Master Thesis

Adapting to Uncertainty: The Role of Strategic Managers in Balancing Organizational Agility during Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis

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Thesis Summary

This Master's thesis explores the challenges managers face in a dynamic, ever-changing business environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).

The thesis adopts a qualitative research method, specifically semi-structured interviews, to collect data from managers in various industries. Furthermore, a formal application of constructivism has been used, considering and emphasizing the role of individuals in constructing knowledge. The research strategy involves multiple case studies to investigate companies' and their managers' perspectives regarding specific contextual changes, namely the Pandemic Recovery and the Global Crisis of the year 2023. In other words, the challenges faced by these individuals and the agility strategies they employ to navigate a complex and changing environment.

The ultimate objective is to shed light on strategic agility change management in the specific era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis.

The findings of this master thesis research mainly focus on the importance of adapting to changes and maintaining open communication, which would ultimately lead to trust. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on strategic change management by contextualizing specifically in the era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis, thus providing practical insights into organizational agility management in times of crisis and uncertainty.

An understanding of the current era and how managers navigate this ever-evolving environment can provide practitioners and students to see what actions that may be needed forward in this globally interconnected world facing another revolutionary change with the rise of AI.

Keywords: strategic Change Management, Organizational Agility Management, the era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis.

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1. Introduction

The time after the global pandemic of COVID-19 **(**Pandemic Recovery Period) and the time entering a global crisis (Global Crisis Period) among other due to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine have brought to the forefront the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) of the current business landscape (Synmonds, 2023). As a result, possessing agility competencies in strategic change management has become essential for effective business administration and leadership. This Master's thesis seeks to examine the difficulties that managers encounter in this current era in a VUCA world where change is a constant factor, and to explore how they employ strategic change management to address these challenges.

The thesis will adopt a qualitative research approach, specifically semi-structured interviews, to collect data from managers in various industries. The research will investigate the specific challenges faced by these individuals and the strategies they employ to navigate through them in the current era.

Fiedler (2010) cites Doppler in stating that the present-day business world presents organizations with numerous challenges, necessitating change if they are to endure and thrive in an ever-evolving landscape.

1.1 Problem Area & Motivation

This problem-oriented thesis has a starting point in the interest of research within the topic of strategic agility management. And within this topic, this thesis research is based on a curiosity regarding challenges, specifically when facing change. The problem area and the focus of this thesis have been illustrated in the following Figure 1. A process-view has been used, rather than the classical system-based perspectives, which focused on personal traits or behaviors of individuals. The more recent approach defends that

Figure 1. Thesis focus (Own design)

organizations are in constant evolution and work in a dynamic way. In their ongoing interconnected processes is where the value creation lies. This makes it very important to understand how an organization works, via their decisions and how they use the available resources. (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2011)

The motivation behind this thesis originates, among others, from the author's interest in the practical aspect of strategic agility management and the obstacles that can arise during changes in the current era. Stemming from the fact that the researchers have not been on internships and regarded the practical aspect of the studies. Additionally, the motivation is based on the knowledge that learning can not be fully covered by theories alone, as theories aim for precisely defined and limited effects (Gregory, 2021), and do not always account for complexities. Furthermore, the researchers are inspired by previous research projects and thus conversations with managers that provided insights into complex real-life challenges. Therefore, the object of this study is to gather empirical evidence on managers' hands-on experiences and focuses on identifying and analyzing the challenges faced.

Moreover, this motivation is combined with a general interest in the outside world, where, in this challenging era the society as a whole is suffering the impact of unprecedented circumstances. The consequences that the economy had to face after this period of uncertainty cannot go unnoticed, with organizations and individuals directly absorbing the huge impact of it.

The findings of this research can be academically relevant and help students to be more prepared for the labor market as it gives an insight into some current challenges. The research also highlights the need for a more recent practical understanding of strategic agility management challenges.

The knowledge problem emerges from a curiosity and an apparent ignorance about the topic. This new era which has presented complex and rapid changes due to historical events (Covid-19 or the War in Ukraine) might help in understanding that leaders need to focus on being agile, rather than theories that defend dynamic capabilities as key for navigating uncertainty. The overall reason behind this research is the lack of research on agility change management and all its different angles that could be provided with different combinations of modern theories.

1.2 Problem Formulation

Based on the knowledge problem, a research question has been developed. The goal is to shed light on strategic agility management in different organizations, with the following problem formulation:

How do strategic managers balance organizational agility when facing change in this era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis?

This question is built on two concepts (strategic management and change) and a relation between them (balance organizational agility) (Olsen & Pedersen, 2019, p. 52). Additionally, the nature of the challenges and how organizations face them will be explored. These concepts will be identified, as well as their connection, by applying the subsequent underline questions and thus enable a precise analysis.

- How are managers and their organizations reacting to external changes?
- What are the most significant challenges for managers when facing change?
- How do managers overcome agility challenges?

1.3 Case Studies

The focus is on the management perspective, on their hands-on experiences regarding organizational agility during change. The 13 interviewed managers are.

- Copenhagen Municipality, Department of Employment and Integration, Office Manager, Jesper Poulsen
- Glovo, Growth Manager Jaume Calopa Piedra, and International Strategy Manager Jordi Riu
- Deloitte (2019-2022) / Glovo Financial Accounting Manager, Hector Mata
- HM Copywriter, Co-Founder, Agustin Mealla Augustin Mealla

- Prinon Dental Experience, CEO, Xabier Arévalo
- DSB, CEO, Flemming Jensen
- Wallbox, Business Development Manager, Vincenzo Vitiello
- Deloitte, Senior Consultant, Rasmus Jørgensen
- Scope Technology, Sales Director Morten Gregersen (2017-2020)
- Connected Cars, CEO, Mads Gregersen
- Novo Nordisk, Vice President, Jens Kovsted
- Oatly, Vice President, People & Culture, Mille von Appen (2020-2022)

Further elaboration on these managers and the companies will be provided in section 3.5.

2. Literature Review

This literature review is a combination of both a historical review and an integrative review. The historical review provides a chronological overview of the relevant historical background regarding strategic change management. The integrative review provides an overview of the current knowledge within the particular researched area.

2.1 Literature Search Process

The search process for relevant data was done with the RUC library database and The Web of Science. The initial search was initiated with keywords. These keywords narrowed down the search area and then led to more specific keywords through the process of literature search.
Keywords: 1) strategic management review, 2) strategic management challenges, 3) successful leadership, 4) theory and practice, 5) strategic leadership, 6) change management, 7) effective management, 8) organizational agility, 9) organizational flexibility and stability, 10) management post covid. This process led to the particular topics.
The time limitation of data used in the literature search process when exploring the historical background of the topic was not strict, allowing an extensive examination of the research area. In contrast, when investigating the current state of knowledge within the topic, more current sources were searched for an in-depth understanding and to seek where further research is needed.
The following section will delve into the historical background of strategic change management and thereafter present the current state of knowledge.

2.2 Strategic Change Management Challenges

2.2.1 Historical Background

Although strategy has been present throughout the history of humanity as a way of defending your own, it was not until the early 20th century that strategic management made its appearance in the field of Business Administration. Starting with a significant influence of military tactics and strategies, the first theories have evolved into the present ones that current managers use in order to cope with their daily challenges. Unsurprisingly, the goals for strategy have mostly stayed the same and still aim for survival. However, the current focus in management is to reach the most adequate decisions that lead to organizations' long-term success. (Heuser, 2010)

Leadership has been one of the most researched topics in the field of Strategic Management. There has always existed the challenge to describe what a good leader means, up to the current times. The obvious objective of defining a good leader is basically translated into how to be or what to do in order to be able to apply successful leadership.
The initial theories focused on the personality or on the specific innate traits that leaders must possess (Great Man Theory and Trait Theory); and later evolved into how anybody could be trained or which behaviors they could adopt in order to have what is needed and be successful (Behavioral Theory) (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). Eventually, the focus was moved to particular situations and contexts where the environment was thought to play an essential role in leadership. In these theories (Situational and Contingency Theories), the authors believed that the different environmental factors would determine the best leadership style to be used and should match as best as possible the situation and the group to be influenced (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014).

Nowadays, leadership theories are still evolving, and their focus is abandoning the classical leader-centric perspective and leaving room for the role that followers have in these interactions. Indeed, the belief in achieving successful leadership in these theories falls on properly understanding the followers' needs, wants, and values (Harding, 2019). In contrast to the traditional leadership theories, which believed leadership to be static, the most recent ones conceive that the different interactions determine when an organization member is a leader or a follower (Schindler, 2014). Bearing this in mind helps to understand that the collaboration of leaders and followers in different situations is critical for establishing effective strategies which will lead to improved processes.

This modern approach given to leadership by incorporating followership into the mix could lead all the previous classical theories to run obsolete. These new theories also emphasize on the importance of appropriate leadership styles depending on each situation (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014).

2.2.2 Current State of the Field

In line with the origins of strategic management, survival is still what is aimed for, more concretely in the long run. However, the increased complexity and today's fast-changing business environment leads researchers and managers to dig deeper and focus on understanding the difficulties organizations encounter when facing change (By, 2007). This research field is highly relevant in today's constant and fast-changing business environment, as organizations must adapt quickly to survive:

> *"The need to understand processes of organization change and innovation has never been greater in order to response to dramatic changes in population demographics, technology, stakeholders' needs (customers, employees, investors, citizens), competitive survival, and social, economic, and environmental, health and sustainability concerns. Witness, for example, the Covid- 19 virus pandemic that humanity is experiencing at the time of this writing, and of the necessity for public, private, and non- profit organizations throughout the world to respond to the pandemic. Unfortunately, with failure rates of organization change initiatives estimated at 50% to 70% (Zorn and Scott, Chapter 28), our track record for managing organization change and innovation has not been good. We critically need new and better ways to understand and manage change initiatives"* (Poole & Van de Ven, 2021, p. v).

Organizations always have a dynamic nature, thus they need specific, adapted strategies that help them manage change in both their dynamic internal but also external environments. As change management is complex per se, it is important that holistic and strategic approaches that actively try to face resistance to change and uncertainty, are used. (By, 2007) The new situation presented by Covid-19 has caused the installation of remote or hybrid work. New and unique challenges are being experienced and this new style of communication presents different knowledge sharing challenges that organizations must overcome (Kirchner et al., 2022). Additionally, the emergence of AI and the rapidly evolving digitalization present these days adds even a bigger challenge to organizations, because humanity has never seen something like this and for sure it cannot be avoided: *"Integrating and exploring new digital technologies is one of the biggest challenges that companies currently face. No sector or organisation is immune to the effects of digital transformation"* (Rêgo et al. 2021).

Initiatives to embrace change are driven by internal and external forces, and are done basically to adapt to these changing circumstances, to stay relevant, or to enclose new opportunities. On the flip side, however, there is resistance to change. The implementation of changes, and the confrontation of people with new and potentially risky ideas, processes or ways of doing things can trigger resistance.

> *"People are not stupid. People love change when they know it is a good thing. No one gives back a winning lottery ticket. What people resist is not change per se, but loss. When change involves real or potential loss, people hold on to what they have and resist the change"* (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 22).

Basically, change provokes emotions and feelings in those affected by it. For this reason, organizations must take a proactive approach by managing the people side of change (Brundin et al., 2022). This means acknowledging the psychology of change (O'shannassy, 2021) and helping employees to navigate those situations that lead to the emotional and psychological responses that could interfere with the change process.

2.2.3 Complex & Fragmented Field

Strategic management is a rapidly evolving field, and when companies face change, the possible change types and variety of challenges are broad. In addition, many organizational aspects must be considered to solve them. The range of possible changes is articulated thus in The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Change and Innovation: *"the nature of change can be very diverse from strategic change and restructuring to mergers and acquisitions, to facility relocations, to introductions of new technology, to name just a few examples"* (Poole & Van de Ven, 2021, p. 36).

Moreover, the diverse perspectives on strategic change management have resulted in many different models and frameworks, as the perspective can vary based on the type of industry, organizational size, and the research lens used (e.g., the process or system perspective). This is also expressed by Elfring and Volberda (2001, p. 1):

> "*In particular, they argue that the field of strategic management is extremely fragmented and that there is no agreement concerning the underlying theoretical dimensions nor the methodological approach to be employed. In response, many strategists have advocated increased integration of theories within the strategy field".*

It means that there may not be one unified view, making the field nuanced and interdisciplinary. The Interdisciplinary nature of the field is due to the variety of disciplines involved, including economics, psychology, and sociology.

It becomes evident that the field of strategic change management challenges is fragmented and complex. As Poole and Van de Ven (2021) describe about the Stouten et al. (2018) summary and review contribution to the field:

> *"the scientific literature is fragmented and lacks any consensus regarding basic change processes. They further contend that this fragmentation may be the main reason practitioners rely on popular writers of change management rather than evidence based practice, which is difficult to pin down and be conclusive"* (p. 36).

Furthermore, with this fragmented research field, it can be difficult to provide a comprehensive overview, and have made it necessary for scholars to conceptualize to understand or explain this complex field.

2.3 Theory & Practice

In the English translation of A.W. Rehberg's academic article *Über das Verhältnis der Theorie zur Praxi,* "On the relationship between theory and practice" by Gregory (2021), one can get the insights into the complex and dynamic relationship between theory and practice that is explored. The author argues that theory and practice are interdependent and not mutually exclusive, meaning theory provides a framework for understanding practice, while practice provides context for theory tests and refining. It further highlights the need for bridging the gap between theory and practice by reflection with a critical stand. Moreover, Rehberg stresses the necessity to be engaged in both theory and practice to achieve deeper understanding and meaningful contributions to the field of interest.

A real live example of bridging theory and practice is when universities collaborate with organizations. Lebrón et al. (2019) describe their collaboration model and the reasoning behind employing the live cases competition for students: *"The AACSB (2016) encourages student learning that engages students inside and outside the classroom to understand business challenges within our larger societal context. Through real-world case studies, students gain hands-on knowledge and practical experience (Kolb, 1984; Snell, Chan, Ma, & Chan, 2015; Wimmer, Meyers, Porter, & Shaw, 2012)".* It is further argued that these live cases gave students the opportunity to engage with managers, thus their current challenges. Furthermore, the university was awarded by the university's prestigious teaching innovation award for offering real-world, interdisciplinary, dynamic learning.

The books and research on strategic management challenges provide valuable insights and practical guidance. However, there is a need for a more recent picture of the field, as the current era is historical, and the field is rapidly evolving.

2.4 The Impact of Covid-19

The context of this research is focused on some of the recent external factors that have been occurring at the time of the writing of this research. The world is still in the light of the repercussions of the Covid-19 Pandemic that sneaked in on the world at the end of 2019.

The Covid-19 Pandemic had a huge impact on both society and organizations. Presenting unique and unprecedented challenges, which organizations had to navigate through to manage their survival. The challenges ranged from the brutal economic impact, of course, depending on the sector and country, to employees' well-being, mental health, or preferences, organizational operations. This resulted in the need for strategies to be changed, to match such an uncertain panorama (Guenther, 2020). To do so, organizations are encouraged to adapt to the circumstances but also to keep an ongoing learning, and to apply the experience that the Pandemic lessons have given them (Guenther, 2020).
Additionally, leaders need to learn to predict upcoming challenges and take care of their stakeholder's interests (Kumar & Gupta, 2021). Another thing that leaders should ensure is a culture that matches their values thus fosters innovation and adaptability (Witzel, 2022).

As demonstrated above, with this short section, many researchers have already researched multiple aspects of the Pandemic impact and its effects. Another way the effects are documented is with a documentary movie called 'Convergence: Courage in a Crisis', presenting natural thus political crises emerging and follows several stories in different countries: *"While COVID-19 exacerbates vulnerabilities across the world, unsung heroes in all levels of society help the tide turn toward a brighter future"* (von Einsiedel, 2021).

In light of these reasons, it is important to address the significance of post-pandemic leadership in order to be able to respond to the constantly emerging changes in an agile manner.

2.5 Organizational Agility

The concept of organizational agility is related to organizations' ability to adapt to environmental changes (Setili, 2014), as is the concept of dynamic capabilities. However, the concepts differ in their focus and scope, making it important to differentiate between them. The focus of agility is on quick and effective response to this rapidly changing world, by identifying and navigating challenges with specific actions, while dynamic capabilities focus on increasing internal capacity to be able to adapt to changing market conditions, thereby the interest of scope is broader.

The increasing uncertainty in this rapidly changing world has made scholars support "*reactive approaches based on 'organizational flexibility' and 'strategic agility' instead of planning and foresight-based approaches"* (Vecchiato, 2015), as the best adaptive approaches to handle high uncertainty.

The work with organizational agility implicit the work with stability and flexibility, thus their trade-off relationship, also called paradoxical leadership. This is e.g. addressed in the journals by Lewis et al. (2014) and Laser (2021). Both papers bring light to the complexity of the work with agility, balancing stability, and flexibility.

Laser (2021) concludes that *"having established that an optimal ("objective rational optimum") state is unrealistic… A second practical conclusion is that to determine the best possible balance in the flexibility-stability continuum, given that all relevant influencing factors cannot be fully known"*.

3. Methodology

The research onion model by Saunders et al. (2021) was used to go through the stages involved in the research process and determine the techniques to be used in each step/layer.

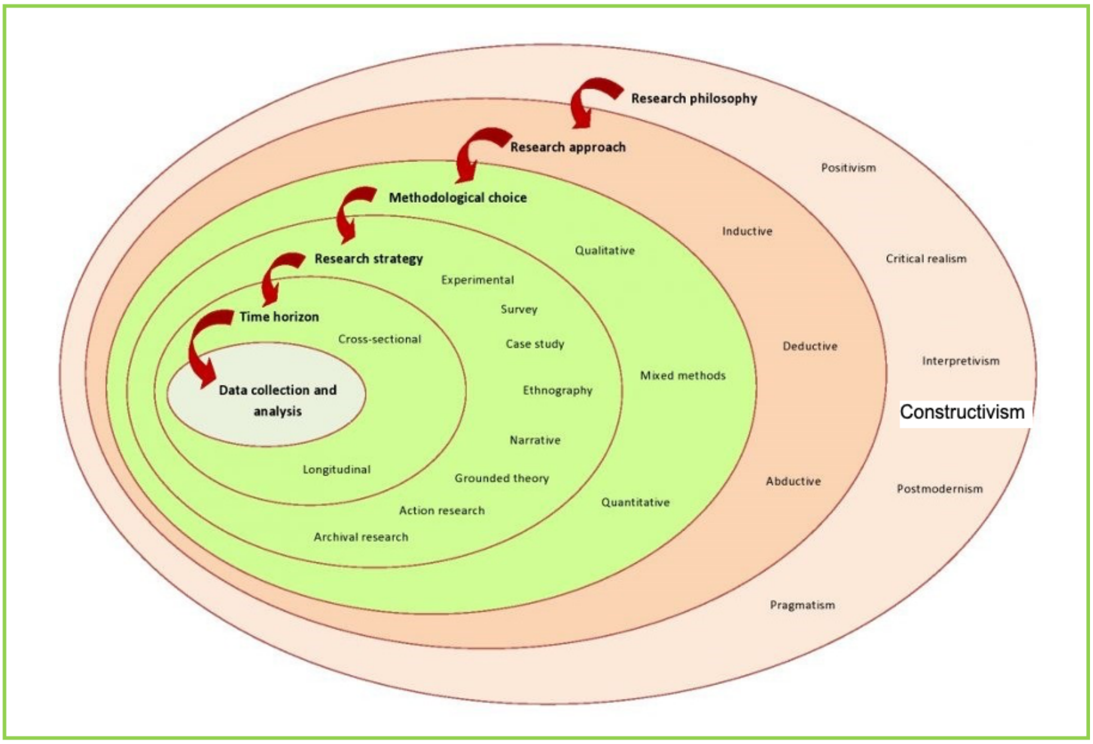

Figure 2: Research Onion (Design edited by us)

Figure 1 is created based on the Research Onion of Mark Saunders (2019).
This chapter will delve into the layers of the research onion, and the reasonings behind the choices of the techniques will be presented. The outer layer involves the philosophy of science and is the starting point of this chapter.

3.1 The Philosophy Of Science

This chapter explains how the philosophy of science serves as a fundamental pillar holding up this project's reality and knowledge, as it offers a crucial examination of the nature, assumptions, and methodology underlying scientific knowledge. It is essential to engage with the philosophical pillars that shape scientific research and its interpretations when the pursuit of knowledge and understanding continues to evolve.

The philosophy of science provides a framework that allows the researchers and the readers to understand the fundamental principles and epistemological considerations that guide our scientific inquiry. By engaging with the philosophy of science, we gain insights into the underlying assumptions and conceptual frameworks that underpin scientific research, which allows us to examine and evaluate the created knowledge.

"Research is a process of intellectual discovery, which has the potential to transform our knowledge and understanding of the world around us" (Ryan et al., 2002, p. 7).

The philosophical pillars act as lenses that help us understand reality and knowledge, not only in the moment when this thesis was created, but also in how this thesis should be understood and interpreted by the reader. If the pillars differ, so do the results and lenses required to properly understand. (Egholm, 2014)
Examining the philosophy of science through the lens of the problem formulation enables the presentation of the theoretical and conceptual aspects related to the concept of organizational agility. To further process the philosophy of science, the research's position regarding ontology and epistemology will be elaborated.

Ontology is the branch of philosophy that attempts to understand what reality consists of and how it is tried to comprehend the world among us. Egholm (2014) and Grattan thus Jones (2010, p. 24), would argue that *"Ontology is concerned about the philosophy of the existing nature of social phenomena. Ontology focuses on what is reality?"*.

For instance, on the one end of the ontological debate, there is realism. Realism believes that reality is the same regardless of where and when one is situated. Realists argue that the world is perceived as existing outside of our understanding of it. So, according to realists, reality and the world around us exists independently of us, and truths are universal. (Egholm, 2014)

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that focuses on how knowledge is created and what it entails. Epistemology examines the nature of knowledge, its justification, and belief. It deals with questions about how knowledge is acquired, what constitutes evidence, and how we can justify our assumptions or beliefs. (Egholm, 2014)

Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 15) would argue that *"An epistemological issue concerns the questions of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline"*. It enhances the transparency and validity of this research, enabling it to contribute to advancing knowledge.

In the realm of epistemology, positivism is often the preferred approach among the natural sciences. Positivistic epistemologists argue that it is possible to uncover the truth as disjointed from the idea of a subject influencing a phenomenon, thus believing truth can be found through categorization and scientific measurements. Epistemologists assume that knowledge exists independently of the researcher and is always close to the truth. As positivism deals with more numerical data, it generally favors quantitative methods. (Egholm, 2014)

During this research, there was a considerable amount of interviews conducted, which may lead some to argue that a quantitative method is used for the data collection. However, as the interviews conducted focus on generating rich and descriptive data rather than numerical or statistical, it is considered the overall nature of the interviews as a qualitative research method.

On the other hand, there is the constructivist approach, which is the selected epistemological approach for this project. Ernst Von Glasersfeld (1995) argues that constructivism is the theory that says learners construct knowledge rather than just passively take in information. Constructivism emphasizes the individual learner's role in constructing knowledge. In contrast, social constructivism emphasizes the social and collaborative nature of learning, where knowledge is constructed through interactions with others and the social environment. According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), learning takes place within the *"zone of proximal development"* which is the gap between what a learner can do independently thus what they can achieve with the support and guidance of a more knowledgeable individual.
The knowledge that learners construct is, on many occasions, applied to other contexts. However, the constructivist approach questions the validity of generalization, as it argues that the specific context of every situation needs to be taken into account before applying the knowledge gathered from previous experiences that is grounded in some other specific data. Whereas generalization might help in simplifying phenomena, each individual's interpretation of things varies as it is conditioned by factors like culture. However, constructivists do not reject generalization entirely but rather defend that the level of generalization should be carefully considered and always justified, as data may not be applicable to all contexts or situations.

In this specific research, the knowledge created might be able to be applied in a proportionate manner in other contexts where organizations are facing challenges of a similar nature. As

Jean Piaget (1972) described, *"Every time we teach a child something, we keep him from inventing it himself. On the other hand, that which we allow him to discover for himself will remain with him visibly for the rest of his life"*.

As the interview questions focus on understanding managers' subjective experiences, decisions, and decision-making processes regarding organizational agility in the context of change during the Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis era, a constructivist approach allows the researchers to delve into the subjective meanings and interpretations managers assign to their experiences. This thesis research aligns with a constructivist approach, which emphasizes on understanding multiple realities and subjective perceptions, as it provides flexibility when analyzing different perspectives from managers with different backgrounds and experiences.

In addition, the interview questions cover the managers' experiences, what they perceive, how they perceive the need for change, how they try to ensure organizational agility, and the way they lead during the change process. The questions explore how managers make sense of the change process, the challenges they faced, and what they learned from it. These aspects are very likely to include subjective interpretations derived from context, which can be effectively analyzed through a constructivist lens. So, because of that, the researchers' standpoint ontology, and epistemology point of view research philosophy is constructivism for this research study.

Since this master's thesis is researching how several managers deal with the challenges that arise during a process of change implementation, it employs a case study research strategy with multiple cases of the organizational change in different departments, industries, and countries. Overall, the research philosophy of the study is aligned with constructivism, considering the focus on individual interpretations and subjective meanings in the analysis of managers' experiences.

This chapter justifies the use of constructivism by emphasizing that the research aims to understand the subjective experiences, interpretations, and decision-making processes of managers in the matter of organizational agility phenomenon in a changing context. Constructivism provides the necessary flexibility in analyzing different perspectives and subjective meanings assigned by managers.

Additionally, this thesis is built up utilizing the inductive research approach. It involves the process of collecting data and exploring a specific phenomenon by analyzing the conducted information, thus identifying themes, patterns, and connections, thereby creating a conceptual framework. That means the researchers seek to understand the meaning and significance of the specific phenomenon being studied, which in this thesis is the concept of organizational agility in the context of change in the era of Pandemic recovery and Global crisis. Moreover, as Saunders et al. explained, the conclusion *"In an inductive interference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions"* (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 153).

After having laid a strong foundation in the philosophy of science, it is time to move forward to the research design. The next section will describe key components of our research design, which include the approach we will take, the methods of data collection and the ethical considerations that guide our research process.

3.2 Research Design

The research design for this thesis will be presented in this section, involving the second to the fifth layers of the research onion. The research design is the formed framework for the collection and analysis of data to answer the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 40). The reasoning behind the choices will thus be elaborated.

In the third layer of the research onion, the methodological research strategy for this thesis involves multiple case studies, as the planned goal was to conduct detailed, comprehensive data of practical, real-life insights into the complex studied phenomenon. The cases refer to individuals with their associated organizations and the experienced change processes. The real-life insights are gleaned by interviewing managers with different manager levels from different organizations and industries. This further promotes the objective, as aforementioned, to identify themes, patterns, and connections within the determined boundaries defining the case studies.
The case study research strategy is thereby chosen to obtain an in-depth study, which is well suited for business research involving complex phenomena such as the topic of organizational change management (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 189 & 196).

The type of case study follows an exploratory purpose, where the problem formulation starts with a 'How' question to explore a phenomenon to further explain relationships within. The exploratory purpose is useful when the goal is the clarification of patterns obtained by including a literature search and 'expert' interviews (meaning the interviewees have knowledge about the subject). Moreover, the interviews are relatively unstructured and result in in-depth data. This is a flexible research strategy as it can be adapted to changes. For instance, in this case, the research started with a broad focus and was narrowed down as the process evolved. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 187 & 443)

The choice of using multiple cases sets the stage for a comparison of the cases. This will further enhance the analysis by identifying theme similarities and thus differences. Moreover, the identification of patterns across organizations can be obtained. These identifications can contribute to the studied phenomenon, by providing insights into *"underlying mechanisms and explanations of the phenomenon across the different organizations"* (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 199).

The study of multiple organizations with an exploratory purpose can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research formulation, enhancing validity and generalizability. This will be further elaborated in section 3.4.

Embedded case study, involves a research of more than one unit of analysis (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 198-199). Where in this matter, the ambition is to study diverse organizations and manager perspectives.

Additionally, the use of multiple case studies has affected the way the thesis is structured, as it is necessary to include a chapter presenting each case (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 725), as it has been done in chapter 3.5.

A possible report structure that emphasizes theory building through a cross-case analysis. In this report, structure type is, according to Yin (2018), a structure where the focus is to consider each case in relation to the rest of the cases, instead of describing and discussing them separately one at a time.

This qualitative research design follows a mono-method research choice, utilizing a single data collection technique, namely the semi-structured interview method. A total of 13 interviews were conducted, within the qualitative method (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 179). These are presented in Table 1.

Moreover, the time horizon for this specific study is cross-sectional, as the research involves the study of a specific phenomenon within a determined particular time frame (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 212), which in this research also is the context, namely a snapshot of the

Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis era. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted within a contended time due to time constraints.

The technique and procedures for the data collection and analysis will be presented in the following section.

3.3 Data Collection

Kristensen and Hussain (2019, p. 15) state that the methods, in all their diversity, constitute a central prerequisite for knowledge creation as a researcher and for assessing the basis and quality of existing knowledge. Building upon this, the chosen social science method employed for this thesis research will now be elaborated on.

The qualitative method has been utilized as it provides in-depth insights: *"Qualitative data sets characterised by their fullness and richness provide an opportunity for in-depth analysis, where context can be related to the themes that emerge from analysis, to produce well-grounded and contextualised explanations"* (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 639).

Within the qualitative method, the semi-structured research interview type was used to collect primary data (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 434).

A subjective research interview approach is utilized, as it, unlike the objective approach, seeks more than answers and delves into understanding the views of the participants, meaning the perspective behind the subjective approach is based on the fact that the social world is socially constructed, thus *"sees interview data as being socially constructed; co-produced on the one hand by the views and interpretations of the participant and on the other hand by the interviewer"*. Furthermore, this approach recognizes the central role of the researcher, who works subjectively and interprets the collected data, and constructs meaning during the data analysis process with reflexivity. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 436)

Data selection

The 'optimal' number of interviews in qualitative research is not existing, as the needed number can vary depending on many factors. However, some guidelines exist and are highlighted by, among others, Hagaman and Wutich (2017).

The aim of the number of interviews was 16 interviews, and the final collected amount was 13 interviews, which, according to Hagaman and Wutich (2017) should be representative:

We found that 16 or fewer interviews were enough to identify common themes from sites with relatively homogeneous groups. Yet our research reveals that larger sample sizes—ranging from 20 to 40 interviews—were needed to reach data saturation for metathemes that cut across all sites.

As aforementioned, the multiple cases constitute the data set for this assignment. The cases were selected with the combination of some non-probability sampling techniques: volunteer-self selection, purposive sampling, and quota sampling. The first technique involved people selecting themselves and volunteering to be interviewed; the second technique involved the researchers selecting managers by contacting them directly; while the third technique involves predetermined managers' propositions, like age and gender, to achieve a more diverse population, unfortunately, this technique did not provide much data.

Furthermore, sampling is used to provide a valid manageable alternative to a consensus, when it would be impracticable to have all population as data, where in this thesis, it would have been all managers in Denmark and Spain. Therefore, becoming the target population. Selecting samples narrowed the focus and resulted in fewer manageable cases with more detailed information, and gave the researchers enough time to process data and the analysis.

The sample selection was not driven by factors like; industry, organizational size, or geography. Instead, the focus was mainly on specific characteristics that were interesting, relevant, and had the ability to provide diverse perspectives to the problem investigated. Therefore the interest was to gather management perspectives on the chosen phenomenon, based on the premise that people with management positions may possess the valuable, needed, and relevant expertise knowledge to help answer the problem formulation. Managing people is part of managers' daily strategic work, therefore, they may present a broad interest in leadership and organizations.

In addition, one strategic consultant was interviewed, as consultants' work consists of, e.g., helping companies develop their strategies and organizational agility, and could therefore provide insights. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 294-296)

Techniques

A standard email was written, thus, a research proposal (Appendix 1) was attached in order to easily be able to send out many emails efficiently. Thus, the preparation for interviews involved sending managers research information on the topic and the time expectation of the time the interview required.

Moreover, a standard LinkedIn message was created. In addition, a link to the online appointment scheduling software Calendly was added to the emails and the LinkedIn messages, so the contacted people and organizations could book a meeting themselves. With the link, it was possible to select a meeting in person or online, with the preferred date and time, within the limited period set allotted: from the end of March to the end of April 2023, due to the thesis timetable that had to be adhered to.

The sampling selection started with contacting relevant organizations and people of interest. Sixty-eight organizations were contacted via email, and thirty-two more through LinkedIn. Few organizations and managers responded with a no thank you due to busyness, while the majority of the contacted organizations and people did not reply. This limited the selection of possible samples from the population. The next step was utilizing established networks to reach more people by uploading LinkedIn posts seeking managers. The posts got 873 reactions in total and resulted in more booked interview appointments.

Furthermore, an opportunity arose to *"enter cooperation with the participating companies"* in the Career Day at RUC, on 15 March 2023. At the event, many contacts were established (13 emails), and the organizations showed great interest in the thesis topic. However, despite their interest, no bookings were made.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The method used within the qualitative study for this research is based on semi-structured interviews to promote a naturalistic and interactive flow with the interviewees (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 179). Furthermore, the objective was to gain a rich and detailed understanding of the underlying meanings the participants attribute to the researched phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 445).

The 13 research interview recordings' average duration time was 29,72 min. excluding some minutes of introduction before getting content for recordings.

Preparatory to the data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews, the five Ps' was utilized: prior planning prevents poor performance. For instance, interview themes were developed in an interview guide, and the research proposal with information about the research was provided to participants before the interviews (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 451).

The interview guide (Appendix 2) was made consistent with the problem formulation, purpose, and strategy. The interview guide is a non-standardized, predetermined list of

themes in the form of key questions to guide the researcher (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 437). It was thus developed based on the guide provided by Bryman and Bell (2019, p. 244).
The use of the predetermined list was determined by the philosophical assumptions and the inductive approach. The interpretivist approach made the use of the interview guide more flexible and was more determined by the participants' perspectives. Moreover, the employed inductive approach "*will naturally follow an exploratory and emergent course of action and allow your interview themes to evolve depending on what emerges from the analysis of data"* (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 438). The interview guide was thus specifically suited for this technique to direct the interview while still retaining some flexibility and room for the central endeavor; the interviewee's own narrative, as Kristensen and Hussain highlight (2019, p. 21). This technique ensured a natural flow in the conversations with the interviewees while still maintaining some structure to secure the information needed.

Three different types of interviews were conducted for this thesis, namely in face-to-face, one-to-one, and two or three-to-one interviews. Two participants were met in person, in the interviewee's workplace, where two of them were a three-to-one interview and one as a one-to-one interview. The rest of the interviews were internet-mediated two or three-to-one interviews, where one or two researchers led and asked questions while one researcher took notes (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 441-442). The majority of the interviews were visually interactive internet-mediated interviews, conducted synchronously (in real-time) online using Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom. The electronic interviews, as it is also called, have the advantage in the access aspect, as the use of online tools can effectively help to obtain the desired amount of data and is convenient to gain a geographical reach. It thus made it easier to get interviews as the managers used less time and therefore were more willing to participate. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 476 & 478)

The nature of the data collection questions in the interview guide (Appendix 1) are nine open-ended questions (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 455). The objective of the developed questions is to obtain participants' perspectives and personal experience information in relation to agility change management. By utilizing the semi-structured technique, the open-ended questions further provide detailed narratives regarding the managers' explanations and reflections
The order and logic of the semi-structured interview guide are structured as follows: Introduction (icebreaker), the researchers provide the participant information regarding the

study and to gain consent to recording. Background information question, as a warm-up question. General questions to gain overview and context, followed by specific questions to address key aspects. Toward the end critical questions that encourage reflection and learning, closing remarks. The interview may also involve clarifying follow-up questions and summaries of responses. Moreover, note-taking made it possible to ask, e.g., elaborate questions and summaries responses to test if understanding was adequate (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 455 & 461). The elaborating questions helped to clarify misunderstandings and unclear testimonies, thereby reducing miscommunications.

Contextual data from the semi-structured interview is provided in each transcript: type of meeting, organization, date, time, gender, title (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 463). The following table 1. provides further interview data.

Table 1. Interview data (Own design)

Nr.	Name	Organization	Position	Date	Duration	Gender	Country
1	Jesper Poulsen	Copenhagen Municipality	Office Manager	29.03.23	30:15	Male	DK
2	Jaume Calopa Piedra	Glovo	Growth Manager	12.04.23	Not recorded	Male	ES
3	Héctor Mata	Glovo /Deloitte	Financial Accounting Manager / Manager (2015-2022)	12.04.23	Not recorded	Male	ES
4	Jordi Riu Aunós	Glovo	International Strategy Manager	14.04.23	28:58	Male	ES
5	Agustín Mealla	HM copywriter	Co-Founder (2021-2022)	14.04.23	32:16	Male	DK

6	Xabier Arévalo	Prinon	CEO	14.04.23	37:43	Male	ES
7	Flemming Jensen	DSB	CEO	14.04.23	37:40	Male	DK
8	Vincenzo Vitiello	Wallbox	Business Development Manager	17.04.23	23:19	Male	ES
9	Rasmus Jørgensen	Deloitte	Senior Strategic Consultant	24.04.23	29:46	Male	DK
10	Morten Gregersen	Scope Technology	Sales Director (2017-2020)	24.04.23	22:50	Male	TH
11	Jens Kovsted	Novo Nordisk	Vice President	25.04.23	26:23	Male	DK
12	Mads Gregersen	Connected Cars	CEO	28.04.23	26:48	Male	DK
13	Mille von Appen	Oatly	Vice President, People & Culture (2020-2022)	28.04.23	Not recorded	Female	DK

3. 3. 2 Data Processing

The qualitative data for this thesis is derived from the spoken words in the collected interviews (verbal data); the verbal data is then processed into a transcript and textual data in the form of notes to be further able to analyze the data (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 638).

The interviews were recorded and processed by transcribing and coding. These processing methods will now be further elaborated.

3. 3. 2. a Transcribing

To be able to transcribe the conducted interviews, ten interviews were recorded, and notes were taken. Three interviews were not audio-recorded as the interviewees preferred not to be recorded. However, they consented to notes being taken. The Microsoft Word transcription software was used to convert the spoken words in the audio files into written texts. This is done to relieve tasks the transcription process involves, which can be very time-consuming, as the word transcribed needs to be the exact words used and should indicate timestamps, thus the speaker. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 644-645)

The first transcription drafts by Microsoft Word are fairly accurate and need to be corrected and polished while listening to the audio. To finalize the transcripts, proofreading, also called data cleaning, is done to ensure the accuracy of the final products in order to be able to code them afterwards.

Additionally, it is important to be aware of the shortcomings that can occur in the process of transcribing. Errors or information loss can occur, e.g., with word omissions where some words are not captured due to accents, quick speech, or technical difficulties, like reduced audio quality. Therefore, are unconfirmed uncertain words highlighted yellow in the transcripts.

Subjectivity in the transcribing process of interviews involves interpreting data while transcribing the words spoken by the interviewees. This further aspect to be considered, as there may be some subjectivity in the process, and different transcribers may interpret the same interview differently.

Furthermore, non-verbal communication and important incidents can be lost. For example, body language and humor are not transmitted to text. However, this can be captured when writing notes. A research notebook was utilized thus for noting ideas and reflections along the process. As mentioned before, a logbook was also utilized, where checklists were made to develop the research. Furthermore, note-taking ensured accuracy and contextual information (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 650-651).

3. 3. 2. b Coding

Before the analysis of rich qualitative data that are non-standardised, coding of data is required, the process involves classifying data into categories (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 643). In other words, coding is; fragmenting data by coding and reorganizing them into analytical categories. In this thesis the codes are derived from existing theories, codes based on theories are referred to as prior codes (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 653 & 655).

The process of coding the collected data is performed using NVivo 12 coding software. The process is initiated with each transcript being inserted into NVivo. These inserted transcripts are then called files. Each file is prior coded (codes in NVivo are called nodes), with the nodes made based on the problem formulation and theories. This process enables linking data from different transcripts to similar concepts.

The created nodes are visually presented in Figure 2 (Nodes, coding framework). The image presents parent nodes at a higher level (Lewin's change management model, Agility, Transparency, Trust, and Uncertainty), while the child nodes are the ones at the lower levels, nested under the parent nodes (unfreeze, refreeze, change, flexibility, adapt, change, culture, freedom, values/goals and structure).

Nodes — Search Project

Name	Files	References
Lewin's change management model	2	3
Unfreeze	5	10
Refreeze	8	19
Change	12	53
Agility	3	8
Flexibility	0	0
Adapt	12	69
Change	13	45
Stability	2	2
Culture	4	8
Freedom (as in WFH, flex hours, remote work)	11	46
Values, Goals	10	34
Structure	11	63
Transparency	7	22
Trust	7	24
Uncertainty	10	38
Communication	12	46

Figure 3: Nodes, coding framework (Derived from NVivo 12)

3.3.3 Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis is a flexible technique utilized for this qualitative thesis, as the objective is to identify themes, patterns, and meaning within the data set collected, in the form of multiple interviews, which matches the primary focus of the technique.
The technique is referred to as a general approach to analysis, thus the foundational method for qualitative analysis. A thematic analysis process involves coding of data to uncover the themes and patterns, to then be able to analyze these in relation to the problem formulation. It is a systematic and yet a flexible approach, due to the order and logic it provides. In this way, the analytical technique promotes understanding of the researched phenomenon with rich description, explanation, and theorizing.
The thematic analysis procedure involves four elements: becoming familiar with data, coding, searching for themes and recognizing relationships, refining themes, and testing propositions.
The inclusion of multiple case studies has added a comparative element to the analysis. It is believed to enhance the depth of the thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 199).

Given the interpretivist and exploratory nature of this thesis, the objective is to explore different managers' interpretations of the phenomenon being studied, involving an exploration of the whole data set to identify occurrences and recurrences of themes. This holistic study of the phenomenon is achieved with rigorous and integrated related data drawn from the transcripts and notes. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 651-655)
Coding of the transcript serves as a vital element in the analysis process, as the grouped data based on themes and patterns need to be examined. The coding involved every transcript, as the inductive approach is utilized in this thesis (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 653). Thus interpretation in coding involves uncovering perspectives, as the collected data involves diverse perspectives due to the context the investigated phenomenon (organizational agility) is situated in (Post-Pandemic and Global Crisis era). Moreover, this thesis exploration of topics is based on existing theories that are considered limited for the objective when used alone, therefore one of the goals has been contributing to theory refinement.

3.4 Research Quality

A good research design is important to ensure reliability and validity, and thereby establish research quality, which has been the goal with the choices within every step of the research onion framework.

Kristensen and Hussain (2019, p. 17) argue that to obtain a professional research, it should be ensured the chosen method is used correctly and in a transparent manner by ensuring the conducted empirical material and the analysis of it complies with rules for validity, reliability, generalizability and ethics applicable in the methodological fields dealt with. Meaning that researchers need to be aware of possible errors, biases, and subsequent interpretations.

Reliability regards replication and consistency, while validity regards appropriateness, accuracy, and generalizability. Consistency and stability during the thesis were strived to ensure internal reliability by having three researchers conducting and evaluating data, thus having a common logbook where memos were written for alignment. The external reliability looks into if the data collection techniques and analysis procedures will produce consistent findings if the research was done again, indicating a transparent evaluated process (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 231-214), thus relationships and effects that are not due to random variations but reflect a true phenomenon. More specifically, internal validity "*refers to the extent your findings can be attributed to the intervention you are researching rather than flaws"* (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 215), while external validity in a research regards the possibility of generalizing the result in other contexts.

However, Saunders et al. (2021, p. 216) further present alternative quality criteri**a** for qualitative research designs (dependability, credibility, transferability, and authenticity) as the argument that validity and reliability measurement concepts applied in a rigid way, often are *"considered as philosophically and technically inappropriate in relation to qualitative research based on interpretive assumptions",* thus *"is not necessarily intended to be replicated because it will reflect the socially constructed interpretations of participants in a particular setting at the time it is conducted".*

Moreover, concerning the internal validity in qualitative research, it is further argued not to be a problem as the method can provide rich, in-depth data and show the establishment of theoretical connections. Even so, there is an alternative criterion for it: research credibility, focusing on the alignment of the research participants' constructed realities representation with their intended meaning. This match can be ensured, for instance, with a thorough analysis, cooperative reflection, data checking, and discussing ideas. This will further

promote the understanding of the participants' cultural contexts, based on cultural reflexivity, which involves critical reflection of the researcher's role related to culture and helps to choose an appropriate level of structure and formality when interviewing participants.
Cultural differences were taken into account, such as differences in conversational norms. As for example, in Danish culture, it can be considered impolite to interrupt conversations, while in other cultures, it is perceived as positive and as an engaging behavior.
Another credible promoting action is to provide participants with information (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 452). For this thesis it involved sending managers research information on the research topic and the time expectation of interview (Appendix 1).
It is thus important to use credible sources as it affects the research quality. For instance peer reviewed articles are preferably used for the literature review, due to the rigorous evaluation process undergone by peers (field experts).
Dependability is the parallel criterion to reliability. Moreover, as aforementioned, the alternative qualitative method criteria argue that qualitative research is not necessarily intended to be repeatable, and since this thesis reflects reality at the time collected, thus being an interpretivist research, the research is modified along the research process (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 447 & 449). However, dependability was still tried to be ensured with rigorous design and rich, detailed descriptions.
Regarding external validity, thus generalizability, on the other hand, has raised concern due to small sample sizes. In response to this, qualitative researchers have referred to generalizability in other forms: arguing that findings from one setting can be applied across other settings, which means allowing generalization to surpass the specific research context. Transferability (the parallel criterion to generalizability) can be achieved with the rigorous description*"of the research questions, design, context, findings and interpretations"*, so the reader has the opportunity to decide the transferability to other settings. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 217 & 450)

First and foremost, the researchers have adopted the role of external researchers, although it should be noted that two of the researchers could be considered internal researchers because they work in two of the studied organizations, namely Novo Nordisk and Connected Cars.
The role of an external researcher can, in these cases, be assumed, since the affiliations are new or distant (the manager is from another department) and are thereby unfamiliar with each other.

As an external researcher, the task involved learning about the participants and negotiating access to managers. Furthermore, it was crucial to be conscious of assumptions and preconceptions, therefore, basic questions were asked even in the affiliated organizations. Thus, status problems were eliminated as the researchers took the role of external researchers in the meetings, distancing them from their position in the company. (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 219 & 220)

The quality of research is closely connected to ethics and integrity. These two concepts will now be elaborated.

To ensure ethics and integrity, Kristensen and Hussain (2019, p. 20) inform that research ethics considerations need to be made concerning: informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymization, and honesty. These considerations have thoroughly been addressed by the researchers and ensured to the best of their ability, with obtaining informed consent before recording interviews, offering the possibility of consent forms, thus confidential agreements to the participants, if confidentiality and anonymity are needed (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 268). It resulted in none of the participants requiring such measures, only three participants asked not to be recorded but allowed the researchers to take notes.

Moreover, the researchers thoroughly arranged voluntary participation for the participants and this was, among others, the reason for using the self-booking link Calendly, allowing them to book a meeting time convenient for them.

Complying with social norms in particular research situations was further prioritized for maintaining professionalism and university ethics guidelines (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 253-254). Thereby avoiding pressing questioning in face-to-face interviews.

It is thus essential for the researchers to dissociate from falsification (distorting or misrepresenting) and fabrication, by ensuring accurately and fully represented data, which is obtained by the maintenance of objectivity. The ethical consideration of avoiding subjectivity is equally important in the analysis and reporting stage to prevent misrepresenting data (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 269-272).

It should also be kept in mind that the collected data may mostly be contrived data and less natural data, as the result is from an interview organized by researchers. Therefore it should be kept in mind that interviews can be an intrusive process for the participants, and they may not reveal everything, e.g., topic aspects that contain sensitive information or clearance (Saunders et al., 2021, p. 446 & 448). Meaning the participants can provide the picture they

want to present. Hence participant bias is considered throughout the process, for example, the time required has also been considered not to reduce participation willingness.
Furthermore, in regards to participant bias, it is necessary to reflect on researcher bias, as it can affect data, e.g., not gaining trust may decrease the value of data.
This interviewer bias also could involve imposing one's own beliefs, interpret response, therefore the researchers utilized clarifying questions and evaluation of responses from different perspectives to minimize possible errors, biases and subsequent interpretations to ensure quality.

3.5 Managers & Strategists

The selected 12 interviewed managers, strategists, and their associated organizations will briefly be presented in this section to provide contextual understanding for the empirical basis the research is built on, thus giving an insight into the people and the companies, so the reader can create connections to theses real-life cases in the following sections to come.

3.5.1 Copenhagen Municipality, Office Manager Jesper Poulsen

The Copenhagen Municipality, a government agency, is responsible for governing and managing the affairs of the capital city of Denmark, Copenhagen. As the local administrative body, it plays a role in shaping the city's development and improving its residents' and visitors' quality of life. The municipality is also responsible for receiving and accommodating refugees. At the moment, there are approximately 3.000 refugees living in Copenhagen, and the municipality provides housing for two-thirds of them. To ensure a decent quality of life for those who have not been able to find employment, social benefits are provided. (Appendix 3) (Web, Copenhagen Municipality, 2023)

The mission of the Copenhagen Municipality is to create a livable, sustainable, and inclusive city for all. With a population of over 600,000 residents, the Copenhagen Municipality is one of the largest local authorities in Denmark. It is guided by principles of democracy, transparency, and citizen participation. It values diversity, inclusivity, and collaboration, seeking to involve citizens in decision-making processes and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among the population.

Jesper Poulsen has been working in this organization since February 2012 until today. In 2020, Jesper was promoted to Office Manager in the office of supervision and law, in the department of employment and integration.

3.5.2 Glovo, Managers Jaume Calopa & Jordi Riu

Glovo is a multicategory delivery app connecting users with businesses and couriers across 25 countries in Europe, Central Asia, and Africa. Over the past years, they have grown from a start-up to a prominent global tech platform, offering on-demand services from local restaurants, grocers and supermarkets, pharmacies, and retail. (Web, Glovo, 2023)

Glovo's mission is to provide fast and convenient delivery services, connecting people with the products they need right at their doorstep. Glovo offers a wide range of delivery services, including food, groceries, pharmacy items, and other essential goods. The company primarily targets busy professionals who value convenience and time-saving solutions. Driven by a culture of efficiency, innovation, and customer-centricity, Glovo strives to uphold its core values of reliability, speed, and quality.

Jordi Riu is working as Glovo's International Strategy Manager from November 2020 until today. On the other hand, Jaume Calopa worked as the Global Partner and Growth Manager from June 2019 until today.

3.5.3 Deloitte/Glovo, Financial Accounting Manager Héctor Mata

Héctor Mata worked at Deloitte as a Financial Accounting Manager from September 2019 until November 2022. From that moment thus until today, he is working in Glovo as a Financial Accounting Manager. We consider that Hector's experience of having worked as a manager in both a scale-up organization such as Glovo and in a more traditional and established company such as Deloitte gives our research more depth, as it allows us to compare the leadership styles within both organizations. Deloitte as an organization will be explained further down in section 3.5.8.

3.5.4 HM Copywriting, Co-Founder Agustin Mealla

HM Copywriting is a dynamic start-up born in Copenhagen in 2021 during the COVID pandemic specializing in creating high-quality content for blogs and reviews with the purpose of providing exceptional written content that captivates readers, drives engagement, and helps businesses succeed in the digital landscape (Appendix 7).

The mission of the company was to deliver value to their clients by crafting compelling and persuasive copy that resonates with their target audience. Their services were targeted for businesses, brands, and individuals seeking to enhance their online presence and connect with their target audience through impactful content. Their services were available to clients worldwide, leveraging the power of digital communication to reach a global audience. At its peak, HM Copywriting had six employees: five copywriters and a proofreader. Incorporating the proofreader created conflict in the management and decreased the organization's profit to the point that it had to go out of business in 2022. (Appendix 7)

Agustin has a diverse background and holds a master's degree from Copenhagen Business School. During the pandemic, unable to work and make money to support himself, he embarked on the entrepreneurial journey of starting a copywriting business, and that is how HM Copywriting was born. (Appendix 7)

3.5.5 Prinon Dental Experience, CEO Xabier Arévalo

Prinon Dental Experience is a dental practice established in Barcelona in January 2011. It specializes in providing exceptional dental care, particularly in the areas of implants, complex dental cases, and apnea treatment. With a team of 15 highly skilled and specialized professionals, they are dedicated to delivering top-quality dental services using the latest technology available in the market.

Prinon's mission is to create a positive and personalized dental experience for its patients. They aim to restore smiles, improve oral health, and enhance the overall well-being of their patients through comprehensive and advanced dental solutions. Prinon has a specialist for every odontology area. Their target audience includes those who are in need of a dentist in Barcelona and its surroundings and those in need of implant treatments, complex dental procedures, and apnea therapy.

Prinon Dental Experience values professionalism, innovation, and a patient-centered approach. Their core values include providing exceptional customer service, staying at the forefront of dental technology, and continuously improving their skills and knowledge.
Xabier is the owner of Prinon Dental Experience, and serves as dentist and CEO, bringing a diverse background in dentistry and management to his role. We consider having a dental practice like Prinon to enrich our study as it brings insights from the Spanish market and from the health industry. (Appendix 8)

3.5.6 DSB, CEO Flemming Jensen

DSB, short for Danske Statsbaner, is the national train company of Denmark. As a 100% government-owned organization, it plays a pivotal role in providing reliable and efficient rail transportation services throughout the country. Its mission is to connect people and communities by offering safe, sustainable, and customer-focused transportation solutions. (Web, DSB, 2023)

The target market for DSB includes commuters, leisure travelers, and business professionals who rely on rail transportation for their daily commutes or longer-distance travel. At its core, DSB is guided by a set of core values that shape its culture and operations. These values include reliability, safety, environmental responsibility, and customer-centricity. DSB strives to maintain a strong customer focus while upholding high safety standards and minimizing its environmental impact.

Flemming is the current Chief Executive Officer at DSB. His professional background spans across diverse industries and roles. Starting as an Air Force pilot, Flemming Jensen went on to have a long career at Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) before assuming his current role as a CEO in 2015, where he leads over 3,500 employees. (Appendix 9)

3.5.7 Wallbox, Business Development Manager Vincenzo Vitiello

Founded in 2015 and headquartered in Barcelona, Wallbox is a Spanish company specializing in electric vehicle (EV) charging solutions. Present in more than 98 countries, Wallbox is dedicated to changing the way the world uses energy in the EV industry. The company now employs over 1,000 people in its offices in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. (Web, Wallbox, 2023)

The mission of Wallbox is to accelerate the adoption of electric mobility by providing innovative charging solutions. The target market includes individual EV owners, commercial fleet operators, businesses, and public charging infrastructure providers.

At its core, Wallbox is guided by a set of core values and a culture of innovation, sustainability, and customer-centricity. The company strives to deliver solutions that are not only technologically advanced but also environmentally responsible. Wallbox's commitment to sustainable practices is evident in its focus on energy efficiency, intelligent charging algorithms, and integration with renewable energy sources.

Vincenzo Vitiello holds the position of Business Development Manager at Wallbox Chargers, where he focuses on the thriving industry of e-mobility. In this role, he oversees a substantial portfolio valued at approximately €25 million. Vincenzo transitioned from Volkswagen to Wallbox during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Appendix 10)

3.5.8 Deloitte, Senior Consultant Rasmus Jørgensen

Deloitte is a global professional services organization that provides a wide range of services in the areas of audit, tax, consulting, and financial advisory. Deloitte has presence in over 150 countries and has more than 420.000 employees. (Web, Deloitte, 2023)

The mission of Deloitte is to help clients and communities navigate the complexities of the business world and achieve their goals. Their target market includes businesses of all sizes, from multinational corporations to startups across various industries. Deloitte serves clients in sectors such as technology, healthcare, financial services, manufacturing, and consumer products. Its clients range from private companies to public organizations and government agencies.

Deloitte's core values and culture revolve around integrity, collaboration, diversity, and a commitment to making a positive impact. These values guide the organization's actions, decision-making, and interactions with clients, employees, and the community. Deloitte fosters an inclusive and collaborative environment that encourages the development of its professionals and supports their growth.

Rasmus Jorgensen works as a Senior Consultant at Deloitte Denmark, and we consider him relevant to our study because he has experience helping companies with their strategic problems and has worked with a lot of strategy managers. (Appendix 11)

3.5.9 Scope Technology, Sales Director Morten Gregersen

Born in Bangkok, Scope Technology is a leading telematics company, composed of 84 employees, specializing in fleet management and vehicle tracking solutions globally across over 65 countries. With a mission to optimize fleet operations, increase efficiency, and promote safety, Scope Technology serves a diverse range of businesses across industries. (Web, Scope Technology, 2023)

The organization offers a comprehensive range of telematics products and services tailored to the specific needs of its clients. These include GPS tracking systems, real-time vehicle monitoring, driver behavior analysis, route optimization, and maintenance scheduling. Scope Technology primarily serves businesses in industries such as transportation, logistics, delivery services, and field services. Its target market comprises companies of all sizes, from small businesses to large enterprises.

Scope Technology's core values are innovation, integrity, and customer-centricity. The organization fosters a culture of continuous improvement, collaboration, and responsiveness to client needs. Scope Technology prioritizes the security and privacy of customer data, ensuring compliance with industry regulations and best practices.

Morten Gregersen was the sales director in Asia and the Middle East. He has a background in sales and sales management in the software industry. He worked in Scope Technology from April 2017 until February 2020. (Appendix 12)

3.5.10 Connected Cars, CEO Mads Gregersen

Connected Cars, is a Danish car connectivity company dedicated to providing cutting-edge solutions that transform vehicles into smart and connected platforms. With a mission to revolutionize the driving experience, Connected Cars focuses on delivering advanced connectivity solutions, integrating technology into vehicles to enhance safety, efficiency, and convenience for drivers and passengers alike. (Web, Connected Cars, 2023)

The company's key products and services include state-of-the-art telematics systems, connected car platforms, and software solutions that enable real-time data collection, remote vehicle management, predictive maintenance, and personalized driver experiences. Connected Cars primarily targets automobile manufacturers, fleet operators, and other stakeholders in the automotive ecosystem.

With a global presence, Connected Cars has a wide reach, serving customers and partners across multiple countries. The company's dedicated team of 54 professionals, including engineers, software developers, and automotive experts, ensures the delivery of high-quality products and services to meet the evolving needs of the industry.

At the core of Connected Cars' operations are values of innovation, reliability, and customer-centricity. The company prides itself on its commitment to continuous improvement, technological excellence, and providing exceptional experiences to its clients. From August 2016 until today (June 2023), Mads has been working as the CEO of Connected Cars. (Appendix 13)

3.5.11 Novo Nordisk, Vice President in Investment Projects Jens Kovsted

Novo Nordisk is a leading global healthcare company, founded in 1923 and headquartered in Denmark, specializing in the research, development, and production of pharmaceutical products and solutions to address diabetes and other serious chronic diseases. Novo Nordisk employs about 54,400 people in 80 countries and markets its products in around 170 countries. Novo Nordisk's portfolio includes innovative insulin products, oral antidiabetic agents, and other medications designed to control blood sugar levels, promote weight management, and mitigate the long-term complications associated with diabetes. (Web, Novo Nordisk, 2023)

The organization's target market includes patients of all ages, from children to adults, who require reliable and effective treatments for diabetes and associated conditions. With a global presence, Novo Nordisk operates in numerous countries and has a substantial employee base dedicated to research, development, production, and distribution.

At the core of Novo Nordisk's operations are its core values of integrity, responsibility, and patient-centricity. The organization operates under a strong ethical framework, ensuring transparency, compliance with regulations, and high standards of corporate governance. Novo Nordisk is deeply committed to sustainable business practices, aiming to reduce its environmental impact and contribute positively to society. (Appendix 14)

Jens Kovsted has been working in Novo Nordisk for over 10 years now and he is the former Vice President of Investment Projects.

3.5.12 Oatly, Vice President, People & Culture Manager Mille von Appen

Headquartered in Malmö, Oatly is a Swedish plant-based food and beverage company that has gained global recognition for its innovative and sustainable oat-based products. With over 1,000 employees, the Oatly brand is available in more than 20 countries across Europe, North America, and Asia. Oatly’s mission is to make plant-based eating more accessible and enjoyable. Thus revolutionizing the food industry and promoting a more sustainable future. (Web, Oatly, 2023)

Oatly offers a wide range of plant-based products, with its signature oat milk being the most popular. Made from nutritious oats, Oatly's products are dairy-free, vegan-friendly, and environmentally friendly. The target market includes individuals who are looking for plant-based and dairy-free alternatives, whether they follow a vegan lifestyle, have dietary restrictions, or simply choose to make more sustainable and ethical food choices.

At the heart of Oatly’s culture and values is a dedication to sustainability, transparency, and integrity. The company strives to promote environmental consciousness by minimizing its carbon footprint, utilizing sustainable sourcing practices, and advocating for more sustainable food systems. Oatly takes pride in its unique approach to branding, incorporating humor and creativity to engage with its audience and inspire positive change.

Mille was the People & Culture Vice-President at Oatly in 2020-2022, and had been part of the company's journey from its early days as a relatively unremarkable brand with a boring product and packaging until its transformation under the leadership of CEO Tony. The company's growth has been supported by a 45-person in-house advertising team that has contributed to its success. (Appendix 15)

With the presentation of the case studies, the research will now proceed to the theory section.

4. Theoretical Framework

An exhaustive literature review has been performed on the different areas related to strategic management. In particular, the review was focused on change management and its challenges, as well as on the term organizational agility, which results in the ability of an organization to respond to internal and external changes in an effective and fast way. Thus, the theoretical framework for this research will address these fields by presenting two significant theories relevant to the research process. Additionally, a third section will illustrate how the two theories will be combined for the use in the analysis in order to take advantage of their common and if existent, contrasting or conflicting points.

4.1 Adaptive Leadership Theory

Regarding the existing literature on leadership and its evolution over time, there has been an emergence of theories that leave behind the idea that leadership requires a specific array of traits or skills that leaders should possess in order to be successful. Instead, scholars are elaborating theories that focus on being able to overcome the obstacles that certain situations, such as uncertainty, ambiguity, or change, might bring to the table (DeRue, 2011).

The Adaptive Leadership Theory could be a great example of that. Formulated in the 1990s by Heifetz, this theory is conceived on the idea that leadership is a socially complex process (DeRue, 2011). Heifetz et al. (2009) point out that implementing changes perpetually brings new and unique circumstances that will always present challenges. For this reason, leaders need to learn how to navigate the uncertainty implicit in organizations and their environment effectively.

Challenges can be of diverse nature, and Heifetz et al. (2009) comment on the importance of distinguishing, in particular, between technical and adaptive challenges. It is not a matter of complexity nor importance, but rather the approach one needs to take to solve them. For instance, technical problems are the ones that can be solved with existing knowledge or abilities. In an organization, many technical problems are faced on a daily basis, and managers use their expertise and apply their *"current structures, procedures, and ways of doing things"* (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 19). On the other hand, organizations also face adaptive challenges. These types of challenges are of an intrinsic complexity and cannot be solved using the same tools used in technical challenges. That does not mean they are more complicated than the previously explained ones. However, they require a much different approach: *"Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties"* (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 19). Whether in the private or the public sector, sectors such as technology, finance, or even healthcare most often present this last kind of challenge due to constant change and the need for development. On some occasions, it could be a challenge itself to label the issues as either technical or adaptive. Indeed, some situations offer the possibility to be faced by both approaches, being the technical one a more superficial approach and the adaptive one as a more thorough solution to the change or problem (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Focusing now on challenges involving previously unexplored areas, it becomes clear that leadership theories relying on endured, static abilities become obsolete because leaders might not be ready to face some unknown, unexpected situations. Instead, building adaptive capacity (Heifetz et al., 2009) could be the key to thriving on the presented challenges when making changes. In order to cope with change and all it entails, leaders must diagnose and determine the roots of the complex challenges to be faced and be determined to go out of their comfort zones. This means being open to changing some existing conditions, including their long-established beliefs and assumptions, and being ready for new ideas and perspectives (Heifetz et al., 2009).

All the abovementioned capabilities can be summed up in one term: Agility. The concept of agility refers to the set of principles that emphasize the response to changes, as well as the adaptability of an organization in a context of increased uncertainty and complexity (Griffiths, 2004). This term has been discussed in the literature in different contexts by many scholars, but it was not specifically used in the field of Organizational Leadership until the late 90s.

As a matter of fact, organizations struggle with reaching and further maintaining a balance between two competing values that organizational agility presents: Stability and Flexibility. Authors like Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1981) and Heifetz et al. (2009) discuss this phenomenon as the Flexibility-Stability dilemma. Whether Stability might be a synonym for control, it also represents all those long-term factors present in a company, which, for instance, could be its identity and purpose, the structure in which the company is built and operates, its values, goals, or long-term strategy. On the other hand, Flexibility is a representation of a company's openness and adaptability to change, thus adjusting to new scenarios and making room for innovation. The dilemma lies in finding the right balance between stability and flexibility. If an organization was to be exaggeratedly inclined towards stability, aspects like resistance to change, stagnation, or missing growth opportunities could emerge. Contrariwise, if a company lacks this stability and only focuses on rapidly evolving without a strong foundation underneath, this could culminate in chaos and misdirection (Heifetz et al., 2009). Although the respective characteristics that flexibility and stability present might display them as opposites, Heifetz et al. (2009) disclose them as complementary forces instead of opposing ones. Accordingly, leaders need to make room for both aspects by creating and maintaining a culture of collaboration, open communication and learning-based that is able to embrace the frequent changes by adapting to them, but always in a framework of clear objectives and shared values (Heifetz et al., 2009).

However, to be agile does not only mean knowing how to react to changes. Instead, it also means being proactive and anticipating and preparing the organization for any potential disruptions. Agile leaders must shift their focus from planning to preparing and should envision future risks, trends, or opportunities (Meyer, 2016). Therefore, in order to make a proper practice of Adaptive Leadership, a few steps to be followed are defined by Heifetz et al. (2009):

4.1.1 Diagnose the System

In this part, the authors compare any situation an organization might face with what any medical condition brought into the hands of a doctor needs, a thorough diagnosis. If there is no knowledge of what is being confronted, there is no way of finding the solution to it. Hence, an accurate diagnosis of the situation and a great understanding of the Adaptive Challenge (in case there is one) is vital to undertake an Adaptive Challenge. In other words, leaders need to identify the origin of the problem before they can cope with it.

4.1.2 Mobilize the System

Once the challenge has been identified, and so has the rest of the system (the stakeholders and the political landscape, for instance), leaders need to create a shared understanding of the challenge so they can mobilize the support and include everyone who is directly or indirectly implicated or affected in working towards a solution. The more engaged people become, the more tools they have to face the Adaptive Challenge. This phase also includes making a comprehensive design of possible effective interventions, which comes hand-in-hand with creating an Adaptive Culture. This culture is composed of values and behaviors fostering learning, adaptability, and resilience when facing change, and it serves as an encouragement for any individual to share their ideas and challenge the *status quo.*

4.1.3 See yourself as a System

In the penultimate phase, the authors mention the importance of an organization's identity. Their values, loyalties, roles, and purposes must be clear and aligned throughout all their processes. Only once they are defined an organization can move to the last step of Adaptive Leadership.

4.1.4 Deploy Yourself

The last phase requires a desire to experiment and learn. Leaders must take risks by trying new things, often leading to failure. The key for this to make sense is to be willing to learn from those failures. In this step, it will become clear if the Adaptive Culture implemented in a previous phase is present and reflections and direction changes are allowed.

4.2 Lewin's Change Management Model

In line with the previously mentioned Agility, another theory that takes into consideration the two previously mentioned dimensions of stability and flexibility is Lewin's Change Management Model. Many other widely established or common theories uniquely rely on the importance of one of these factors. For instance, Organizational Flexibility or Resource-based views put the focus solely on flexibility, whether Institutional theory or Containment theory defend that an organization needs to operate within established norms and constraints to reach the well-desired stability, hence in accordance with stability (Grant, 2019). The emphasis that Lewin's Model puts on getting stability and flexibility to work together in the different phases any change goes through would hopefully bring light into the specific context of the research:

In a constantly evolving panorama, such as the organizational one, companies need to make sure to successfully evolve and not fall behind. Organizations that have been able to navigate through the different evolution stages and finally find themselves under a certain maturity stage might then face important decisions concerning their long-term strategies. These decisions can lead them, for instance, to shrink their operations, maintain a stability in a particular phase, or continue to grow into larger organizations (Scott & Bruce, 1987).

Organizational strategies can be different due to the many factors affecting them. However, in any case, organizational management has to make sure to constantly implement changes if it wants to navigate the organizational panorama effectively. Although there is no magic formula for changes to be effective or even successful, understanding how changes work and, most importantly, how to implement changes is crucial. For this reason, back in 1940, Kurt Lewin developed the Change Management Model. This framework, which was named after himself, illustrates the forces that maintain the *status quo* and how *"one may increase the striving forces for change"* (Hussain et al., 2018, p. 123). In other words, the goal that Lewin pursued was to understand the underlying psychology and social dynamics that any change effort implies. Lewin designed this model after investigating child behavior and with the goal of resolving social conflicts such as racism; however, it is also considered a valid approach to organizational change (Burnes, 2020). This early Change Management Model has a well-structured and systematic approach that, applied to the leadership field, aims to support the management's decisions in order to navigate uncertainty and all the complexity inherent to change successfully. This model structures any change process into three stages: Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze (Hussain et al., 2018).

4.2.1 Unfreeze

This stage constitutes the initiation of any change process. Whatever the reason for the change might be, a plan needs to be elaborated, and, on any occasion, the organization's current system needs to be *unfreezed* (Levasseur, 2001). The organization needs to create a sense of dis-conformation or dissatisfaction with its current state. This sense of urgency and the establishment of the need for change needs to be transmitted from the management, as *"employee involvement is the main factor for shifting an organization from one phase to another"* (Hussain et al., 2018, p. 126). This involves breaking down the existing structures and habits that have contributed to the current situation, the so-called *"quasi-stationary equilibria"* (Schein, 1999), or, as an alternative, finding and displaying the consequences that not performing this change could lead to. Following these steps will get an organization ready to deal with change. It is important to note the vital role of culture in this step; hence if it is not aligned with the change process, it could act as a barrier to an effective change. Thus, organizations with a culture that fosters readiness and motivation for change will be more likely to succeed in change processes. (Hussain et al., 2018)

4.2.2 Change

As its name reveals, the change will be implemented in this phase. This process can involve an indefinite range of actions of any size, importance, or type. For instance, introducing new systems, processes, or structures or altering a company's most static values, behaviors, or attitudes. Of course, all employees involved need to participate in the change, not only the individual in charge of implementing this change. During this process is where the exchange of information must occur. This *"sharing knowledge is actually the organizational learning process"* (Hussain et al., 2018, p. 125) or, as Schein (1999) mentions, *"the process of learning about a system and changing that system are, in fact, one and the same"* (p. 65). This has the potential to become a precious asset for the future of the organization. During the change phase, the organization is responsible for supporting those affected by the change. If this is correctly done, it will most likely avoid an undesired resistance to change. Appropriate guidance, the transformation of cultural elements that need to shift, together with an open and frequent communication, can be determinant for a successful implementation of the change. (Hussain et al., 2018)

4.3.3 Refreeze

Although mentioned in the last place, this is not the end of the process. As previously mentioned, if a company wants to thrive in the current panorama, it will have to be under constant change so, optimally, the refreezing phase will always be followed by a new unfreezing phase, starting then a cyclical process (Hussain et al., 2018). This refreezing stage will serve to ensure that the new behaviors stick in the organization (Levasseur, 2001). For this reason, the *"new behavior must be, to some degree, congruent with the rest (...) or it will simply set off new rounds of disconfirmation that often lead to unlearning everything one has learned"* (Schein, 1999, p. 63). Concretely, this phase is about consolidating the changes and making sure that they were made to become the new norm. Again in this phase, those affected will need ongoing support in the form of training or recognition. This will result in the incorporation of all these aspects into the organization's culture, which will become more solid and consistent with the new *status quo*. (Hussain et al., 2018)

Lewin's Change Management Model might seem too basic when compared to other models, such as the five main goals formulated by the ADKAR change management model, the McKinsey 7-s model, or even the eight steps in Kotter's change management model (Grant, 2019). However, it is considered to be one of the most elegant and practical guides to cope with the complex and puzzling problems that change processes can present (Levasseur, 2001) as well as *"the most influential approach to organizational change"* (Burnes, 2020, p. 33). Additionally, according to Schein, a renowned researcher famous for its huge contribution to the field of organizational culture and leadership, Lewin's model enriches the understanding of *"how change happens and what role agents can and must play if they are to be successful"* (1999, p. 71).

Drawing inspiration from Leonardo da Vinci's timeless wisdom that *"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication"*, Lewin's Change Model can unquestionably be a much more appropriate framework for embracing change. It highlights the significance of distilling change down to its core essence, thus enabling the focus on its fundamental aspects and inherent nature. For this reason, Lewin's Change Management Model could lead to high effectiveness and efficient results (Levasseur, 2001).

4.3 Integrating Adaptive Leadership Theory & Lewin's Change Management Model

In order to understand complex and uncertain phenomena, combining and integrating multiple theoretical frameworks is often required. Due to each of them´s uniqueness in terms of perspectives and possible insights into the circumstances under research, this section aims to explore the potential advantages of combining the Adaptive Leadership Theory by Heifetz and Lewin's Change Management Model. Moreover, as mentioned previously in the literature review, the strategic management field is considered complex and fragmented (Elfring & Volberda, 2001). This is because the field is full of different theories, approaches, perspectives, and models, among others, making it often complicated to know how to navigate the complexities of strategic management effectively. The two theories in this research have been chosen because they are believed to create together a comprehensive framework to understand and effectively navigate change.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the main reason why the theories in this paper were chosen was that they both take into consideration the two aspects that organizational agility comprises: Flexibility and Stability. However, with the merging of the two theories, another legitimate connection can occur in recognizing that the given adaptive challenges might necessitate a process of unfreezing, change, and refreezing, besides the adaptive capabilities of leadership. If this combination of theories and the new structure is followed, the adaptive challenges can be tackled in a more structured way:

4.3.1 Unfreezing Phase - Diagnose & Mobilize the System

In the earliest stage of any change, Adaptive leaders can use the unfreezing phase, as described by Lewin (Hussain et al., 2018), to *diagnose the system*, which constitutes the first step in the Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz et al., 2009). At this point, leaders realize the need for change and create a sense of urgency. Therefore, they have to break with the current stable system by challenging the existing norms, behaviors, or their mindset (Hussain et al., 2018). Furthermore, leaders need to step out of their own bubbles and *mobilize the system* by including all the direct and indirectly involved individuals in the change process, with the goal of making them part of the change. A good engagement of the stakeholders is crucial to be able to move forward in the change process. (Heifetz et al., 2009)

4.3.2 Change Phase - Mobilize, see Yourself as a System & Deploy Yourself

All that was done before this phase was to get the system ready for the following step, which is indeed the implementation of the change. Although the two theories explained have multiple aspects in common, they are not structured in the exact same way. For this reason, aspects of the *mobilize the system* step from the Adaptive Leadership Theory can still be observed in what would be Lewin's change phase, as well as aspects from further steps. An excellent example of this would be the exhaustive plan design to effectuate the change (Heifetz et al., 2009), which matches well with the introduction of new systems, processes, or structures mentioned by Lewin (Hussain et al., 2018). The remaining parts of the Adaptive Leadership Theory matching the change phase endorse creating a supportive environment that encourages adaptive experimentation, learning from failures, and constant adjusting strategies that need to happen during the change implementation (Heifetz et al., 2009). According to Lewin, the new practices must be monitored for their effectiveness, and the learning must come from experience (Hussain et al., 2018).

4.3.3 Refreeze Phase - Deploy Yourself

The last phase of Lewin's Change Management Model argues that the new state acquired needs to be stabilized and reinforced, using the feedback provided by the stakeholders (Hussain et al., 2018). This coincides with what the Adaptive Leadership Theory states: leaders need to consolidate the change by reinforcing the new behaviors (Heifetz et al., 2009). Suppose all the change implementation until this step has been done correctly, but this step is forgotten. In that case, there is a high risk of failure to implement the change because it is complicated that the change will stick and stay within the organization over time. Ensuring that the change becomes institutionalized will help sustain the progress made for good.

After having gone through all the common points from both theories, it is also necessary to point out where they diverge. Whereas the need for change is well recognized by both theories (Heifetz et al., 2009; Hussain et al., 2018), they differ in understanding the nature of changes and how they should be approached. On the one hand, Adaptive Leadership Theory often sees change as an unpredictable element and defends this point by arguing that uncertainty and unpredictability can only be faced with great Adaptive capacity. Therefore, leaders will effectively navigate through uncertainty by a process of ongoing learning and experimenting, thus adapting to the complex and dynamic environment. (Heifetz et al., 2019)

On the other hand, Lewin's more structured and linear approach to change defends that changes usually happen as a result of planned interventions and not only as a result of uncertainty. These changes can be under control by following its three-step guidelines of planning, implementing, and stabilizing the change. (Hussain et al., 2018)

Moreover, each presented perspective has its strengths and limitations. For this reason, combining them both might be beneficial to understanding and tackling the complex and uncertain phenomena that change presents. This research is composed under the framework of the current times, enclosing the Covid-19 and post-Covid-19 situation, the Ukrainian war, and some of its consequences, such as inflation. Consequently, a theory that acknowledges this panorama of complexity and uncertainty needs to be used for a thorough analysis of the qualitative data, and, in this case, this would be Adaptive Leadership Theory. However, this theory also presents some limitations. For example, it does not provide any specific tools or guidelines for leaders to navigate changes, nor gives detailed advice on how to shape an organization's culture to make it fit and support the upcoming changes. Thereupon, a theory that actually gives advice on managing change has been chosen to complement Adaptive Leadership Theory, and this is Lewin's perspective. Together, it is believed that these theories can address the changes and the challenges that change presents more effectively, thus, how changes are reacted to.

The following Figure nr. 4 has been developed to provide a visualization of the integrated theories. This illustrates how the theories could be connected in a cyclical process.

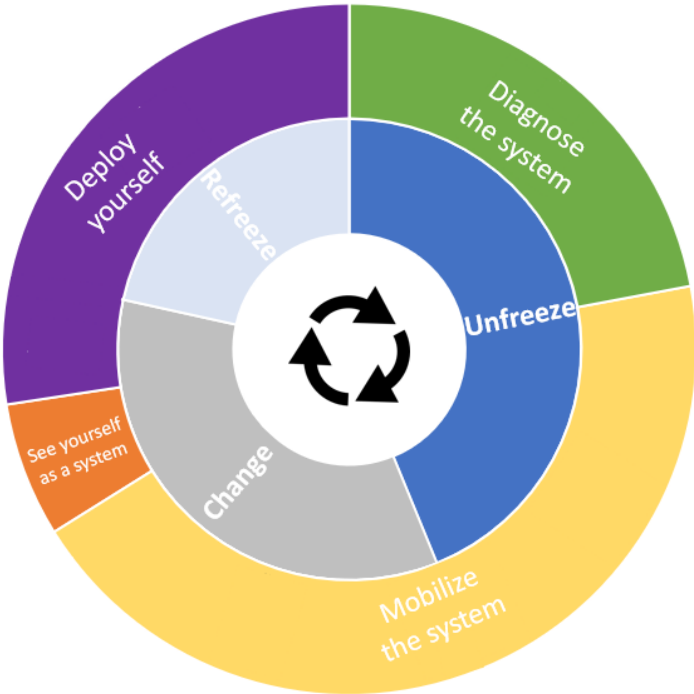

Figure 4:
Integration of Adaptive Leadership Theory & Lewin's Change Management Model
(Own design)

5. Analysis

This section aims to examine the compiled data, with the primary goal of addressing the research question: **How do strategic managers balance organizational agility when facing change in this era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis?**

The structure of this analysis will follow the three underlying questions:

- How are managers and their organizations reacting to external changes?
- What are the most significant challenges for managers when facing change?
- How do managers overcome agility challenges?

It is worth mentioning once again that the data quality and integrity that have been considered throughout all the research are also given significant attention in this section, which will delve into the relationships between the data and will explore possible patterns and their significance in connection with the theoretical aspects presented in previous sections. Ultimately, this section aims to provide valuable insights and contribute to a better understanding of organizational agility when facing change in this era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis.

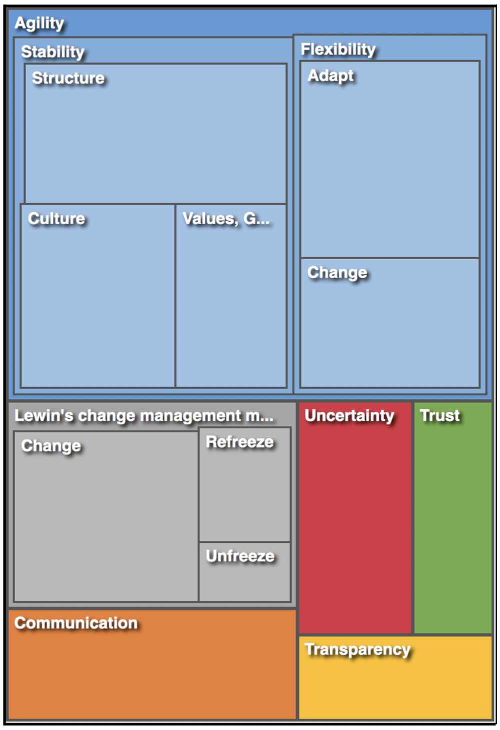

Figure 5. Treemap Hierarchy Chart, of nodes (Derived from NVivo 12).

This chart visually portrays the comparative significance and magnitude of various nodes, relying on the frequency or prevalence of coded data associated with each node. Each node is presented as a rectangular box positioned within a larger rectangular space. The size of each box reflects the amount of data coded to the respective node. Employing Treemap, encourages researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data's distribution and prominence, enabling them to recognize patterns, trends, and specific areas of concentration in their analysis.

5.1 Reactions to External Changes

The context in which this project is situated, which has been thoroughly commented on throughout all the research, has impacted in a significant way how organizations work. Organizations and managers seem to be much aware of the rapidly changing environment.

Left without a choice, they had to adapt to the Covid-19 circumstances, regardless of its impact on their respective organizations. Additionally, this same period of the Pandemic and its recovery presented another event that had no less impact on society, the war in Ukraine, resulting in a crisis period felt all over the Globe or unexpected levels of inflation, for instance. As accurate as it is that organizations must deal with all these events, trends towards becoming more sustainable and the switch of preferences of new generations are also current requirements. Another rapidly-approaching external change is related to the evolution of technology, which is experiencing exponential change and evolution due to Artificial Intelligence (AI).

This section aims to go deeper into the significant changes undergone by organizations as a result of all the abovementioned external changes. From the imposed arrangements for remote work to digitalization, this analysis will explore the dynamics and evolving nature of these organizational changes, more specifically, from the point of view of the different managers and strategists. Many of the managers and strategists interviewed comment on the same change event when asked in the interview to "*Keep in mind a recent specific change situation due to external factors where you, as a manager, had to balance between flexibility and stability"* (Appendix 2): The Covid-19 Pandemic. Some of the most relevant answers will be commented on this section and which aims to connect them to the framework of the merged theories.

By unanimity, all thirteen managers and strategists interviewed agreed that the Covid-19 Pandemic meant a before and an after in their organizations (Appendix 16). The common aspect was the change from office to remote work. Although the short time companies had to prepare for the change (*unfreeze* the situation / *diagnose the system* (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009)) initially presented many challenges, most managers coincide on the point that organizations "*have reached a point where we are in the balance again"* (Jørgensen, Deloitte, Appendix 11), meaning that a *refreeze-deploy yourself* phase (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009) has also taken place. This *"new normality"* is characterized by a better acceptance of working in a more flexible manner (Kovsted, Novo Nordisk, Appendix 14), both from the employee's but also the manager's point of view. Furthermore, it is believed to provide "*better work-life balance and better work efficiency"* (Kovsted, Novo Nordisk, Appendix 14), and employers can increase their talent search by finding people who are out of the country and, in a different situation, would have never been able to join the

organization (Gregersen, Scope Technology, Appendix 12). In this new state, most employees have a hybrid model which combines office work and remote work. In some cases, the company decides how and in which percentage it will happen (i.e., Glovo) but in other cases, it is up to the employee to decide it (i.e., Deloitte or Wallbox). Vincenzo Vitiello explains how it is performed in Wallbox:
"Potentially for me the key is in the middle. Being able to, to work by remote, but at the same time having the possibility to go in the office. Probably, yeah, a 60-40 in terms of percentage, 60 at the office, 40 flexible by remote" (Appendix 10).

Rasmus Jørgensen, Senior Consultant in Strategy at Deloitte Denmark, agrees that to navigate an ever-changing landscape, it is essential to be aware of the external factors that directly impact the organization (Appendix 11). In line with that, Xabier Arévalo, CEO and dentist at Prinon, was able to detect much earlier than others that employees' preferences towards the working week were changing, as he implemented a four-day workweek. Social trends show indeed that people desire better work-life balances, and more concretely, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated peoples' reflections on their lifestyles and has rearranged their priorities. The fact that Arévalo felt that they could not fill a regular 8 hours a day Monday to Friday with work, together with the changing trends, made him establish this four-day week. The fact that they "*have to do that 40 hours in four days"* (Appendix 8) could have supposed a conflict for some workers, but it only ended up having a few critics on Twitter. However, the people affected by the decision did not present any resistance to the change but were happy instead. Arévalo explains that his employees agree on *"having a Friday, a Saturday and Sunday free... it's a good exchange"* (Appendix 8). Another change Prinon Dental Clinic had to embrace was the development of technology, which in health areas, is crucial to stay ahead in the business, enhance patient experience or provide more accurate diagnoses. To compensate for the Covid-19 impact, the CEO is encouraging employees, including himself, to keep learning and forming themselves either by extended education or by specializing at work. This last concept was enhanced at Prinon by establishing the *"Champion Method"* (Appendix 8), which consisted of appointing each of the employees "champion" of a specific technology, based, of course, on the interests shown during their daily work. This benefits not only the employee but also the organization, which improves their customer service.
In line with the Tech changes that have been accelerated after the Pandemic, a company that could not manage this abrupt change was HM Copywriting. Although the company did not notice differences caused by the Pandemic, since it was created in the middle of it, it was

indeed affected by the advance in technology. HM Copywriting was a Copyright business that initially provided very flexible remote work to its collaborators. Writers had to create original writing content and could always choose when and how much to work. The company grew considerably and incorporated another person to review the content. Everything went well until the moment that *"clients stopped giving us work because their clients were not asking them to work because there are a lot of new automations, AI especially"* (Appendix 7), explains co-owner Agustín Mealla. The change happened fast, and HM Copywriting. was not prepared for change, as the *unfreezing-diagnose and mobilize the system* phase requires (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009). This change was of too big a magnitude and happened almost without notice. For this reason, the company had to shut down.

Changing the subject, organizations also had to react to the invasion of Russia into Ukrainian land. It is the case of Glovo, for example, which at the time, was present in Ukraine as one of their top 10 countries and with great growing potential. As the situation was evolving, Growth Manager Jaume Calopa explained that they also did not dispose of much time to plan how to react to that change. Thus, they almost went right to action, so to the *changing-mobilize, see yourself as a System, and deploy yourself* phase (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009). The changes they needed to perform consisted of relocating all their Ukrainian employees to Barcelona or Poland and helping them in the greatest effort to cover their needs. During this time, Glovo had to face an important decision: whether to keep or end their activity in Ukraine. As they differentiate between irrevocable and non-permanent decisions, in this case, leaving Ukraine would mean losing it forever. An evaluation of pros and contras was made, and they opted to maintain the activity. At present, most of the relocated employees are still in the new locations. However, the activity in Ukraine has been retaken, and a new manager has been appointed in the Ukrainian main office, matching a *refreeze-deploy yourself* state (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009). Even though they do not expect to reach the former numbers, they expect it to start growing again slowly. (Appendices 2, 3 & 4)

Jesper Poulsen from the Copenhagen Municipality also comments about their change process of taking care of Ukrainian refugees:

> *We've been handling refugees for a long time... but there have been very few refugees in Denmark for the past 10 years... so those that... came before the war in Ukraine... it took them a fairly long time before they became the responsibility of the municipality. So they*

> *pretty much knew how to get around, in the Danish society... Now, with the Ukrainian refugees, they came very early to the municipalities, so we had to build up the capacity to actually help them... with all these things that... Danish bureaucrats tend to forget* (Appendix 3).

In his case, the *unfreezing-diagnose and mobilize the system* stage was short because it is usually the organization itself that needs to create a sense of dissatisfaction or disconformity (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009); but it became evident that they would not be able to handle the new situation with their old structure and ways of working. For this reason, the *changing-mobilize, see yourself as a System, and deploy yourself* phase (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009) came imminently, making them transition from the old state to the desired stage. Whereas their old state consisted of helping them get a bank account or logging into NemId, this new desired stage consisted of having *"an organization that's able to help around the clock"* (Appendix 3) and which can adjust to any need refugees have, for instance, help with finding a place to stay. The change would not have been possible without the company's *"short circuit their usual onboarding system, manned up from… 170 employees to now 310"* (Appendix 3) and by using employees from other departments to cover the amount of work in theirs. Although Poulsen comments that it was not easy, as they had to *"invent on-the-go"*(Appendix 3) as the needs were emerging, they have reached a comfortable state where *"routines have become more established"* (Appendix 3) and from where they can operate and deal with challenges on their usual ways. In this case, this is analogous to the *refreezing-deploy yourself* phase (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Sustainability is undoubtedly gaining importance these days and is incorporated into every organization's agenda. Although it might seem that the sustainability goals were not much affected by the Pandemic, the increased emphasis on promoting well-being requires sustainability measures such as improving the air quality, access to green spaces, or getting to healthier food systems. For this reason, organizations like Oatly or DSB have adapted to the new recent requirements. Oatly already had crazy demands, making them struggle to supply before the Pandemic. However, the incorporation of climate change prioritization into their agenda might be the reason why more and more conscious consumers want to buy their products. This made them have to elaborate more expansion plans in the next few years to expand their production capacity (Appendix 15). Another company that affirms to have dealt with this increment in focus on sustainability is DSB, which claims that it is essential to ensure a good alignment with the overall organization's purpose. To achieve that, the only tool they count on is to attract top talent, align with the societal and environmental goals and foster a good environment.

Last but not least, all the recent events have contributed to elevated inflation levels. Flemming Jensen talks about the impact that this has made on gas prices and higher maintenance costs. The publicly owned organization only has the chance to increase prices once a year when the board reunites and approves it. For this reason, their increase in expenses is only countered in their revenues one year later. This situation gives them a big time to prepare (*unfreeze-diagnose the system* (Hussain et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009)) before the changes are made and become established as the new situation. This segment of time from the sensed need for a change to its establishment could also cause them problems, as Jensen explains:
"Next year, we may be allowed to increase them by 10%, but next year it is going to be a hard communication to tell people that we're increasing prices by 10% when inflation has gone down again" (Appendix 9).

5.2 Management Challenges when Facing Change

The act of managing change in organizations presents challenges of all kinds, due to the difficulties of the current competitive and dynamic business panorama. Organizations need to understand that changes disrupt the perceived stability of the company by breaking established routines and creating uncertainty among their employees. For this reason, an organization's short-term strategy must include the resolution of the emerging challenges in their strategies to be able to keep on with their long-term operations. The management challenges presented by the interviewees will be analyzed with the help of the chosen theoretical framework.

The Adaptive Leadership theory clearly distinguishes between technical challenges and what Heifetz and his colleagues (2009) named adaptive challenges. As explained previously, technical challenges do not require a think-out-of-the-box mindset but can instead be solved using the existent procedures of an organization and its natural processes. Contrariwise, Adaptive challenges require more creative solutions, often implying giving up on priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties (Heifetz et al., 2009). The interviewees introduced the researchers to the challenges they had to cope with, which were induced by the last recent events in the organizational panorama.

For instance, the Copenhagen Municipality, the Swedish food company Oatly, and the copywriting business HM Copywriting faced a similar situation in relation to unprecedented growth. The municipality had to deal with a huge increment of Ukrainian refugees they had to receive and help cover their needs; Oatly had to size up due to a hugely increased demand, and HM Copywriting went through a similar situation where the workload increased abruptly (Appendices 15 & 7). In these cases, the leaders in charge of dealing with this exceptional growth had to increase their workforce rapidly. They dealt with this kind of technical challenge using *known solutions and procedures* (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Another relevant case concerning technical challenges is the largest Scandinavian train operating company, DSB. This company has a particular situation due to its public ownership: *"We are owned by all Danes, every Dane contributes to... the cost we have"* (Appendix 9). Simultaneously, they also face the same challenges as any private company, for instance, getting good revenues and obtaining profits. While being nationally owned represents a privilege for them, it also means they have to deal with the obligation of delivering more than *"a good bottom line and economic return"* (Appendix 9). DSB has always had to deal with this challenge, thus making them center most of its strategies towards accomplishing this balance of satisfying its stakeholders. Although being a challenge of acute complexity, DSB has proven throughout the years that they have the *authoritative expertise* and the *know-how* (Heifetz et al., 2009) to deal successfully with these recurring technical challenges.

The interview guide (Appendix 2) did include a specific question on Adaptive challenges. Although the name of the concept was not provided to avoid biases, the different managers and strategists interviewed were explicitly asked if, during or after the provided circumstances, they had to give up any priorities, beliefs, habits, or loyalties. Although most of them initially said that they did not have to, the researchers have been able to identify many Adaptive Challenges behind their explanations. The reason behind that could possibly be the wording of the question, which might have bad connotations, as giving up could imply something bad. Consequently, some of the most relevant Adaptive Challenges the researchers found will be presented hereunder.

As described by Heifetz et al. (2009) in the book 'The Practice of Adaptive Leadership', Adaptive challenges enact complex and systemic problems, typically lacking predetermined or ready-made solutions. For this reason, if organizations want to overcome them, they need to be willing to adapt; in some occasions, this implies giving up some of their priorities, beliefs, habits, or loyalties. In other words, they need to go beyond their comfort zones and be willing to challenge their *status quo.* In the process of interviewing managers, many daily, conventional challenges were found, thus identified as technical. However, the recent events that put context in this research gave rise to many other Adaptive challenges. (Heifetz et al., 2009)

For these types of challenges, it is worth bringing again to the table the company DSB. For a business without competition in their area, as *"there is not another train operator running the tracks"* (Appendix 9), CEO Flemming Jensen claims that this should "*not keep us from trying to invent and develop new products to our customers"* (Appendix 9). The Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war were "*not a big game changer*" (Appendix 9) for them; however, they still led to consequences they had to face. Besides the abrupt increase in fuel prices, the other main challenge he presented in the interview was attracting non-public transport users or getting back the ones that used it before the pandemic. DSB performs an analysis of the user's affluence in the different areas of Denmark by using data from the municipalities. At this point, they focus on the places where public transportation use is lower or has reduced after the Pandemic, and they decided to *"put more focus on our commercial offering"* (Appendix 9). At this point, they started to ideate innovative and specific strategies. Some of their focus points were Køge, where they only have an 8-10% of the market share, or RUC (Roskilde Universitet), where many students still choose to drive or carpool. The initiatives that arose after the analysis consisted of supporting these two communities with a one-month free commuter pass, with which they can try the service, and hopefully, it would encourage them to keep using the service after the free period. The exceptional situation led DSB to a *change in habits* (Heifetz et al., 2009). In other situations, their usual response to a decrease in passengers was to *"work with prices... work with other offerings, obviously, but we are pretty much stuck into this"* (Appendix 9).

Another common Adaptive challenge that the researchers found in many of the interviews due to the Covid-19 Pandemic was the struggle to maintain levels of motivation and efficiency and to preserve the organizational culture while working from home. Morten Gregersen, referring to his experience as Sales Director at the company Scope Technology, mentioned that the onboarding of a new team member in a remote setting was challenging. Even though he was already familiar with working with people online, it was a whole new experience to have employees working fully on remote. He remarked about the new employees joining the company. With the circumstances in Covid times, he would probably never get to meet them physically, which he previously believed to be essential. For this reason, Gregersen had to create new ways of *"being visible even though it's not in the office and make sure you really get in touch with what they're actually feeling"* (Appendix 12). His ideas consisted of trying to keep a close connection with employees online by a weekly motivation and feelings questionnaire and organizing frequent virtual coffee chat breaks to have casual conversations. Moreover, together with the HR department, virtual workshops, team days or even virtual cocktail or cooking parties were organized. The changing circumstances led him and his organization to a *change in beliefs* (Heifetz et al., 2009), acknowledging that remote working can be as efficient as physical work and motivation and connection levels among employees can be maintained or even raised. Casually, Morten's current CEO at Connected Cars, Mads Gregersen, also shared the same idea previous to the Pandemic:

"Before COVID we were clearly an office first company like, basically remote work was something we didn't really want because we believe badly in people working together physically" (Appendix 13).

The rapid changes that Covid-19 imposed also relatively changed this strong belief at Connected Cars, making them believe that working from home can still be as productive and effective as working from the office. Additionally, Gregersen defends that a sense of belonging to a team is essential for a good work environment, and this led them to figure out new practices so employees did not lose this feeling. When coming back to the "new normality", another reason why they did not choose to go back to their old habits but rather decided to implement a hybrid mode combining remote and physical work was that employees have also had a switch in *priorities* (Heifetz et al., 2009) and therefore, they *"not only expect, but also prefer"* (Appendix 13) to be given this option so they can deal better with work-life balance.

Another interviewee who remarks that employees' work-life priorities have changed is Rasmus Jørgensen, Senior Strategic consultant at Deloitte Denmark, who works and gives advice to Strategy Managers in different sectors. Regarding remote working, he reflects that *"looking back that was needed in the past"* (Appendix 11). After the pandemic, he defends that his company *"reached a point where we are in the balance again"* (Appendix 11), and this consists of employees freely choosing whether they want to work in the office, work from home, or another place, or also, changing it depending on their needs. On this last option, he remarks the benefits this has also for the company:

> *We see a lot that if some of our colleagues have sick kids, for instance, then before then they would call in, I have a sick kid I cannot work today. But today, I mean they are not like completely checked out and they will still be somehow available, they can still open their computers because all the systems, all the online tools, they make sure that we can collaborate in the same manner as if he or she was in the office while they are at home... So for instance, if you have a, have kids and family, then you can be a bit more stable within peak hours and then you can be flexible with your job, whereas before it might have been a bit more the other way around* (Appendix 11).

He also mentions that flexibility has given the company many advantages, for instance, lower transport costs from consultants visiting the customers for meetings. All this time has made them learn how to use the different available tools and how to achieve the perfect dynamics of running online meetings (for instance, having shorter meetings to avoid people losing their attention and structuring them in a better way); he also mentions that they have an unresolved matter due to some communication problems arising from having both people working in the office and on remote in the same meeting. In this case, as Deloitte does not have the *experience, knowledge, nor the tools* (Heifetz et al., 2009) to solve this issue, it can be said that they are facing a challenge of an Adaptive nature, which can only be solved by using their creativity and innovation to make everyone equal in this hybrid kind of meetings.

The researchers also interviewed a current employee at Glovo, which used to work as a manager for Deloitte Spain during the Pandemic. Héctor Mata shared his experience there, and curiously, Deloitte Spain faced different challenges than Deloitte Denmark. Whereas Deloitte Denmark was very much used to using online platforms to have meetings (i.e. Skype, Teams) (Appendix 11); in Spain, the company was based on teams working physically in the same room. Due to the inexistence of knowledge-sharing systems besides the old ones, employees struggled to deliver work and senior positions became overloaded, causing a cascading effect of employees resigning from the organization, similar to a snowball rolling downhill (Appendix 6). In this situation, Deloitte Spain was facing a challenge like no other before and according to Mata, they were not able to adapt as fast as the situation required (Heifetz et al., 2009), thus making the company experience a much higher employee rotation than usual.

Regarding organizational culture, a similar perspective to that is the one from the company Glovo, which has always been characterized by high flexibility levels. Contrary to Scope Technology and Connected Cars, they did not fear losing their particular organizational culture when all their employees were sent home due to Covid-19. They believe the reason behind this is their strong culture because HR makes sure to hire people matching the company's style and values. Although they did not believe that this new model would change the way in which they work, the company has recently *"announced that now we* (the employees) *will be forced to be in the office at least three days per week"* (Appendix 5), believing that a hybrid model which combines remote and physical work would be the best option to keep the culture alive. Although their initial thoughts were that remote work would not have an impact on culture, this recent move shows a current slight change in their *beliefs* (Heifetz et al., 2009), probably because they prefer to ensure that the company values do not become compromised. Much earlier, though, Glovo also had to change *priorities* (Heifetz et al., 2009) due to a reduced budget during more challenging times. Some of their tech projects gained importance, replacing some others in customers' well-being that were only *"nice to have"* but not *"core"* (Riu, Appendix 5), and their operations in Ukraine became null during the war, and they almost took the decision to leave the country (Calopa, Appendix 4).

5.3 Learnings & Future Considerations

In this section, we dive into the valuable lessons and insights gathered from managers' experiences in various organizations during challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian conflict. Using their knowledge and expertise, the aim is to uncover key takeaways that can help future managers in their practices and contribute to organizational resilience and agility. The key learnings that emerged from analyzing the interviews are basically communication and trust.

The first learning is about providing effective and transparent communication. In times of uncertainty, clear and timely communication becomes essential to ensure that employees are well-informed and aligned with organizational goals and changes. Jordi Riu from Glovo argues that "*it's crucial to effectively communicate to everyone and constantly everything that's happening, to have everyone on board in the same ship*" (Appendix 5). Agustin Mealla agrees by claiming that having good communication and helping the teams understand "*why*" changes are being made is crucial when dealing with resistance to change (Appendix 7). Another similar example is Prinon Dental Experience. The former CEO of this dental practice claims that employees need communication and orientation of why changes are being made. (Arévalo, Prinon Dental Experience, Appendix 8) You can tell why on the run. Communicate, understand, find the meaning behind the changes being made. (von Appen, Oatly, Appendix 15)

Managers recognize the significance of keeping channels of communication open, fostering transparent dialogues, and ensuring that information flows efficiently throughout the organization. According to Mille von Appen, former Vice-President of People and Culture at Oatly, *"It is better to say you have nothing to say, than saying nothing"* (Appendix 15).

In the case of Deloitte Denmark, during the Global Pandemic, they were pushed to have meetings online. This forced them to change the way the meetings were done because of the increased difficulty to retain people's attention for more than 20 or 30 minutes. Therefore they were forced to make more structured, efficient, and shorter meetings (Jørgensen, Appendix 11). In some cases, changing the whole communication system in such a short time might break the communication system. As Meyer (2016) asserts: *"All aspects of the system must be able to communicate... an organization cannot compete if communication between team members has broken down"* (p. 121). This could be the case of Deloitte Spain, which found its communication "broken" due to Covid-19. Before the Pandemic, they did rely on teams sitting together and highly collaborating. However, they did not quickly manage to reach effective online communication. It was probably the strongly hierarchical structure of the company that did not allow to have *"open channels of communication across job functions and levels of authority"* (Meyer, 2016, p. 122), leading to a slower adapting process and a high dropout number (Mata, Deloitte & Glovo, Appendix 6).

Lastly, the analysis emphasizes the importance of trust and transparency. Managers who prioritize transparency create an atmosphere of openness where employees feel included and informed. Transparent decision-making processes and sharing relevant information contribute to building trust and fostering a sense of unity within the team.

Trust is a vital element that managers need to focus on during extraordinary circumstances, and, as Meyer assesses, *"trust is the foundation for the shared success of Agile teams"* (Meyer, p. 85). Building and maintaining trust among team members becomes even more critical in times of crisis. To provide trust, it is important to specify the Managers' need to establish trust through their actions, decision-making processes, and by fostering an environment of support and collaboration. *"Trust is the center of everything"* (von Appen, Oatly, Appendix 15).

In a constantly changing environment, it is crucial to promote organizational teams and allow teams to be agile and make independent decisions (Meyer, 2016). Employees have to be given trust. And the long-term and short-term aspects need to be separated to remain agile. Agility is the balance between stability, which deals with long-term decisions, and flexibility, which deals with the short-term ones (Heifetz et al., 2009). When employees get more responsibility, they are also given an increased sense of trust. This trust empowers teams to exercise judgment and make informed decisions within the relevant teams. This decentralized decision-making process is crucial to provide agility as it enables employees to determine the most appropriate course of action, thereby enhancing organizational responsiveness. (Gregersen, Connected Cars, Appendix 13).

Additionally, we delve into the insights shared by managers regarding the significance of effective communication, transparency, and maintaining a positive work environment. They emphasize the importance of clear and empathetic communication to address resistance to change, foster trust, and facilitate acceptance among employees.
Looking towards the future, our analysis considers the implications of the lessons learned and insights gained for managerial practices. We discuss considerations for enhancing organizational agility, such as integrating remote work into future planning, prioritizing communication and explanation of changes, and embracing a culture of continuous learning and unlearning. By reflecting on these insights, organizations can prepare for future challenges, build resilience, and position themselves for sustained success.

In summary, this analysis highlights the invaluable lessons learned from managers' experiences during times of uncertainty and change. Their insights provide a roadmap for future managerial practices, enabling organizations to adapt, thrive, and flourish in an ever-evolving business landscape. By incorporating these considerations, organizations can strengthen their ability to navigate future challenges and foster a culture of agility, resilience, and growth.

With this summary, it is now possible to proceed with the discussion phase.

6. Discussion

The aim of this section is to review and interpret the findings constructed throughout the research process, examine their implications and what they mean, but also identify its limitations. Furthermore, the findings will also be compared with the current existing literature, and alternative interpretations will be explored. At the end of the section, the overall contribution to the field will be presented, together with the strengths and weaknesses of the research, and suggestions for a possible future research within the field will be provided.

6.1 Key Findings

Although it might seem obvious, external changes affect organizations differently, many different factors such as organizational size (e.g. start-up or well-established organization), industry, or even the different values a company shares among their employees, have a lot to do with how the organization deals with those changes. These factors further affect how organizations balance Organizational Agility, but manager's preferences can also influence or shape the process according to their leadership styles.

Furthermore, companies also have specific challenges in regards to their ownership and type of organization. For this reason, organizations face challenges such as balancing political interests and business efficiency, which is the case for state-owned organizations like DSB, as they must cater to political wishes while focusing on profitability and customer satisfaction.

Or the case of Novo Nordisk, which needs to comply with Governmental agreements to ensure medical supplies. (Appendix 14)

However, a noteworthy pattern has been identified in this research. After analyzing the data, a clear affirmation can be made: There is not one specific balance point of agility that suits all organizations or situations, meaning that the perfect point of equilibrium for an organization might be completely different from the optimal point for another organization. Thus, there is no 'magic formula' that determines which amount of flexibility and stability for the optimal one individual organization.

Heifetz et al. (2009) defined flexibility and stability as complementary forces, and this research has proven so, even though the researchers initiated the process thinking they were opposed forces. The fact that an organization does not necessarily have to give up flexibility in order to become more stable or, contrarily, give up some of their stability to make room for flexibility, leaves an infinity of different options for companies to try and find the balance. For this reason, the flexibility-stability levels do not have to be seen as a straight line where stability is on one end and flexibility on the other, where the organization needs to choose one point. It should also not be seen as one of the old-fashioned scales, where one end needs to weigh the same as the other. Its essence is more abstract, so the researchers have not found a way to display it, so it has to be further explained.

Therefore, the researchers propose an approach to the flexibility-stability dilemma, consisting that one aspect needs the other to counter and help with balancing, but this is made in the shape of different forms or factors. For instance, if a company gives a lot of freedom to employees, e.g. working from home, or having high independence and responsibility in their tasks, this has to be countered with something strong enough that allows for this to happen.

Glovo's case can be taken as a reference. The start-up is characterized by its high levels of flexibility since its inception. It is not a very hierarchical organization and employees have been used to flexible working hours and are given major responsibility in their tasks. According to the managers working there, Covid-19 was not much of an issue for keeping their operations and the company has been able to keep its growth without having a negative impact versus other companies. The reason behind this could be the factor that allows them to have their stability: their strong culture. (Appendices 4, 5 & 6)

To sum up, their high flexibility levels in the form of the employees' benefits are countered by a strong culture earned by the effort from Human Resources to look for potential candidates who share the same values that would keep the company's culture alive. Of course, more factors come into play, some of them contributing towards flexibility and some towards stability, and should not be disregarded; but in this situation, the researchers have found employee freedom and culture of higher importance. Ultimately, this is how Glovo achieves its own balance, and this has probably helped them appear as an example of an effective business on many occasions in renowned sources such as Forbes or Harvard University (Appendices 4, 5 & 6).

Another case that can help with the explanation of the approach is Deloitte Spain. As it is defined in the interview, the organization counts with a very hierarchical structure. Furthermore, the processes in Deloitte are very well-defined and established, making Deloitte a stable organization. The result of the Pandemic left Deloitte with high levels of turnover. The reason behind this was probably the lack of flexibility when the company had to adapt to the new circumstances. The circumstances in play were the change in priorities of some employees, who did not want to fully work from the office once it was safe to do it. In fact, this caused major issues to the company, causing people to quit. This case is a clear example of a misalignment between stability and flexibility in uncertain times. In this case, Deloitte lacked to give employees more flexibility in the aspect of remote working and, the elevated turnover levels could have maybe been avoided if they acted in time and had given employees the at least the choice to work in a hybrid way. This was an example of an imbalance between stability and flexibility, and another case will be explained as follows. (Appendix 6)

A learning point that these cases suggest is that organizational response and adaptation to global events is crucial to overcome them. Changing and learnings, helped organizations to thrive and, for the ones that were not able to overcome some of the risks, reflections implying the same lesson have been given. For instance, the Copenhagen Municipality admits that they probably did not manage the Covid-19 crisis in the best way, as it acknowledged to have been too rigid and slow to manage the situation. However, they took the learnings from it and their response to the following event, the Ukraine invasion was dealt with in a much better way because they could adapt better and faster to the situation. Therefore, it is of great importance that the required speed of changes is attempted to be met by the organizations when facing sudden changes in market conditions and external factors.

The company HM Copywriting, established as a result of the Pandemic, had a flat structure and provided freedom to their freelancers to work from wherever, whenever, and in the amount they wanted. This gave HM Copywriting the freedom to hire people mainly from countries in Latin America, even though the company was established in Copenhagen. This allowed them to save costs in personnel due to the lower salaries and to hire people freely depending on the work levels. On the other hand, what countered their flexibility was the high demand they achieved to have in a short time. HM Copywriting kept on collaborating with more freelancers, which were taking more and more work and they even got to hire someone to review the content, to ensure that the work was being done properly. The owners had managed to find a demand gap and the secured amount of work was giving them the needed stability. However, the quick development of Artificial Intelligence unexpectedly stole HM Copywriting a huge share of the market. What used to be a security or strength for the organization turned out to be their weak point. The stability of the company decreased quickly and precipitously and, at this point, the amount of flexibility was not enough to maintain the balance and the company had to shut down. (Appendix 7)

Moreover employees' wellbeing has also been getting more focus from the manager's side. This may be resulting from some realizations after the hardships during the Pandemic, where many people struggled with mental health. And the realization of that work actually can be done remotely and increase employee satisfaction.

Overcoming resistance to change is crucial for managers, who should recognize and face natural resistance by implementing gradual changes rather than sudden ones. Open and transparent communication along with the support of change responsibles can facilitate a smoother transition. Effective communication and a strong company culture play vital roles during times of change, as they align employees with shared values and promote transparency, fostering organizational cohesiveness and stability.

Trust is a fundamental element in achieving agility. By giving trust to the individuals and teams and empowering them to make their own decisions, organizations encourage flexibility, increased responsibility, and a sense of ownership.

Establishing a solid organizational foundation before implementing numerous changes is crucial for maintaining stability. Examples like Oatly and Connected Cars demonstrate the challenges companies face in balancing organizational stability and long-term strategic goals amidst changing environments, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Differentiating between long-term and short-term goals is important. Stability is associated with long-term goals, while agility becomes necessary for short-term objectives. It is essential for organizations to adapt to new situations and structures while preserving core values and priorities, even in times of rapid change or uncertainty, as exemplified by Deloitte Denmark's focus on sustainability goals and DSB's dedication to maintaining stability amidst uncertainty.

6.1.1 Analyze & Interpretation of Findings

These key findings indicate the relationships between the theoretical concepts investigated. It is evident that the concepts and what they entail are interconnected, more precisely like a cyclical process as visualized in figure 4.
Moreover, patterns have appeared during the research process, through the interviews where the managers expressed many similar things, which has also made it easier to see the differences (that are as mentioned earlier due to specific factors of an organization). Furthermore the patterns indicate trends such as remote work, that are perceived as a positive aftermath of Covid-19. Nonetheless, the patterns point to the process organizations undergo when facing change thus during change, and how often they go through the cyclical process of change, as demonstrated in figure 4. Additionally, the managers express their awareness that this cyclical process is more frequently encountered in today's business world.
Another pattern that has become visible for the researchers during their studies, is the situation that arises when organizations have not achieved a solid fundamental stability, challenges will be met later on, as the case of Oatly (Appendix 15) and a previous project (Appendix 21). Where organizations scale too fast or implement too many changes at once, that later results in employee layoffs or resignations, as the challenges become too extensive.

A critical consideration is whether the intricacy of the phenomenon being examined is adequately grasped. When merging two theories, the comprehension is enriched by leveraging their respective strengths and perspectives. By integrating the change model, known for its simplicity and systematic approach, with the adaptive model, which highlights flexibility and adaptability, a more holistic understanding of navigating change can be achieved. This approach offers an improved framework for tackling the complexity of change, acknowledging that it is not a straightforward progression but rather a dynamic loop that demands constant adaptation.

6.2 Research Limitations

The findings of the thesis must be seen in light of some limitations that affected the results. The study faced limited access to data, as it proved challenging to obtain participants. Although efforts were made to provide generous availability in order for participants to book themselves an interview, many of them still alleged to be busy.
It is further important to note that only one female manager was interviewed. Although the study has not considered gender to be relevant in this specific research, this lack of gender balance could result in a study not reflecting the target population, thus an effort to gather more female points of view should have been made. However, the researchers have reflected on the possibility that this could have a direct relationship with the low percentage of women in managerial positions.

Lastly, it is essential to mention the potential biases of the researchers, such as the accuracy of managerial perceptions and trust between researcher and participant. As participants can determine what they choose to reveal in the interview and may present themselves thus their companies in a favorable light. The approaches which were used in prior studies and the impact they had on findings are intended to be taken into account. However, this could still be considered as one of the project's limitations, as not in all occasions it is clear that the sources chosen are the most recent and accurate.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, the research reliability and validity were ensured to the best ability, as discussed in section 3.4.

6.2.1 Consider Alternative Explanations

The study suggests that a proactive approach to change is important based on the combination of two theories and findings from a diverse sample. However, alternative explanations should be acknowledged in order to provide different perspectives. An alternative explanation is that organizational agility alone might not be enough to navigate the challenges of the Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis era. Factors like the conditions of the markets, the existing financial resources, and the technological capabilities may also play significant roles in effective change management. Additionally, the limitations of the study's findings should be acknowledged, because the focus on a specific industry or region might limit generalizability. An alternative explanation could be that different industries or regions require unique strategies to balance their own organizational agility.

6.3 Implication & Application

This thesis contributes to the field of organizational agility, by the merge of the two theories, Organizational agility during change was the phenomenon being studied, while the context of the study was the Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis era. Meaning it thus provides a snapshot of the current state of the business field, in the form of the researched organizations operating in this era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis. This specific context was chosen as it was considered a very special era, since it involves two overlapping crises. And as director general of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said *"For a better outcome you don't do it alone, you push together. It is a crisis, but opportunities are born from crises"* (von Einsiedel, 2021). Which has shown to be right in this thesis, as the external changes have provided new opportunities for organizations when there is learning from the crises, for instance working in new ways.

Furthermore, this era is not just about Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine, but also inflation, technology, thus the complexity and interconnectedness of the globalized world, where everything is changing exponentially.

Moreover, in human history related to progress, some events stand out due to being especially revolutionary, for instance invention of agriculture, industrial revolution and the invention of the World Wide Web (Web, Norwich University, 2023). It is now believed by many researchers and among others business owners, that AI is one of these changes that historically will stand out, and is even believed it may become the biggest change in human history (Web, Conn,2023), as it will be accompanied by many disruptive changes (Web, Ravichander, 2023).

In recent years, technological breakthroughs have unfolded, and is only the tip of the iceberg that we have seen of the effect this external change may have, which is thus creating a lot of uncertainty, as for example in the labor market (Web, Rogaczewski, 2023). This change topic is therefore an very interesting choice to further research, this additionally elaborated in the upcoming section.

6.4 Future Studies

The research conducted in this master thesis has shed light on some of the strategies and approaches employed by managers to promote organizational agility in the face of a constantly changing environment. However, there are several avenues for further exploration and future studies that can contribute to a deeper understanding of this topic.

Future studies could focus on conducting a comparative analysis across companies that are within the same industry, to examine how leaders from various or from the same sector navigate and encourage organizational agility. By comparing the approaches and practices employed in similar contexts, researchers can identify industry-specific challenges and best practices for enhancing agility.

Another option could be related to the limitation of having time constraints and conducting studies that analyze a longer time period and not only the period between the appearance of Covid-19 and the present. This can provide valuable insights into how managers sustain organizational agility over time. By observing and analyzing the strategies employed by managers during the different phases of change, researchers could most likely detect patterns, success factors, and potential threats associated with maintaining agility in the long run.

Considering that technology is developing exponentially, future investigations could also delve into the possible benefits and threats that can come with the implementation of technologies in the realm of Artificial Intelligence and explore its role in enabling organizational agility. Studying how the use of digital tools, data analytics, and emerging technologies affect the way managers lead their teams.

Moreover, further studies can dive deeper into the influence that organizational culture has on the development and implementation of agility. Exploring how cultural factors, such as openness to change, risk-taking propensity, and innovation orientation can greatly influence an organization's ability to adapt and respond to ever-changing environments. Additionally, for future studies, the researchers could be interested in exclusively studying strategy consultant perspectives on this topic. Where as an example, the method could be to conduct a group interview where managers could debate between them.

Alternatively, it would also be very interesting for future researchers to note that this master thesis could have incorporated a greater gender balance, or it could have been exclusively focused on women leaders. Exploring the perspectives and experiences of women in leadership roles would provide insights into their approaches regarding organizational agility in an ever-changing environment. By doing so, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics and promote gender equality in research.

On the other hand, this research was done by interviewing managers or leaders in different industries and countries, but focusing on the managerial side. It could be very interesting for future studies to dive into the employee side of the story and analyze how followers react to different styles of management or leadership. Investigating employee engagement, empowerment, and involvement in decision-making processes can contribute towards proving an understanding of how both managers and employees contribute to creating an agile organization.

7. Conclusion

In this section, the problem formulation *How do strategic managers balance organizational agility when facing change in this era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crisis?* will be addressed.

The combination of the two approaching theories and its mutual integration, together with the findings from the variated sample has made the researchers comprehend the importance of a proactive approach to embracing change. Meaning organizations need to constantly keep adjusting their strategies or implementing new strategies which ensure value creation and efficiency. It is thus fundamentally of importance to understand that there is no 'magic formula' for organizational agility suiting every organization or situation, as the characteristic of an organization, among other factors, plays a big part in what the right agility balance is.

Furthermore, in this era of Pandemic Recovery and Global Crises, hybrid work models and different managerial styles have been necessary to thrive in such an uncertain and dynamic panorama.

Another of the factors that have been proven to help navigate difficulties, is to ensure to create and maintain an Agile organization, which develops a willingness to adapt and preparedness for continuous change, while putting the focus on both capability and value creation management. This way, agility and adaptability to face the upcoming external challenges can be guaranteed.

The crucial role that strategic managers play is to be the ones providing this organizational agility and thus ensure company's adaptability during the challenging times. Leaders must embrace change, address challenges, guide employees, and help the organization adjust to new situations while also maintaining the fundamental structure, thus the long-term vision and goals. Therefore, organizations that can count on Adaptive Leaders are well-positioned for thriving in dynamic and evolving business landscapes.

Overall, managers have learned that organizational agility, effective communication, adapting to new work environments, and strategic leadership are crucial elements in managing change and maintaining stability in volatile and uncertain times.

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Research proposal.

Appendix 2: Interview guide.

Appendix 3: Coded transcript - Copenhagen Municipality, Office Manager Jesper Poulsen.

Appendix 4: Coded notes - Glovo, Growth Manager Jaume Calopa Piedra.

Appendix 5: Coded notes - Glovo, International Strategy Manager Jordi Riu.

Appendix 6: Coded transcript - Deloitte/Glovo Financial Accounting Manager Hector Mata.

Appendix 7: Coded transcript - HM Copywriter, Co-Founder Agustin Mealla.

Appendix 8: Coded transcript - Prinon Dental Experience, CEO Xabier Arévalo.

Appendix 9: Coded transcript - DSB, CEO Flemming Jensen.

Appendix 10: Coded transcript - Wallbox, Business Development Manager Vincenzo Vitiello.

Appendix 11: Coded transcript - Deloitte, Senior Consultant Rasmus Jørgensen.

Appendix 12: Coded transcript - Scope Technology, Sales Director in Asia & Middle East Morten Gregersen.

Appendix 13: Coded transcript - Connected Cars, CEO Mads Gregersen.

Appendix 14: Coded transcript - Novo Nordisk, Vice President, Jens Kovsted.

Appendix 15: Coded notes - Oatly, Vice President, People & Culture Mille von Appen.

Appendix 16: NVivo Coding Summary By Code.

Appendix 17: NVivo Coding Summary By File.

Appendix 18: Study portfolio - Àfrica Soucheiron.

Appendix 19: Study portfolio - Xabier Arévalo Urbizo.

Appendix 20: Study portfolio - Malu Grønvold. Petersen.

Appendix 21: Project C - Organizational Culture Change in a Startup.