and conducted employee-surveys in order to determine how the new environment should be designed for example. This manager also took part in the work to equip and help other managers to become change leaders. Lisa did not take part in the design of the A-FO per se, but still participated in the implementation. For example, by participating in the workshops and trying out the new environment.

As mentioned, the employees were somewhat more skeptical towards the A-FO. The new office environment required that everyone needed to become paperless and store all of their documents digitally. This transition was believed to be quite difficult according to some employees.

"I had…almost 10 shelves with binders and thought 'how will I succeed in transferring this to a small computer and start working?'." – (Sofia).

Anna also had the belief, prior to the implementation, that it would only be possible to work in a quiet environment since this employee was used to working in an individual office where the door could be closed. This belief was also held by Lisa who stated;

"…I did not believe that I would be able to tune other people out…" - (Lisa).

Anna had also partaken in study visits where negative opinions from people who had already implemented an A-FO were overheard which affected Anna's initial perception of the A-FO in a negative way. Furthermore, since the concept of an A-FO was quite new in Sweden at the time of the implementation, Felicia was a bit skeptical of the change since this employee felt that it was important to form one's own opinion about and read up on the new working environment in order to weigh the pros and cons. On the other hand, Amanda, was very open to change in general and moving to an A-FO was no different, though this employee stated that many colleagues were more skeptical.

The respondents also stated how their perceptions had changed during the implementation process and how they felt about working in an A-FO. As mentioned, many of the managers argued that their initial perception of the A-FO was mainly positive. They also stated that the results lived up or exceeded their expectations.

"I would never move back to a 'traditional' office space again". – (Lisa).

The managers stated increased knowledge and usability of new technology as one positive aspect of the A-FO. As previously mentioned, the new working environment of the A-FO demands that everything is more digitized, and this was perceived as something positive by the managers once they had started working with the new technology. Furthermore, Karoline stated that the A-FO resulted in a need to plan the day better, which created more structure in the manager's everyday work. This was due to the fact that one should not occupy one desk during the whole day and therefore needs to plan how they need to move around the office and what items they need to bring with them. Karoline also stated that the leadership identity had also changed after working in the A-FO, since the managers and employees share the same working area. This has created the opportunity to focus more on coaching the employees in their everyday work tasks. Emma also emphasized that their leadership identity had changed to a more "trust based" style of leadership. This leadership style focuses on providing the employees with clear goals and appropriate tools to ensure that they can perform their work in the best possible way. It is based on trust between the manager and the employees. Moreover, another advantage of working in an A-FO, which was brought up by both managers and employees, is the fact that everyone is sitting very close to each other. This was stated to make it easier to communicate, decrease the length of meetings since you can ask questions to colleagues "on the go", and create a greater sense of community amongst managers and employees.

The employees also mentioned that the new technology in the A-FO had facilitated their work. Sofia, who had feared that it would be impossible to work "paperless" stated that the binders that were saved analogically had never been looked at.

"The advantage is also that you have the technology with you... Before, you had to print a lot of blueprints and stuff and now you can just obtain it from the computer directly." – (Sofia).

Amanda stated that it is often easier to get right to the task since the different working areas provide the right tools for each specific task. It was also argued, much like the managers and other employees, that the A-FO provides a better contact network since one works so closely with colleagues. Amanda also mentioned that the environment is esthetically pleasing, with new furniture, beautiful colors and appropriate working areas. Other employees also stated that the A-FO facilitates cooperation across different sections within the department.

"I think that we have started to work more harmonized since we started working in this way"- (Anna).

After the respondents stated the positive aspects they believed were a result of the A-FO, they were asked to mention possible negative aspects. Even though all managers stated that they would not want to go back to working in a "traditional" office, Karoline stated that having an individual office had its benefits if the manager needed to have private meetings or conversations with employees. Lisa also mentioned that it was much more difficult to find people in this type of working environment. Before, everyone knew where everyone had their office, but now it could be difficult to find them if they did not answer their phone and one did not have an appointment. This drawback was also emphasized by many employees.

One of the employees, Amanda, stated one sometimes could feel a bit observed by others in the new environment. Also, despite the "high focus" areas, where it is supposed to be as quiet as possible, it could sometimes be hard to focus since there would still be people who are moving around and making some sort of noise.

"If I sat in my own office it was completely quiet, I could focus 100% and nobody walked past me." – (Amanda).

Anna also stated that the noise levels could be quite high in some working areas from time to time. In this case however, it was argued that one could easily put on headphones and listen to music or simply move to a quieter area. It was also highlighted that a few people, referred to as "campers", did not utilize the environment to its full potential by sitting at the same desk independent of how the area was suited for the work tasks at hand. By staying at the same place, the usefulness of the area may decrease since one area is not suited for every possible task. This may make it harder to perform certain tasks within a specific area.

"...the different working areas can be amazing, but if we do not have the appropriate ways of working...it could destroy the purpose of the area very easily. But you can make an average working area amazing if you work hard with finding appropriate ways to work within them." – (Felicia).

5.2.3. Inter- & Intra-Communication and Cooperation in the A-FO

Both managers and employees perceived that the inter- and intra-communication had increased and become enhanced after moving to an A-FO. This was believed to be due to the fact that everyone works very close together, which makes it easier to ask questions and interact with one another. Many employees also stated that the A-FO increased the possibility to communicate with co-workers that they otherwise would never have talked to only because they sit so close to each other in this environment. As a result, Lisa stated that it felt like they had gained many more co-workers after moving into the A-FO. The environment and increased communication have also been seen, by both managers and employees, to increase cooperation, both within and between different teams.

"...you run into each other all the time in this environment and you gain a whole different opportunity to cooperate and that has been one of our most important goals. You talk more with each other and understand each other's problems a bit more and I also believe that increases understanding (between co-workers)." – (Karoline).

Emma claimed that the A-FO has created a better structure within the team since they have had to communicate and discuss a lot more. For example, about what type of meetings they should have, how often they should have meetings as well as plan the meetings in general. Also, since the whole department shares the same working environment, Emma believed that it has become easier to observe what other teams are doing that would not have been noticed if they did not share the same space. This made communication and cooperation easier between teams.

"It has become much more apparent what others do that you would not have understood and seen before. Then you understand that 'oh, we can benefit from their experience' or 'they can benefit from ours (experience)'." - (Emma).

On the other hand, Amanda stated that the improved communication between teams has taken time to develop. It was perceived that, in the beginning of working in the A-FO, the communication and cooperation between teams were more or less the same as before. Today however, it was perceived to be very easy to communicate and cooperate between teams, something that has been facilitated by the new environment. Felicia mentioned that the increased communication, especially between teams, is something that has developed during the implementation process of the A-FO as everyone got to know each other "across borders". Also, Felicia said that the communication and cooperation within teams have increased since the shared facilities have provided more reasons to communicate and cooperate in order to achieve common goals. Anna strengthened this belief by also stating that the communication within and between different teams had been improved after moving to an A-FO. Although, it was stated that there is still a long way to go in order to ensure that the communication and cooperation between teams are fully facilitated.

5.2.4. Satisfaction with the A-FO

After comparing the advantages and the drawbacks of the new working environment, the respondents were asked how they perceived the A-FO today. Both the managers and the employees that were interviewed for this study claimed that they were very satisfied with the implemented A-FO and would not want to go back to a "traditional" working environment. This answer was the same, no matter if the respondent had been positive or skeptical towards the A-FO before the implementation.

"No, I would never want to go back (to a "traditional" office) again." – (Emma).

"I am very satisfied (with the A-FO) and I would never choose to go back to the old way of working…"- (Amanda).

Karoline stated that most of the employees seemed satisfied with the implementation of the A-FO and mentioned that they had scored a "best practice" on the Leesman index, which measures workplace experience and how the workplace impacts the employees and affects organizational performance. Emma also mentioned that the implementation of the A-FO had been especially satisfactory since it became very apparent how all of the employees were able to develop, flourish and take on more responsibility. Also, Emma perceived the workplace to have become more full of laughter than before. Not only within teams, but also between teams. Lisa was mostly satisfied based on that the new environment provided the tools to become more creative and mentioned that it was an inspiring environment to work in. Karoline also affirmed that the goals set in the beginning of the implementation, increased cooperation etc., have been reached in an appropriate way and that they have also increased their efficiency in the workplace.

"I would say that we, overall, have managed (the change) pretty well and I think we can see that in our studies as well." – (Karoline).

On the other hand, Lisa stated that even though the implementation of the A-FO had been satisfactory, there were surely still areas that could be improved, something that was emphasized by other managers as well. However, they did not mention what these improvements might be.

One employee, Anna, stated that the A-FO was satisfactory since it provides easier ways of solving problems and offers a closer connection to other co-workers. Felicia also mentioned that the change had been satisfactory since all of the employees felt a sense of pride of the new A-FO working environment. Felicia believed that the sense of pride amongst managers and employees was something that increased their *Leesman index*. The pride was based on the importance of everyone believing that the A-FO is a mutual working environment and that everybody should be able to relate to it.

"...the workers should feel that even though they do not have their own flowers or curtains at work, or photos of their husbands, they should still feel that 'this is an environment I can relate to'."- (Felicia).

Felicia stated that by emphasizing these facts, both managers and employees have become proud of the fact that the A-FO is their office, which is at the forefront.

"...and what we could see was also that the people who had been a bit more skeptical (to the change) had been given answers to their questions and had prepared themselves so that they used the environment (the A-FO) as one is supposed to." – (Felicia).

One reason for why Amanda was satisfied with the A-FO was the fact that one is able to choose the place of work based on the work task at hand. This possibility also provides the opportunity of sitting close to certain coworkers when one needs it. Amanda stated that the need for a certain person's help may change throughout the day as work tasks differ and it is therefore important to be able to adapt to these needs. This is a requirement that the A-FO fulfils. Even though Sofia was satisfied with the new working environment, this employee still believed that there were a few things missing.

"No, I could not move back to how it used to be, but I can sometimes miss having my own office next to my closest colleague if I just want to ask a quick question. Now I must call him or go look for him." – (Sofia).

Felicia also emphasized that it is important to keep raising the bar and not settle once the primary goals have been achieved, but instead to keep on setting new goals. However, even though managers and employees mostly have positive perceptions towards and are satisfied with the A-FO today, one manager stated that;

"It is always a struggle of not falling back into the old ways of working." – (Karoline).

6. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter will contain an analysis and discussion of the empirical findings in relation to the Theoretical Framework. This will create a deeper understanding of the A-FO change process from the perspectives of managers and employees and facilitate in answering the research questions; "How does the perception of the change process concerning activity-based flexible offices differ between managers and employees? What do managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how do these perceptions differ?". Based on the empirical result, this chapter will consist of the following themes; Important Aspects of Change, Consequences of Change, Communication in the Change Process, Efficiency in the A-FO, Disturbances and Visibility in the A-FO, Communication and Cooperation in the A-FO and Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with the A-FO. Keeping in mind when reading the text, the two themes of Communication and Cooperation in the A-FO and Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with the A-FO was not balanced with the different perceptions between managers and employees since the employee's perspective was more relevant in these two cases.

6.1. Change Management
6.1.1. Important Aspects of Change

During the interviews, the respondents were asked to define what they believed was important in order to achieve successful change. The result seemed to differ between managers and employees, where managers focused more on practical issues, while the employees emphasized more on "soft values". However, it is important to mention that the respondents were only asked to answer this question once which may result in the respondents forgetting to state some important factors. Continuing, when discussing the change at Skellefteå municipality and change in general, the managers mentioned clear goals/vision, time management, conducting a needs assessment and creating a strong guiding coalition as important factors in order to ensure a successful change process. As previously mentioned, Kotter (1995) stated that creating a vision and providing short-term goals is highly important in a change process since it is believed to motivate the employees to continue to contribute to the change as well as help in understanding why the change is taking place. However, many of the respondents stated that Skellefteå municipality did not create a specific vision, but that the focus was on communicating the goals of the change to the department. It may thereby not be the vision per se that is important when communicating, but rather how the communication is conducted and that the goals of the change are made clear.

A clear goal is also stated to increase trust in a work group (Simon & Peterson, 2000, p. 102). In relation to this, one of the managers clearly emphasized the importance of a trust-based leadership approach and how this has been facilitated after the change. It was then stated that it was the new working environment that facilitated the increasing trust between managers and employees. However, it may be argued that working towards a common goal could have provided a foundation for the increasing trust to be built on. Neves and Caetano (2006, p. 352) further emphasized on the importance of creating trust within the organization before the change takes place, since it may be difficult to promote change in an untrusting environment. Gigliotti et al. (2018, p. 95) also highlight that employees are more likely to accept the change if they trust the management. As

previously mentioned, all of the respondents stated that the resistance to the change was perceived as low. One could therefore argue that the high focus that the management had put on trust-based leadership, both before, during and after the change, may have decreased the resistance to the change process.

One manager emphasized the importance of "taking your time" when implementing the change in order for all of the managers and employees to adapt. Skellefteå municipality did the transition to the A-FO in several steps in order to ensure that everyone was on the same track and were able to adapt to the change in their own time and not feel rushed or forced. This is in accordance to the *Popcorn model* (Lidström & Bolter, 2016, p. 70) which states that even though many may be positive towards the change in the beginning, there will always be people who are skeptical towards it and need more time to adapt. Time is thereby needed in order to ensure that most managers and employees are positive towards the change (Stanley et al., 2005, p. 457). By having sufficient time, this change process may have been more easily accomplished. This since having more time to adapt to and prepare for the change may reduce resistance amongst employees. Furthermore, the managers involved in the steering committee stated that they made change leaders out of the managers. These change leaders were provided with the right tools in order to be able to promote the change and further motivate their employees to contribute to the change. As previously mentioned, Kotter (1995) argues for the importance of creating a guiding coalition in order for the change to be successful. This means that it is important to form a group that will promote the change, much like they have done in the department at Skellefteå municipality. Lines (2007, p. 163) also mentions the importance of the guiding coalition consisting of people with power, i.e. managers. The change leaders for this change at Skellefteå municipality consisted of managers within different areas of the department and were equipped to promote the change. Having equipped change leaders and a structured "roadmap" may be one of the reasons for why the change was perceived as a success, thereby proving Kotter's notion of the importance of a strong guiding coalition.

The importance of committed managers in a change process were also mentioned several times by the employees that were interviewed for this study as an important factor in a change process. Most of the employees believed that their managers had been highly committed to the change. However, one employee had experienced an uncommitted manager in the beginning of the change process and mentioned that the lack of commitment from the manager had given the employee a less positive attitude towards the change itself. It was also the belief of another employee that if the manager would have been uncommitted or negative towards the change, this employee would have had a similar, negative perception. It can thereby be argued that a manager's commitment has an effect on employee commitment and satisfaction during a change process. Oakland and Tanner (2007, pp. 5-6) reinforces this statement and argues that it is highly important that leaders and managers support the change in order for it to be successful.

Many of the employees stated the importance of being involved in the change in order for it to become and feel successful. They stated that the managers needed to ensure employee involvement and allow the employees to contribute in order for the employees to keep being motivated and positive towards the change. The importance of employee involvement in a change process is further emphasized by Hussain et al. (2016, p. 126). One way to do this is by providing the employees with the right information and knowledge at the right time (Gill, 2002, p. 315). This will allow them to contribute to the

change. Gill (2002, p. 315) further states that it is an effective leader's job to ensure that the employees are able to contribute to the change. Throughout the interviews, all of the employees stated that they had felt very involved in the change process at Skellefteå municipality. As previously mentioned, the employees had the opportunity to, for example, participate in workshops, choose names for each working area, participate in study visits and offer their opinions throughout the process. All of the employees emphasized that the possibility to be able to contribute was highly valued and a few employees even stated that it had affected their view of the change in a positive way. This is practical evidence of the importance of employee involvement and how it has increased the overall perception of a satisfactory change.

Gill (2002, p. 316) also argues that it is important for an effective leader to be able to motivate the employees in order to achieve a successful change, since the employees are more likely to contribute to the change if they feel motivated and inspired. This had not been mentioned by the respondents as an important factor for change, but during the interviews, the managers had stated that they tried to motivate the employees in many different ways. For example, by providing them with the right tools for personal development and by providing the opportunity to contribute to and affect the outcome of the change. The employees also confirmed that many of the managers had tried to motivate them in different ways and that this had affected their perception of the change. The employees also often connected the managers' ability to motivate the employees to the managers' commitment to the change. As a result, it can be argued that a manager that is more committed to the change is better able to motivate their employees to contribute to the change. This could be due to that a committed manager may better highlight the positive aspects of the change as well as promote it more efficiently, thereby motivating the employees in a more efficient way.

The employees also stated the importance of clear communication within the change process since the communication is believed to affect one's understanding of and attitude towards the change. Something that was also emphasized by the employees. This statement is strengthened by Allen et al. (2007, p. 196) who state that employees better understand the change process if they receive high quality information. As has been previously stated, the importance of communication within a change process has been emphasized by several researchers (Kotter, 1995; Stanely et al., 2005; Covin & Kilmann, 1990). In this instance, Skellefteå municipality did not only use top-down communication but also provided the opportunity for the employees to raise concerns and offer opinions. As a result, the communication during the change process within the department at Skellefteå municipality can be directly connected to increased employee involvement.

One employee stated that even though the change had been successful, it may have been ended a bit abruptly. Kotter (1995) emphasized on the fact that one should not announce victory too soon when conducting a change since it may increase the risk of going back to old ways. It can thereby be argued that some problems may occur within the department after the change has been achieved and implemented. However, three years have passed since the implementation and none of the respondents mentioned issues of people going back to the old way of working. Although they did mention that a few people had still not fully adapted to the environment. A few reasons for why the people within the department at Skellefteå municipality have continued with the new ways of working may be the fact that everyone was highly involved in the change process. This may have caused a feeling of ownership of the new environment and thereby resulting in them upholding the A-

FO's principles. Also, the managers that were interviewed for the study still seemed to be highly committed to upholding the implemented change. Committed managers may thereby continue to motivate their employees to maintain the new ways of working.

Both one manager and one employee stated the importance of continuing working with the change, even after it had been implemented, in order to ensure that everyone will not go back to the old way of working. This has also been emphasized by Kotter (1995) and Jacobs (2002, p. 177) who state that the change may be undone if it is not anchored properly within the organization. This means that the change needs to become a part of the organizational culture. This is further argued for in Lewin's third step of *refreezing* (Robbins, 2003, pp. 564-565) which focuses on stabilizing the implemented change in order to ensure that it will remain. In this case, since both managers and employees are aware of this fact, it may help ensure the continued work and development of the change process and guarantee that everyone will continue with the new way of working. Also, since the respondents did not mention that people had started going back to the old way of working, the implemented change may in fact have become a part of the organizational culture.

Even though this was not specifically mentioned by the respondents as an important aspect of change, it can be argued, from the empirical findings, that the department at Skellefteå municipality tried to create a sense of urgency in order to facilitate the change implementation. This is in accordance with Kotter's Eight Steps (1995). For example, all of the respondents mentioned that they needed to go through with the change in order to be able to manage their facilities better and to save money on office spaces. This fact had been clearly communicated to the people involved in the change and can be argued to cause a sense of urgency. One manager also mentioned that the change had to be conducted in order for the municipality to achieve the strategy of Skellefteå 2030. By stressing the importance of better facility management and its possible negative effects on the strategy if they would not be able to reduce their facilities, urgency for the change must have been created.

This theme shows a difference in perceptions between managers and employees when it comes to important aspects of a change, even though some of the aspects overlap. As has been mentioned, the managers seemed to focus more on practicalities, such as having a clear plan, while employees believed that employee involvement was at least as important, if not more. While conducting a change, one must therefore consider both the managerial and employee perspectives since they focus on different important aspects. Even though the managers may not have mentioned it specifically during the interviews, their actions during the change still show that "soft values" were also emphasized as important throughout the process. As a result, the employees felt highly involved in the change process and had a positive perception of the end result. This theme also shows that, even though many aspects of for example, Kotter's Eight-Step Model (1995) are still valid today. However, they may not all be necessary or needed to be executed in a precise way in order for a change to be successful as was stated by Kotter (1995).

6.1.2. Consequences of Change

The empirical findings show that undergoing a change is not easy and painless for everybody. Rather, it could be a tough process for those who are not eager for change. Two of the managers mentioned that they thought it was a challenging time in the

beginning as there were some teams that faced larger uncertainties among the employees than others. Furthermore, many stated that they were worried as they had seen other municipalities and companies who had moved to an A- FO, who were not as successful and satisfied with the change. Uncertainty and worry were thereby present amongst both a few managers and employees before the implementation had started. Many employees felt uncertainty regarding the change process and what it would entail, since this was a relatively new type of working environment. The resistance to the upcoming change was therefore somewhat different amongst the managers and employees, but the overall belief was that many actually became positive towards the change. The difference in perception between managers and employees may be due to the fact that the employees had less knowledge of the A-FO compared to the managers. As a result, uncertainty amongst employees was higher, thereby increasing resistance to change.

When analyzing the responses from the interviews, the respondents all stated that communication is vital in the change process. This corresponds to earlier studies (Stanley et al. 2005, p. 457; Kotter, 1995) who state that communication as well as having a vision is vital in order to conquer resistance to change. As previously mentioned, Skellefteå municipality did not create a specific vision for the change, but they had clear goals throughout the change process which were communicated to the employees. The clear communication regarding the goals of the change and what the change would entail could therefore have helped to reduce the resistance amongst the employees. Unclear communication could have increased uncertainty and caused confusion amongst the employees, which in turn could have made the implementation of the change more tedious. The importance of clear communication could therefore not be understated. The entire change continued during a two-year period where they prepared themselves digitally and practiced different ways of working, giving the employees time to adapt.

Skellefteå municipality also had a comprehensive time plan for the entire project that they communicated to the people involved, even though they did not know exactly how everything would turn out in the end. One of the managers believed that one of their strengths during the implementation process was that they did not know all the answers to all of the questions and this was something that they clearly communicated to their employees and other managers. The focus in the communication was instead that they would try to find the answers to the questions together. The manager meant that this was a way for them to overcome uncertainties and obstacles together. This way of handling the change process within the department at Skellefteå municipality coincides with earlier studies such as the Eight-Step Model of Change by Kotter (1995) where the fifth step is to *remove potential obstacles to the vision*. This means that it is important to try to remove the larger obstacles even though one might not be able to remove every single one. If Skellefteå municipality would instead have pretended to know all of the answers to the questions, this could have created confusion and caused a lack of trust between managers and employees, thereby resulting in greater resistance to change. By being transparent, Skellefteå municipality was able to overcome obstacles together with their employees. Furthermore, as managers were highly involved in the change process, it was believed to further inspire and empower the employees as well as reduce the resistance to change and the feeling of uncertainty.

According to the *Popcorn Model* (Lidström & Bolter, 2017, p. 70), it is important to get all the employees on board for an upcoming change. However, this is easier said than done. When analyzing the empirical findings, all of the respondents said that there were people who were resistant to changing towards an A-FO. All of the respondents estimated that the major part was positive towards the upcoming change, while there was a smaller part within the department that were against the change. This is also highlighted in the *Popcorn Model* by (Lidström & Bolter, 2017) which is based on the 20-60-20-rule. Skellefteå municipality wanted to find cost-effective work solutions with modern technology and thereby convert to new ways of working. This resulted in some of the respondents being negative from the beginning as they thought that they would not be able to handle such a large change. Some of the respondents were scared as they would no longer use their binders, instead they would have to rely on new and modern technology. However, the respondents stated that they are very satisfied with the increased technology today and most of the people who work in the A-FO have been able to adapt. For example, one employee stated that those who were the most resistant towards the change are now a part of the people who are the most satisfied with the change. Their increased satisfaction may be due to the fact that everyone in the change process had the opportunity to participate and affect the outcome.

Even though a few drawbacks and consequences regarding the change process were mentioned by the respondents, the overall perception was that the change process had been successful and satisfactory. The perception regarding the consequences of the change differed among the managers and the employees. The result showed that the managers were more confident with the upcoming change as they had received information in an earlier state while employees felt more uncertain from the beginning. This strengthened previous research regarding employee resistance to change. The drawbacks that were mentioned have also been found in previous research and do not seem to be divergent for this study.

6.1.3. Communication in the Change Process

As previously mentioned all of the respondents, both managers and employees, agreed upon the importance of having good and clear communication. Furthermore, all of them seemed satisfied about how Skellefteå municipality had handled the internal communication throughout the change process. As stated earlier, one of the managers saw the openness and transparency of the communication as one of their strengths, meaning that it was a good thing that they were open about what they knew and what they did not know. It then became very important that they were clear about the fact that the change was something they all would have to do together, both managers and employees. According to Hassan et al. (2011, p. 24), a good and supportive communication climate is vital in order for an organization to maintain its efficiency. Workers will be encouraged and more willing to participate in the communication, as information will be shared freely and openly which in turn contributes to conflicts being resolved faster. Communicating change face-to-face has shown to be influential as it tends to increase trust as well as other important values such as transparency, honesty and respecting employees' feelings. These aspects tend to be important to take into consideration for an organization when undergoing a change (E. F. Harshman, & C. L. Harshman, 1999, p. 5; Allen et al. 2007, p. 198). This way of working is further supported by Lippitt (1997, p. 19) who stated that employees would better support the goals of the organization if the internal communication is good. Viewing the responses, all of the respondents mentioned that the

communication was perceived as sufficient and well thought through. The fact that the internal communication and respect from the managers towards their employees was well performed could be one reason for why so many employees and managers were satisfied with the change.

Based on the Eight-Step Model of Change by Kotter (1995), the fourth step entails *communicating the created vision.* Although Skellefteå municipality did not have a specific vision, they still had short-term and long-term goals that they wanted to achieve as well as a thought of how to get there. When analyzing the responses of what each respondent believed was the reason for moving to an A-FO, everyone had slightly different answers but no one said that they did not know why they moved to an A-FO. This means that Skellefteå municipality has succeeded in explaining the reasons for moving to an A-FO. However, the respondents mentioned different reasons such as the economic aspects, better facility management, increased cooperation, the transformation to a more digitized way of working etc., even though most of these factors were mentioned by everyone. This means that even though all of the respondents mentioned reasons for moving to the A-FO, the main goal may not have been completely clear since the reasons slightly differed between managers and employees. Although the goals were set and communicated, it still seems that Skellefteå municipality could have been slightly more clear. This could have resulted in even less resistance to change. On the other hand, Skellefteå municipality has shown that an organization perhaps does not need a clear vision as stated by Kotter (1995) rather, clear goals and a clear communication regarding the reasons for *why* a change is needed. Judging by the respondents' answers, everyone seemed to know the reasons for the change. Skellefteå municipality seems to prove that a specific vision may not be needed as long as one communicates the short- and long-term goals as well as emphasizes on the reasons behind the change.

Skellefteå municipality also made a "roadmap" regarding how the change would be carried out as well as a communication plan. They also performed physical activities such as kick-offs and theaters where everyone within the department participated in order to bond and transform this change to their own. Furthermore, according to Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change, the stage of *unfreezing* through changing behavior and reducing the tension of resistance to change was done in this case by having these activities. From the interviews we could see that there were employees who, from the beginning, were uncertain about the upcoming change and all of these events were meant as a way to be able to interact and discuss the reasons and goals of the change. Thereby trying to reduce any uncertainty. Without these events, the employees may not have been as positive towards and satisfied with the change, since these events provided an important opportunity for them to contribute and affect the change as well as reduce any insecurities.

Skellefteå municipality performed the transformation in different stages, they had evenings together where they cleared out their desks in their old traditional office room from unnecessary binders etc. This was done in order to facilitate the transformation to a more technology-based way of working, but also since the employees and managers no longer would be able to have their own office. Instead of simply telling all of the workers to get rid of binders, the change leaders and managers communicated why this was necessary and made it into an enjoyable activity. According to Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change this was the *changing stage* and this is known as the hardest step to overcome (Robbins, 2003, pp. 564-565). This difficulty was also seen when analyzing the responses. For example, one of the managers had employees who said that they needed their own

office chair for ergonomic reasons, another employee required a certain light in the office while others did not think they would be able to reduce the amount of binders. This was discussed between managers and employees in order to explain why certain changes to the way of working were necessary and ensure that the employees understood these reasons. This also provided an opportunity for the employees to voice and discuss their concerns. We believe this was a way for Skellefteå municipality to communicate the change during the process as well as involve the employees in the change and it seemed successful, as people now have adjusted to the new environment.

We were also further interested in how the communication was performed throughout the change process. According to Kotter (1995), it is important to use all available channels as well as communicating through actions from the guiding coalition that show that they are also undergoing and adapting to the change. When asking the employees, they mentioned that the communication occurred both through email, activities and different surveys but mainly through their closest manager, who in turn received information from the project group or the main change leader. This is somewhat similar to what is called a *top-down* approach according to Jones et al., (2004, p. 741). It is however, important to not only use *top-down* but rather take advantage of all of the communication channels. However, even though the *top-down* approach seemed to be the main focus of Skellefteå municipality's communication, it also seems like they have used several different communication methods that also involve their employees, such as meetings where the communication goes both ways. This way of communication creates another opportunity for the employees to feel involved and contribute to the change. One interesting finding arose from one of the employees who stated that those who were the most resistant to change in the beginning were also the ones who had the most opinions and complaints. However, they have been seen as those who contributed the most to the change, and are today believed to be the ones who have highly adapted to the A-FO.

The findings showed that Skellefteå municipality had mostly focused on the "*top down*" approach, but they also allowed employees to provide inputs to the change which showed that they allowed communication from both ways. When analyzing the managers' responses regarding their opportunity to contribute with inputs, most of them emphasized that the employees had the opportunity throughout the change process to share their inputs and opinions. It was, however, implied that the managers had the opportunity to provide inputs as well since they had been highly involved in the change process. This could be one of the reasons for why the perception of the communication was satisfactory amongst both managers and employees. To conclude, both managers and employees agreed upon the importance of having a good internal communication.

6.2. Activity-Based Flexible Office
6.2.1. Efficiency in the A-FO

As previously stated, one of the reasons for implementing an A-FO is to increase efficiency within the organization (Oakland & Tanner, 2007, p. 5). However, when the respondents were asked about the reasons behind the implementation of the A-FO within their department, none of them mentioned increased efficiency. Nevertheless, one of the managers did mention that they believed that they had become more efficient within the department as a result of the A-FO. One employee also stated that the increased focus on digitalization improved the possibility to work more efficiently. Furthermore, even though the rest of the respondents did not mention the word efficiency specifically when

speaking about how the A-FO had affected their work, all of them mentioned aspects that can be interpreted as efficiency. For example, several respondents mentioned that the A-FO requires that everyone share the same working area and therefore sit very closely together. As a result, it has become much easier to ask quick questions to co-workers and it has thereby reduced the need for scheduled meetings. Many respondents also drew the conclusion that a result of these quick interactions between co-workers had reduced the time of scheduled meetings as well, because less questions and issues were raised during the meetings. Furthermore, one employee mentioned that before the A-FO, the employee's work consisted of a lot of travelling to different meetings. Since they have now a greater focus on technology, after moving to the A-FO, the need to meet face-to-face has been reduced since they can now use technology for conducting video-conferences instead. Consequently, the time travelling between different meetings has decreased. Reduced time consuming activities has not been shown in earlier studies of A-FOs such as *the* Activity-Based Flexible Office Model mentioned above. Thereby this is an additional aspect that should be taken into consideration when planning on implementing an A-FO.

As previously mentioned, one of the main focuses of an A-FO often concerns technology (Lidström & Bolter, 2016, p. 106). In fact, the right technology is believed to be vital in order for the A-FO to reach its full potential. Technology has thereby also been as an important focus in the implementation process of the A-FO within Skellefteå municipality. Several employees stated that before the A-FO, they needed to print a lot of material that they needed for work in order to bring to meetings for example. This was both time consuming and a possible waste of paper and ink. However, after moving to the A-FO, the new technology reduced the need for printing material since one could now easily find the relevant document in one's computer. Moreover, before the A-FO, a lot of documents and material were saved analogically in different folders and binders. Now, the managers and employees save all of their documents in their computer. As a result, one would only need to bring one's computer with them to different meetings instead of printing a lot of documents, which takes time, and bringing many different binders, which can be challenging. Also, the decreased need for printed documents and binders decreases the need for shelf-space, which means that the working environment can be used more efficiently. This means that more space within the working environment is allocated to the employees and the A-FO can thereby provide a greater opportunity for different working areas, making it more adaptable. This has been proven to be the case in this study.

Both managers and employees seem to agree on the fact that the A-FO has contributed to greater efficiency in the workplace. They gave the example of shorter and more efficient meetings and also mentioned how technology had improved their ability to work more efficiently. However, the importance of technology was slightly more emphasized by employees. The examples that were mentioned by the respondents also highlighted new aspects of the A-FO that had not been specifically mentioned in previous research. For example, the decreased need for travel due to the new technology in the A-FO. This decreasing need has not been specifically stated in previous research, even though it may have been implied. Even though increased efficiency may not have been one of the reasons for implementing the A-FO, it seems like it is an inevitable result of the new working environment. This has also been proven by previous research (e.g. Oakland & Tanner, 2007).

6.2.2. Disturbances and Visibility in the A-FO

From the empirical findings it can be deducted that some of the respondents, mainly employees, found that the A-FO resulted in more distractions. For example, noise and distractions seemed to increase in the open areas by other peoples' talk or movement. It could also be perceived as disturbing if people conducted a particular work task in an area that is not suited for the task, such as sitting in a quieter area but still needing to have discussions with co-workers. Even though the close proximity and possibility of asking quick questions to co-workers was mainly seen as something positive, some respondents believed it created a lack of respect. This was due to the fact that, by asking a question "on the go" one may disturb someone in the middle of a work task by doing so. This means that while the A-FO provides an environment with a greater focus on helping one another, it can also create a lot of distractions for the people who work within it. Lee and Brand (2005, p. 324) stated that satisfaction with the work environment may decrease if the employees experience a lot of distractions. However, this may be counterbalanced by the possibility of flexibility in the workplace provided by the A-FO (Lee & Brand, 2005, p. 330). The flexibility of choosing where one worked was perceived by the employees as something positive with the A-FO. This may be a reason for why the respondents were satisfied with the A-FO, even though some employees could find the environment to be distracting at times, since they are able to move away from the noise if needed.

Distractions in the A-FO can also be connected to the Activity-Based Flexible Office Model where Wohlers and Hertel (2017, p. 473) explain *privacy* in the work environment as dependent on how well the employees are able to control disturbances. As previously stated, the A-FO often provides a lack of privacy due to its often open landscape (Charles & Veitch, 2002, p. 3) and it may thereby be hard to control disturbances. However, even though a few employees felt that the noise level could become quite high in some working areas, others argued that they still had the possibility of controlling the disturbance. For example, by moving to a quieter area or using headphones. It was also emphasized that some areas are in fact supposed to facilitate communication between co-workers and that this needed to be accepted. This is also supported by Allen and Gerstberger (1973, p. 2) who state that the close proximity between co-workers in an A-FO affects the possibilities for communications. Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 277) also stated, in their study regarding the A-FO and *perceived need-supply fit*, that open office landscapes often increase distractions, but the flexibility of the A-FO allows the employees to avoid disturbances to a greater extent. As a result, distractions were expected to decrease when moving from an open landscape to an A-FO. However, moving from a "traditional" working environment, with closed and individual offices, to an A-FO seems to have entailed more disturbances for some people while others seem to have adapted. This was not included in Gerdenitsch et al. (2018) study, but something that still needs to be taken into consideration when moving to an A-FO.

As previously mentioned, Mayer et al. (1995, p. 710) state that the visibility between team members may decrease as a consequence of the A-FO. This was not specifically mentioned by the respondents, although one employee did mention that they could move around outside of their team depending on the work task at hand. As a result, it could be argued that the visibility of team members may be reduced in an A-FO, since members can move around to different areas if they have differing work tasks within the team. On the other hand, another employee stated that their team tended to sit close together, independent of the work they were conducting. The visibility of team members thereby

seems subjective and dependent on the individuals in the team. This finding strengthens Wholers' and Hertel's (2017, p. 475) conclusion regarding how visibility increases in an A-FO to some extent. One employee also stated that visibility could become an issue for other reasons and stated that it could be psychologically demanding. This employee meant that the A-FO created a feeling of constantly being observed, which could be perceived as stressful. One of the managers also stated that the increased visibility in the A-FO could sometimes become an obstacle when sensitive information needed to be discussed.

To conclude, disturbances in the working environment were more frequently mentioned by employees than by managers. The results from the managers hardly show any evidence of disturbances in the workplace, which resulted in a more thorough discussion of employees' perceptions on this theme. The only issue that was mentioned by a manager was the visibility could sometimes become a problem when discussing sensitive matters with employees. No manager mentioned the noise level as disturbing, even though one manager believed in the beginning that this would be a problem. One reason for this may be that managers often spend more of their time in meetings than an employee, which means that an employee often spends more time in the A-FO than a manager. As a result, an employee may be more aware and susceptible to the surroundings, i.e. disturbances. As previous research has mentioned, employee satisfaction may be negatively affected by distractions in the workplace (e.g. Lee & Brand, 2005, p. 324). Despite the disturbances mentioned by both managers and employees, the empirical findings show that they were still satisfied with the change to an A-FO. Thereby proving that even though disturbances may affect satisfaction negatively, other factors may play a role regarding satisfaction at the workplace.

6.2.3. Communication and Cooperation in the A-FO

As mentioned earlier, both employees and managers felt that the communication has been perceived as good throughout the change process. As a result, we were interested in asking how the communication has changed internally after moving to the A-FO. As it has now been three years since the change took place, most respondents stated that the *intra-communication* (the communication within the team) has been improved. Other respondents did not feel a major change in the *intra-communication*. However, one of the employees mentioned that they are now working more efficiently within the team as the communication paths are shorter and it is easier to ask the colleagues a quick question instead of booking a meeting as they previously did. When asking about the *inter-communication* (the communication between different teams), most of the respondents stated that it has increased. The respondents said that this was due to the A-FO as they are constantly moving around within the office, meeting new people from other working teams, allowing new interactions etc. This is further stated in the study by Gerdenitsch et al. (2018, p. 275) where the *perceived need-supply fit* showed that the A-FO has three main effects after implementation, among these is the A-FOs effect on *Interactions Across Teams*. The increased visibility and proximity amongst workers from different teams is expected to increase interactions across teams and thereby encourage *inter-communication* due to the A-FO implementation. This however, is something that took time to ensure. One of the employees mentioned that it is only now, three years later, that one can see the increased cooperation between teams. The fact that the cooperation increases due to the A-FO is something that we believe is a result of the increased communication across teams. The increased cooperation is thereby a result of people

getting to know each other and wanting to help out and thereby be more service minded towards their colleagues within the department. Increased cooperation is thereby something that also seems to be a result of an A-FO implementation. On the other hand, Gerdenitsch et al. (2017) did not mention that interaction within teams also has a tendency to increase. This fact was stated by this study and is perceived as one additional effect of the A-FO that could be added to Gerdenitsch et al. (2017) study.

The increased cooperation due to an increased communication and visibility in the A-FO, is clearly stated by one of the managers that mentioned that it is now a risk of disturbing someone by asking "quick questions" on the go. Due to the close proximity to co-workers and increased communication, the A-FO promotes an environment where people are more eager to help each other out, even though the person might not have time. As a result, this may increase stress due to the willingness of helping others even though the time is not sufficient. We have viewed this as one drawback within the A-FO, which has not been stated in earlier studies such as the Activity-Based Flexible Office Model. It is thereby important that the people in charge of the change continuously work in order to decrease stress within the A-FO. Further, the increased cooperation can be linked to increased efficiency. One study conducted by Meyer and Rowan (1977, pp. 340-341) stated that a consequence of organizations adapting to new trends, such as A-FO based environments, could conflict with an organization's efficiency. Other studies have shown the opposite, that moving to an A-FO can instead improve the efficiency of the organization (Oakland and Tanner, 2007, p. 5). However, viewing the respondents' answers, some of them mentioned that the efficiency within and between groups had increased due to the increase of communication and cooperation provided by the A-FO. For example, when it comes to communication regarding quick answers on questions and shorter meetings, but also the increased willingness to help others etc. According to Hassan et al. (2011, p. 24) the communication climate within an organization is vital in order to remain efficient. This seems to be reflected within Skellefteå municipality since the A-FO has increased the communication and cooperation across and within teams, making them more efficient.

To conclude, viewing the respondents' answers, both managers and employees state that the interaction across teams has increased and this is further strengthened in earlier studies by Gerdenitsch et al., (2018, p. 275) who argued for increased *interaction across teams.* However, according to one employee, as mentioned above, this was first seen in Skellefteå municipality after three years. This could imply the importance of constantly emphasizing new ways of working in order to reach the wanted result such as increased interaction, cooperation and digitalization since it takes time to achieve these goals. Thereby it is vital to keep working with the implementation even after the new A-FO is finished in order to reduce the risk of going back to old traditional ways where people sat at the same spot throughout the day. This is further stated by Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change*,* where the seventh step involves *not announcing victory too soon*. This means that the change is not completed right after moving to the A-FO, but rather one needs to continue to ensure that people do not go back to old ways of working. This is done by focusing on Kotter's eight step; *secure the achieved changes in the organizational culture* (Kotter, 1995).

6.2.4. Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with the A-FO

Ross et al. (2017, p. 6) stated that increased employee satisfaction was another reason for implementing an A-FO. This is further emphasized by van der Voordt (2004, p. 139) who also stated that employee satisfaction can increase if the needs of the employee matches the working environment. As a result, A-FOs often increase employee satisfaction due to its high flexibility. The empirical findings did not reveal increased employee satisfaction as one of the reasons for moving to an A-FO. However, much like efficiency, increased employee (and manager) satisfaction seems to have been one of the outcomes of the new working environment. As mentioned above, all of the respondents felt satisfied with the change and the A-FO, even though some mentioned aspects that could be improved. The reasons for the increased satisfaction were, however, not always clear. As previously mentioned, the communication during the change had been very satisfactory. Bordia et al. (2007, pp. 360-361) stated that well-defined communication in a change process could increase job satisfaction since it decreases uncertainty amongst the employees. This is also emphasized by Osei-Bonsu (2014, p. 142) which confirmed that employees will be more supportive to the change if the communication is satisfactory. The clear communication throughout the process may therefore be one of the reasons for why the satisfaction with the A-FO was so high.

Edwards et al. (1998, p.7) also argued that dissatisfaction often arises if the working environment does not match the needs of the employees. Gerdenitsch et al (2018, p. 279) stated in their model that employee satisfaction would increase in an A-FO since the environment would be perceived to suit the employees' work tasks better, due to the high flexibility of the new environment. As a result, it can be argued that the characteristics of the A-FO itself also helped in increasing the satisfaction amongst both employees and managers. For example, a few of the employees specifically mentioned the flexibility of the A-FO as something that had affected their satisfaction in a positive way. Also, the emphasis on digitalization and new technology, which are two aspects that are brought about by the A-FO, was also perceived as something that increased satisfaction amongst both managers and employees. Moreover, Matzler et al (2004, p. 1179) also stated above that if employees are satisfied, the productivity within the organization can increase. The increased satisfaction after the change can therefore be connected to the increase in efficiency that has been perceived by both managers and employees in the new working environment.

On the other hand, van der Voordt (2004, p. 134) claimed that by not having a personal desk, employee satisfaction may decrease since the employees are not able to express one's status or since they are deprived of privacy. The empirical findings show, however, that the issue of expressing one's status was not relevant for the respondents. Instead, both the managers and the employees believed that it was important that everyone was considered as equals in the new working environment, independent of their title. This meant that managers and employees should follow the same rules and no one in the A-FO should have their own office, not even the highest manager. Miller (2001, p. 362) argued that it is important that managers are able to "lead by example" and show that they will also adapt to the change if they want to ensure a successful change process. This fact has clearly been considered by the managers within the department at Skellefteå municipality and may be a contributing factor to why the employees are especially satisfied with the A-FO. However, one manager did mention that a few employees did still believe that it would be more appropriate that the highest manager had an individual

office if, for example, sensitive information would be discussed. The lack of privacy, on the other hand, was raised as an issue by a few employees, but it did not seem to affect the satisfaction with the A-FO.

As mentioned many times before, the employees who participated in this interview stated that employee involvement was a highly important factor in a change process. This fact has also been emphasized several times in this report and by several researchers (Hussain et al., 2016; Gill, 2002; Oakland & Tanner, 2007). All of the employees also stated that they, in fact, had been very involved in the change process and felt like they had the opportunity to affect and contribute to the new working environment. This meant that the employees felt that their participation was extremely important and something that would affect their perception towards the outcome. The employees also experienced that the managers believed that the employees' opinions were important. It can thereby be argued that since the employees perceived that their feelings and opinions were taken into consideration by top managers, their satisfaction with the A-FO may have increased since they felt involved in the process.

Another issue that shows that many of the people who started working in the new environment were satisfied with the A-FO, is the sense of pride. One employee specifically mentioned that most, if not all, of the people who now worked in the A-FO felt a sense of pride while working there. The employee also believed that the flexibility of the A-FO allowed more people to relate to the environment and feel a sense of community, since the environment is highly adapted to specific work tasks and everyone works within the same area. The feeling of pride while working in an A-FO has not been found in previous studies, but seems to be connected to satisfaction with the work environment in this study.

However, as stated by the respondents, there are still a few people who are not completely satisfied with the A-FO. This was conveyed in their estimation of how many people they believed resisted the change in the beginning and how many disliked the A-FO today. This fact is in accordance with Lidström's and Bolter's (2017, p. 70) *Popcorn Model* which states that approximately 20% may never accept the change. In this case however, the respondents believed that the remaining people who were dissatisfied with the change would probably be much less than 20%. We further asked the respondents whether they believed that there were any drawbacks with the A-FO. One interesting finding was that both one manager and one employee mentioned that they could not find their co-workers as easily as before when working in a "traditional" office. Now that everyone is changing their seat throughout the day, it is hard to get in contact with certain employees or managers as one may not know where they are sitting at the time or what all of the people within the department look like. This can make the search for a co-worker time consuming if one did not book an appointment. Therefore, the respondents meant that it would be good to have technology that could specify where each person is sitting at a particular time. Viewing earlier studies on A-FOs, nothing similar regarding the issue of not being able to find co-workers has been observed. Even though this was mentioned as a minor drawback, it still needs to be taken into consideration and discussions should be held regarding how to minimize this issue.

When discussing satisfaction in the A-FO, the focus became mainly on the employee perspective, since this has also been emphasized as important in previous research. However, even though the employee satisfaction is highlighted, it often corresponds with

manager satisfaction as well. Both managers and employees agreed that they were satisfied with the A-FO, but the reasons behind the satisfaction differed. For example, one of the managers mentioned increased satisfaction due to the increased well-being of the employees, while many of the employees mentioned that their participation in the change process had increased their satisfaction with the outcome. It has been previously mentioned that it is important for a manager to be committed to the change since this will affect the employees' perception of the change. We thereby argue that managers also play an important role when it comes to employee satisfaction in the workplace since they have been stated to affect employees' attitudes towards a change. However, the correlation between employee satisfaction and managers' commitment to the change was not specifically stated during the interviews, but rather it was implied. To conclude, it has also been shown that the perceptions of managers and employees in the beginning of the change process had little effect on their perception of the A-FO after it had been implemented. This since all of the respondents were satisfied with the A-FO irrespective of if they were skeptical or positive towards the change in the beginning.

6.3.   Summary of the Analysis

When analyzing the interviews, it became clear that most themes balanced and compared the two perceptions of managers and employees. However, some themes were more focused on an employee perspective, such as *Disturbances and Visibility in the A-FO* and *Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with the A-FO.* This was due to the fact that few managers mentioned any disturbances in the A-FO, but we still felt that it was an important aspect to raise. Also, satisfaction focused more on the employees since employee satisfaction has been raised as an important issue in previous research and the resistance to change has come mainly from the employees. Furthermore, a few areas within each of the themes consisted of aspects where managers and employees had similar perceptions. This made it difficult to continuously compare and contrast the two perspectives throughout the text.

The analysis shows that managers' and employees' perceptions often differ in many aspects of both the change process and when it comes to the A-FO. For example, regarding *important aspects of change*. Managers seem to believe that practical issues, such as planning, are highly important in order for a change to be successful. Employees, on the other hand, focus more on cooperation and the opportunity for employees to provide insights and opinions as highly important in a change process. Furthermore, resistance to the change was higher amongst employees, while the managers who were interviewed were, overall, more confident towards the change. Also, employees were more aware of the disturbances in the A-FO compared to the managers and saw some of the downsides that these disturbances could have. Managers, on the other hand, did not mention disturbances as an occurring issue. They did, however, mention other aspects of the new environment that could sometimes affect their way of working in a negative way, for example, visibility.

It is also evident that their perceptions sometimes overlap and the perspectives of managers and employees can complement each other. For example, the reasons for change and how the A-FO has affected efficiency in the workplace. The managers and employees believed, for the most part, that the A-FO provides greater opportunities to work more efficiently. However, different aspects were emphasized differently by managers and employees. For example, the employees argued more extensively for the

importance of the new technology and its effect on efficiency. Both managers and employees also emphasized on the importance of clear communication throughout the change process and both groups perceived the communication as sufficient during this change process. They also mentioned that the communication and cooperation within and between teams has increased since moving to the new environment.

To conclude, both managers and employees stated that they were satisfied with the A-FO after its implementation and would not want to go back to working in a "traditional" working environment. However, the reasons for increased satisfaction differed between managers and employees. Managers mainly mentioned that they were satisfied with the A-FO since they could see how well their employees could fit into the new environment and how they were able to thrive. Employees, on the other hand, mentioned that the change process itself had a positive effect on the level of satisfaction with the A-FO once it was implemented. This can be observed in table 3.

Themes	Overall Common Perceptions Between Managers and Employees	Overall Different Perceptions Between Managers and Employees	How They Differ
Important Aspects of Change		✖	*Managers' Beliefs:* - Clear goal - Time management - Guiding coalition *Employees' beliefs:* - Involvement - Managerial commitment
Consequences of Change		✖	*Managers' Beliefs:* - Saw few drawbacks *Employees' Beliefs:* - Higher uncertainty
Communication in the Change Process	✖		*Managers' & Employees' Beliefs:* - Communication is an important aspect of change. - The communication was well thought through in this process
Efficiency in the A-FO	✖		*Managers' & Employees' Beliefs:* - A-FO has facilitated higher efficiency in the work place.
Disturbances and Visibility in the A-FO		✖	*Managers' Beliefs:* - Perceived few disturbances. - Being visible to others in the A-FO was perceived as a small problem

Disturbances and Visibility in the A-FO			*Employees' Beliefs:* - More aware of and susceptible to disturbances
Communication and Cooperation in the A-FO	✖		*Managers' & Employees' Beliefs:* - Increased communication within and between teams. - Increased cooperation within and between teams.
Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with the A-FO		✖	*Managers' Beliefs:* - Overall satisfied - Satisfied due to visible increased employee satisfaction *Employees' Beliefs:* - Overall satisfied - Satisfied due to involvement, increased flexibility - A feeling of pride

Table 3. Summary of Managers' and Employees' Perceptions.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter of this thesis, the conclusion for the study will be presented. The conclusion is founded on the empirical findings as well as on the analysis and will help answer the research questions: "How does the perception of the change process concerning activity-based flexible offices differ between managers and employees? What do managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how do these perceptions differ?". Then, the theoretical and practical contributions as well as the limitations of this study are presented. The chapter concludes with presenting suggested areas for future research.

7.1.   Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to create a deeper understanding of the change process. More specifically, to investigate the change process regarding the A-FO and how managers and employees perceive this change. This has been done by conducting semi-structured interviews with respondents at Skellefteå municipality who implemented this change three years ago. After performing the interviews, the results have been analyzed in order to answer the research questions: *How does the perception of the change process concerning activity-based flexible offices differ between managers and employees? What do managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how do these perceptions differ?*

Starting by answering the first research questions: *How does the perception of the change process concerning activity-based flexible offices differ between managers and employees?* When analyzing the results, it was discovered that the perceptions between managers and employees often differed when it came to the change towards the A-FO in Skellefteå municipality. On the other hand, it also showed that the perceptions were similar on many occasions. Both the managers and employees that were interviewed for this study emphasized that they were very satisfied with the implementation of the A-FO. This was regardless of how the respondents felt before the implementation took place. However, as mentioned above, this study found different reasons for increased satisfaction when comparing managers and employees. This proves that the two groups value different things during a change process and in a working environment. It is thereby important to be aware of what they find important in this type of working environment before implementing the A-FO. This will ensure that as many as possible will be satisfied with the result. For example, by using clear communication, uncertainty towards the change is more likely to decrease which may result in the employees being more motivated to work with the change and thereby more satisfied with the result. Also, being able to contribute to and affect the change has been stated to increase satisfaction amongst employees in this study. The high involvement of employees may be one of the reasons for why many of them are so satisfied with the change. On the other hand, many of the employees mentioned several disturbances that the A-FO entailed, while the managers hardly mentioned any disturbances. Since employees have been found to experience more disturbances in the A-FO, it is important to work more with employees in order to find ways of working that will help them cope with or reduce the possible disturbances.

Even though both managers and employees were satisfied with the change, this study showed that managers were more positive towards the change in the beginning, while many of the employees felt uncertainty. Since the perceptions of managers and employees

differed in the beginning of the process, it is important to take uncertainty and resistance to change into consideration before starting the implementation of the change process. In this study, it has been shown that clear communication and being able to admit if one does not hold the answers to a certain question seem to have given successful results regarding the reduction of uncertainty. It provided a great sense of transparency and may therefore have increased the trust between managers and employees. The study also found that both managers and employees perceived an increase in communication within and between teams after moving to an A-FO, even though the communication between teams had taken some time to increase. Also, due to the increased communication combined with the close proximity in which everyone works, the cooperation also seems to have increased within and between teams. In this case, both managers and employees seemed to connect increased communication with increased cooperation and it can thereby be concluded that the A-FO also facilitates cooperation. The increased communication and cooperation has also been stated to have a connection to the increase in efficiency that many of the respondents experienced after moving to an A-FO.

Continuing by answering the second research questions: *What do managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how do these perceptions differ?* As previously mentioned, managers believed that practical issues were more important when it came to the change process. Employees, on the other hand, believed that their own involvement in the change was one of the most important things in order for them to feel that the change had been a success. As there is a difference in perceptions, it is vital to take both aspects into consideration when conducting a change. This has been proven to be successful for Skellefteå municipality, since they seem to have taken both managers' and employees' opinions into consideration during the change process. Furthermore, both managers and employees stated that clear goals and communication was extremely important during a change. One can thereby draw the conclusion that clear goals and communication may be more important than a specific vision. These factors may also promote the change since it promotes trust between managers and employees. Also, having both short- and long term goals throughout the process may further increase motivation during hard times since reaching a short term goal may raise spirits and provide a foundation to further work towards the long term goals. Moreover, in order to not overwhelm the participants of the change, Skellefteå municipality has shown how taking your time when implementing the change can be vital in order to ensure that everyone is on board with the change and thereby reduce resistance towards it.

Managers also emphasized and showed the importance of a guiding coalition when implementing an A-FO change process. In this case, the emphasis was on providing managers with the right tools to promote the change and motivate the employees to contribute through good communication. Once again, this aspect of change has been proven to be important and still seems valid in today's society. Also, the employees believed that committed managers were highly important in order to motivate them to contribute to the change. One can thereby not emphasize enough on the importance of getting all of the managers on board with the change in order for the result to become successful. Furthermore, both one manager and one employee stated that it is important to continue upholding the change after it has been implemented in order to ensure that the wanted effect is maintained, thereby strengthening previous research. However, even though one of the employees argued that the change process ended a bit abruptly, no apparent negative effects have been observed in this case. Thereby, the results diverge

from theory, showing that a change may end abruptly but may still be successful. This may be due to the organizational culture, where many people are open to change as suggested by the interviews, and has had a long time to adapt and get used to the change. As a result, the people working in the new environment may still uphold its purpose. On the other hand, even though the change itself may have ended abruptly, several respondents stated that they continued the process of implementing a new way of working. This may also be one of the reasons for why the A-FO has been successful.

To conclude, this study has found that it is important to take both managers and employees perceptions into consideration before, during and after implementing a change, since they can often differ. If both perceptions are considered, this may help improve the implementation of the change. In this case, the change was perceived as successful by the respondents. This may have been due to the fact that the respondents felt involved in the process and believed that their opinions had an effect on the final outcome. The fact that both sides have been considered seems to have improved the outcome of the change to an A-FO within the department at Skellefteå municipality. It has also been observed that some factors and perceptions are equivalent between managers and employees. It is therefore important to identify the areas where managers' and employees' perceptions differ and are similar, in order to know what to focus on in the change process. This can be observed in table 4.

Factors within the change process that have been seen as essential by managers are:	Having a clear "roadmap", time management, setting clear goals, having a communication plan, transparency, and promoting the cooperation between managers and employees.
Factors within the change process that have been seen as essential by employees are:	Employee involvement and opportunity to affect, having a committed as well as an informative manager and clear communication.
Factors within the A-FO that have been seen as essential by managers are:	Technology, flexible working environment, employees being able to thrive, increased cooperation, better facility management.
Factors within the A-FO that have been seen as essential by employees are:	Technology, increased cooperation, flexible working environment, appealing working environment, possibilities to avoid disturbances.

Table 4. What managers and employees perceive as essential factors of the change process and A-FO implementation and how these perceptions differ.

7.2. Contributions and Limitations
7.2.1. Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions that this study provides consists of the identified gap within the area of A-FO and Change Management. Today there are relatively few studies

conducted within the area regarding the correlation between organizational restructuring and the individual and group responses to changes in the workplace (Kalleberg, 2011, p. 446). Most of the studies regarding the A-FO concern the ergonomic and psychological aspects of it and not the actual implementation process and the perceptions from the managers and employees from a business related point of view (e.g. Makhbul et al. 2007, p. 50; Hultberg, A. 2019). This study thereby contributes to previous research by providing a business perspective.

The concept of Change Management on the other hand is an area where studies have been conducted for years, where different theories and models have emerged from. Combining these two concepts; A-FO and Change Management, would fill the identified gap within the yet, not fully saturated area of the change process and implementation of an A-FO, where both managers' and employees' opinions and perceptions of this change at a specific organization are investigated. As the perceptions of managers and employees have not been investigated earlier within this area, this study would thereby contribute theoretically to this aspect. Being aware of this phenomenon would thereby contribute to the theoretical understanding of what is important for organizations when undergoing a larger change towards an A-FO. Moreover, as previously mentioned Kotter (1995) emphasized the importance of having a clear vision in order for a change to be successful. However, this was not as important in this study since Skellefteå municipality did not create a vision but rather focused on clear goals. The study therefore contributes with new and additional findings to previous theory.

In the research framework provided by Gerdenitsch (2018, p. 275) they focus on the effects of an A-FO, where they state the increased interaction across teams as one effect. However, they do not mention the possible increase of interaction within teams. The increasing interaction within a team was found in this study and can thereby be a contributing factor to their framework. Also, even though Gerdenitsch (2018, p. 277) state that interaction increases within the A-FO, they do not specifically mention increased cooperation. This factor has been emphasized in this study and found to be connected to increased interaction and communication. As a result, cooperation has been stated as an important effect of the A-FO and therefore something that needs to be taken into consideration for future research. Furthermore, one consequence of the A-FO that was found in this study was the difficulty of finding people in the new environment, as they are constantly moving around. This consequence was not mentioned by Wohlers and Hertel (2017, p. 470) and their Activity- Based Flexible Office model. This study thereby contributes to their model and future research.

7.2.2. Practical Contributions

Since change has been stated to be a constant factor of today's society, it is vital that organizations know how to go through a change process successfully. The extensive focus on the change process will thereby hopefully further assist organizations when going through a change by providing relevant background information on change as well as emphasizing the perceptions of both managers and employees. Furthermore, as previously mentioned the implementation of A-FOs has been continuously increasing and the A-FO itself is seen as the future of the workplace. However, even though the benefits of implementing an A-FO is perceived as high, the implementation process is believed to be difficult. By providing a practical example of a successful A-FO implementation, other organizations can learn from their success. The empirical findings also provide the

opportunity for others to learn from mistakes and take new things into consideration that has been perceived as especially important by the respondents in this study.

This thesis hopes to inform organizations of the dangers and possibilities that an A-FO change process entails and thereby help ensure the success of the implementation. This thesis has also pointed out that during this particular change, the perceptions of managers and employees were more or less the same at the end of the change, even if it differed in the beginning. On the other hand, the thesis has also shown differences in perceptions between managers and employees in regards to what they believe is important in a change process. The similarities or differences in perceptions are therefore important to take into consideration by other organizations who are implementing this type of change. By focusing on two perspectives, this thesis highlights the importance of including both managers and employees in the change process, not simply managers. Since this thesis focuses on a change process that has been perceived as successful by its participants, other organizations can use the success factors mentioned by the respondents in order to achieve a successful A-FO change process. Managers should thereby focus on making the employees feel involved in the change process. For example, managers should involve the employees to some extent in the decision process and allow them to contribute and affect the outcome of the change. Moreover, the managers also need to promote the change in order to be able to motivate the employees to contribute. An important aspect to consider is preparing for the change in time, in order to ensure that everyone involved will be able to adapt and accept the change. However, as has been emphasized above, no change process is the same since all organizations are different. This needs to be taken into consideration before implementing a change. Furthermore, the thesis has shown the importance of taking previous studies such as Kotter's Eight Steps of Change into consideration. On the other hand, even though this thesis strengthens some of the aspects of Kotter's theory, such as creating a vision and a guiding coalition, it also shows that not all of the steps are necessary in order to create a successful change. Other organizations should therefore take these findings into consideration before implementing an A-FO.

This thesis tries to highlight the important aspects of an A-FO change process, which has not been thoroughly emphasized in previous research, and thereby tries to help organizations in the successful transition from a "traditional" office to an A-FO.

7.2.3. Societal Implications

The main contribution of this study is, as mentioned, to identify what is important in a change process when implementing an A-FO and if this perception differs between managers and employees. Although this study did not aim to focus specifically on the society we have seen that the results provide societal implications. When performing the study at Skellefteå municipality, many of the respondents mentioned that one of the reasons for undergoing the change was to reduce the working area. In the beginning, Skellefteå municipality used attractive facilities in the middle of the city, but the areas were not always used in an effective way. Moving to an A-FO and thereby reducing the working space would allow new and existing companies to move into attractive facilities in the whole Skellefteå municipality. The societal implication is thereby that the A-FO allowed for the growth of Skellefteå municipality as a community, by providing better use of facilities and attractive locations for other organizations. Thereby, coming one step closer to the goal of Skellefteå 2030 to increase the number of citizens in the municipality. Since this thesis emphasizes on many positive aspects of an A-FO process and aims to

help other organizations with this change, the positive outcome of increasing growth may benefit other municipalities in Sweden. Another societal impact is that they saved money that could be spent on other socially important functions. Something that has been highlighted in this thesis.

Another societal impact of moving to an A-FO is that it tends to involve more technology, as it did for Skellefteå municipality (Lidström & Bolter, 2016, pp. 108-109). This would further allow companies and organizations working in an A-FO to adapt to the "new world" of technology (Barling et al., 2005, p. 219). Something that would enable the application of these technologies would mainly be to provide education and training for everyone in the organization. This will ensure that everyone knows how to use the new technology, since this is often an obstacle and a difficult task for many people. The importance of education in this area has been shown as vital in this study. Organizations should, for example, acquire equipment for conducting video conferences and have extensive and reliable Internet connection which allows the employees to easily move around. Companies and organizations that have the opportunity to adapt and follow the technological improvements also tend to succeed. This is further one of the aspects that the A-FO would contribute with and something that has been emphasized in this thesis.

Other societal implications of Skellefteå municipality moving to an A-FO involves the individual. Moving to an A-FO has in this study been shown to increase employee satisfaction and earlier studies showed that satisfied employees tend to feel lower levels of stress. Although the stress factor has not been emphasized in this study, it is stated by Makhbul et al. (2007, p. 50) that a well-designed working environment tends to increase satisfaction among workers and reduce the levels of stress. This notion contributes to healthier employees and managers as well as a sustainable place of working, which in turn would have a positive impact on the society as a whole.

7.2.4. Limitations

This study has encountered a number of limitations, some of which have been mentioned in the beginning of this thesis. As previously mentioned, the time for conducting this thesis has only been one semester. If there would have been less time restrictions, a larger study could have been conducted with several organizations, thus providing more comparability between organizations. Even though focusing on one organization provides a deep understanding of the research questions, it only provides a one-sided view of the topic and the result may not be applicable to other organizations. Also, as only one organization has been studied, the risk of bias amongst the respondents may increase since they may be very loyal to the organization and therefore not mention more negative aspects. This fact cannot be verified since it is not possible to compare the answers to other organizations. Moreover, since the focus of this study has been on a public organization, the perspective of the private sector is lost. Since these two sectors may have different prerequisites for conducting this type of change, it may not be possible for private companies to benefit from the findings. Also, as no organization is the same, the A-FO change process will be different depending on their characteristics. This provides a limitation for this study, since the findings may not be applicable if the organizational structure is completely different. Furthermore, throughout the literature search, there were some occasions where literature could not be accessed due to high costs or lack of availability in the library. This may have resulted in important literature or research being

left out of this study. However, we believe that the previous research that has been used as a foundation for this thesis has been sufficient and well-founded.

The pandemic of the Covid-19 virus also put limitations on this study, more specifically on the possibility of conducting face-to-face interviews with the chosen respondents. Instead, video interviews were used in most instances which still provides similar prerequisites as face-to-face interviews, but still can entail problems such as technological difficulties and not being able to fully analyze body language.

7.3. Future Research Suggestions

When conducting the literature search for this study, we found very little research on the A-FO change process in general. Even less so in business journals, since the focus has been mainly on ergonomics or on facility management. We would thereby emphasize future researchers to further investigate the implementation of the A-FO from a business perspective since this has not been thoroughly researched. We believe that by studying the A-FO change process from a business perspective, more organizations can benefit from and use the findings since our thesis shows that the A-FO change process does not only consist of ergonomic or facility management aspects.

Another aspect that would be interesting to research further would be to investigate an A-FO change process where the change is not perceived as successful. This provides the opportunity to once again compare managers' and employees' perceptions of the A-FO process and see if there are larger discrepancies in the case of an unsuccessful change. Furthermore, conducting a larger study of the A-FO change process could also be interesting to investigate. Even though no change process will be identical, it can still be fascinating to compare different organizations within the same industry who have transitioned from a "traditional" office to an A-FO. A more comprehensive study will provide the opportunity to create more generalizable results and be able to compare the perceptions of managers and employees in a much greater sense. This provides the opportunity to investigate the topic in a quantitative study in order to gain more comprehensive and generalizable findings. It could also be interesting to conduct two different studies on the A-FO change process, one with managers and one with employees, and then compare them in order to gain more in-depth knowledge of the difference in perceptions. Finally, since this thesis focused on an organizational perspective, it would also be interesting to investigate the A-FO change process from a company's perspective. Thereby being able to compare if there are any differences between the two perspectives.

8. Truth Criteria

When performing a qualitative research, it is important to evaluate the quality of the research. This chapter will thereby evaluate the truth criteria in order to show that the demands for quality are met. This is assessed using four criteria for the trustworthiness of the study; credibility, transferability, dependability as well as conformability.

According to Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 396) *credibility* is one of the most important factors when considering the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Confirming that the researchers have understood that the social world correctly ensures the establishment of credibility by submitting research findings to the people who were a part of the investigation. To ensure the credibility of the study, the final result was sent to the respondents in order to guarantee that the result is in accordance with their actual perceptions. This provides the opportunity for the respondents to correct potential errors or misconceptions. Doing this will ensure that the respondents are presented in an ethical way.

Transferability refers to the fact that qualitative research tends to be narrowed to a small research group meaning that the findings tend to be related to a unique contextual aspect of the social world (Bryman & Bell 2015, p. 398). As a result, it might be difficult to transfer the results of a qualitative study to other contexts than what has been studied. Since this study focused on one department within Skellefteå municipality, the results may be difficult to transfer to other organizations and sectors. According to Geertz (1973, cited in Bryman & Bell 2015, p. 398) it is important for qualitative researchers to provide a *thick description*, meaning that the researchers provide the readers with an opportunity to make judgements about the findings. This has been attempted by relying on earlier studies and providing the reader with a deep insight of the A-FO change process from the perceptions of managers and employees.

Dependability means that the researchers should have an auditing approach throughout the investigation and all phases such as the problem formulation, the selection of participants, notes, transcripts from interviews, data analysis etc. (Bryman & Bell 2015, p. 398). This is used to assess to what extent the theoretical inferences can be justified. This has been done by being transparent throughout the research process by critically auditing previous research and carefully transcribing and presenting the results from the interviews. Furthermore, the thesis has shown the step by step approach that has been taken in this study, thereby ensuring the *dependability*.

Conformability means that it should be apparent that the researchers have not contributed with personal values or theoretical opinions that could have affected the study in a certain way (Bryman & Bell 2015, p. 398). *Confirmability* has been taken into account throughout the thesis, meaning that the researchers have tried to remain objective during the entire process. In order to ensure that the personal values would not affect the research or its findings, the researchers' pre-understandings have been presented in chapter 3.2. However, since this is a qualitative study, it may be difficult to continuously separate personal perceptions during the discussion and analysis due to the researchers being highly involved with what is being researched. Even though the aim of this thesis has been to ensure transparency and confirmability, the possibility of personal perceptions may be visible in certain sections.

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Appendix 1- Invitation Letter - Swedish and English

Swedish version:

Hej X,

Som XX kanske har berättat är vi två studenter från Handelshögskolan vid Umeå Universitet som just nu skriver vårt examensarbete. Arbetet kommer att handla om förändringsprocessen när en organisation går från ett "traditionellt" kontorslandskap till ett aktivitetsbaserat arbetslandskap sett ur två perspektiv, chefer och medarbetare. Intervjun kommer att spelas in och den slutgiltiga uppsatsen kommer att publiceras i Diva. Vi delar gärna med oss av det färdiga resultatet ifall intresse finns.

Det är frivilligt att delta och intervjun kan avbrytas när som helst enligt dina önskemål. Det går även bra att exkludera någon del av intervjun ifall du önskar. Personlig information kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt och resultatet kommer inte gå att spåra till intervjupersonen. Alla intervjuer kommer att vara anonyma i vår uppsats.

På grund av tidsramen av arbetet ser vi att intervjuerna genomförs så snart som möjligt, gärna innan påsk, men anpassar oss självklart efter dina möjligheter att delta. Vi har möjlighet att genomföra intervjuerna fr.o.m. torsdag eftermiddag och framåt. <u>Vänligen meddela oss en tid som passar dig</u> om du har möjlighet att delta. Har du inte möjlighet att delta ber vi att du gärna meddelar oss om detta.

Tack på förhand!

Med vänlig hälsning,
Victoria Jonsson & Cecilia Persson

English version:

Dear X,

As XX might have told you, we are two students from Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics who are currently working on our degree project. The thesis will concern the change process regarding when an organization moves from a "traditional" working environment to an Activity- Based Flexible Office viewed from two perspectives, managers and employees. The interview will be recorded and the final thesis will be published on Diva. Vi are more than happy to share the result of the study if you are interested.

It is voluntary to participate and the interview can be cancelled whenever you wish. It is also acceptable to exclude any part of the interview if you wish to do so. Personal information will be confidential and the results will not be able to be traced to you as a respondent. All the interviews will be anonymous in our thesis.

Due to the time restraints of this thesis we would like to conduct the interviews as soon as possible, preferably, before Easter, but we will of course adapt after your possibilities to participate. We have the possibility to conduct the interviews starting from Thursday afternoon and onwards. <u>Please let us know what time is suitable for you</u> if you have the

possibility to participate. If you do not have the possibility to participate, please let us know.

Thank you in advance!

Kind Regards,
Victoria Jonsson & Cecilia Persson

Appendix 2. Interview Guide - Employees

Employee Questions			
General Questions			
What is your current position?			
What type of tasks do you perform during a workweek?			
What do you believe were the reasons for Skellefteå municipality to move to an A-FO?			
Topic	*Question*	*Follow-up question*	*Model/ Theory*
Activity-Based Flexible Offices	What was your perception towards the A-FO concept right before the relocation?	Has this changed throughout the process and how?	
	How has the A-FO affected your performance?		The Activity- Based Flexible Office Model (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017)
	What benefits do you notice for your work in the new office environment?	What do you think had an impact on the positive outcomes?	The Activity-Based Flexible Office Model (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017), Activity-Based Flexible Offices and Need-Supply Fit (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018)

	What difficulties do you notice for your work in the new office work environment?	What do you think had an impact on the negative outcomes?	The Activity-Based Flexible Office Model (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017), Activity-Based Flexible Offices and Need-Supply Fit (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018)
Change Management	How were you informed about each step of the change management process?		
	How did you experience your manager's commitment regarding the change?	How was this expressed?	Employee Satisfaction
	How has the communication been used/helped to stay updated on the change process.		
	Did you participate in the change process?	How did your participation or lack of participation affect your perception of the implemented change?	Employee Satisfaction

	How has the communication between team members and between teams (inter- and intra-communication) been affected after the change to an A-FO? (A-FO model)		Activity- Based Flexible Offices and Need- Supply Fit (Gerdenitsch et al., 2018)
	Can you explain your satisfaction with the change?	Why are you/are you not satisfied? If not, what could have been done differently? If yes, what could have been done differently in order for it to go even better?	Popcorn- Model, Employee Satisfaction
	What do you believe is important in a change process?		Kotter (1995), Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change (1947)

Appendix 3. Interview Guide - Managers

Managerial Questions			
General Questions			
What is your current position?			
What type of tasks do you perform during a workweek?			
What do you believe were the reasons for Skellefteå municipality to move to an A-FO?			
Topic	*Question*	*Follow-up question*	*Model/ Theory*
Activity-Based Flexible Offices	How has the A-FO affected your work?	How? Pros & cons?	The Activity-Based Flexible Office Model (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017)
	Did you participate in the design and implementation of the A-FO?	If so, how was the A-FO designed? Did you prepare the A-FO change with an internal/external analysis? How?	
Change Management	Did the organization create a vision for the upcoming change?	How did this affect the change process?	Kotter (1995)
	How did you communicate the change before the implementation?	What was crucial in that communication?	Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change (1947)

	How did you perceive the upcoming change?	How did your perception change throughout the process?	
	How was the change received amongst the employees?	How many employees do you perceive did not accept the change? Did this change during the implementation? How?	Popcorn-Model (2017)
	How did you communicate the change during the implementation?		Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change (1947)
	What techniques have you used to motivate the employees to contribute to the change?		Kotter (1995)
	Have you seen a change in communication between and within teams after the implementation of the A-FO? (A-FO model)		Activity-Based Flexible Offices and Need-Supply Fit (Gerdenitsch et al. 2018)
	Have you reached the goal of the change? Is it satisfactory?	How and why?	

	Could you have done anything differently in order to reach a better result?	What?	
	What do you believe is important in a change process?		Kotter (1995), Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change (1947)

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