Middle Managers as Change Agents - An Investigation of Their Role in a Top-Driven Change Process towards End-Customer Orientation

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The President:

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“It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare, it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.”

(Seneca)

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London and Münster, July 2016

Cansu Oral
To my family...
Abstract

Recognizing the benefits of integrating end-customers in the business strategy, executives are initiating changes to align the entire company towards greater end-customer orientation. However, despite the investment of substantial resources to build an effective change management, a majority of change projects fail in practice, according to recent studies. To more successfully implement change strategies, executives emphasize the importance of middle managers as change agents.

Although executives nowadays put middle managers in charge of implementing change, yet scientific research on this topic is scarce. To address this gap, the present research investigates how middle managers enact their role as change agents in a top-driven change process towards end-customer orientation. More specifically, this research explores how middle managers perceive an organizational change process, their challenges and practices in their change role enactment, and reasons for variations within their change role performance.

A longitudinal comparative case study of middle managers in one company with 25 semi-structured interviews and 620 hours of participant observations provides novel insights. The results first imply that middle managers perceive an organizational change process in seven key steps: establishing a sense of urgency, developing a vision and strategy, creating a guiding coalition, communicating the vision, coping with change conflict, gaining short-term wins, and consolidating gains and producing more change. Second, a newly developed process model shows that middle managers enact their role as change agents in four steps. In the role assignment (step 1), top managers direct expectations towards middle managers, who start interpreting their role as implementers of change. Most middle managers face severe challenges during change implementation (step 2), such as lack of vision, time dynamics of change, and lack of change capabilities. To address these challenges, middle managers employ various practices (step 3), such as engagement with change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking, and learning change skills. Based on their use of these practices, middle managers can be categorized according to three pathways that result in three role performance outcomes: role expansion, role integration, and role resignation (step 4).
Zusammenfassung

Die Vorteile einer verankerten Endkundenorientierung in der Unternehmensstrategie sind heutzutage unbestritten. Führungskräfte initiieren daher Veränderung, um das Unternehmen stärker auf Endkunden auszurichten. Aktuelle Studien zeigen jedoch, dass die Mehrheit dieser Projekte scheitert – trotz hoher Investitionen in ein effektives „Change Management“. Um den Wandel erfolgreich umzusetzen, betonen Führungskräfte die Rolle von mittleren Managern als „Agenten des Wandels“.

Obwohl mittlere Manager verstärkt die Umsetzung und die Verankerung neuer Strategien verantworten, gibt es bislang kaum Forschung, die sich mit der Rolle mittlerer Manager in einem organisationalen Wandel befasst. Die vorliegende Arbeit versucht, diese Forschungslücke zu schliessen und untersucht, wie mittlere Manager die ihnen zugewiesene Rolle in einem organisationalen Strategiewechsel zu einer stärkeren Endkundenorientierung gestalten. Insbesondere erforscht die Arbeit, wie mittlere Manager einen organisationalen Veränderungsprozess wahrnehmen, welche Herausforderungen und Praktiken sie in ihrer neuen Rolle aufweisen und weshalb sie Unterschiede im Erfolg ihrer Rollenausübung zeigen.

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Abbreviations

APAC Asia-Pacific  
BCS Bayer CropScience  
BCG Boston Consulting Group  
CEF Commercial Excellence Framework  
CEO Chief Executive Officer  
Cf. Compare (Latin: confer)  
CO Customer Orientation  
COO Chief Operating Officer  
CRM Customer Relationship Management  
EBIT Earnings Before Interest and Taxes  
e.g. For example (Latin: exempli gratia)  
EMEA Europe, Middle-East, and Africa  
FTE Full Time Equivalent  
HQ Headquarters  
HR Human Resources  
i.e. That is (Latin: id est)  
KPI Key Performance Indicator  
MM Middle Manager  
p Page  
pp Pages  
R&D Research and Development  
RM Regional Manager  
TM Top Manager  
WFPMA World Federation of People Management Associations
### Key Definitions

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<td>Change agent</td>
<td>manager in charge of the strategy implementation in the change process who tries to overcome resistance, allocate resources, and manage the change process; supports the learning process of the employees (Meffert et al., 2012, p. 778)</td>
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<td>Change inertia</td>
<td>inability of managers to cope with change initiative overload and with organizational politics</td>
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<td>Change management</td>
<td>“process of continually renewing an organization’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the changing needs of external and internal customers” (Moran &amp; Brightman, 2001, p. 111)</td>
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<td>Change resilience</td>
<td>ability of managers to bounce back from negative incidents in the change process and to allocate their resources effectively</td>
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<td>Change role performance</td>
<td>degree to which middle managers accomplish the objectives of their change role and facilitate the overall success of the strategy</td>
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<td>Customer orientation</td>
<td>understanding of one’s customers in order to continuously create superior value for them (Narver &amp; Slater, 1990)</td>
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<td>End-customer orientation</td>
<td>alignment of the company’s marketing activities closer towards the end-customer, the user of the firm’s products and services</td>
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<td>Implementing strategy</td>
<td>alignment of organizational action with strategic intentions and integration of subordinates’ activities in compliance with this strategy (e.g., monitoring activities to support top management objectives) (Floyd &amp; Wooldridge, 1992)</td>
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<td>Intermediate customer</td>
<td>buyers of a company’s products, but not its direct users, for instance retailers or distributors</td>
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<td>Learning practice</td>
<td>managers’ willingness to learn and their fast acquisition of change skills in management training</td>
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<td>Middle manager</td>
<td>organizational member who has access to the top management team, has some operational knowledge, leads employees, and reports to supervisors (Wooldridge, Schmid, &amp; Floyd, 2008)</td>
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<td>Practices</td>
<td>specific activities that strategic actors use in a strategy process (for instance, symbolic or material tools that enable strategy work) (Jarzabkowski &amp; Spee, 2009)</td>
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<td>Role</td>
<td>totality of expectations directed by others towards an individual within a social structure (Katz &amp; Kahn, 1978)</td>
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<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>different interpretations of environmental cues and inconsistent expectations among managers at different hierarchical levels (Wooldridge et al., 2008)</td>
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<td>Role enactment</td>
<td>dynamic process in which managers enact a specific role by adjusting their role behavior over time</td>
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<td>Role expansion</td>
<td>role outcome of change agents who use the additional change role as an opportunity to advance in their careers and be promoted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role integration</td>
<td>role outcome of change agents who struggle with change role at first but manage to integrate their daily role with change role in the end</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role overload</td>
<td>situations in which managers feel that there are too many responsibilities or activities expected of them in the time available, their abilities, and other constraints (Rizzo, House, &amp; Lirtzman, 1970)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role resignation</td>
<td>role outcome of change agents who give up on their change role and resign</td>
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<td>Role stress</td>
<td>posits that multiple social roles are most commonly perceived as a burden on the individual (Nordenmark, 2004)</td>
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<td>Sensegiving</td>
<td>relates to “sensemaking and meaning construction of others” with respect to the change process (Gioia &amp; Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensemaking</td>
<td>“meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempted to develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the intended strategic change” (Gioia &amp; Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy-as-Practice</td>
<td>posits that strategy is not something that an organization <em>has</em> but something its members <em>do</em>; focuses on the individual activity of strategy practitioners on a micro-level (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Langley &amp; Abdallah, 2011)</td>
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<td>Strategy process</td>
<td>“is concerned with understanding how organizational strategies are formulated and implemented and the processes of strategic change” (Van de Ven, 1992, p. 169)</td>
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<td>Top-driven change</td>
<td>indicates that the top management team develops a change strategy and communicates it downwards until it reaches the front-line employees and customers</td>
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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Motivation

“In order to implement customer orientation, I take responsibilities in addition to my daily role. I am the translator between the new strategy and the operations in the country organizations.”

(Change agent from middle management, Bayer CropScience, 2011)

In 2011, Bayer CropScience (BCS) – a multinational crop protection company – has rolled out a new marketing strategy to strengthen its end-customer relations with the objective of becoming the market leader in its industry. In order to implement this new customer orientation strategy in the entire company, its top management spent large amounts of financial resources and appointed more than one hundred middle managers from several country organizations to be change agents. These middle managers played a crucial role in the company’s strategic change towards customer orientation as they had to manage the global implementation process. More specifically, while the top management of BCS had planned and developed the new strategy, middle managers acted as change agents and were responsible for the operational work of the change process.

As the opening quote shows, when middle managers began their role as change agents implementing the new strategy, they were confronted with several new responsibilities in addition to their daily activities. For instance, these additional responsibilities included guiding the change project in their work units, convincing their peers about the new strategy, and passing on the new strategy to the front-line employees. However, the new responsibilities which they took over have caused several challenges to BCS’ middle managers, such as limited personal resources and skills. The challenges with which middle managers were faced when they became responsible for the implementation of the customer-oriented strategy and the individual practices they used to deal with these challenges constitute the starting point of this dissertation.

In this dissertation, I focus on the company’s strategic change process towards end-customer orientation and, more specifically, I investigate how middle managers in the field of marketing handled the implementation process of the new strategy and enacted
their role as change agents. The main motivation of this research is to derive relevant success factors of managing and implementing a change process for middle (marketing) managers of BCS and other companies in order to support their role enactment as change agents. Moreover, the results of this investigation should provide important implications and recommendations for top managers (e.g., how to develop a change vision and guide middle managers to successfully implement the change), human resources managers (e.g., how to hire and coach middle managers for the change process), and change initiators (e.g., how to build a change team) to help middle managers in the change process.

Figure 1 illustrates and summarizes the research motivation of this dissertation. In a nutshell, middle managers in marketing enact a regular role in their work. When a company assigns to them the additional role as change agents who will implement a new strategy in the company, their regular role as a marketing manager becomes enhanced by additional tasks. In this vein, they face several challenges. How managers adapt themselves to these challenges and enact their new role is part of this research. The following sections discuss the practical relevance of this research motivation, derive the research gaps and goals in more detail, and provide an overview of the general structure of this dissertation.

**Figure 1: Research Motivation**

Source: Own Illustration
1.2 Practical Relevance

Over the last few decades, practitioners have paid an increasing attention to the topic of organizational change management. However, despite the huge investments practitioners have made in tools, training programs, and literature, recent practice-oriented studies still show an extremely high failure rate for change projects (Ashkenas, 2013). For instance, a global survey of 3,199 executives reveals that only one change project in three succeeds, whereas all others are not successful, and their failing can cause severe business and management problems for an organization (McKinsey, 2009). Interestingly, the high rate of change project failures has stayed constant from the seventies to the present, which indicates that executives have not yet found a solution for implementing change programs successfully (Ashkenas, 2013).

But why do companies’ change efforts fail so often? Kotter (1995) provides initial evidence for the main barriers to change. He found that, for instance, neglecting to form a case for urgency in the organization, failing to create a powerful coalition to enforce the change, and lacking a clear change vision can hinder companies in changing effectively (Kotter, 1995). If companies do not address and solve these important barriers, several negative outcomes can be observed in practice, such as confusion, chaos, and feelings of anxiety and frustration (Capgemini, 2015).

In order to overcome these barriers and successfully design the organizational change, many companies have drawn attention to the role of the top management. In this vein, it has been argued that the critical lever in enacting change in an organization is how top managers lead the change initiative, as they are the architects of most strategic change processes (Deloitte, 2013). Indeed, many practitioners see the change as an episodic interruption of the status quo – something initiated and managed from the top levels of the company (McKinsey, 2014). Work on top-driven changes has shown that, in order to develop and design a successful change process in an organization, top managers should pay attention to the dynamics within their teams, to changes in the organization’s perceptions about the initiative, and, importantly, to a clear communication of the change objectives and activities (Sirkin, Keenan, & Jackson, 2005).

However, while top managers plan and guide the change process in their organizations, they are usually not responsible for its implementation. Nowadays, 

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1 For instance, Amazon.com shows over 87,000 books about change management.
responsibility for the implementation of the change often lies with middle managers (Emerald, 2008; McKinney, McMahon, & Walsh, 2013). Middle managers have access to the top management team, and their additional skills and knowledge about the operational work makes them unique in the organization (Wooldridge et al., 2008). It is therefore not surprising that in recent years top managers have increasingly recognized that the true power of the organization lies “in the middle” and that middle management’s involvement in the corporate strategy can facilitate the success of a change process (Accenture, 2007). As a result of their high relevance for the success of a change process, companies nowadays aim at better understanding how middle managers enact their roles as change agents (Fuller, 2013).

Within a change process, middle managers play a crucial role, as they act as boundary spanners between top managers and front-line employees. Specifically, they receive new strategic directions from the top management and are then responsible for implementing and passing on the strategy to front-line employees (Lam, Kraus, & Ahearne, 2010). Further, middle managers need to energize front-line employees who interact directly with customers (A.T. Kearney, 2011). In order to support middle managers in their crucial role in the strategy process, executives call for more empowerment of the middle management. For instance, according to a recent survey of 1,304 senior executives – conducted by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA) – 80% of business leaders think that middle managers should be more empowered to implement new strategies more effectively (Caye et al., 2010).

In a similar vein, another survey of 250 managers reveals that middle managers, especially those in the marketing area, should be more empowered in customer relations (cf. Temkin Group, 2012). This is the case because these managers are essential for implementing a customer orientation strategy due to their central position in the organization and their proximity to customers (BCG, 2010). Customer orientation refers to the understanding of one’s customers in order to continuously create superior value for them (Narver & Slater, 1990). Being closer to the markets than top managers, middle managers are able to assess the viability of customer-oriented strategies (Neilson, Martin, & Powers, 2008). Moreover, as middle managers connect strategies with the operational work, their performance also determines the success of customer-oriented strategies (Schögel & Herhausen, 2012). They translate customer orientation into concrete implementation plans, communicate with employees, and manage the daily change business (BCG, 2010).
However, especially middle managers in business-to-business companies increasingly face an “implementation gap” as they struggle with severe challenges to serve their “customer’s customer” (Meffert, Burmann, & Kirchgeorg, 2012). In addition to their emphasis on the relations with their intermediate customers (e.g., distributors), business-to-business companies also need to focus their marketing activities on their end-customers, that is, the users of their products and services (French, LaBerge, & Magille, 2011). Overall, middle managers in business-to-business companies should market to and directly own the relationship with their end-users by ensuring the offer of the right services for delivering convenience and an experience that will engage and drive loyalty amongst end-users (Forrester, 2014).

To conclude, in recent years, practitioners have strongly emphasized the importance of middle marketing managers in top-driven change processes working towards a stronger end-customer orientation. However, we still know very little about how middle marketing managers enact their change roles in such a process. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on middle marketing managers who are responsible for changing their company’s customer orientation strategy from one that primarily targets intermediate customers, namely the distributors, to one that targets the end-customers, the end-users. In this context, middle marketing managers enact their change role in such a way that it aligns the company’s marketing activities closer to the end-customers. In sum, by addressing this highly relevant topic, this thesis investigates the following key research question:

Key research question:
How do middle marketing managers enact their role as change agents in a top-driven change process towards end-customer orientation?
1.3 Research Gaps, Goals, and Positioning

In order to address the key research question, “How do middle marketing managers enact their role as change agents in a top-driven change process towards end-customer orientation,” the dissertation derives four specific research goals. These research goals are:

(1) Understanding how middle managers perceive the organizational change process of a top-driven change towards an end-customer orientation.

(2) Exploring the challenges that middle managers encounter in their change role enactment when the organization shifts its strategy towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

(3) Exploring the practices that middle managers employ in their change role enactment when they change the organization towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

(4) Explaining why some middle managers are more successful than their peers in the enactment of their change role towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

The next sections elaborate on these goals in more detail by illustrating the related research gaps.

**Research Gap 1:** Research suggests that change management is best addressed from a process perspective (Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). According to the process perspective, organizational change is defined as alterations of existing work routines and strategies that affect the whole organization (Herold & Fedor, 2008). Conducting change is one of the most important tasks of an organization (e.g., Beck, Bruderl, & Woywode, 2008; Herold, Fedor, & Caldwell, 2007; Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012), and while a successful implementation of the change in the organization can strengthen a business, its failure can cause severe consequences, including an organization’s death (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012). For instance, in top-driven changes (see chapter 1.2), the top management team might fail to execute change strategies while they pass several levels until they reach the customer-facing employees (Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011). Information on the new strategy might get lost or modified as it diffuses gradually which, in turn, can cause ineffective and inefficient decision-making (cf. Hartline, Maxham, & McKee, 2000).

The implementation of a customer orientation strategy is closely related to an organizational change process because the organization and its managers need to
change the way they work (e.g., Gebhardt, Carpenter, & Sherry, 2006; Hartline et. al, 2000; Sarin, Challagalla, & Kohli, 2012). Since customer orientation creates customer value and, as a consequence, can improve organizational performance, the question of how companies can become more customer-oriented has received great research attention until now (e.g., Day, 1999; Gebhardt et al., 2006; Rust, Moorman, & Bhalla, 2010; Slater & Narver, 1994; Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012). By analyzing the antecedents of customer orientation, Kirca, Bearden, & Hult (2005) show that, for instance, top management emphasis, interdepartmental connectedness, customer-oriented reward systems, and customer-oriented training impact the company’s customer orientation positively.

Although research has analyzed the antecedents of an organizational customer orientation, it has largely neglected to look at (the effectiveness of) the implementation process itself in order to direct the company towards more customer orientation. Two exceptions are Kennedy, Goolsby, & Arnould (2003) and Gebhardt et al. (2006). Kennedy et al. (2003) investigate the implementation of a customer orientation in a school district from an organizational level. They find in particular that senior leadership, interfunctional coordination, and market intelligence are important for organizations when they change their units so as to enact a customer orientation. Moreover, Gebhardt et al. (2006) study the process steps in an organizational change towards a customer orientation. They argue that the organization needs to go through four particular steps: initiation, reconstitution, institutionalization, and maintenance (see chapter 2.4). While these two studies have particularly focused on the organizational enactment of a change process, so far no research has explored the change process towards customer orientation from the perspective of an individual manager. This research aims at filling this gap.

In particular, in business-to-business contexts, the change process towards a stronger customer orientation might challenge managers as they need to serve two customers: the ones to whom they sell directly (intermediate customers) and the ones that their buyers sell to (end-customers) (Parasuraman, 1998). This approach can often be observed in distribution structures with two or more tiers (Schögel, 2013a). Homburg, Wilczek, & Hahn (2014) problematize customer orientation in this context by raising the question of how companies can approach their customers’ customers in order to create superior value for them, which in this dissertation is called an “end-customer orientation” (for a detailed discussion of their work, see chapter 2.4).

As discussed in chapter 1.2, in most business-to-business companies, not top managers but middle managers are responsible for the implementation of an organizational
However, scientific work on the contribution of the middle managers to an organization’s change process towards customer orientation is scarce (e.g., Lam et al., 2010). This is surprising because in business practice it is the middle manager who is responsible for the change and the implementation of the end-customer orientation. Specifically, in business-to-business contexts, the individual role of middle managers is crucial as they coordinate the activities between various stakeholders, such as supervisors, team members, intermediate customers, and end-customers (Homburg et al., 2014).

The combination of these developments in the areas of change management, customer orientation, and middle management leads to research goal 1:

**Research Goal 1:**
Understanding how middle managers perceive the *organizational change process* of a top-driven change towards an end-customer orientation.

**Research Gap 2:** Research in various fields, such as marketing and management, has paid attention to organizational change efforts *without considering the roles of individuals in the change process* (e.g., Battilana & Casciaro, 2012; Van Raaij & Stoelhorst, 2008; see also the discussion above). This seems surprising since individuals’ understandings of the change efforts and their associated roles, of how they interpret these roles, and of their interactions with other actors, determine the success of a change process (Bartunek, 2014). Therefore, research has begun to devote increasing attention to the role of individuals. In particular, middle managers as change agents are an important part of understanding strategic change (e.g., Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2013; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Guth & MacMillan, 1986). As discussed in the preceding sections, middle managers occupy a crucial position in the organizational hierarchy, as they are responsible for implementing top management change plans and ensuring that employees fulfil their tasks (Harding, Lee, & Ford, 2014).

When implementing change strategies, middle managers are likely to *face role challenges* because they interact between upper or lower hierarchy levels in the company (Hutt, Reingen, & Ronchetto, 1988; Wooldridge et al., 2008). Specifically,
research that focuses on the challenges middle managers encounter in a change process towards an end-customer orientation remains scarce (cf. Browne, Sharkey-Scott, Mangematin, Lawlor, & Cuddihy, 2014). Evidently, the challenges of middle managers in a change process towards an end-customer orientation require more research. To address this research gap, research goal 2 aims at:

**Research Goal 2:**
Exploring the *challenges* that middle managers encounter in their change role enactment when the organization shifts its strategy towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

**Research Gap 3:** The strategy-as-practice literature suggests that managers engage in *practices in order to implement strategies* effectively (Whittington, 2006). Practices are specific activities strategic actors enact in a strategy process (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Mantere (2008) initially presents practices that enable the roles of middle managers. He shows that particularly narration, contextualization, resource allocation, and respect from top managers towards middle managers support the implementation role of middle managers. Moreover, Rouleau (2005) determines four middle management practices in a strategic change process: translating, overcoding, disciplining, and justifying.²

Although research has made initial attempts to capture practices in a middle management context, we still know very little about *practices that middle managers enact* in their role as change agents when the company implements a stronger end-customer orientation. As such, this dissertation responds to calls for a stronger focus on the practices middle managers apply to accomplish strategic change toward end-customers (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Schmid & Brunner, 2013; Teulier & Rouleau, 2013). To address this research gap and to provide insights into the practices middle managers enact in their role as change agents, research goal 3 is:

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² See chapter 2.3 for more details.
Research Goal 3:
Exploring the practices that middle managers employ in their change role enactment when they change the organization towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

Research Gap 4: Research has shown that middle management’s involvement in strategic processes can result in both positive and negative outcomes (e.g., Ahearne et al., 2013; Tarakci, Ates, & Wooldridge, 2015). On the one hand, Floyd & Wooldridge (1994), for instance, compare mid-level managers with “dinosaurs” which means that these managers rather hinder change. In fact, Guth & MacMillan (1986) show that middle managers can sabotage the implementation of strategies which decreases the organizational performance. On the other, middle managers can act as “dynamos” (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994), as Floyd & Wooldridge (1997) show the positive effects of middle management’s strategy involvement on organizational performance.

Despite studies on how middle management’s involvement in strategy impacts organizational outcomes (e.g., Noble & Mokwa, 1999), scholars have neglected to analyze the impact on middle managers’ individual outcomes, such as their own role performance. In this vein, Mantere (2003) clusters managers of an organization into champions (high involvement), citizens (medium involvement), and cynics (low involvement). According to Mantere (2003), cynics do not believe that their work can influence the strategy process (e.g., execute strategy or influence strategy creation). Citizens act as a part of the strategy process, but do not try to influence the organization in strategic issues outside their own immediate working environment. On the other hand, champions report on actively trying to influence the larger sphere (e.g., other people’s opinions, larger organizational systems) in order to act as strategic agents (Mantere, 2003, p. 75).

However, Mantere’s (2003) typology remains rather descriptive, neglecting both the specific practices that middle managers use and the outcomes to which these practices may lead. Thus, research needs to open the black box of the middle management’s change role enactment in order to tackle the factors that differentiate a superior change agent from an inferior one. In order to address this research gap, research goal 4 is:
Research Goal 4:
Explaining why some middle managers are more successful than their peers in the enactment of their change role towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

In conclusion, the four research goals guide the following research process. First, this thesis uncovers the perceived organizational process of a top-driven marketing change towards an end-customer orientation by middle managers (addressed by research goal 1). Second, the analysis reveals specific challenges that middle managers encounter in their change role enactment (addressed by research goal 2). Third, the dissertation determines individual practices that middle managers employ within their change role (addressed by research goal 3). Finally, the dissertation explores why some middle managers are more likely to enact a successful change role than their peers (addressed by research goal 4). In pursuing these research goals, this dissertation’s overall key goal is to derive a process model of how middle managers enact their role as change agents in a top-driven change towards a stronger end-customer orientation. Figure 2 illustrates the four research goals.
Figure 2: Research Questions
Source: Own Illustration

Figure 3 shows the positioning of this dissertation regarding the relevant literature streams. It integrates work on strategic change, middle management, and customer orientation, and it contributes to the intersection of these three research streams. More specifically, in terms of the strategic change literature, it builds primarily on approaches from change agent and strategy-as-practice research (chapter 2.1; chapter 2.3). Moreover, in order to better understand the roles of middle managers, this dissertation refers to role theories (chapter 2.2). Finally, with respect to research on customer orientation, it elaborates on customer orientation implementation and work on end-customer orientation (i.e., how to serve the customer’s customer; chapter 2.4).
1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

The research gaps in chapter 1.3 guide the structure of the dissertation. The following chapter 2 outlines the theoretical approach of the thesis, introduces definitions of the main terms, and provides a literature review. First, this chapter explains strategic change management by elaborating on the organizational change process and the individual change process of change agents. Second, it captures the middle management’s role enactment. To do so, it defines role enactment, middle management, and the roles of middle managers. Third, chapter 2 also presents the strategy-as-practice approach, which focuses on the practices managers use in order to implement change strategies. Fourth, it shows current research findings on the implementation of a customer orientation. Finally, it summarizes the existing research findings in a literature review.

Chapter 3 explains the empirical approach by illustrating the epistemological research background. Further, it explains the research method and research design. In particular, it discusses the case study method, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. Further, it presents criteria of goodness in case study research. This chapter also gives information on the case study setting, the data collection, and
data analysis. In total, 25 managers were interviewed and a total of 620 hours of participant observation were made.

Chapter 4 provides insights into the research questions by presenting the research findings. It studies the organizational change process from a middle management point of view. The data analysis provides a novel process model of how middle managers enact their change role in a change towards a stronger end-customer orientation. The analysis further shows the pathways that middle managers take when enacting their change role. In this phase, the empirical results are connected with findings in the literature. Not only studies from the literature review but also research streams that were not investigated in the beginning are linked, for instance resilience and sensemaking. This section discusses similarities and differences between the emerging model and the literature. It concludes with a summary of the research findings.

Chapter 5 depicts a general discussion of the results by presenting a final reflection on the research goals. It derives implications for middle managers, top managers, human resources managers, and change initiators. Also, it shows the contribution of this dissertation to strategy research, leadership research, research on roles of middle management, and research on customer orientation. Finally, the chapter concludes with limitations that provide implications for future research. Figure 4 illustrates the structure of this dissertation.
**Research Step** | **Illustration** | **Main Results** | **Remaining Research Questions** | **Chapter in Dissertation**
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
1. Definition of focal phenomenon | Observation of real-life phenomenon | - | • How do middle managers enact their change role for a stronger customer orientation? | Chapter 1: Introduction
2. Literature review | Invoking relevant literature (Yadav, 2010) | • Approaches to understand how middle managers enact their change role | • How do preliminary results relate to a middle management context? | Chapter 2: Theoretical approach
3. Field study | Data triangulation (Eisenhardt, 1989) | • Organizational change process | • How do the results from field interviews and observations relate to constructs from existing literature? | Chapter 3: Empirical approach
4. Connection of empirical results with literature | Connection to additional theories and literature streams (Pratt, 2008) | • Discussion of similarities and differences | • How can the results of the field study and the literature analysis be integrated? | Chapter 4: Research findings
5. Finalization of framework and theoretical arguments | Theoretical integration | • Academic implications | • What are limitations of the study? | Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications

Source: Own Illustration
2 Theoretical Approach

To better understand the middle manager’s role in a strategic change process towards an end-customer orientation, this chapter discusses relevant findings of four research streams. First, it defines strategic change management by elaborating on the organizational and individual change process and the roles of change agents (see chapter 2.1). Second, it presents findings on middle managers’ role enactment. It defines role enactment, middle managers, and the specific roles of middle managers in the strategy process (see chapter 2.2). Third, this chapter introduces the strategy-as-practice approach, which focuses on the practices managers use in order to implement strategic change (see chapter 2.3). Fourth, it summarizes research findings on how companies implement a customer orientation (see chapter 2.4). Finally, it captures the most essential research findings related to this thesis in a literature review (chapter 2.5).

2.1 Strategic Change Management

2.1.1 Process View on Organizational Change

“There is nothing permanent – except change.”

(Heraclitus, Greek philosopher)

As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus says, change is a continuous process. Nowadays, change management is defined as “the process of continually renewing an organization’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the changing needs of external and internal customers” (Moran & Brightman, 2001, p. 111). Following Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) strategic change refers to the attempt of changing current modes of cognitions and actions to enable the organization to take advantage of current opportunities or to deal with environmental threats. Moreover, a strategic change process is about “understanding how organizational change is formulated and implemented” (Van de Ven, 1992, p. 169).
In order to implement strategic change, companies can choose between several implementation styles. The choice of the implementation style can cause or prevent conflicts that may result from different attitudes towards the change (e.g., Gupta & Gonvindarajan, 1984). Adapting to changing goals and demands has been a timeless challenge for organizations, yet guiding change effectively and choosing the “optimal” implementation style have become even more essential in recent years (Piderit, 2000). But how can companies decide which implementation style is appropriate for their strategic change process? The following section discusses relevant theories and literature that help to explain the process view on strategic change. In general, three accounts are discussed that have received particular research attention in recent years: the top-down or bottom-up approaches, the planned or emergent approaches, and Staehle's (1990) three approaches to enacting change.

First, companies might implement a strategy top-down or bottom-up (Krüger, 2009). A top-down approach indicates that the top management team develops a strategy and communicates it downwards until it reaches the front-line employees. In top-down changes top managers generally conceive and plan the change. Middle managers, on the other, are responsible for the detailed coordination, implementation, and internal management of the change (Emerald, 2008). In contrast, according to a bottom-up approach the strategy is developed “in the field” so that the upper levels only accept or modify it (Meffert et al., 2012, p. 780). The bottom-up approach creates conditions for direct employee participation that top-down change generally does not provide (Emerald, 2008).

A second approach distinguishes between planned and emergent change (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). The planned approach can be related to a top-down change, whereas the emergent approach can be related to a bottom-up change. The planned approach tries to depict the dynamics in the change process (Burnes, 1996; Eldrod II & Tippett, 2002). It focuses on the importance of understanding the different states an organization goes through in order to move from an unsatisfactory state to a desired state (Eldrod II & Tippett, 2002). This approach was initiated in 1946 by Lewin (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). Lewin (1963) determines three phases of a change process: unfreezing, moving, and freezing. First, he proposes that specific behavioral patterns in the organization need to be questioned (unfreezing). Only after the unfreezing of these patterns can the change be initiated properly (moving). Finally, organizations should maintain the new patterns sustainably (freezing). Following Lewin (1963), the process steps occur one after the other.
In elaborating on the planned approach to change in more detail, Table 1 depicts *three process models of how top managers can guide change processes*. First, Kanter, Stein, & Jick (1992) present ten commandments for executing change. These authors analyze the organization and its need for change, creating a vision and a common direction, separating from the past, creating a sense of urgency, supporting a strong leader role, lining up political sponsorship, crafting an implementation plan, developing enabling structures, communicating, and reinforcing and institutionalizing change. Second, Kotter (1996) shows the following eight steps for a transformation\(^3\): establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision, communicating, empowering, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring new approaches in the culture. Third, Luecke (2003) introduces seven steps of a change process, including mobilizing energy, developing a shared vision, identifying the leadership, focusing on results, spreading change in the organization, institutionalizing success, and monitoring. These three process models show several analogies. At least two of the three models include the steps of analyzing the situation, creating a vision, creating a sense of urgency, identifying leaders to sponsor the change, and communicating the change and institutionalizing it in the culture (Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003). To conclude, these common steps are likely to be vital for guiding a change process effectively.

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\(^3\) Kotter (1996) uses the terms “transformation” and “change” as synonyms.
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<td>I) Unfreeze</td>
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<td>1. Establish a sense of urgency</td>
<td>1. Mobilize energy and commitment through joint identification of business problems and their solutions</td>
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<td>2. Create a vision and a common direction</td>
<td>2. Create a guiding coalition</td>
<td>2. Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness</td>
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<td>3. Separate from the past</td>
<td>3. Develop a vision and strategy</td>
<td>3. Identify the leadership</td>
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<td>4. Create a sense of urgency</td>
<td>4. Communicate the change</td>
<td>4. Focus on results, not on activities</td>
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<td>5. Support a strong leader role</td>
<td>5. Empower broad-based action</td>
<td>5. Start change at the periphery, then let it spread to other units without pushing it from the top</td>
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<td>7. Craft an implementation plan</td>
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<td>8. Develop enabling structures</td>
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Table 1: Models of Change Processes
Source: Illustration Based on Todnem By (2005)
Although the planned approach to change is accepted as being effective (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Burnes, 2004), it has also received major criticisms (Burnes, 1996; Kanter et al., 1992). First, research has argued that the approach emphasizes only incremental change, and, hence, it is not useful in situations that require quick major change (Burnes, 1996, 2004). Second, the planned approach predicts that companies can move in a pre-planned way from one stable state to another (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). Research has argued, however, that this “freezing” phase does not match today’s dynamic environment (Meffert et al., 2012, p. 776). Additionally, current studies propose that strategic change implementation is not a single linear process but rather a set of simultaneous processes (Sonenshein, 2010). Third, planned change neglects situations where more flexibility is necessary. This can include a crisis situation, which requires major and fast change.

In order to respond to the critics of the planned approach to organizational change, an emergent approach of change has become popular (Todnem By, 2005). Rather than capturing change as a top-driven process, the emergent approach sees change as happening from the bottom-up (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Burnes, 1996, 2004). This approach claims that change is fast and that it is impossible for top managers to effectively identify, plan, and implement the necessary organizational responses on their own (Kanter et al., 1992). Thus, they need to delegate the responsibility of organizational change to lower levels (Wilson, 1992). The emergent approach emphasizes that change should not be perceived as a series of linear events within a given period of time, but as a continuous, open-ended process of adaptation to changing contingencies (Burnes, 1996; Dawson, 1994). It further highlights the unpredictable nature of change, perceiving change as a process that develops through the relationship of a set of variables in the organization (Dunphy & Stace, 1993; Todnem By, 2005).

In addition to the two above-mentioned ways (either the top-down or bottom-up approach; either the planned or emergent approach), Staehle (1999, p. 936) introduced three further approaches to enact strategic change: “empirical rational approach”, “normative and educational approach”, and “power-based and non-participative approach.” The empirical rational strategy and the normative and educational strategy can be used both in planned and emergent change. By contrast, the power based and non-participative strategy is likely to be associated with planned change only. In the empirical rational strategy, the organization tries to maximize the employees’ benefits. The involved employees accept the change as soon as they understand its advantages. For instance, the advantages can be conveyed by empirical studies within the
company. The normative and educational strategy starts the change with cultural aspects and uses managers as role models. It is important to receive the buy-in of all employees. The major means are training and personal development programs. The power based and non-participative strategy uses power to implement the change. Typically, top managers introduce such a change by “dropping a bomb” (Staehle, 1999, p. 936). Thus, they use the momentum of surprise and try to overwhelm the company.

2.1.2 Process View on Individual Change

The previous section provided an overview on organizational processes of enacting strategic change. The present section, however, discusses individual change processes of employees who are involved in an organizational change. In particular, it first addresses how organizational members perceive and go through a change process. Then, it focuses on the specific role of change agents who are responsible for the implementation of the change process.

Isabella (1990) presents a model of how organizational members respond to a new change initiative. The model proposes that organizational members construe events linked to the process of a change as unfolding in four stages: anticipation, confirmation, culmination, and aftermath. The anticipation phase starts when they first hear rumors about a potential organizational change. They use this piece of information to develop their interpretation of their personal role within this change process. In the confirmation phase, they then sort the change events into a so-called “frame of reference.” Employees use this frame to compare the current events with those that happen currently, and they rely on understandings that have worked in the past. The culmination phase results from a comparison of conditions before and after an event. In this phase, employees modify their frame of reference by either including new information or eliminating unsound information. In the final stage, called aftermath, the employees review and evaluate the consequences of the change.

Similar to Isabella (1990), Jaffe, Scott, & Tobe (1994) present a four-phase model of how organizational members construct organizational events as change develops over time. The four phases are denial, resistance, exploration, and commitment. Denial occurs when employees refuse to believe that a change is necessary. Resistance refers to employees’ refusing to participate in the change process and their postponement of change-related activities. In this phase, employees often try to convince decision
makers that the proposed change is neither appropriate nor necessary (Jaffe et al., 1994). In the exploration phase, employees start accepting the change and experiment with new tools and behaviors in order to achieve the change objectives. Finally, in the commitment phase, employees pledge themselves to the new organizational situation by embracing the change (Jaffe et al., 1994).

In order to enable that organizational members embrace the change, organizations often employ change agents to implement the new organizational strategy and support the management in overcoming denial and resistance throughout the company (Meffert et al., 2012, p. 778). These change agents allocate resources, manage the change process, and support the learning process of other employees. In particular, they help employees to develop “knowledge and understanding,” “ability,” and “motivation” in terms of the new strategy (Meffert et al., 2012, p. 779). However, implementation barriers, such as rigid behavioral patterns or conflicts in the organization, might impede this learning process. Therefore, change agents are also supposed to create a climate of change in the organization so as to overcome such barriers and to unite different groups of stakeholders to achieve the change objectives.

In this regard, research has discussed different types of change agents. For instance, Havelock & Havelock (1973, p. 60) define change agents by their role in the change process. Independent of their formal job position, employees can act as change agents in four ways: catalysts, solution givers, process helpers, and resource linkers. Catalysts overcome the change barriers of employees by convincing them of the necessity of the change. Solution givers provide change solutions that help the employees in the change process. Process helpers assist the organization in all aspects of the change process, from raising awareness of need through relationship building and defining the problem to be pursued. Resource linkers bring people together and help employees to find and make the best use of resources in order to enact change.

Caldwell (2001), on the other hand, categorizes two dimensions of change agents based on engagement in transformative versus incremental change and focusing on vision versus expertise. While transformative change refers to a change in strategy, structure, or processes that influences the practices in the whole organization, incremental change relates to gradual modifications of the organizational policy, procedures, and processes that affect minor activities (Caldwell, 2001). Moreover, change agency is not a generic role or functional position, but rather combines the strategic vision of management and the needed expertise for implementing the change (Ulrich, 1997). In this regard, Caldwell (2001) defines vision as a set of values, beliefs, ideals, and interests that aim at supporting the mission, key role, status, and legitimacy
of the human resources profession. Expertise refers to specialist training, knowledge, skills, experience, and organizational standards of professional behavior that values the contribution of managers to effective people management (Caldwell, 2001). Based on these two dimensions, Caldwell (2001) distinguishes four types of change agents: champions, adapters, consultants, and synergists (see Figure 5). Champions are experts and guide transformative change. Adapters are experts as well but they rather guide incremental change. Synergists use a change vision and guide transformative change, whereas consultants also use a vision but lead incremental change.

![Figure 5: Types of Change Agents](source: Illustration Based on Caldwell (2001))

Further, Tichy (1975) distinguishes four types of change agents in organizations: organization development type, outside pressure type, analysis for the top type, and people change technology type. First, change agents of “organization development type” focus on the learning processes of employees. They influence how people work and they focus on changing the organizational structures. Their main vehicle for enacting change is the organizational culture and formal structure. Second, change agents of an “outside pressure type” believe that only external pressure towards the organization can legitimize a change process. They claim that the power in the organization should be reallocated throughout the change process. In their view, organizations can change by using either informal structures or the motivation of employees. Third, “analysis for the top” change agents believe in the effectiveness of a top-driven change. They suggest changing the technologies and structures in the
company with top management guidance, and they enact change by employing formal structures and formally adjusting the goals of the employees. Fourth, change agents of the “people change technology type” posit that change succeeds only when the organization effectively manages its employee base. Accordingly, the organization may even fire those employees who are extremely resistant and refuse any change so as to facilitate the motivation of those who are accepting the change. To achieve the latter, this type mainly uses leadership practices, role clarification, behavioral training, and change in reward structures to convince the employees to change (Staehle, 1999; Tichy, 1975).

Moreover, in order to successfully implement a new organizational strategy, change agents can employ different tools of change (cf. Westover, 2010). Tichy (1975), for instance, posits that change agents have three fundamental tools for accomplishing their change tasks: mission and strategy, organizational structure, and human resources management. Mission and strategy tools relate to the organization’s goals and action plans. Change agents use these goals and action plans to guide the change process. Tools related to organizational structure include both the ways in which change agents define and group tasks and the ways in which they coordinate employees to accomplish these tasks. Tools from human resources management include recruiting, selection and placement, training and development programs, performance appraisal, and development of financial and non-financial reward systems (Tichy, 1975; Westover, 2010).

Taken together, chapter 2.1 showed several approaches to organizational and individual change. In particular, it focused on the change model of Lewin (1963), the ten commandments for executing change (Kanter et al., 1992), the eight steps to organizational transformation (Kotter, 1996), and the seven steps to change (Luecke, 2003) (see Table 1). In order to elaborate on individual change, the chapter further discussed the individual process models of Isabella (1990) and Jaffé et al. (1994). Additionally, the discussion above illustrated several change agent types and which tools they use to enact change.

### 2.2 Middle Managers’ Role Enactment

The previous section emphasized the relevance of change agents in the implementation process of an organization’s strategic change in general. This section discusses the specific role of middle managers in an organizational strategy. To do so, it first
elaborates on role theory and on the concept of role enactment (chapter 2.2.1). It then defines middle management (chapter 2.2.2) and explains its roles in the strategy process (chapter 2.2.3).

2.2.1 Role Enactment

Organizational and management-related research has largely neglected to discuss the role enactment in a mid-level management context within an organizational change. Therefore, this dissertation integrates approaches from other research fields, particularly from the field of sociology, in order to define a role and the concept of role enactment in this context.

A role is generally defined as the sum of expectations directed by others towards an individual within a social structure (Katz & Kahn, 1978), whereas role enactment refers to “recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome” (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 189). The role enactment is not static; rather it evolves over time as individuals modify their behavior related to the role expectations and reactions from other parties (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Turner, 1978). Applying this approach to middle managers in the context of an organizational change process, a role enactment describes how middle managers behave as strategic actors in the company to implement a change (cf. Mantere, 2008). Specifically, when middle managers observe discrepancies between their role enactment and the expectations from top managers, they may adjust their behaviors accordingly (Raes et al., 2011).

A natural question that arises when middle managers are assigned the role as change agents is how they acquire and enact the new role. In order to explain middle managers’ role enactment, role process approaches from the field of sociology can be applied. For instance, Thornton & Nardi (1975) propose four stages how individuals acquire and enact their roles in a social system. These are: (1) the anticipatory stage, (2) the formal stage (3) the informal stage, and (4) the personal stage.

The first stage of role enactment is the anticipatory stage, which is the period prior to the actual assignment of the role. According to Thornton & Nardi (1975), in this stage, individuals usually start to prepare themselves for their new role. They develop a general understanding of expectations towards themselves when acquiring the role. These expectations, however, are rather generalized and stereotyped conceptions of the role, that is, the role conceptions include only a few selected features of the actual role.
Based on this selected information, individuals construe an ideal role in a way that they consider only those aspects that “should” be part of their role enactment – instead of considering what the role actually comprises. Applied to the organizational change context, in this anticipatory stage, change agents from mid-level management think of what the role as “change agent” might contain, even though they might be rather unsure about its actual content.

In the second phase of the role enactment, the so-called formal stage, individuals no longer experience the role as outsiders. Rather, they define the role from an insider’s perspective. Role expectations in the formal stage, for instance, come from individuals who enact the same role as well. For example, these expectations may come from change agents towards other change agents. Similarly, individuals might direct expectations towards themselves in terms of how to enact the specific role (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). In an organizational change context, organizations might capture the official expectations towards a change agent in written documents, such as job descriptions (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

The third stage of the role enactment is called the informal stage. In this stage, individuals add new elements to enact their roles. Thornton & Nardi (1975, p. 878) illustrate this with the following example: in the informal stage, “new secretaries find out how long a coffee break should be or professors get to know what the unofficial dress code is.” Informal expectations towards a role develop over time as individuals interact with each other. Meanwhile, individuals try to incorporate these expectations in their role enactment (Berlo, 1960). Applied to an organizational change context, change agents may discover informal elements of their role during informal events with other change agents or top managers. Similarly, change agents begin to shape the role by using their own personality. As such, every change agent interprets the role in a unique way and thus, although middle managers are assigned the same role officially, their role outcomes are likely to vary due to different role enactments (cf. Thornton & Nardi, 1975).

Following Thornton & Nardi (1975), the fourth stage of a role enactment is called the personal stage. In this stage, the role enactment leads to a specific role performance. The authors propose that past experiences, abilities, skills, values, and beliefs influence the role enactment, and thus the role performance. This assumption implies that middle managers are likely to have different role outcomes as agents of organizational change.
Another approach to analyzing role enactment is to use a leader and follower perspective. Taking this perspective, Graen & Scandura (1987) suggest dividing the role enactment process into three phases: (1) role taking, (2) role making, and (3) role routinization. In the role taking phase, leaders try to determine which specific qualities employees, who are supposed to enact the role, should have. They choose their followers based on these qualities and assign them to a specific role (cf. Staehle, 1999). For instance, in an organizational change, top managers might assign middle managers to be change agents to move the organization jointly (cf. Heimer, 1994). In the second phase, the leaders and followers agree on the role description. This phase is characterized by the interactions between leaders and followers. For example, in an organizational change process, top managers and change agents might negotiate about which tasks actually belong to the role of a change agent. In the third phase, the followers strengthen their role enactment and stabilize their role (Staehle, 1999).

In sum, the literature review shows different approaches to analyzing how individuals enact a role. The presented approaches have the definition of role enactment as a process in common. In line with this, this dissertation uses a process view to explore the change role enactment of middle managers in a top-driven change towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

2.2.2 Middle Managers

A study of the University of Manchester revealed that monkeys in the middle of the hierarchy suffer from the most social stress. They are involved in conflicts from those above them as well as from below, whereas those in the bottom of the hierarchy avoid conflict. The mid-level animals are more likely to challenge and to be challenged by those higher on the social hierarchy. The study suggests relating these results to humans: “It’s possible to apply these findings to other social species too, including human hierarchies. People working in middle management might have higher levels of stress hormones compared to their boss at the top or the workers they manage. These ambitious mid-ranking people may want to access the higher-ranking lifestyle which could mean facing more challenges, whilst also having to lead lower-ranking employees” (Edwards, 2013).
As the findings of the above-mentioned study illustrate, middle managers face several challenges because they interact between upper or lower hierarchy levels in the company (Edward 2013). These challenges can cause stress for middle managers. Indeed, recent studies have shown that middle managers are more likely to be depressed and anxious than those at either the top or bottom of the organizational hierarchy (Burkus, 2015; Financial Times, 2015a; Prins, Bates, Keyes, & Muntaner, 2015) and that middle managers tend to be unhappy with their jobs (Zenger & Folkman, 2014). An international survey with 1,500 middle managers from nine countries shows that 61% of the managers was frustrated by their employers (Accenture, 2007). In a similar vein, current press articles report that “middle managers feel underappreciated, not listened to, and stuck” (Financial Times, 2014), and they sometimes “feel like purgatory” as they “try to find their role in the organization” (Financial Times, 2015b). If an organization does not address these issues among middle managers effectively, it can become susceptible to severe management problems. A current example for this is the company Zappos. Zappos lately has introduced a self-management system (“holacracy”⁴) and thus has cancelled job titles and middle management positions. As a result, 14% of the middle managers left the company and they felt betrayed by their employer (Whitehurst, 2015).

One reason why middle managers are often stressed is that they usually work under pressure: they interact with both higher and lower levels, lack resources, receive low support from top management, and face an intense workload (Buchhorn, 2012). Further reasons are the end of the mid-level managers’ career ladder, their job insecurity, and frequent restructuring in organizations. Due to these facts middle managers often feel discouraged emotionally (McKinney et al., 2013). Apart from the emotional situation of middle managers, the investigation of their roles is crucial for understanding the nature of strategic processes in organizations (Mantere, 2008). Indeed, Balogun & Johnson (2004) propose that middle management’s role will continue to gain importance as organizations become increasingly complex. As such, during the past thirty years, the strategy process literature has expanded from studying only top management to exploring mid-level managers, since middle managers strongly influence a company’s strategy formation.

In strategy formation, middle managers act as “linking pins” that both give and receive directions (Raes et al., 2011; Stoker, 2008). They are located below top

⁴ See http://www.holacracy.org/ for more information about the self-organization system.
managers and above first-level supervision in the hierarchy (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Uyterhoven, 1972). However, the main characteristic of mid-level managers is not where they sit in the organizational chart. Rather, their access to the top management team and their knowledge about operations make them unique in the organization (Wooldridge et al., 2008). This functional view embeds different middle management positions, such as general line managers (e.g., head of business units), functional line managers (e.g., vice president of marketing), and team or project managers (e.g., leaders of strategic initiatives) (Wooldridge et al., 2008).

Although the relevance of middle layers in an organization is recognized today, it for long time has been controversial, and the literature on their importance is not consistent. Specifically, a first research stream argues for flat organizational structures due to its doubt of the necessity of a middle management level (Drucker, 1988; Quinn, 1992). For instance, Gratton (2011) proposes that technological developments may decrease the importance of middle managers because technological devices can replace managers by monitoring performance, by providing instant feedback, and by creating reports automatically. On the other hand, however, another and more recent stream of research views middle managers as important communicators between the top management and lower-level employees (e.g., Dutton et al., 1997). In this regard, Osterman (2008, p. 72) for instance, calls middle management “the glue that holds companies together.” Indeed, middle management serves as a boundary spanner across several departments and countries (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

In a similar vein, previous studies have shown mixed findings about the performance impact of involving the middle management in the organizational strategy process (Wooldridge et al., 2008). Noble & Mokwa (1999) link strategy factors, dimensions of commitment, and role factors to individual and organizational outcomes. The authors find, for instance, that the commitment of a middle manager increases the middle manager’s role performance. Recently, Ahearne et al. (2013) propose that the relationship between middle managers’ strategy implementation and business performance is curvilinear and contingent on formal and informal structures in the organization. In this context, the authors define formal structures as the size of formal networks, whereas they define informal structures as social capital from informal networks.

While this literature stream suggests a positive link between middle management’s involvement in strategy and the implementation success of that strategy (e.g., Burgelman, 1994), other work views middle management’s contribution to the strategy as a barrier to organizational performance. For instance, middle managers
might hinder strategies against their own interest by “sabotaging” their implementation (Guth & MacMillan, 1986). Further, Sillince & Mueller (2007) find that middle managers who implement a top-down strategy may reframe responsibilities and expectations throughout the change process. In this process, unclear top management directions might lead to an opportunistic behavior of middle management. In particular, middle managers might interpret these unclear directions from top managers in such a way that they benefit the middle managers.

In conclusion, this thesis defines a middle manager as an organizational member who has access to the top management team, has some operational knowledge, leads employees, and reports to supervisors. The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on the middle managers who are the implementers of strategic change (see chapter 4). In this regard, this dissertation defines the middle managers’ change role performance as the degree to which they accomplish the objectives of their change role and facilitate the overall success of the strategy (cf. Lam et al., 2010; Noble & Mokwa 1999; Thorpe & Morgan, 2007).

### 2.2.3 Roles of Middle Managers

“You know what the problem with being a middle manager is? You need to consider the internal and the external recognition. And when I say recognition of course it has an impact on motivation and personal drive. On the one hand you have the senior manager who is very high on internal recognition, high economic benefit, status, power. On the other, you have people dealing with customers who are very low on internal recognition but high on external recognition. They are happy when they make the customers happy. The challenge is here with middle managers because they have neither internal nor external recognition.”

(BCS middle manager, 2014)

As the quotation of a middle manager at BCS illustrates, middle managers are often not being recognized either by internal parties, such as top managers, or by external parties, such as customers. However, “the senior executive who learns to recognize, respect, and deal fairly with the most influential middle managers in an organization
might gain trusted allies – and improve the odds of realizing a complex but necessary organizational change” (Huy, 2002, p. 79). In fact, middle managers could become highly valued “dynamos” in change processes (Marichal & Segers, 2012).

In change processes, the number of interactions and the complexity of the information are higher for middle managers than top managers or front-line employees (Floyd & Lane, 2000). Hence, middle managers might encounter role conflicts because they need to have technical competencies and understand the organization’s daily work to interact with front-line employees. At the same time, they need to know the organization’s goals and strategy and the political context in which the organization operates to interact with top managers (Floyd & Lane, 2000). In particular, studies show that inconsistent expectations from top managers cause role conflict among middle managers (e.g., Currie & Procter, 2005; Mantere, 2008). Ketokivi & Castaner (2004) note that top managers might resolve role conflicts among middle managers by encouraging them and involving them in the strategic change process. Mantere (2008) concludes that consistent expectations between top and middle managers help to avoid role conflicts in the strategy process.

But which specific strategic roles do middle managers enact in the strategy process? In order to categorize the roles for middle managers, Floyd & Wooldridge (1992) present a role matrix with four roles (see Figure 6). The dimensions “upwards/downwards influence” and “divergent/integrative ideas” determine each role. Upwards influence affects the top management’s opinion on organizational circumstances and alternative strategic options. Downwards influence affects the organizational alignment to the new strategy. Divergent ideas are not in line with the organization’s given strategy, whereas integrative ideas support the organization’s strategic alignment. Middle managers enact these four roles by interacting with both upper and lower hierarchy levels in the company. The role matrix illustrates the following four roles: (1) championing alternatives, (2) synthesizing information, (3) facilitating adaptability, and (4) implementing strategy (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). These four roles are described in the following.
1. **Championing alternatives**: When middle managers present strategic options to the top management, middle managers’ divergent ideas reshape the top management’s strategy development (e.g., qualifying new programs, assessing new proposals, looking for new opportunities) (Ates, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2015; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). For instance, Bower (1970) provides detailed descriptions about the process by which middle managers become champions of strategic alternatives. In this vein, middle managers select specific alternatives, wait until they are likely to be successful, and present them as new strategic opportunities to the top management team (Bower, 1970).

2. **Synthesizing information**: Middle managers interpret both internal and external information to deliver important information to top managers (e.g., collecting information about the practicability of new programs, summarizing competitors’ activities, evaluating major changes in the business environment). They gather valuable information by evaluating, advising, and interpreting the information (Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980). In this role, mid-level managers affect how top managers interpret strategy information (Dutton & Jackson, 1987). Also, middle managers use the information to promote their own strategic agendas in front of top managers (Dutton & Duncan, 1987). Floyd & Wooldridge (1992) further suggest that the role of “synthesizing information” might be the first step to take in order to champion strategic alternatives.
3. **Facilitating adaptability**: In this role, middle managers encourage their employees to form new ideas and to engage in experiments which differ from the current organizational strategy (e.g., fostering informal discussion, providing resources for pilot projects). For instance, mid-level managers defend these activities from top managers while they gather extra resources and relax regulations to support their employees’ efforts toward new strategic ideas (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). In this way, middle managers ensure adaptability within the plans of the given strategy by front-line employees (Bower, 1970; Kanter, 1983).

4. **Implementing strategy**: In this role, middle managers align their organization’s operations with its strategic intentions. To do so, they integrate their subordinates’ activities according to this strategy (e.g., monitoring operational activities to support top management goals, translating goals into both action plans and individual objectives, selling top management initiatives to subordinates) (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Implementing the strategies that top managers formulate is often seen as the key task of middle managers (Nutt, 1987). The aim of this role is to control the implementation process regarding desired outcomes (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984). Nevertheless, even in the most deliberate organizational contexts, middle managers often revise strategies (Quinn, 1980).⁵

As this thesis focuses on the specific middle management role “implementing strategies”, the next section discusses studies in this field. For instance, in this context, Huy (2002, 2011) investigates the mid-level managers’ role in coping with their emotions during a strategic change implementation. By balancing emotional reactions during strategic change processes, middle managers help others to make sense of the change. In this way, they prevent provocative reactions and facilitate a smoother execution of difficult strategies (Huy, 2002). Also, Huy (2011) shows how group-focus emotions encourage middle managers to support or hinder a strategic initiative –

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⁵ In addition to these four key roles, some researchers have argued for a fifth role of middle managers in an organizational strategy, which is called the “issue-selling role”. This role combines elements of the championing and synthesizing roles of middle managers (e.g., Ling, Floyd, & Baldrige, 2005). Issue selling means that middle managers affect the attention of top managers and their understandings of specific organizational events, developments, or initiatives (Dutton & Ashford, 1993).
even if the initiative does not threaten their personal interest directly but rather the interest of the group environment in which they work (Huy, 2011).

Moreover, in a sales context, Sarin et al. (2012) focus on the role of middle managers in influencing their teams to implement changes in a marketing strategy. The authors show that the successful implementation of a strategic change depends not primarily on giving the team members rewards for successfully implementing change, but rather on limiting their risks and recognizing them for their change efforts. Additionally, Thorpe & Morgan (2007) note that organizations should foster environments in which they give middle managers clear instructions about what is required from them during the implementation process. Finally, the authors note that organizations should encourage their mid-level managers and value them for their work.

Figure 7 provides a framework to organize research about middle management. Wooldridge et al. (2008) cluster the antecedents into individual, group, and organizational antecedents. This thesis focuses on the individual level of analysis of a middle manager. As such, research has focused on the individual middle management antecedents such as organizational commitment, network position, social capital, or relationship with top management (Wooldridge et al., 2008). Figure 7 further shows three subprocesses: generating ideas, developing initiatives, and implementing strategies. This thesis investigates the “implementation role” of middle managers. This role suggests that top managers are in charge of formulating the strategic change process while middle managers are in charge of implementing it (Amason, 1996; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Raes et al., 2011). This is in line with Mantere (2008, p. 308), who describes the strategic role of middle managers as “implementation” and notes that “the expectation to implement strategy may be the most typical of expectations encountered by a middle manager in the context of organizational strategy.”
Figure 7: Framework for Research on Middle Management
Source: Own Illustration Based on Wooldridge et al. (2008)

Summing up, literature on middle managers’ strategic roles has identified several ways in which middle managers contribute to strategic processes. The implementation of strategies is one of the key roles of middle management (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). One that I investigate in more detail within this thesis is the implementation role of middle managers from a strategic change perspective. As change agents, middle managers manage the daily business, help employees to go through the change process, and implement changes to their divisions (e.g., Balogun, 2003). While enacting their role as implementers of change, middle managers use a series of “practices” (e.g. Rouleau, 2005). To elaborate on these practices, research on “strategy-as-practice” is introduced next.

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In this thesis, I use “implementer” and “change agent” interchangeably.
2.3 Strategy-as-Practice

In order to understand the practices middle managers use to fulfill their change role, this dissertation builds on a *strategy-as-practice perspective* (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Strategy-as-practice literature distinguishes between practices, praxis, and practitioners as the starting point for organizing research in the strategy domain (Whittington, 2006, 2007). In this vein, practices are “shared routines of behavior, such as traditions, norms and procedures for thinking, acting and using things” (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008, p. 101) and they represent the “social, symbolic, and material tools that enable strategy work” (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 70). Further, praxis refers to the actual activities which people undertake in practice “to do” strategy work. Finally, practitioners are the strategy actors who enact strategic practices in praxis (Whittington, 2006, 2007).

The strategy-as-practice approach claims that researchers have investigated organizational strategies from a macro perspective *without paying attention to human action in the organization* (cf. Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). In particular, it is argued that strategy researchers have rather neglected the role of the individual practitioner in implementing strategies (Whittington, 2006). In order to understand the practitioner’s role in strategy implementation, the strategy-as-practice approach emphasizes the refocusing of research on the individual actions (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007), because the strategy is “not something that an organization has but something its practitioners do” (Jarzabkowski, 2004, p. 529).

The practices of two groups of strategy practitioners in particular have received research attention in the strategy-as-practice literature: those of top and those of middle managers. In this vein, *top managers’ practices often shape the role of middle management in strategy* (Mantere, 2008). Following this perspective, middle managers are enablers of strategic change. Hence, top managers should use the middle management’s energy effectively (cf. Bruch & Menges, 2010). For this, they should employ practices to strengthen the vision and strategy of middle managers as well as to create excitement for them, to engage their intellectual capacities, and to create a sense of urgency. Further, Mantere (2008) reveals top management practices that clarify role expectations towards middle managers and enable these managers to perform their strategic role of “implementing” effectively. These top management practices are (1) narration, (2) contextualization, (3) resource allocation, and (4) respect (Mantere, 2008). Narration means that top managers openly tell the reasons why they selected the particular strategic direction. By contextualizing, top managers link strategies to
specific work contexts of middle managers. With resource allocation, top managers allow middle managers to realign their resources in their everyday work. By respecting and acknowledging the implementation work of middle managers, top managers encourage them to perform their implementation role effectively (Mantere, 2008).

Apart from top management practices, strategy-as-practice scholars propose to investigate middle managers’ practices in a strategic change. For example, Rouleau (2005) examines how mid-level managers interpret and sell strategic change to the customers of their firm. In a case study, Rouleau (2005) identifies four middle management practices in order to sell strategic change: (1) translating the orientation, (2) overcoding the strategy, (3) disciplining the client, and (4) justifying the change. The analysis of these practices delivers insights into the role of middle managers as implementers of strategic change. Translating means that middle managers tell the customers stories that they want to hear (Hopkinson, 2001). In this specific practice, middle managers choose elements which they will use to translate the strategic orientation. Also, within this practice, they need to use materials and symbols that belong to the language of the customers in order to convey the message to them. Overcoding means to inscribe in the strategy words and actions from the codes of the audience for the strategic change (Sfez, 1984). In Rouleau’s (2005) study, the middle managers made use of cultural and gender codes to sell the change to the customers. “Disciplining the clients means that middle managers, through their routines and conversations, produced subjective and emotional effects whose objective is insidiously to ‘sell’ the new strategic orientation to the client” (Rouleau, 2005, p. 1428). Justifying means providing good reasons for the customers to adapt to the change. In particular, the middle managers referred to the customers’ interests and demands to legitimate the strategic change of the firm.

While the strategy-as-practice approach has received attention in management literature, more recently it has also gained the primary attention of marketing scholars. For instance, Browne et al. (2014) are among the first to apply the strategy-as-practice approach in the marketing domain. They argue that marketing’s influential role in strategy adaptation is enacted through three critical practices of sensing (anticipatory sensing and internal sensing), challenging (encouraging direct feedback, embracing debate, and discussion), and transmitting (unraveling conflicting messages and downward and upward information funneling).

To conclude, strategy-as-practice appears as a useful approach to investigate the practices middle managers enact in a strategic change as these practices help to explain the implementer role of middle managers. In particular, the next section...
elaborates on literature about the implementation of a specific strategy – customer orientation.

2.4 Customer Orientation Implementation

As Peter Drucker stated in 1954, “Marketing is the whole business seen from the point of view of its final result, that is, from the customer’s point of view.” In fact, no company will ever succeed in business practice without gaining and retaining customers. Not only do customers buy a company’s products and services, they may also recommend them to other customers and support the company in the acquisition of new customers – if they are satisfied (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997).

Customer-oriented companies treat their customers individually and react flexibly to new customer needs (Belz, Schögel, & Arndt, 2008). To do so and to fulfill the customers’ expectations, it is important to identify their current and future needs (Herhausen, in press; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Customer-oriented companies develop a good understanding of their end-customers and hence, are able to create superior value for them continuously (Narver & Slater, 1990). Moreover, a company’s culture often reflects its customer orientation in which every single organizational member has a customer-oriented mindset (Dobni, Ritchie, & Zerbe, 2000; Steinman, Deshpandé, & Farley, 2000). Deshpandé, Farley, & Webster (1993, p. 27) define customer orientation as “the set of beliefs that puts the customer’s interest first, while not excluding those of other stakeholders, such as owners, managers, and employees, in order to develop a long-term profitable enterprise.” Table 2 summarizes the main definitions of a customer orientation in chronological order.

But why is customer orientation so important in marketing practice? Both marketing scholars and executives agree on the importance of customer orientation in order to increase business profitability (Kirca, Jayachandran, & Bearden, 2005; Kumar, Jones, Venkatesan, & Leone, 2011). Indeed, customer orientation pays off for companies since those with relatively high customer satisfaction levels are found to gain higher shareholder values (Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson, & Krishnan, 2006). Fornell et al. (2006) show that investments based on customer satisfaction produce relatively high returns. To conclude, the authors suggest that companies should increase their customer satisfaction in order to perform better.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Definition of Customer Orientation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narver &amp; Slater (1990)</td>
<td>Customer orientation is the sufficient understanding of one’s target buyers to be able to create superior value for them continuously.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deshpandé et al. (1993)</td>
<td>Customer orientation is an organizational culture that emphasizes the customer as the focal point of strategic planning and execution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homburg et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Customer orientation has two dimensions: the cognitive and affective organizational system. The way information is processed within organizations is described as “organizational cognition”, whereas organizational culture is referred to as “organizational affect”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirca et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Organizations become customer-oriented if they both implement and internalize the orientation.</td>
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Table 2: Definitions of Customer Orientation  
Source: Own Illustration

Given the clear benefits of customer orientation, the importance of an effective implementation of a customer orientation strategy in a company has been emphasized in recent years (Kennedy et al., 2003). For instance, according to a management study, 88% of 1,500 surveyed Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) believe that getting closer to customers is the key priority for reaching their company’s future business goals (IBM, 2010). A recent business case of a successful customer orientation strategy is the company IBM. While IBM generated only 20% of its revenues by customer services in 1995, the company increased the revenues with customer services to 80% in 2014 (IBM, 1996; IBM 2015). To achieve this significant improvement, the company changed its strategic positioning towards a customer focus.

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7 Authors are listed chronologically in order to show the development of the construct “customer orientation”.
Nevertheless, success stories of a change towards a strong customer orientation like IBM are rather scarce, as a study among 540 managers reveals that only 23% perceive their companies’ level of customer orientation as appropriate (Schögel, 2013b). In fact, studies show that many companies still have low levels of customer orientation (e.g., Lee, Sridar, Henderson, & Palmatier, 2012; Rust et al., 2010). Therefore, firms that align their strategy more towards their customers might gain a competitive advantage (e.g., Hartline et al., 2000; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). But why are most companies not effective in reaching high levels of customer orientation?

One common trap is that many years pass between the formulation of a customer orientation strategy and its successful implementation (“implementation gap;” Herhausen, Egger, & Oral, 2014; Meffert, Burmann, & Kirchgeorg, 2012). That is, while companies formulate ideas about how their customer strategy should change rather easily, they struggle to actually implement the changes (Homburg, Krohmer, & Workman, 2004; Kennedy et al., 2003; Sarin et al., 2012). However, customer orientation “is […] the result of careful planning and execution using state-of-the art tools and techniques” (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 25). Research shows that organizations become customer-oriented only if they implement the orientation effectively (Kirca, Bearden, & Hult, 2011). By using an implementation perspective, Kennedy et al. (2003) show that senior leadership, interfunctional coordination, and market intelligence are crucial for implementing a customer orientation in organizations. Senior leadership should own the change, commit emotionally, and drive the commitment of the employees with allocating new resources. The departments should cooperate intensively and share a mission and a vision in order to create value for the customers. In order to understand which levers impact the customer performance, organizations should measure causality in stakeholder data. Also, within market intelligence, organizations should link operational performance with customer requirements (Kennedy et al., 2003).

Moreover, Gebhardt et al. (2006) note that the implementation of a customer orientation is tightly connected to a change process. According to the authors, the organizational change process towards a stronger customer orientation involves the steps initiation, reconstitution, institutionalization, and maintenance. In the initiation

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8 Marketing strategy formation consists of a formulation part and an implementation part. Cespedes (1991) proposes that implementation contains the “how-to-do-it” aspects of marketing. He challenges the assumption that strategy implementation follows strategy formulation since both activities are reflexive and iterative. Mintzberg (1978), on the other hand, distinguishes between the intended and the realized strategy. In his view, the realized strategy is more important than the intended one.
phase, the organization recognizes the need to change and prepares for the change process. In the reconstitution phase, the guiding coalition presents its plan to the organization. Further, the organization needs to change its culture by removing change skeptics and hiring employees who believe in the change. The reconstitution phase ends with the development of a collaborative strategy. In the institutionalization phase, the guiding coalition formalizes the customer-oriented culture by instituting rituals and symbols. Thereafter, rewards should be aligned based on customer orientation and the employees should be trained; after that, the power shifts from the guiding coalition to the rest of the company. The change ends with a maintenance phase. In this phase, for instance, the organization needs to hire employees who are suitable to the organization’s customer-oriented culture.

Apart from the implementation perspective on customer orientation, the customer orientation literature stream recently has faced another twist. That is, scholars have called for research that investigates how business-to-business companies can implement a customer orientation for the customers of one’s customers. Homburg et al. (2014) point out that business-to-business firms actively manage relationships with not only their direct customers, such as retailers, but also the customers of those direct customers, such as end users. Specifically, their qualitative study depicts three approaches of a business-to-business firm’s marketing activities to indirect customers: (1) direct customer downstream support, (2) cooperative indirect customer marketing, and (3) independent indirect customer marketing. In direct customer downstream support, business-to-business firms support their direct customers in order to increase their customer performance with indirect customers. Cooperative indirect customer marketing implies that business-to-business firms target indirect customers jointly with their direct customers in order to create synergy effects. In independent indirect customer marketing, business-to-business firms address their indirect customers independently without any collaboration with their direct customers (Homburg et al., 2014).

This dissertation addresses the implementation of customer orientation in a business-to-business context and analyzes how middle marketing managers enact their change roles in such a setting. It analyzes how middle managers change the company’s customer orientation strategy from one that primarily targets retailers as the main customers to one that primarily targets end-users as the main customers.
2.5 Summary of Theoretical Approach

Chapter 2 discussed several theoretical approaches in order to address the research context. First, it depicted literature on strategic change management by discussing different views on the change process both on an organizational and an individual level. Then it explained the role of change agents in strategic change processes. Second, the chapter discussed how middle managers enact their roles in change processes. For this, it defined the terms “role enactment,” “middle management,” and “implementation role.” After pointing out the four established roles of middle managers (championing, synthesizing, facilitating, and implementing) it narrowed the analysis down to the core middle management role of “implementing.” Third, the chapter used the strategy-as-practice lens in order to understand the practices middle managers employ in strategic change processes. Fourth, the chapter presented different definitions of the concept of “customer orientation.” Then, it raised the question of how business-to-business firms may establish a customer orientation for their indirect customers by creating superior value for them.

Table 3 systematically depicts findings of the literature review summarizing the key studies that are relevant for the research questions. In particular, strategic change management, role theory, middle management research, strategy-as-practice, and customer orientation are relevant for the literature review since they help to take different perspectives on the research goals (see chapter 1.3). In sum, the literature review points out the core findings related to the identified research gaps. The findings of these studies form the starting point for the empirical investigation.
Core Findings

- Relationship between middle managers’ strategy implementation and objective business performance is curvilinear and contingent on formal and informal structures.
- Reputational social capital enhances the performance impact of middle managers’ upward influence while informational social capital increases the performance of their downward influence.

Reputational social capital enhances the performance impact of middle managers’ upward influence while informational social capital increases the performance of their downward influence.

Marketing’s influential role in macro-level strategy adaptation is played out through three practices of sensing (anticipatory sensing, internal sensing), challenging (encouraging direct feedback, embracing debate, discussion), and transmitting (unraveling conflicting messages).

Expectations of key stakeholders are identified as primary antecedents to middle management’s strategic contributions.
- Inconsistent cues from stakeholders cause managers to be reluctant to perform needed role and created role conflict.
## Table 3: Literature Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Main Construct</th>
<th>Theoretical Lens</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Sample/Data</th>
<th>Core Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Homburg et al. (2014) | Business-to-business suppliers manage relationships with not only their direct customers but also those customers’ customers. This gives them information about downstream market characteristics, creates product preferences among indirect customers, and aims at stimulating demand. | -                 | Qualitative study, grounded theory                  | 30 interviews, archival data           | • Three approaches of business-to-business suppliers’ marketing to indirect customers: (1) direct customer downstream support, (2) cooperative indirect customer marketing, and (3) independent indirect customer marketing.  
★ Internal professionalization of a business-to-business supplier’s organizational structure and processes strengthens the positive financial impact of each approach. |
| Huy (2002)        | Emotional balancing enables managers to regain some personal control over a discontinuous and threatening change context. | Emotion management | Longitudinal case study on radical change in IT service firm | 256 formal interviews with middle managers | • Middle managers help to balance emotions during change.  
★ Middle managers help groups to adapt to the change by committing passionately to individual change projects. |
| Kennedy et al. (2003) | Customer orientation implementation: the set of beliefs that puts the customer’s interest first, while not excluding those of other stakeholders in order to develop a profitable enterprise. | -                 | Paired-comparison ethnographic study                 | Two elementary schools (observations, in-depth interviews, focus groups) | • Empowering local leadership is key to practical success of implementing a customer orientation.  
★ Formal and decentralized intelligence dissemination lead to enhanced inter-functional coordination.  
★ The link of external and internal customer data is critical to transform to customer orientation. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Sample/Data</th>
<th>Core Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lam et al. (2010) | Individual market orientation: organizational member’s practice of integrating customer preferences, competitor intelligence, and product knowledge into the process of creating and delivering value to customers. | Social learning theory                    | Quantitative survey | 43 top managers, 285 middle managers, 1528 front-lines employees, objective firm data               | • Middle managers learn not only to become more market-oriented by observing top managers as role models, but also their expert peers.  
• The higher a middle manager’s organizational identity, the more market orientation he can learn from top managers. Although the study focuses on market orientation, the findings are applicable also for customer orientation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Mantere (2003)   | Social positions in the strategy process: The social positions of the agents in the strategy process are constituted by the roles the agents perform as members of the strategy process. | Structuration theory, role theory, strategy-as-practice | Qualitative study   | 301 interviews with 12 organizations                                                                | • 20 social positions are identified and explored under the categories of champion, citizen, and cynic.  
• Three role performance categories emerge: role-players, role-seekers, and bystanders.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Mantere (2008)   | Strategic agency: individual’s capacity to have a perceived effect upon the individual’s own work on an issue the individual regards as beneficial to the interests of his firm. | Role expectations, managerial agency       | Inductive analysis of interviews | 262 middle managers from 12 European organizations                                                 | • Role expectations can both enable and constrain middle management strategic behavior, suggesting a reciprocal role theory.  
• Enabling top management actions: narration, contextualization, resource allocation, respect, trust, responsiveness, inclusion, and referring.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<th>Theoretical Lens</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Sample/Data</th>
<th>Core Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Noble & Mokwa    | *Marketing strategy implementation*: communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of a marketing strategy or strategic marketing initiative. | Role theory            | Grounded theory, quantitative survey | Two firms ($n_1=254$ middle managers, $n_2=534$ middle managers)          | • Commitment influences individual performance and the overall success of the implementation.  
• Organizational buy-in is essential in enhancing the commitment of individual managers and for the implementation success.  
• Role significance influences commitment to the role, role performance, and implementation success. |
| Raes et al.      | *Top management team and middle management interface*: process that is successful when the organization’s activities are, over time, optimally matched with environmental constraints and opportunities. | Strategy process, role theory | Conceptual                      | -                                                                          | • Managers should focus on contact episodes: managing information exchange to achieve cognitive flexibility and mutual influencing to bargain.  
• Both parties should be aware of their roles, because this influences the interface processes through shaping the role behavior of the other party. |
| Rouleau          | *Sensemaking*: Sensemaking has to do with the way managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves based on the information surrounding the strategic change. | Role theory, micro-practice | Interpretive case study           | 2 middle managers                                                        | • Four practices to sell strategic change: translating the orientation, overcoding the strategy, disciplining the client, justifying the change.  
• Seminars for developing greater self-knowledge, communication skills, and sociological analytic ability. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Sample/Data</th>
<th>Core Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarin et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Marketing change implementation: refers to salespeople getting their customers to transact business using the Internet rather than through the salespeople themselves.</td>
<td>Stress theory</td>
<td>Quantitative survey</td>
<td>Study of 828 salespeople in one organization</td>
<td>• Successful implementation of strategic change depends not merely or even primarily on giving salespeople rewards for successfully implementing change, but also on limiting salespeople’s risks and recognizing them for their change-related efforts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Thorpe & Morgan (2007) | Middle management role in strategy execution: Degree to which a middle manager achieves the goals and objectives of the execution role and facilitates the overall success of the strategy execution effort. | Role theory       | Quantitative survey | 115 mid-level marketing managers               | • Middle managers should exhibit external loci to fulfill their role performance.  
• Foster environments in which individuals are given clear instructions as to what is required of them and encouraged to feel valued for their work. |
3 Empirical Approach

To better understand how middle managers enact their role as change agents in a top-driven change towards a stronger end-customer orientation, this thesis uses a qualitative research approach – particularly a comparative case study (cf. Eisenhardt, 1989; Schögel & Tomczak, 2009; Yin, 2009). The following chapter presents the empirical approach in detail. First, it illustrates the epistemological research background of this dissertation (see chapter 3.1). Second, it elaborates on the research methods and design by discussing the case study method, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation (see chapter 3.2). Third, it shows how the data was collected and analyzed (see chapter 3.4). Fourth, it describes the case study setting by providing information on the choice of the case study company BCS, on the industry context of crop protection, on the company profile of BCS, and on the case sample (see chapter 3.3). Finally, the empirical approach is briefly summarized (see chapter 3.5).

3.1 Epistemological Research Background

“Qualitative research has [the] potential to rehumanize research and theory by highlighting the human interactions and meanings that underlie phenomena and relationships among variables.”

(Gephart, 2004, p. 455)

Qualitative methods are often used in interpretive studies (Creswell, 2009; Parker, 2000). Here, researchers explore how and/or why something is happening (Gray, Stensaker, & Jansen, 2012). The aim is to gain in-depth insights on how people perceive, interpret, and understand their worlds (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This fits with the overarching goal of the present study. I use qualitative research methods, primarily interviews and participant observations, to explore the research questions described in chapter 1.3, as interpretation is an important tool for exploring how organizational members experience the change (Flakke, 2014). Hence, this thesis builds on interpretive assumptions.
A real-life managerial challenge has been the starting point of this dissertation (see chapter 1). As the reality-oriented research approach advises, I use an iterative research process by combining theoretical reflection with empirical data analysis (Tomczak, 1992; Ulrich, 1981). In doing so, I try to unite relevance and rigor in order to deliver both contributions to managers and academics. In the early stages of the dissertation, I follow the proposition that the research methods should suit the research goals—“questions before methods” (Punch, 2005, p. 20).

In order to answer the research goals, I use a rigorous case study design for inductive theory building because I am interested in deriving a novel process model (see chapter 4.3) (Gephart, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 2008). A comparative case study design with 21 middle managers from a single organization ensures an adequate capturing of the multi-dimensional phenomenon of a middle manager’s change role enactment (cf. Punch, 2005; Yin, 2009). Throughout the early stages of the process, I did not posit prior propositions (Cavaye, 1996) – rather the research questions guide my study, based on an extant literature review (see chapter 1.3 and chapter 2.5). The following section provides insights into the case study method in detail.

3.2 Research Methods and Design

3.2.1 Case Study Method

“A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Case studies combine the logic of design, data collection techniques, and mostly qualitative approaches to data analysis (cf. Eisenhardt, 1989; Schögel & Tomczak, 2009). Scholars prefer case study research when “the phenomenon cannot be separated from its context, the research focuses on contemporary events, and the actors’ experience is vital” (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009, p. 40). In fact, this thesis looks at a contemporary phenomenon which cannot be separated from its context and the middle managers’ experience is important. In particular, as the research question calls for an investigation of the role enactment of middle managers in a context of top-driven change towards a stronger end-customer orientation, I use the case study method.
Yin (2009, p. 37) distinguishes between three forms of case studies: (1) exploratory, (2) descriptive, and (3) explanatory. The case study in this thesis combines all three elements. It explores the role of a middle manager as a change agent and the different pathways a manager can take to enact this role. Further, it describes the organizational change process from a middle management’s point of view. Additionally, the case analysis explains which specific practices influence the change role outcomes of change agents from middle management.

Moreover, Yin (2009, p. 46) presents four types of case study designs: (1) single case holistic design, (2) single case embedded design, (3) multiple case holistic design, and (4) multiple case embedded design. This dissertation focuses on a single case embedded design as the research takes place within a single organization and includes 21 different middle managers, who are the units of analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Martin & Eisenhardt, 2010; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009). In this context, I treat every manager as a separate case.

According to Pettigrew (1990), a major limitation of change studies is that they are likely to analyze little episodes of change rather than the holistic and dynamic change processes. As change is dynamic and evolves step by step (Van de Ven, 2007), the meaning attached to the process and the impact it has on the employees who are involved in it might change over time (Dawson, 2003). In order to embed this temporal side of a change process, it is crucial to embrace the complexity that is incorporated in the process (Dawson, 2003). As Yin (2009) points out, longitudinal case studies provide researchers with the chance to investigate continuous processes in their context and to point out the differential interconnectedness of the levels in the analysis. By collecting longitudinal data in organizational change contexts, some scholars have responded to this limitation of earlier studies (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gebhardt et al., 2006; Huy, 2011; Rouleau, 2005). However, most studies on middle management’s role enactment during a top-driven change build on cross-sectional designs. In such designs, scholars collect the data in one point in time, for example before or after the change process (Flakke, 2014). The reason for this might be that longitudinal change studies with middle managers are likely to be time-consuming and difficult of access. In order to respond to this challenge, this dissertation uses a longitudinal lens and captures the role enactment of middle managers during different stages of the change process (cf. Dawson, 2003).

Moreover, only few scholars carried out longitudinal change research in real-time. In real-time settings, scholars observe the research topic (Dawson, 2003), for instance by observing a change when it is actually happening in an organization. Although real-
time studies provide important insights, only a few researchers gain access to initial change as this is a sensitive time for everyone involved in the change process (e.g., Balogun, 2004; Flakke, 2014). As such, scholars who aim at conducting longitudinal and real-time studies should strive to follow the change process from as early in the process as possible. In this dissertation, I have explored how middle managers working at marketing functions at BCS unfold their change roles in real-time, engaging with the managers for 33 months.

Taken together, this dissertation uses a longitudinal comparative case study approach in order to investigate the research questions presented in chapter 1.3. Moreover, it applies a real time approach to examine the middle managers’ role in the change process as precisely as possible.

### 3.2.2 Criteria of Goodness for Case Studies

To develop the case study, I relied on the criteria of goodness for case studies. According to Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki (2008), a rigorous case study fulfills four criteria: (1) internal validity, (2) construct validity, (3) external validity, and (4) reliability. First, internal validity, also called “logical validity,” shows the causal relationships between the observed variables (Gibbert et al., 2008). To this end, a case study incorporates a clear research framework, pattern matching, and triangulation (Yin, 2009). To address this criterion, I talked to the interviewees in several follow-up meetings and sent some interview transcripts to the interviewees to make sure that I had captured their perspective as accurately as possible (communicative validation; Schögel & Tomczak, 2009).

Second, construct validity ensures the quality of the conceptualization and operationalization of the relevant concept. More specifically, a case study should focus on what it claims to investigate and the researcher should not make subjective judgments, but observe the reality (Denzin, 2000). In order to meet this aspect, I established a clear chain of evidence, and again used triangulation (Gibbert et al., 2008). The case study of BCS observed the reality by capturing the role enactment of middle managers who implemented an end-customer orientation for their company.

Third, external validity takes generalizability for granted (Dul & Hak, 2008). Since this research is based on a single multinational company, the generalizability and transferability of the results is a challenge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Normally, the results derived from the case should be applicable also in other settings (e.g., McGrath
This work analyzes several units in one firm (middle managers) instead of analyzing a holistic single case (Gibbert et al., 2008). Thus, it compares different individual patterns in order to generalize the findings. I tried carefully to support the interview data with my observations. Also, in the limitations sections I specify theoretical conditions under which my observations should hold (see chapter 5.4) and support the evidence with similar findings in the literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Fourth, reliability means that other scholars should derive the same results when conducting the case study with the same steps (Denzin, 2000). By using a case study protocol and a database, I accomplished transparency and replication (Gibbert et al., 2008). Further, in order to ensure credibility and consistency of the interpretation, scholars suggest that the researcher should invite other, external reviewers to consider the data and offer their interpretations in order to check for the consistency (Riley, 1996). I involved various external reviewers while developing the process model within the case study (see chapter 3.3 for a detailed description).

To sum up, the thesis uses the criteria of goodness in case study research by focusing on internal validity, construct validity, external validity, and reliability. The next section discusses the data collection methods “participant observation” and “semi-structured interview” as these are prominent data sources in qualitative studies and are widely utilized in the present study (Bryman, 2012, p. 493).

### 3.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews and Participant Observation

**Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews are one of the most important sources for case studies. For my research purpose, I used semi-structured in-depth interviews in the form of guided conversations (Yin, 2009). They were targeted and directly focused on the case study topics. Although the focus of the interviews was to investigate how middle managers enact their change role in a top-driven change towards a stronger end-customer orientation, I allowed for flexibility during the interviews. Hence, the interviewees could bring in new elements that were interesting for the research questions. In particular, there was a list of questions to be covered, but the interviewees could decide on their own how to reply and how much time they would dedicate to a specific question. In this manner, the questions did not exactly follow the sequence in the interview guide. Nevertheless, I covered all questions with a similar wording in all
interviews (Bryman, 2012). I stopped interviewing organizational members after I had reached theoretical saturation and additional interviews did not provide further insights (Yin, 2009).

I developed the interview guideline based on Martin & Eisenhardt’s (2010) work. The guideline combined narrative with quantitative sections (cf. Auer-Srnka, 2009). In the narrative sections, I asked the informants to tell their experience about specific topics, for instance, the challenges they faced when they implemented the change or which tools they used in this process. In the quantitative part, I asked them to rate specific variables, such as their performance in enacting their new role or the frequency of their interaction with end-customers. This approach explored new elements through narration (e.g., Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009). At the same time, it determined high performing to low performing managers by means of ratings. The questionnaire began with a short warm-up section and continued with questions about the implementation of a customer orientation. The following questions are examples taken from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for the full interview guideline):

- In your view, who is the main customer of BCS?
- Who is responsible for customer orientation? What is your role?

Then, I asked the interviewees about their challenges in the change process:

- How did the transformation\(^9\) initiative towards customer orientation start at BCS? In which stages have you been involved?
- What were your personal challenges in this process? How did you overcome these? Could you tell me a specific situation?

Moreover, I asked them about the practices they used to deal with the challenges in the change process:

- Which practices and tools help you to align yourself towards the customer?
- What are the barriers to end-customer orientation?

Finally, the informants talked about how to measure the change success and rated constructs that were important for answering the research questions:

- How do you measure transformation success towards customer orientation?

\(^9\) BCS called the change process a “transformation”.

- Please rate your own customer orientation and job performance compared to your peers on a scale from 0-10 (0=very low; 10=very high).

It is important to note that by interviewing only middle managers, scholars may not discover all the challenges and practices which the managers have as change agents. This is the case because managers often act unconsciously in specific situations (cf. Cook & Brown, 1999), which makes it difficult to assess all facets of challenges and practices. To address this point and to capture this form of knowledge, close participant observation is needed (Gummesson, 2000; Rasche & Chia, 2009). Hence, the next section describes the participant observation method and how it is used within this dissertation.

**Participant observation**

**Participant observation is a qualitative method that has its roots in ethnographic research** (Di Domenico & Phillips, 2010; Iacono et al., 2009, p. 39). Primarily, anthropologists applied participant observation doing fieldwork by combining active looking, informal interviewing, and writing detailed field notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). In this context, Marshall & Batten (2004, p. 79) define an observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study.” According to Waddington (2004, p. 154), participant observation “involves social interaction between the researcher and informants […], the idea being to allow the observer to study first-hand the day-to-day experience and behavior of subjects in particular situations, and if necessary, to talk to them about their feelings and interpretations.” Participant observation is important as “from great distances phenomena look much different than they do from just a short distance away. They look different when viewed from different angles” (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 53).

By observing as a participant, researchers learn the perspectives of the studied individuals. In particular, the researchers who conduct participant observations aim at learning the perspective of an “insider” while the researchers still remain an “outsider” (Di Domenico & Phillips, 2010). Usually, these observations take place in community settings, in locations which the researchers assume to have relevance to the research questions (Mack & Woodsong, 2005, p. 13). The method is unique because the researchers approach the informants in their own environment rather than asking them to come to the researchers’ environment. The participant observers normally collect data through conversations, in-depth, informal, and unstructured interviews, as
well as formally structured interviews, questionnaires, personal accounts, or researcher documentation and diaries (Di Domenico & Phillips, 2010). Researchers can use the technique in large or small organizations (Yin, 2009, p. 112).

Table 4 illustrates both the *main advantages and disadvantages of participant observation*. Despite disadvantages scholars recommend the method for research questions about human interactions that scholars can better understand from the insider’s perspective (Jorgensen, 1989). This is the case with the present investigation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Affords access to the backstage culture</td>
<td>- Time-consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Allows for richly detailed description and insight into contexts, relationships, behavior</td>
<td>- Requires conscious effort at objectivity because method is inherently subjective (researcher bias)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can provide information previously unknown to the researcher that is crucial for project design, data collection, and interpretation of other data</td>
<td>- Documentation relies on memory, personal discipline, and diligence of researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improves the quality of data collection and interpretation and enables the development of new research questions or hypotheses</td>
<td>- Insights depend on the choice of the key informants (key informant bias)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inherently longitudinal in character</td>
<td>- Ethical challenges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Advantages and Disadvantages of Participant Observation*
*Source: Own Illustration Based on Bryman (2012); Di Domenico & Phillips (2010); Kawulich (2005)*

While conducting observations, the researcher might engage in different ways with the studied individuals. In this vein, Burgess (1991) suggests *four possible research identities* for the participant observer:

- the *complete participant*, who observes “undercover,” hiding his identity in the observed setting;
• the *participant-as-observer*, who gets in contact with the informants and participates in joint activities but is open about his identity;
• the *observer-as-participant*, who has only superficial contact with the informants and asks few questions;
• the *complete observer*, who only observes without engaging with the informants.

Research suggests that the observer should get close to the informants and, at the same time, maintain the professional distance, important for an adequate observation (cf. Jorgensen, 1989). I acted as a *participant-as-observer* since I formed relationships with the informants and participated in joint activities with them. My researcher identity was open and I was involved in the research setting and the community of the informants for three years. As soon as I got more familiar with the study setting, I focused on issues of specific research interest. These resulted from the emerging problem of the study. First, I began the observation with a couple of issues, and gradually limited them to one particular phenomenon: the role enactment of middle managers in the change process. More focused observations led to higher involvement with middle managers in the setting, in particular to informal conservations (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 84).

In order to analyze my field data, I followed Burns’ (2000, p. 413) “analytic induction” approach. First, I divided the data into categories. Second, I examined these data for patterns and relationships, for ideas derived from literature, and for existing theories. Third, I regrouped the material in order to provide answers for the research questions (Waddington, 2004, p. 156). The detailed data collection and data analysis are described in the next section.

### 3.3 Data Collection

In order to collect proper data to investigate the research questions discussed in chapter 1.3, I gained *access to middle managers at BCS*, a multinational crop protection company that aimed at changing its strategy towards a stronger end-customer orientation (see also chapter 1.1). The recruited middle managers were responsible for implementing the change in the organization. The access to middle managers at BCS granted me first-hand information.
To investigate middle managers’ role enactment in the change processes, I used various sources of data, as Pettigrew (1990) recommends for process studies. In particular, I triangulated data sources such as semi-structural interviews, participant observations, short-questionnaires, workshop outcomes, informal conversations, emails as well as secondary data sources such as website information, press releases, annual reports, news articles, and strategy documents. I used this multiplicity of sources to maximize richness and closeness to the research objectives (Martin & Eisenhardt, 2010, p. 270), and to minimize a bias that might result from relying on a single data source (Denzin, 2000; Eisenhardt, 1989). Table 5 provides an overview of the type of the collected data and its use in the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Use in the Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured</td>
<td>25 managers were interviewed; 21 middle managers, three top managers, and one human resources manager at the headquarters. The average interview lasted 60 minutes (see Appendix 1 for interview guideline)</td>
<td>Tracking the process of the change implementation at BCS. Interviews with middle managers served to understand how they coped with their change role. Interviews with top managers and human resources manager at headquarters aimed at enriching my understanding of how the change process started and how the middle managers were assigned to be change agents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Training site in Switzerland: October 2012 – March 2015 (about 600 hours)</td>
<td>Establishing trust with informants, becoming familiar with the context facilitated interpretation of informants’ accounts, and assessing the validity of their interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>Headquarters, EMEA, APAC offices: April – June 2014 (about 20 hours) (see Appendix 2 for detailed list)</td>
<td>Observations during training sessions helped to track the role patterns of the change agents. Establishing trust with informants, becoming familiar with the context facilitated interpretation of informants’ accounts, and assessing the validity of their interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Gathered on the Training Site</td>
<td>26 PowerPoint presentations by middle managers about how they enact their change role; 16 self-made posters that describe what a successful implementation of change means</td>
<td>Understanding what change means for the individuals. Gaining additional forms of data, for instance, visuals, in order to enhance case study reliability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Surveys</td>
<td>21 middle managers’ written answers to open questions about challenges in their change role (see Appendix 3)</td>
<td>Identifying the challenges middle managers face while implementing the change; validating data from interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Elements in Interview</td>
<td>All 21 middle managers rated the success of their change project and their job performance.</td>
<td>Measuring “role performance” for each informant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Surveys</td>
<td>All 21 middle managers filled out surveys before and after the training.</td>
<td>Measuring “role performance” for each informant and triangulating methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails</td>
<td>Emails with training participants, headquarter representatives, and top management from 2012 – 2015.</td>
<td>Triangulating emails with other data in order to derive the holistic story of the change process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Presentations</td>
<td>Several PowerPoint presentations of BCS from 2012 – 2015.</td>
<td>Triangulating facts and observations; gaining additional understanding of the organization and its new strategy and how the strategy was communicated internally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Various information gathered online on the website of BCS</td>
<td>Understanding the context of the change and gathering information about the firm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Farming’s Future, Facts and Figures, and BEENOW: In total, eight issues available on the firm’s website

Articles about the company and its end-customer orientation strategy (2009 – 2015) retrieved from Factiva, about 50 pages total

Annual reports from 2009 – 2014, six reports in total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company Magazines</td>
<td>Tracking official corporate narrative and accessing transcripts of public speeches of organizational leaders. Tracking the firm’s marketing strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Press</td>
<td>Integrating information about the implementation of end-customer orientation as a change process at BCS. Tracking external responses to the organizational change. Ensuring external validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Reports</td>
<td>Tracking historical actions and performance. Triangulating interviewees’ assertions and recollections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Summary of Data Sources and Use in Analysis

Source: Own Illustration

In total, I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews in a time period of three months. Specifically, I involved 21 middle managers from seven country organizations, four regional organizations, and the headquarters and, in addition, I interviewed three top managers and one human resources manager. I involved not only middle managers but also top managers and human resource managers to reduce the information bias which may result from only one type of informant. The average interview duration was 60 minutes. Following Martin & Eisenhardt (2010), all interviews were transcribed within twenty-four hours after they were conducted.

Furthermore, I performed approximately 620 hours of participant observations which delivered field notes. I conducted these participant observations mainly at training sessions to which all middle managers were invited. In these training sessions, middle managers were taught about their role as change agents and received support for their role enactment. Additionally, site visits at the headquarters, the European regional

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10 Exception: Only the interviews with the new COO and the human resources manager were conducted in 2015. The goal was to follow up on the change process.
office, and the regional office for Asia-Pacific provided relevant insights on the daily working environment of the participating middle managers.

When I recruited managers to participate in this case study, I followed a theoretical sampling procedure (Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Pettigrew, 1990; Stake, 1995). In theoretical sampling, researchers select cases because they are suitable to explore the relationships between the constructs in the research questions (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Thus, I aimed at creating a sample that provides possibilities for comparison and allows for rich theoretical and generalizable conclusions across middle managers at the headquarters, the regions, and the different country units (cf. Danneels, 2002). The investigation focused on the enactment of the change role of specific middle managers. The middle managers in the selected organizational units all worked in marketing functions at BCS and were high-potentials. I focused on middle managers from marketing functions because they were responsible for implementing the new end-customer orientation strategy (see chapter 1.1). Different individual outcomes ensured the needed variance for inductive case-based theory elaboration (Yin, 2009; see chapter 3.3).

The informants in the sample were selected carefully. First, I created a long list of middle managers who could be potential interviewees. To shape my short list, I consulted two marketing managers from the headquarters who were part of the guiding change team and the project owners. Together with these two managers, I carefully selected middle managers for the interviews. The selection process was based on managers’ knowledge and role enactment in the change process. The short list contained 21 middle managers from BCS who had taken part in a change training program and were responsible for the change implementation in their units. Whenever possible, I aimed at interviewing two managers from each unit in order to be able to compare their perceptions of the change process and their role enactment as change agents. Table 6 shows an overview of the involved managers, their position in the company and the duration of the interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Manager</th>
<th>Position of Manager</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type of Interview, Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Market Research</td>
<td>03.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 55 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, region</td>
<td>Marketing and Sales</td>
<td>03.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 75 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, region</td>
<td>Marketing and Sales</td>
<td>07.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 55 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Product Marketing</td>
<td>14.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 75 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Customer Strategy</td>
<td>14.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 75 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Business Excellence</td>
<td>15.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 60 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Customer Interaction</td>
<td>15.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 40 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, region</td>
<td>Marketing and Sales</td>
<td>16.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 65 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Customer Strategy</td>
<td>24.04.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 50 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top manager</td>
<td>Chief Operating Officer</td>
<td>29.04.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 75 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, HQ</td>
<td>Marketing and Services</td>
<td>29.04.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 45 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top manager</td>
<td>Global Head of Marketing</td>
<td>30.04.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 55 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>30.04.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 60 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, HQ</td>
<td>Commercial Excellence</td>
<td>30.04.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 60 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Commercial Excellence</td>
<td>07.05.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 70 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, region</td>
<td>Business Excellence</td>
<td>06.05.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 65 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Customer Strategy</td>
<td>09.05.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 70 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Tools and Services</td>
<td>12.05.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 60 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>14.05.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 70 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Business Excellence</td>
<td>20.05.2014</td>
<td>Phone, 65 min</td>
</tr>
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<td>MM, HQ</td>
<td>Customer Interaction</td>
<td>26.05.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 60 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, HQ</td>
<td>Customer Interaction</td>
<td>28.05.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 65 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, country</td>
<td>Business Excellence</td>
<td>03.06.2014</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 60 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top manager</td>
<td>Chief Operating Officer</td>
<td>17.03.2015</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 20 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM, HQ</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>20.06.2015</td>
<td>Face-to-face, 50 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: List of Informants**

**Source:** Own Illustration
3.4 Data Analysis

The units of the analysis are the 21 selected middle managers who were assigned the role as change agents. The sample consists of thirteen managers working at country organizations (i.e., Belgium, Brazil, France, India, Italy, Spain, and USA), four managers working at regional offices, and four managers working at the headquarters. The reason why I interviewed fewer managers from the headquarters and regions was because, in relation to the overall number, fewer change agents were working there (e.g., Danneels, 2002). Table 7 provides further details about the sample, such as the distribution of tenure with the organization, the affiliation, and the training cohort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure with the Organization\textsuperscript{11}</th>
<th>N (=25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than two years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-10 years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>N (=25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Cohort\textsuperscript{12}</th>
<th>N (=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Group</th>
<th>N (=25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMEA</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APAC</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Study Sample

Source: Own Illustration

\textsuperscript{11} The tenure is depicted in 2014 as the interviews were conducted then.

\textsuperscript{12} The three interviewed top managers and the human resources manager were not assigned to a specific cohort. They took part in some workshops only in order to interact with the change agents.
In order to analyze the data, I followed interpretive assumptions. That is, my purpose was to understand middle managers’ interpretation of their change role enactment in the company’s change process towards end-customer orientation (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). I analyzed the data following the “Gioia method” which is often used in qualitative research (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004; Langley & Abdallah, 2011; Suddaby, 2006). The method is based on the grounded theory work of Glaser & Strauss (2008). “The aim of grounded theory is ultimately to build a theoretical explanation by specifying phenomena in terms of conditions […], how they are expressed through interaction, the consequences that result from them, and variations of these qualifiers” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 9). In this regard, researchers uncover “scientific truth” by observing and interviewing the informants (Suddaby, 2006, p. 633).

In order to apply the Gioia method, research has suggested following five general analysis steps (Ravasi, 2014) which are described next. Table 8 describes these steps and shows in which chapters of this dissertation they can be found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Application in this Dissertation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establishing a timeline of events of the study</td>
<td>Chapter 4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Open coding to articulate first-order concepts, second-order themes, overarching dimensions as a “data structure”</td>
<td>Chapter 4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “Data table” collects selected evidence to illustrate and support coding structure</td>
<td>Chapter 4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. First-order concepts and second-order themes used as building blocks for grounded model</td>
<td>Chapter 4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Steps of Gioia Method
Source: Own Illustration Based on Ravasi (2014)

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13 This work uses “first-order concepts” and “first-order codes” interchangeably.
The following section explains the second step as this is the most important one in the data analysis. In this step, I started to code the interview data. I coded the data using the software ATLAS.ti which helps to sort and analyze qualitative data. In this process, I started with in-depth open coding of transcripts and field notes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used so-called “memos” throughout the research process which helped me to write up emergent ideas (Goulding, 2001). Following Locke (2001), I analyzed the data line by line for each informant in order to find related statements and grouped them into “first-order concepts” and “second-order themes.” In this sense, “first-order concepts are the facts of an ethnographic investigation and the second-order themes are the theories an analyst uses to organize and explain these facts” (van Maanen, 1979, p. 540).

First-order concepts summarize the subjective perspective of the informants. The researcher needs to derive the first-order concepts by staying as closely as possible to the interview transcripts. Thus, in this first-order analysis, I tried to use the informants’ wordings to name the codes. Specifically, I used in-vivo codes (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In-vivo codes capture words that the informants use in their daily lives, rather than words from the researcher’s theoretical environment. Therefore, in-vivo coding is particularly suitable for the inductive Gioia method (Saldana, 2013).

My coding scheme developed as I proceeded with the data analysis and – at various points in time – I recoded previously coded texts (cf. Petriglieri, 2015). In total, more than 100 first-order concepts emerged from the data analysis (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). To reduce this initial amount of codes to a more feasible number (approximately 40 codes), I looked for similarities and differences among the codes (Gioia et al., 2013). In particular, after having established preliminary conceptual constructs, I refined them by going back and forth between the data, emergent theory, and findings in previous literature (e.g., Martin & Eisenhardt 2010). As an example, I started the analysis with having middle management’s roles and customer orientation literature in mind (see chapter 2). As I analyzed the data, I discovered that literature on role stress (e.g., Bolino & Turnley 2005) and role expansion (e.g., Grant & Hofmann, 2011) further helped me to understand the emerging process model even better (for a discussion of the literature, see chapter 4).

Relying on a typical inductive case study research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), I used within-case and cross-case analyses with no priori hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 2008). First, I built individual write-ups for each case, each individual, by triangulation of all data (Jick, 1979). Second, following the approach by Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007), I performed an iterative cross-case comparison (Corbin
Further, paired case comparisons allowed for building explanations and deriving cross-case findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus, I compared the different change role patterns of all informants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thereby, it became evident that middle managers enacted their change role differently in terms of the practices they used. After having finished the first coding round, I tried to group the codes and looked at which informants dominantly showed these codes. As an example, from the participant observations, I noticed that one manager was not talking to the end-customers at all, whereas another manager frequently visited end-customers. Therefore, I went back to the interview transcripts and looked for differences in the code “engaging with the end-customers.” I discovered that one interviewee was talking about not having any time to engage more with the end-customer, whereas another one frequently interacted with the end-customers. Thus, I decided to derive a new code, “loose interaction with end-customers.” I discovered the same pattern in the codes related to the interaction with the headquarters and the top management.

I performed axial coding in the next step of the data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). By doing so, I was able to aggregate the first-order concepts into more abstract categories. In line with Petriglieri’s (2015) approach, I repeatedly regrouped the codes of each interviewee’s transcript in order to look for variations and relationships between codes. For instance, I did a comparative analysis of the group of interviewees who was very positive about their change role and the group who was rather negative about it. The aim of this comparison was to tackle the underlying reasons for the difference in their perception of their own role enactment. This step of the data analysis derived theoretical categories that united my first-order concepts into second-order themes.

In the second-order analysis, I found themes that helped me to describe the observed phenomena. When the second-order themes emerged, I assembled them into “aggregate dimensions” (Gioia et al., 2013). Following Gioia et al. (2013), the data structure not only allowed for visualization but also showed the progress from raw data to broader themes that indicate rigor in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). Figure 8 illustrates that this dissertation’s data structure builds on an analytical categorization approach.
Throughout the data analysis process, ongoing feedback session (so-called member checks) and data triangulation increased trustworthiness (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Therefore, in critical stages of the data analysis, I constantly engaged with other researchers and managers of the case study company in order to strengthen my theoretical model and gather new insights. I presented the ideas as they developed in numerous research workshops as well as informal meetings with the interviewed managers. Hence, I was able to incorporate their feedback into my analysis. For instance, I talked to the managers in training sessions and unofficial meetings while I was in the data analysis process so as to share and discuss my insights with them. These regular feedback loops helped me to increase the internal validity of the study (for rigorous case studies see chapter 3.2.2).

In order to tackle the data structure and process model, ongoing critical feedback sessions with individual researchers were an essential part of this research. Particularly, research experts in qualitative management methods commented on the emerging codes and the data structure. In total, I conducted eight individual feedback sessions with qualitative researchers. The average feedback session lasted approximately one hour. These feedback loops are a crucial part of the Gioia method because the codes need to be self-explanatory (Gioia et al., 2013). That is, it is important that other researchers understand the abstraction from first-order concepts to second-order themes and from second-order themes to aggregate dimensions (Ravasi, 2014). I ended the data analysis process when I reached theoretical saturation and the analysis did not provide me with new insights to answer the research questions (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008).
To conclude, I collected various sources of data in order to answer the research questions of the present research (as discussed in chapter 1.3). By analyzing the data inductively following the Gioia method, I developed a process model of middle management's role enactment during the strategic change process after establishing the data structure (see chapter 4.3). The next section elaborates on the case study setting so as to put the analysis into a context.

3.5 Case Study Selection and Setting

3.5.1 Choice of Case Study Company

In order to understand the change process and middle managers’ role enactment as change agents, and to evaluate the generalizability of the research findings, it is important to appreciate the change context (O’Connor, 2000). Hence, this section provides background information on BCS where this investigation of a strategic change process took place and the corresponding change setting. BCS – a business-to-business company operating in the agricultural industry which was the second largest company in the crop protection sector globally in 2011 – was chosen for this study for numerous reason.

First, agriculture has been a context for innovation in marketing theory and practice for a long time (Neilson, Shapiro, & Tamilia, 2011). For instance, the prestigious Journal of Marketing has published more than 200 articles on agricultural topics since its founding in 1936 (Press, Arnould, Murray, & Strand, 2014), demonstrating the high relevance of and interest among researchers in this sector. Moreover, the agricultural sector is very volatile and dynamic; it is characterized by intense competition and faces several challenges (Bayer CropScience, 2015). For example, a growing population, changing dietary behaviors, and extreme weather conditions influence agricultural production nowadays. It is therefore crucial to increase productivity and food security for the world population which will reach 10 billion by 2050. In this vein, most agricultural companies try to support the growers in order to increase the food quality and feed the world (Bayer CropScience, 2015).

Second, traditionally, the crop protection industry has been focusing its marketing activities towards the retailers and neglecting the end-customers (i.e., the growers). In 2010, however, the industry faced a dramatic shift in customer needs so that an increasing number of agricultural companies started to focus on the growers in order to
promote their products and services (McKinsey, 2011). In line with these developments, BCS aimed at aligning its marketing activities away from their direct customers, the retailers, towards their end-customers, the growers. In order to change the company’s strategy and its processes towards more end-customer orientation and to become the global market leader in the crop protection industry, BCS assigned selected middle managers the task of implementing the end-customer orientation in the company. Therefore, BCS appears as a representative case to investigate my key research question of how middle managers enact their change agent role to implement the end-customer orientation of their company (cf. Yin, 2009).

Third, by collaborating closely with the case study company, I gained an extraordinary access to multiple sources of data from 2012 until 2015 (see chapter 3.3). In total, I observed 60 middle managers while they enacted their new additional role as change agents to derive my field notes. Furthermore, I was able to conduct both formal and informal interviews with 21 of these middle managers, and, in addition, three top managers and one human resources manager. Also, I made numerous observations at the research site. The observations captured middle managers from different country organizations, regional functions, and the headquarters in Germany. Further, the company provided me with several workshop outcomes and internal papers. Overall, the unique access to multiple forms of data delivered extra-ordinary insights into the role enactment of middle managers during the change process.

Fourth, the company provided me the opportunity to collect longitudinal data in real time for three years, while middle managers changed their company’s strategic direction towards a stronger end-customer orientation. This allowed me to explore middle managers’ challenges and practices at different points in time. Hence, I was able to integrate a dynamic view into my findings. For instance, to illustrate this dynamic, the company has encountered a CEO change in 2012 and a strategy change in 2014, which made the case study more vivid (for a detailed description of the development of the change strategy, see findings in chapter 4.1).

Finally, the variety of middle managers’ outcomes made the case study unique for type comparisons. I interacted with middle managers who worked at the same organization but had different change role outcomes (as will be shown in chapter 4). This difference in the role outcome ensured sufficient variance to investigate the research question 4 on why some managers were more successful than others in their role as change agents (see chapter 1.3).
3.5.2 Industry Context of Case Study Company

The market structure of the crop protection industry is unique. First, distributors in this industry sell crop protection products and act as wholesalers at the same time. They often purchase products in bulk and distribute them to retailers who, in turn, sell the products to agricultural end-users (Rojas, 2013). This means that the distribution structure in the crop protection industry usually has two tiers. Moreover, the top six crop protection companies shared about 70 percent of the $64 billion global crop protection chemicals market in 2014. With sales of $10.4 billion at the CropScience division in 2014, Bayer is the second-biggest producer of crop protection chemicals behind Syngenta, which has $11.4 billion. BASF, Dow, Monsanto, and DuPont follow with smaller shares (Bloomberg, 2015).

The crop protection industry faces several trends nowadays in terms of demographic development, economic growth, sustainability, technological development, and health issues:

- **Demographic development**: A growing population affects the agricultural business today (Bayer CropScience, 2014). The world’s population will increase by one-third by 2050. In this regard, Dekkers, Board Chairman of Bayer, remarked: “We all know that the world’s population is increasing all the time. We need new and better ways to boost agricultural yields if we are to have an adequate food supply in the future” (ENP Newswire, 2014). In fact, studies show that the world demand for agricultural products will continue to rise within the next years. For instance, even during the last thirty years, the produced amount of wheat has not been sufficient to meet the consumption demand. In 1950, a hectare fed two people but by 2030, it will have to feed five. Thus, the agricultural industry must produce more food in the next 50 years than it has in the past 10,000 years. As a result, agriculture is gaining attention in the global growth agenda, and firms in the agricultural industry play a vital role in the global food security (Nerlekar, 2013).

- **Economic growth**: Due to the growing middle class, food demand is expected to increase by 70% in 2050. As demand increases, crop prices increase as well. In addition, a growing middle class means that the request for consumer products will rise, which will create a higher demand for industrially produced goods. Thus, as water is more valuable to use in industry than in agriculture, farms
may face water shortages. For instance, in China a drop of water is 30 times more valuable in the service sector than it is in agriculture (Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, 2015).

- **Sustainability**: The mission of crop protection companies is to help plants survive changing weather conditions and to support growers in producing high quality and safe food for consumers (Bayer CropScience, 2015). In the last ten years, drought has impacted yields in many countries, such as Australia or the USA. Extreme weather conditions will make commodity prices more volatile. Also, as consumers pay more attention to sustainability, governments could shift their subsidies from biofuel, for instance, towards organic food (Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, 2015).

- **Technological development**: As technology develops, digital tools for farmers become increasingly complex. Hence, business models and service offers need to adapt accordingly. In future, retailers might use more e-commerce and direct-to-consumer strategies. This may affect the value chain in the crop protection industry. Also, technological developments will enable weeding robots and drone spraying, and thus will change agricultural business (Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, 2015).

- **Health issues**: As people’s perception of a healthy life changes, markets modify their food offers accordingly. For instance, retailers increasingly offer organic or gluten-free products. This, in turn, impacts the type of crops planted by growers. Further, the media and non-governmental organizations have been criticizing crop protection in the last few years. Environmentalists have criticized the damage that crop protection products, such as pesticides, cause on animal health (Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, 2015). Despite this criticism of specific consumers that value a healthy lifestyle, crop protection is vital to feeding the world. For example, a study of the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, shows that if Germany quit applying crop protection products on its wheat fields, its wheat production would fall by 12.1 million tons. This is the amount of wheat consumption of 184 million people per year (Bayer Agrar Deutschland, 2014).
Taken together, the above-mentioned trends show that the agriculture industry is highly dynamic and faces several challenges today. This industry setting characterizes the market environment of BCS, and therefore also the setting of the current investigation of how middle managers enact and fulfill their role as change agents in a strategic change process.

3.5.3 Company Profile of Case Study Company

“Our processes begin in the lab and the benefits end up with the customer. We enable doctors to help patients, we enable farmers to help feed the world, and we enable veterinarians to help animals. This is all in line with our mission: Bayer: Science for a better life.”

(Dekkers, Board Chairman BCS, retrieved from ENP Newswire, 2014)

In 2013, Bayer celebrated its 150th anniversary with its mission: “Science for a Better Life.” The company dates back to 1863 when Friedrich Bayer founded the company as a manufacturer and seller of synthetic dyestuff. In 1897, Bayer entered the global markets with the “drug of the century” – Aspirin (Bayer AG, 2015b). Nowadays, the corporate brand of Bayer is ranked third in the CoreBrand power ranking (Tenet Partners, 2015). Bayer is now a global firm with core competencies in health care, agriculture, and high-tech polymer materials. As an innovative company, Bayer operates in research-intensive areas. In 2014, Bayer employed 113,200 people and had sales of 40.2 billion Euros. Capital expenditures were 2.2 billion Euros and R&D expenses 3.2 billion Euros.

Bayer defines the values, goals, and strategies for the entire Group. Bayer’s subgroups and service companies operate independently, led by the Bayer Corporate Center. Until 2014, Bayer had three subgroups: Bayer HealthCare, Bayer CropScience (BCS), and Bayer MaterialScience. Since September 2015 Bayer MaterialScience operates independently and is called “Covestro” (Bayer AG, 2015b). Figure 9 shows Bayer’s organization chart. The grey marked part is the subgroup where I collected my data.
This dissertation focuses on the subgroup BCS, whose establishment goes back to 1924, when the Bayer Crop Protection Research Department was founded. This department launched, for instance, the world’s first systemic insecticide, Systox™, in 1951. In 2002, BCS was launched as the first legally independent Bayer subgroup and has been providing crop protection products, seeds, and environmental solutions. BCS operates in 120 country organizations and has more than 22,400 employees worldwide (Bayer AG, 2015b). BCS’s employees are guided by the philosophy called LIFE – Leadership, Integrity, Flexibility, and Efficiency (Bayer AG, 2015c).

Today, BCS is one of the world’s biggest companies in the crop protection industry, offering chemicals and biological products for improving plant health and crop seeds. It also provides customer services to support sustainable agriculture. A further focus of the firm is on non-agricultural applications. BCS is structured into six operational business units: four regional units for the crop protection business, the environmental science unit, and seeds units. Crop protection covers insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides. The environmental science unit offers both professional and consumer products. The seeds unit offers vegetable seeds and seeds for agricultural crops (Bayer AG, 2015b).

BCS’ customer base differs in each country. For instance, in Brazil some farmers grow crops on 250,000 hectares, whereas in Vietnam some farmers have only one hectare (Nenstiel, 2014). The distribution structure of BCS has two tiers. Usually, BCS does
not sell products directly to the growers. Instead, they sell their products to the wholesalers which, in turn, serve the retailers. The retailers provide these products to the growers, the end-customers. Hence, this thesis defines the retailers as the intermediate customers of crop protection companies and the growers as the end-customers. Figure 10 illustrates the organizational setup and the distribution structure of BCS.

Figure 10: Organizational Setup and Distribution Structure of BCS
Source: Own Illustration Based on Data Analysis

In order to provide further context information, Table 9 depicts the revenue in millions of Euros, the number of employees, and the market position of each country organization where the interviewed managers worked in 2013. At that time, BCS had a total revenue of 8,810 million Euros. The company had its highest revenues in the USA, Brazil, and France. India, Italy, Spain, and Belgium had lower revenues compared to the first three countries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Unit</th>
<th>Revenue in Million Euros in 2013</th>
<th>Number of Employees in 2013</th>
<th>Market Position in 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCS (total)</td>
<td>8,819</td>
<td>23,100</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Description of Units of Study Participants
Source: Own Illustration Based on Data Analysis

3.6 Summary of Empirical Approach

Chapter 3 explained the empirical approach of the present study by illustrating the epistemological research background (chapter 3.1). Also, it explained the research methods and research design (chapter 3.2). In particular, it discussed the case study method and the criteria of goodness in case study research while pointing out how the present study fulfills these criteria. Further, it presented semi-structured interviews and participant observation as these are the major data sources of this research (chapter 3.3). This chapter also gave information on the data collection by showing the various data sources. In total, 25 managers were interviewed and a total of 620 hours of participant observation were made. Additionally, the chapter discussed the data analysis in-depth by presenting the Gioia method (chapter 3.4). By doing so, it elaborated on how the inductive analysis derived first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregated dimensions. This particular method helps to build the novel process model in the next sections.

Further, this chapter gave detailed information on the case study setting of the present study (chapter 3.5). In detail, it justified the choice of the case study company BCS. Finally, it gave insights into the industry context of BCS (crop protection) and presented the company profile of BCS. This background information is crucial in order to understand the context of the case study.


4 Research Findings

The fourth chapter addresses the guiding research question by presenting the research findings of the case study on how middle managers enact their role as change agents in a top-driven change. First, it elaborates on the organizational change process steps from a middle management point of view in order to answer research goal 1 (see chapter 4.1). Second, it analyzes the change role enactment of middle managers and shows three different pathways they might take to enact their role as change agents (see chapter 4.2). Third, by putting the findings together, the chapter further develops a process model of how middle managers enact their change role. This process model provides answers to research goals 2, 3, and 4 (see chapter 4.3). Chapter 4 concludes with a summary of the research findings (see chapter 4.4).

4.1 Process of the Organizational Change

“The grower should be the protagonist of our strategy.” (9)14

As the quotation shows and as discussed in the previous chapters, BCS introduced a change in order to create more value for the grower. In my analysis, I first focused on the context of the change (see chapter 3). More specifically, I examined the steps that BCS encountered in order to enact the change towards a stronger end-customer orientation. From the perspective of change agents, the results of this analysis suggest seven general steps of the change process. These general steps include: (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) developing a vision and a strategy, (3) creating a guiding coalition, (4) communicating the vision, (5) coping with change conflict, (6) gaining short-term wins, and (7) consolidating gains and producing more change. Also, each of the seven steps comprises several sub-phases, as shown in Table 10. The following section describes the organizational change process in more detail and explains each step. To do so, I integrate several data sources as explained in chapter 3.3, such as the information from the interviews with 25 middle and top managers at BCS.

14 The interviewee number is indicated in parentheses after all quotations I use in the following.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Steps</th>
<th>Sub-Phases</th>
<th>Main Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establishing a sense of urgency</td>
<td>(1a) Forming a change case</td>
<td>BCS kicked off the change process by forming a marketing department at the headquarters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1b) Building up from scratch phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Developing a vision and a strategy</td>
<td>(2a) Vision phase</td>
<td>BCS created a tailored vision and a change concept and analyzed the current customer orientation of hand-picked country organizations. BCS determined the pilot organizations based on this analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2b) Conceptualization and analysis phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Creating a guiding coalition</td>
<td>(3a) Selection phase of change agents</td>
<td>BCS selected specific change agents from middle management at the headquarters, regional organizations, and country organizations. These middle managers were trained for the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3b) Training and connecting change agents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communicating the vision</td>
<td>(4a) Catalyst and confusion phase</td>
<td>The middle managers spread the change vision and strategy in their units. This caused confusion among some change recipients which the middle managers were able to solve in the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4b) Diffusion phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Coping with change conflict</td>
<td>(5a) Control and push back phase</td>
<td>Some change agents in the country organizations gave critical feedback to the strategy. The top management team at the headquarters adjusted the strategy accordingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5b) Resolution and adjustment phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gaining short-term wins</td>
<td>(6a) Strategy enhancement phase</td>
<td>The new CEO developed the change strategy further by adding to it the “Market Leadership and People Strategy.” The company achieved initial success in the country markets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6b) First success phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Consolidating gains and producing more change</td>
<td>(7a) Measurement phase</td>
<td>BCS measured the change success and aimed at replicating the success stories globally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7b) Replication phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: General Steps, Sub-Phases, and Main Characteristics of the Change
Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis
4.1.1 Establishing a Sense of Urgency

In order to form a change case, BCS first established a sense of urgency for the change in the company. In this step, I discovered two sub-phases: (1a) forming a change case and (1b) building up from scratch.

(1a) Forming a Change Case

In the years 2009 and 2010, BCS faced a rather weak financial performance and its EBIT decreased compared to the previous years (2009: -13.1%; 2010: -67.3%; Bayer CropScience, 2010; Bayer CropScience, 2011). To address this negative financial development and in order to increase EBIT again and find new ways for growth opportunities, the former CEO decided to create a case for change. In this vein, BCS revealed a new “Four Pillar” strategy for future growth in the beginning of 2011. In particular, the company outlined its commitment to grow by focusing on four key goals: (1) reviving the core crop protection business, (2) reinventing customer centricity along the entire value chain, (3) rebalancing and refocusing innovation, and (4) extending the BioScience footprint in focused crops (China Chemical Reporter, 2011).

The second pillar – reinventing customer centricity along the entire value chain – formed the starting point of this dissertation. This pillar aimed at improving customer centricity across the value chain to deliver solutions from seed-to-shelf, that is, a stronger end-customer orientation and improved collaboration with channel partners (China Chemical Reporter, 2011). One informant pointed out the importance of a customer-centric strategy as follows:

“Well, I think we are in an age today that if you cannot focus on customer needs you simply don’t have a business. So in one way or another, a business can only exist if you can create and deliver a customer need.” (1)

The organization aimed at changing the strategy in the marketing functions at the headquarters, regional offices, and country organizations. In this context, BCS was mainly challenged by the implementation of the new strategy rather than its formulation. An interviewee pointed out:
“It is easy to put up a plan on paper – this takes a few days. Putting it into action takes ages.” (1)

A further executive described the culture of BCS towards strategy making as follows:

“We are probably the best company in the world at building wonderful strategies, but we’re probably rather weak when it comes to implementing those strategies and really get the value out of it and seeing the impact in our business.” (13)

To overcome this challenge and aim at a successful implementation of the new strategy, BCS tried to find important levers for the overall strategy implementation. A major lever was to employ selected middle managers from the headquarters, regional offices, and country organizations as change agents.

(1b) Building up from Scratch Phase

BCS founded a marketing department at the headquarters in the end of 2010, called “Agricultural Commercial Operations Marketing.” For this, BCS established the position of a Chief Operating Officer (COO) (VerticalNews, 2010). In this regard, the former CEO of BCS said in 2010 that “the establishment of this Chief Operating Officer function enabled them to drive forward the closer cooperation of their crop protection and seeds and traits operations on a regional level for the benefit of their customers.” She continued that “this organizational setup would help them to sharpen their focus on providing innovative solutions for their customers and speed up the execution of their business strategy” (VerticalNews, 2010).

The COO was responsible for the company’s marketing activities. The marketing department under the lead of the COO owned the strategy change. With the new marketing department, the position of the “Global Head of Marketing” was created. The manager in this position was selected due to his superior operational knowledge in several countries as a country head. Further, the company embedded the change projects under the corporate strategy of “Commercial Excellence” as it was tackling the business processes related to the challenge of how to serve the end-customers better (i.e., growers).
4.1.2 Developing a Vision and a Strategy

The second general step in the change process – *developing a vision and a strategy* – consisted of a (2a) vision phase and a (2b) conceptualization and analysis phase. The next section presents these two phases.

(2a) Vision Phase

BCS used the overarching vision of the Bayer Group in order to communicate the change to the entire organization. This vision was: “Science for a better life” (Bayer CropScience, 2015). Moreover, BCS developed a new vision that was tailored to their goal of reaching the end-customers and used the BCS vision for the change “Propelling farming’s future” (BCS internal document, 2011). In line with these vision statements, the former CEO established an overall sense for the change by noting the following during a press conference: “Our entire organization is relentlessly focused on meeting the rapidly changing needs of a planet hungry for agricultural resources” (China Chemical Reporter, 2011).

(2b) Conceptualization and Analysis Phase

In 2011, the marketing department at the headquarters created the change concept by developing a 9-module-structure framework. This “Commercial Excellence Framework” (CEF) tackled relevant marketing issues to implement the change towards a stronger end-customer orientation. The nine modules included customer needs, customer segmentation, customer pull creation, pricing, services and solutions, brand equity management, channel management, key account management, and sales excellence. After having developed these modules, the marketing department applied a so-called “heatmap analysis” to uncover the marketing potentials in each of the nine modules in pre-selected pilot countries. By extending and sequencing the modules, BCS defined and sorted the concrete steps in the change process towards more customer orientation. The result was a twelve steps go-to-market approach. This approach included the following steps:

1. Define markets, strategic objectives, and growth potential
2. Detect customer needs
3. Segment customers and define target segments
4. Develop solution offerings
5. Develop and manage brands
6. Implement value driven prices
7. Create pull marketing
8. Activate channels
9. Manage your key accounts
10. Create sales excellence
11. Plan financial investments
12. Ensure overall impact and continuous improvement

The heatmap analyses served as the starting point for the change processes. In cooperation with the country heads, the heads of marketing, and heads of sales, the headquarters assessed the pilot countries with this tool. An informant at the headquarters pointed out: “The strategy is labeled as it is coming from the headquarters. However, the headquarters developed it together with the country organizations” (19). In 2012, the company assessed 20 country organizations based on their performance in the heatmap modules, for instance in brand equity management, channel management, or sales excellence. Out of the 20 organizations, the company then selected eight pilot country organizations in which the change should be implemented first (four growth and four defense countries)\(^{15}\).

4.1.3 Creating a Guiding Coalition

The third general step – creating a guiding coalition – was incorporated in the human resources policy. This step was about screening and choosing middle managers in each country organization who would be able to lead and implement the change in their units and to support them in their role as change agents. BCS then started to create a guiding coalition for the change process by bringing the change agents together and training them. In the following, these two sub-phases – (3a) the selection phase of change agents and (3b) the training and connecting change agents – are presented in detail.

\(^{15}\) BCS divided the country organizations into growth and defense countries for the analysis. In growth countries the market for crop protection is still growing so that BCS can expand its market share there. However, in defense countries the market growth is very low. Thus, the company mainly aims to defend its market share in those countries.
(3a) Selection Phase of Change Agents

After having determined the pilot country organizations via the heatmap analysis, the company started to build change teams which should be responsible for the change implementation in the specific country organizations. The management at BCS assigned selected middle managers the role as change agents. The main tasks of these change agents were to work as “catalysts” of the new strategy and to lead the implementation.

To select the “right” middle managers, BCS first analyzed the backgrounds of potential candidates in terms of their abilities, competencies, and skills to manage the change process as change agents. For instance, a middle manager’s social competence, marketing and sales skills, talent, and the attitude towards the new strategy played a vital role in the selection process. Also, the company tried to choose managers with a good job performance to increase their chances of being a leader in the organization in future (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11: Profile of the Typical Change Agent at BCS](https://example.com/figure11.png)

Source: Own Illustration Based on Schögel et al. (2014)
As a result of the selection process, the *typical change agent* had an average work experience of eight years in marketing and/or sales. The change agents worked at various country organizations in marketing functions, at regional offices, or at the headquarters. For BCS, it was then vital to create a guiding coalition with these change agents before spreading the change in the company. This is illustrated by the following quote from a middle manager:

> “Due to the size, diversity, and complexity of the company, I believe that we are challenged by creating a common understanding amongst the ‘core’ team before roll-out [of the new end-customer orientation strategy] in order to be able to speak with ‘one voice’ and cut through the clutter.” (Middle manager, field notes, 2012)

Further, the *top management team at the headquarters formed expectations* towards the guiding coalition of change agents. For example, the Head of Global Marketing described the role of a change agent:\(^{16}\) “You are internal key opinion leaders and high-achievers. We have put special attention on you and you will change the company” (22). Furthermore, the following points are taken from an official job description and show the general task profile of a change agent at BCS:

- Leading an implementation team in order to change the company,
- Convincing the relevant stakeholders of the urgency of the change process,
- Changing the mindset of commercial excellence stakeholders,
- Communicating the benefit of the adoption of the commercial excellence framework for the daily business, and
- Bringing both parties, marketing and sales, on board to manage the interfaces between both departments.

A comment of a change agent supports the last point of the document as he said the following about his role: “I deal with a large number of people at a time: Sales Force, Key Account Force, Marketing Force, being at the same time a kind of

\(^{16}\) He made this statement in a speech at the training site.
‘communication and negotiation bridge person’ between departments” (Middle manager, BCS, field notes, 2012).

(3b) Training and Connecting Change Agents

In order to support the selected managers in their role as change agents, BCS rolled out training programs, choosing an educative approach to accelerate the change impact. The change agents first took part in the “Skillcamp” training through which they learned the “Twelve step go-to-market approach” proposed by the top management of the company and a common strategy wording (see chapter 4.1.2). This training covered three days of basic marketing and sales content. For non-English speaking countries the training was translated into the local language.

After the Skillcamp training, the company aimed at building a community of change agents by using a specific training program. With this, the company intended to connect the change agents globally. Instead of working in silos, BCS strongly encouraged the change agents to work across countries by sharing their tools and best practices with their peers. Moreover, in this specific training program, the change agents developed skills that enabled them to lead the change teams by using workshops and transfer tasks. One participant noted during the training: “It’s impossible to build a cathedral without people understanding how they can influence and take part in that process” (Middle manager, BCS, field notes, 2013). This quotation illustrates that the training helped the middle managers to recognize their own contribution to the implementation of the change.

BCS conceptualized training sessions in cooperation with the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland in June 2012. This cooperation program was initiated under the name “Marketing & Sales Excellence Transformation Leaders Program”. Four full-day meetings took place in order to develop a concept for the program. Representatives from BCS as well as the project team from the University of St. Gallen participated in these meetings (see Appendix 2). The training program addressed the following main areas: marketing and sales, leadership, change management, and networking skills (see Figure 12).
Figure 12: Main Content of the Training Program for Change Agents at BCS
Source: Own Illustration Based on Schögel et al. (2014)

In total, four groups of approximately 60 middle managers participated in this training program with the University of St. Gallen. Each manager was trained three weeks in total (three times during a 6-months-period).

4.1.4 Communicating the Vision

The fourth step in the change process – communicating the vision – followed the selection and training of the change agents. This general step consisted of a (4a) catalyst and confusion phase, and a (4b) diffusion phase.

(4a) Catalyst and Confusion Phase

In this phase, change agents started to promote the strategy in their own units. In this context, a change agent summarized the company’s new strategy as follows: “We need to bring the marketing to the ‘driving seat’ of the organization” (8). Similarly, the change agents explained the new strategy to the change recipients: “We need to convince the organization that this is not just another initiative” (Middle manager,
Another manager remarked in an interview: “It’s really true to me that you cannot capture people’s minds until you capture their hearts. So we really need to consider both aspects of how we are going to bring their hearts and minds along with the change through” (1).

During the change process, some change recipients became confused about the new strategy. This confusion happened mainly due to the change in the definition of their main customers. BCS uses a two tiers channel distribution, that is, the company sells the products to its retail partners and these partners resell the products to the growers (see chapter 3.4.3). BCS therefore does not have any direct transactional relationship with their end-customers (growers). Before the implementation of the change in the strategy, employees considered the retail partners as their main customers. According to the new strategy, however, the company targeted not only retailers but also growers as their customers as the following quote depicts:

“We tend to look at things more black and white, so if the grower is our customer, well that means the retailer is not our customer [...] We have clearly articulated that the grower is our customer. The channel is our partner. We are joining ranks and holding hands with the channel to get to our customer.” (5)

Some change recipients could not get used to interpreting growers as their customers because the money came from the channel partners. The middle manager pointed out that changing the mindset of their employees challenged him tremendously.

“‘In the short-term it really is about key account management and making sure that the retailer is on our side, so people get confused when you say that our customer is the grower, they say: ‘Well what about the retailer?’ I think that everybody in our industry struggled with this, because we get confused how the money flows and who we are trying to create value for.’” (5)

It is not only that employees became confused about the new focus of the company’s strategy, but also retailers struggled with the new customer definition by BCS. In this vein, the same manager continued:
“When I’m talking to retailers, I tell them: ‘The grower is our customer’. Sometimes they’ll push back and say: ‘No, you sell the products to us.’, but actually the value is generated at the grower level. The reason we spend [a] million dollars in research is not to have the retailer grow crops, it is to help the grower grow crops [...] Our employees talk to the retailers and the retailers tell them: ‘Hey, I’m your customer, don’t go around me, don’t mediate me’, day in, day out, they start to take the perspective of the retailer and that’s kind of the double edge sword, we need them [the retailer] so we have to maintain a really good relationship with them [the retailers].” (5)

To address and solve this confusion among their employees, change agents found a way to explain the new strategy:

“If you’re in the field, then you’re calling on retailers all day. So, of course you’re going to think of the people that you call on as your customer because those are the guys that you’re selling to, those are the guys you’re interacting with. But I think it’s a pretty easy shift to say we have a mutual customer and that’s the grower. How do we create a better relationship so that we team up to get that grower what he needs?” (2)

(4b) Diffusion Phase

Figure 13 depicts the diffusion of the top-driven change process at BCS. The headquarters spread the change downwards in the organization. First, the change reached the regional level, then the country organizations, and finally, the intermediate customers and the end-customers in the market.
The following statement by a top manager characterizes the diffusion phase: “Our company is a ‘heavy ship’ that you turn and that hardly moves” (Top manager, field notes, 2013). This means that it took time to change the strategic direction of the company as it is big and complex. In the diffusion phase, it was “crucial to get commitment from every single employee in the field since one employee not committed meant one region not implementing” (Middle manager, field notes, 2012). In fact, interviewees said that it took some time until the top-driven change from the headquarters arrived at the country organizations. An interviewee pointed out this phenomenon and highlighted the important role of the regional offices in this context:

“I think whenever something has a commercial excellence initiative, like the change projects and all the things around [training name], they need time to cascade down into the countries. If things are developed at the headquarters it takes at least a year or more to be cascaded down in the organization. I mean cascaded by a sense of understanding and agreeing
and being aligned to it. And our role in there is as a region to accelerate these kinds of understandings. *We are the ambassador of global initiatives and strategies and help to make them happen.*” (3)

An important challenge in this phase was that BCS was confronted with *information loss*. One participant framed it as follows: “If you have to communicate something from one level to a level that is three, four steps down the road, you know that information will get lost. That’s just a fact.” (13) The diffusion phase ended when the employees at the country organizations internalized the change projects.

### 4.1.5 Coping with Change Conflict

The fifth step – *coping with change conflict* – was characterized by two sub-phases: a *(5a) control and push back phase* from the middle managers at the country organizations and a *(5b) resolution and adjustment phase*. These are described hereafter.

*(5a) Control and Push Back Phase*

The control and pushback phase was characterized by the dynamics between the headquarters, the regional offices, and the country organizations. The following quote is an illustrative example for this phase.

> “I see contrasts between the willingness to be more customer-centric and the need to comply with the internal procedures and hierarchies. *The balance between the global strategy and the local implementation has yet to come.*” (7)

In this phase, some change agents in the country organizations mentioned that *the headquarters monitored the change process thoroughly*. In the beginning, the headquarters used a top-driven implementation approach and regularly controlled the country organizations in their activities rather than giving them room for flexibility. Even change managers that worked at the headquarters noticed this, as one informant mentioned in the interview.
“We [the headquarters] are trying to monitor too much. We need to give more freedom to the countries now that they know the direction of the journey. We should not ask them how things are every four weeks.” (19)

Additionally, change agents pointed out that the top-driven approach of the headquarters caused a gap in terms of needs between the headquarters and the country units. Specifically, an informant said: “There was a certain gap between headquarters and countries in terms of what the need was, right? So it might be that the headquarters had a nice idea of some concepts that they wanted to roll out, but the countries didn’t really see how that added value to their daily work of running the business. So there was always this discussion: “Okay, if you want us to do that, who is then going to take care of the business?” (13). This informant added that managers working at country units felt overwhelmed by the amount of additional tasks they needed to accomplish to drive the change. Also, the informant drew attention to a potential bottleneck in the change process. This bottleneck was about the demotivation of employees:

“You should definitely be ambitious, but you should not be ‘stupid’ because that kills the motivation in the team if they are just pushed like hell over and over again. People get demotivated if they never see something coming to an end, having a little bit of chance to catch your breath and then you can start working on the next project.” (13)

This was not only an issue for people working in operational functions in the markets. Also, regional functions were affected by the work overload, as one informant indicated in the interview: “Whenever you do these kinds of change projects and you have a high visibility, there is a pressure from the global colleagues [from the headquarters] to be successful. I think the challenge is that the timing and the expectation management about that such a change can be done in three months was way too high” (3). This pressure was often accompanied by a feeling of loneliness due to the fact that the change agents were pioneers in their units. “We [countries] had a lot of conversations back and forth with global colleagues and I’ve had great support from the marketing team in the region, but it was a lonely journey when there were political fights and we had differences, until we had 87% of the understanding and having the right figures demonstrating we were right, it helped to have proof. It was painful, but in the end the figures demonstrated we were in the right direction” (8). In addition to
the regional change agents, many change agents faced reactance in the country organizations when they implemented the change.

“When I was in the country organization things were unclear because the real message either was not captured by the management in the country, or even though it was captured, it wasn’t delivered properly to the organization. The main message in the country was: We want to change. We missed completely the context of it. We didn’t even know what commercial excellence was. At that time, the twelve steps were not paid attention to. It was another project coming from the head office.”

(11)

Moreover, many middle managers criticized the global formalities coming from the headquarters: “We face global pressure to use templates that have not been proven to increase lift. We are being inundated with templates and processes that don’t always add value” (Middle manager, answer in questionnaire, 2013). A manager explained that he was challenged by being the bridge between strategies and operations. He pointed out that “convincing people to practically implement ‘theoretical’ ideas from the headquarters was his challenge” (Middle manager, field notes). Similarly, managers at the headquarters noticed this issue: “Sometimes we [the headquarters] give too much information and tools to the countries so that they face an information overload. We need to find the right balance” (Middle manager, field notes, 2013). This phase resulted in a resolution and adjustment phase when the organization realized that it needed to overcome these barriers as one participant indicated: “We need to overcome the ‘excuse’ and ‘blaming’ discussion and drive towards problem solving approaches” (Middle manager, field notes, 2013).

(5b) Resolution and Adjustment Phase

Compared to the previous phases, the resolution and adjustment phase was characterized by a stronger consensus about the strategy in the organization. In this vein, one informant emphasized:
“We had a kind of collaborative approach. They [the headquarters] recognized that experts are also working outside of the headquarters, and were trying to communicate with us about – us meaning the region and the countries – developing something together.” (3)

In this phase, the top management team was open for feedback and answered the questions of the change recipients about the change process. One narrative of a middle manager describes how the top management approached the change recipients all over the world: “You come up with town hall meetings where the country head addresses the change to the organization, make sure that the heads of marketing, sales and so forth are aligned in terms of how we communicate to the next level of managers. At the end of the day we open up to the employees so they can, at any time, go back and say, ‘Okay, I need to understand better. Why is it that we’re doing these things?’ We spend a lot of time on that now which I’m not sure we did in the past” (13).

Moreover, one manager from a country unit pointed out that the headquarters gave the project team in the country organization more flexibility in the change process. In this matter, he distinguished between internal and external procedures. According to this manager, internal procedures were rather standardized, whereas external procedures were handled by the local country organization. “We know what works in our country. We will fine-tune it accordingly. They [the headquarters] allow us to independently modify the change. They will also pick up some of the best practices from us and use it. It is not top-down always. But in the processes it might be, as with support functions where internal customers are involved. There you might have a standardized process. But for external customers, relationship management, the local marketing, and sales management, we have flexibility” (6). In a similar vein, a change agent highlighted that the interaction between the headquarters and his country unit was collaborative. “I don’t think that their [headquarters’] approach is top-down per se because we discuss the strategic guidance on a local level. We had lots of flexibility to point out the country situation and try to adapt on that. We have a global guidance and a framework […] this is something very important to us. We have flexibility to tailor and adjust some local and regional situations” (15).

Due to the feedback of the middle managers, the top management adjusted its change timeline in the end of 2012. The following statement of a middle manager sheds light on the scheduling of the change projects:
“In the beginning when it [change project] was rolled out, we were talking about a time limit of three to six months. Then, it was immediately changed to six to twelve months, coming out of the experience or from the first projects. Now, we’re talking about twelve to 24 months, even going to 36 months because if you look into the theory, they would normally say that it takes three to five years to implement and activate a customer segmentation, for example.” (3)

BCS recognized that change takes time, and, hence, *the firm extended the deadlines for the change projects*. One informant described this as follows: “I guess one of the things is that change really can’t be done in a short period of time. What you do is you set up a project to get this started, start the process, and get it to the point where you can transfer ownership of that ongoing change to the operational organization” (5). Another one put it this way: “Change in a company this size in a market this big is sometimes glacial. It takes time to do that. I sometimes have trouble with patience when it comes to the amount of time it takes to change something. So it’s happening, but it’s happening at a very slow pace” (2). Although the change happened at a slow pace, the company’s market share grew slightly that particular year. The former CEO said the following at BCS’ annual press conference: “BCS has a robust strategy in place and is geared for continued strong growth over the mid-term” (M2 Presswire, 2012). The middle managers reported that after the resolution and adjustment of the strategy the company gained short-term wins.

4.1.6 Gaining Short-Term Wins

The sixth general step – *gaining short-term wins* – captured the (6a) *strategy enhancement phase* and (6b) *the first success phase*. These phases are described hereafter.

*(6a) Strategy Enhancement Phase*

In December 2012, *a new CEO was appointed for BCS*. This caused ambiguity in the organization since employees were afraid that the strategy would change again. Yet, the new CEO did not change the strategy entirely. Rather, he modified the Commercial Excellence strategy by adding the “*Market Leadership Strategy*” and “*People
Strategy” to it. The Market Leadership Strategy aimed at being the global market leader in the crop protection business. For this, BCS identified 63 “must-win-battles” globally and derived “key enablers”.17 The People Strategy put emphasis on the development of the capabilities of the employees. This strategy had an impact on many departments and processes at BCS – from the recruiting process within human resources to employee training such as the extension of the cooperation with the University of St. Gallen. A middle manager described the People Strategy as follows:

“We’re now talking with the People Strategy of improving our competitive attitude, our customer orientation – and it makes a lot of sense. I think in our company we have a group of people who have a higher degree of competitive mindset and customer orientation and those are the people that deal almost daily with customers. So I think if we really want to force our people to increase their competitive attitude, we have to involve those people in other positions. In other words, we have to take those people to the headquarters.” (11)

As the quote above indicates, BCS rotated operational managers to the headquarters while repositioning some managers from the headquarters into country organizations. The reason for this was to enable the exchange of experience between the headquarters and the country organizations in terms of strategy and operations.

Also, in order to communicate the strategy enhancement to all employees, BCS developed a change pyramid (see Figure 14). On the top of the pyramid it put its vision “Science for a better life.” In the middle, it placed the Four Pillars (see chapter 4.1.1), the Market Leadership Strategy, and the People Strategy. The “LIFE” values formed the foundation of the pyramid: leadership, integrity, flexibility, and efficiency. The new CEO continuously repeated the strategy enhancement as one interviewee pointed out: “So repeating continuously what it is that we do as a company; where is it that we want to go, and what does that mean for the guys really in the field? He [the new CEO] took also the opportunity now to really go to these guys by town hall meetings.

17 The company defined “must-win-battles” as change targets with high priority, for instance, increasing sales in a specific market. To achieve the “must-win-battles,” the company used “key-enablers,” for instance, activating a customer segmentation.
Every time he is somewhere in the country he will always have a town hall meeting” (13).

Figure 14: Change Pyramid at BCS
Source: Own Illustration Based on Bayer AG (2015a) and Field Notes

(6b) First Success Phase

In 2013, most of the change projects accomplished first success. For instance, an end-customer segmentation project was very successfully implemented in BCS Brazil. On the other hand, however, because some change projects did not achieve the targeted change goals the company needed to better align these goals. For instance, BCS had to redefine the channel management project in China as the implementation team did not achieve improving the partnership with the retailers and distributors to better serve the end-customer.

Considering the variance in implementation experiences, change agents exchanged first experiences in their global change community. To this end, all change agents from the first two training cohorts met within an alumni-meeting in St. Gallen in December 2013. During this meeting the COO dedicated a day for talking to the change agents, and the CEO scheduled a video conference with them which also served for open feedback.
4.1.7 Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change

The last step in the change process – consolidating gains and producing more change – consists of a (7a) measurement phase and a (7b) replication phase.

(7a) Measurement Phase

In 2014, in order to measure the change success globally, the headquarters developed an internal survey called “NICE” (Navigated Improvement Commercial Excellence). For this, employees all over the world who were involved in the change process were asked to complete this survey. However, the employees did not immediately regard the survey approach positively. For instance, one change agent said: “I think it makes a lot of sense to measure what we do, and to try to track our developments. But I have the feeling that NICE is not perceived as the right approach by the country organizations. I think NICE is an approach which provides a kind of dashboard for the senior management here [at the headquarters] to have a better understanding [of] what goes on in the countries, but I’m not one hundred percent sure this is also perceived as a useful tool for the countries to implement commercial excellence” (11). The measurement helped BCS to demonstrate legitimacy for the change as the company could show the positive impact of the change strategy on various indicators, such as employee satisfaction or interdepartmental collaboration.

(7b) Replication Phase

After having measured the change impact in the pilot country organizations, BCS sought to replicate the success stories of the strategy change towards more end-customer orientation globally. One middle manager pointed out that the pilot phase was over: “Now, it’s all about making it happen with ruthless and sound implementation. We are kind of ‘shy’ in this regard and though instead of fully moving change, we go through pilots” (Middle manager, field notes, 2013). Since the pilot change projects helped some country organizations, such as Brazil and USA, to improve their relationships with the end-customers, other country organizations, that were not pilot organizations, also asked the headquarters for change management support. A manager summarized the essence of this phase by noting:

“We try to replicate best practices that we see in some countries by applying them to other countries.” (20)
In order to foster the exchange between all pilot countries, the company organized a large alumni event in March 2015 with more than 60 change agents from all over the globe. At this meeting, change agents shared success stories. In fact, the Head of Global Marketing highlighted, “Let us share success stories and best practices. We should celebrate the success and promote customer-centric behavior. For this, we need good leadership and role models” (22). Again, the CEO talked about the current achievements in the change process with the participants and thanked them via a video conference.

Overall, this chapter has addressed research goal 1. It discussed how middle managers who acted as change agents during the implementation of a new strategy towards a stronger end-customer orientation perceived the organizational process of the change process. To do so, this chapter described various phases that BCS encountered during its change journey. Figure 15 summarizes the study timeline and milestones of the change process at BCS. The figure depicts both milestones for the whole organization and exemplary milestones of an individual change agent during the observed period of 33 months from 2012 until 2015. From the first part of the analysis, I derive the first key finding of this thesis as follows.

**Key Finding 1:**

Middle managers perceive seven key organizational change process steps: (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) developing a vision and a strategy, (3) creating a guiding coalition, (4) communicating the vision, (5) coping with change conflict, (6) gaining short-term wins, and (7) consolidating gains and producing more change.
Middle Managers’ Usual Role Enactment

Entry into Organization

13 Months

Additional Role Enactment as Change Agent

Study Observation Period

33 Months

Organizational Milestones

May 2011
TMT at HQ decides to change the customer strategy with the four pillar strategy

Jun 2012
Marketing department defines pilots

Communication with pilot countries & heatmap analyses

Training development and roll out for all marketing functions worldwide

HQ assigns change agents

Sending project support from HQ and external consultants to countries

Understanding that change projects last longer than 3 months

HQ rolls out Market Leadership and People Strategy

Pilots succeed/fail

Other countries ask for help in order to change

HQ develops internal survey to measure the change success

Creating alumni community for change agents

Individual Change Agent Milestones

Enacting usual daily role

Facing a new role

Attending training programs

Change agents being afraid that strategy might change again

Experiencing first success/failure

Enjoying alumni events and exchanging with peers

Change Steps*

1. Forming Change Case
   - Building from Scratch
   - Concept & Analysis

2. Vision
   - Trainings
   - Diffusion

3. Selection
   - Catalyst & Confusion
   - Resolution & Adjustment

4. Control & Pushback
   - First Success
   - Replication

5. Enhancement

6. Measurement

*1=establishing a sense of urgency, 2=developing a vision and a strategy, 3=creating a guiding coalition, 4=communicating the vision, 5=coping with change conflict, 6=gaining short-term wins, 7=consolidating gains and producing more change.
4.2 Change Role Enactment of Middle Managers

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the organizational change process and organizational milestones for the change as well as the influence of these two aspects on middle managers who were responsible for implementing the change in the company; in this chapter, I now focus on the specific role enactment of these change agents from middle management. In this context, the first key insight was that all managers who participated in the study encountered challenges when their company assigned them the role as change agents on top of their daily tasks. The assignment created a major role overload for the managers.18

It is important to note that all middle managers had similar starting points for enacting their change role, and they attended the same training which was designed to support them in their role enactment. Also, middle managers reported facing similar challenges at the beginning of their change role enactment. However, they coped with these challenges differently and completed their role enactment with three different outcomes. Two of these outcomes – role expansion and role integration – refer to a successful change role enactment, that is, the implementation of the change project. In contrast, the third pathway – role resignation – refers to a failure in the change role enactment (see chapter 4.2 and 4.3 for more details).

To better understand the reasons for such differences, I analyzed the data by closely looking at the practices that middle managers used to implement the change. These practices were either directly mentioned by middle managers during the interviews or derived from my observations in the field (for all used data sources, see chapter 3.3). In this analysis, I found substantial variations among the enactment of a given set of practices which, in turn, may account for the different role outcomes. In particular, I discovered four key practices that influenced change agents’ role outcomes. These practices include: (1) engagement with change initiators, (2) change resilience, (3) sensemaking, and (4) learning change skills. Those middle managers who enacted these four practices strongly took the first pathway of “role expansion.” These managers were engaging with the change initiators (e.g., top managers), and they were motivated to learn how to enact their new role successfully. They also made sense of the change and were open to learn change skills. However, those middle managers

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18 A role overload describes situations in which managers face too many responsibilities or activities expected of them within their available time or their abilities (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970).
who did not engage strongly with the change initiators and were rather hesitant in developing themselves as change agents took either the second ("role integration") or third ("role resignation") pathways. Those managers who scored low on all four practices did not succeed in implementing the change successfully. They decided either to leave the organization or acted resignedly in their roles, feeling frustrated (cf. Petriglieri, 2015).

In the following, I discuss the role enactment of change agents in detail. I present evidence on how managers perceived the change environment, the change role assignment, their change role challenges, the three pathways for coping with these challenges, and how different practices – engagement with the change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking, and learning change skills – helped managers to overcome the challenges in the change process.

4.2.1 Change Environment

At the beginning of the change process, all interviewed middle managers had a similar perception of the change environment (see Figure 16). The managers perceived the change as top-driven so that the headquarters owned and guided the change. In fact, the top management team at the headquarters initially formulated the strategy. The strategy then was passed over to middle management, to the front-line employees, and eventually to the intermediate and end-customers. Many managers realized that such a top-down approach could have both advantages and disadvantages in order to implement the change, as one informant pointed out:

“Honestly, I think the headquarters went for a top-down approach. So, I think there was a lot of identification of gaps done and then after that followed basically mandated changes. I’m not saying that’s bad or good. It has its advantages and challenges, so please don’t equal top-down as bad. I don’t see it that way. But it has very distinct challenges to employ a top-down approach.” (1)

Since the change was top-driven, the country organizations were able to make only minor adjustments to the strategy. In line with this, a manager observed that every country tried to adapt the global strategy to its specific situation:
“The strategy I think is good, but the implementation is difficult, and sometimes the problem is that the people who are working at the headquarters are focusing on big countries. So trying to implement the same strategy in the big country to the medium or little size is hard. So we have to adapt the strategy.” (21)

In line with the quote above, many middle managers reported that each country organization is different. Hence, it was a big challenge to adapt the global strategy – which was formulated at the headquarters – to the local context. A manager put this as follows: “In an organization like ours with 80 country organizations split across the world you tend to be quickly in stereotypes and that is not correct in terms of who is the customer, grower or distributor, you can have the stereotype to say this organization has been so far away from the customer, you will always find countries where this is not the case.” (10)
First-Order Concepts | Second-Order Themes | Aggregated Dimensions
--- | --- | ---
Middle managers feel that headquarters guide the change. Middle managers say that country organizations only do minor adjustments. | (A) Top-driven change | Change environment
Middle managers say that each country organization is different. Middle managers note that each country market is different. | (B) Characteristics of a multinational company | |
Middle managers talk about themselves as being the implementers of the new strategy. Middle managers would like to move the organization towards a stronger end-customer orientation. | (C) Change role content | |
Middle managers are being assigned with change agent roles. Middle managers say that organization expects them to enact the change role on top of their usual roles. | (D) Top-driven role expectations | |
Middle managers would like to see more involvement of top managers in the change process. Middle managers talk about an unclear vision of the end state. | (E) Lack of leadership | Challenges in change role
Middle managers feel that change takes much time. Middle managers find it hard to balance short term and long term goals in the change. | (F) Time dynamics of change | |
Middle managers think that they lack change skills. Middle managers think that they lack change resources. | (G) Lack of change capabilities | |
Moreover, *many informants mentioned the multinational setting of the company as a challenge*. According to the informants, every market seemed to be different in terms of the distribution structure. For instance, some countries dealt with five distributors, whereas others dealt with a tremendously larger number. Additionally, the structure of the end-customer base varied greatly. Some country organizations mainly served a few key accounts which are called “mega-farms,” whereas other country organizations faced a high amount of end-customers and a highly fragmented customer base. A manager described this multinational context by pointing out certain market differences: “The market here is very fragmented. We have [number] million farmers here. And also the characteristics or the structure of the market [in country] is [pauses] we have many, many, many crops. For example, in [country] they have mainly wheat, some fruit, potatoes, sugar beet and that’s it. But here we have everything. We have, for example, vegetables, such as tomatoes, lettuce, and pepper” (21).

In conclusion, middle managers mentioned two important factors in the change environment. First, they felt that the headquarters guided the change (*top-driven change*) and that the country organizations were allowed to make only minor adjustments to the *rather standardized strategy*. Second, based on this, they noted challenges that are due to the fact that each country organization and each market structure is unique (*characteristics of multinational company*). Table 11 presents examples of quotes for the second-order themes of the aggregated dimension “change environment” (see chapter 3.4 for the explanation of the data structure).

**Table 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A) Top-driven change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers feel that headquarters guides the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This [the change] was clearly top-down. I mean again, you always need to be careful in an organization like ours with 80 country organizations split across the world. […] So, but let’s say to give it a global push, we say we want to have commercial excellence and globally give certain guidance how it should be handled. Globally do the assessment of how we perform, that has been a global push – top-down, definitely.” (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This strategy is key for changing the direction of the company which comes from the headquarters. A clear mission that we need to move resources to change the functions of some people. To say: ‘This is the way to do it’.” (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Middle managers say that countries only do minor adjustments

“We know what works in [country]. We will fine-tune the strategy accordingly. They [the headquarters] allow us to independently modify the transformations in [country].” (6)

“I think bottom-up happens only if you see that the strategy does not work at all. Normally, you just adjust the strategy if necessary.” (14)

“I think that we had flexibility to point out the country situation, the regional situation and try to adapt on that.” (15)

(B) Characteristics of a multinational company

Middle managers say that each country organization is different

“Well, the challenge is always to take something global and make it fit in a regional country. By nature, global interests are slightly different than a country [’s] interests. By nature, global frameworks are more aggregated and more general and may contain aspects that are irrelevant to a certain country. So taking a global framework and adapting it to a local need is a real challenge.” (1)

“I mean, this is a global industry but actually we have a large diversity of business models and market structures across the countries. If you take any given crop in different countries, that crop probably has different technical issues, different diseases, different pests. And even the same pest or disease is treated differently.” (11)

Middle managers claim that each country market is different

“Well, just the farming community looks very different in different countries. If you go to [country], you really have […] just a very small number of agro-holdings, whereas they have the largest farm corporations in the world driving the ad market. If you move a little further east and you go to [country] you have [number] million farmers. So along the infrastructure which is coming out of the history of the country has a direct impact how close you can be to the customer. You cannot be close to [number] million farmers.” (1)

(Some countries tell us that their market is tremendously different than the other markets and so they claim that the change strategy will not suit their situation. We have various country reactions to the change strategy.” (19)

Table 11: Representative Data for Change Environment

Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis
4.2.2 Change Role Assignment

The dimension change role assignment consists of the second-order themes “change role content” and the “top-driven role expectations” towards the middle managers (see Figure 16). Most study participants interpreted their role in the change process similarly. They described themselves as being the “implementers” of the change. A middle manager elaborated on the additional role assignment as follows: “As translators, sometimes we are just there to filter the strategy to the countries. And it helps if you just hear the same message again just from another angle” (13).

With respect to the strategic content of their role, middle managers pointed out that their main task was to move the company to a stronger end-customer orientation. Until 2010, the company was primarily retailer-oriented. However, in order to gain a competitive advantage, it decided to shift its strategic focus towards the end-customer (see description in chapter 4.1). Middle managers now referred to the end-customer, the grower, as the new customer in this context (cf. Homburg et al., 2014). They perceived themselves as advocates of this strategic change. A manager from the headquarters described this as follows: “We need to become a market and customer-oriented organization. When we started this journey, we were a R&D company. We invented something, put it out there, and hoped that someone would buy it.” (19) Another manager noted: “We have had a tendency, historically, of being very lab-driven, so we would produce molecules that did certain things, and then we would go out and try to find a market for those things. We’re trying to shift the orientation, [so] that we look for the gaps or white spaces and do that by interviewing and getting really in-depth information on and knowledge from farmers so that then we can communicate back through the organization, back to R&D, so these are the real gaps and what the farmer struggles with on a daily basis and how do we address this?” (3).

Further, a manager explained that the company has not reached the level of customer orientation that he wished: “We still are very much a lab-driven company. When they come up with some active ingredient, even if it does exactly what something else does in the marketplace, they want to commercialize and push that which is not […] very customer-centric in my view” (2).

Another issue raised by middle managers was the top-driven role assignment and the expectations top managers had of the change agents in implementing the change. The participants of the study clearly pointed out that they were designated by the headquarters to be change agents and that their main task was to spread the strategy in the organization. With this, they took on a double role. On the one hand, they still
worked in their usual job position, such as a customer manager; on the other hand, they started to enact their additional role as change agents. The following narrative shows how a middle manager perceived the additional role assignment.

“I was nominated as a transformation lead [change agent]. In parallel, I had my role of Customer Strategy Manager at that time. My daily tasks were also building the customer strategy, setting up CRM, to design better ways to interact with customers. I had this additional responsibility as a transformation lead. My task was to get the organization on board and build a new momentum of belief that we make the [end-] customer as starting point for our decisions. I had two duties at that time.” (15)

Summing up, first, the middle managers called themselves “the implementers of the change,” and they interpreted their role content as moving the company towards a stronger end-customer orientation. Second, they were confronted with top-driven role expectations as the role assignment came from the headquarters, which expected these middle managers to take over additional tasks on top of their usual responsibilities. Table 12 shows representative data for the second-order themes about the aggregated dimension of “change role assignment.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(C) Change role content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers talk about themselves as being implementers of the new strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I was implementing transformations and was in charge of building the countries to implement the commercial activities on the long-term, segmentation, and CRM.” (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We need to translate from global to local and then try to find out how can we fit the change strategy in in a concrete way that we can grow on a local level but also be part of the global strategy.” (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers would like to move the organization to a stronger end-customer orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think there has been a shift at BCS and the definition of a customer has changed somewhat. We very staunchly defined customers who we sold our products and services to directly, meaning for example the distributors of crop protection products. I think especially over the last two or three years, that has really shifted to the end-user of our product which is the farmer.” (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(D) Top-driven role expectations

Middle managers are being assigned with change agent roles

“[describes how change started] I was put on that [change team] when we first started discussing it and led the transformation on [change project name]. I was also heavily involved in the [project name] as well.” (3)

“The choice of the change agents was made by the head office.” (retrieved from document analysis: Schögel et al., 2014)

Middle managers say that organization expects them to enact the change role on top of their usual roles

“Really, in my official role, it is to understand customer needs, to understand their behavior and to translate that into insights, to help build better strategies and tactics. I also work with an other team, which is a culture change group in the [country], and I am in charge with customer centricity on that team as well, which is more around the cultural beat.” (5)

“And then the countries were rated and somebody had to coordinate the activities. My supervisor assigned this change project on top of my daily tasks. That was really tiring.” (14)

Table 12: Representative Data for Change Role Assignment

Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis

4.2.3 Challenges in Change Role

The majority of study participants reported that they perceived challenges when they started to enact the change role to which they were assigned by the top management team. In this connection I explored three general (second-order) themes: (1) lack of leadership, (2) time dynamics of change, and (3) lack of change capabilities.

First, in terms of lack of leadership, the middle managers wanted the top management to be more active in the change. They indicated that the top managers should show greater efforts and should be more involved in the change process. One interviewee explained this as follows: “One thing I would love to see, and we have seen it a little bit but I would love to see it more, is to have senior management in the company that really walks the talk.19 So when we start talking about customer orientation I would love to see the guys [senior managers] out there.” Further, the interviewee added: “It’s not just a management exercise. It’s really where you have to engage with the colleagues, those guys in the field that really have to do these things at the end of the

19 “Walking the talk” means that top managers should act as role models for middle managers.
day” (13). Another participant emphasized that the top managers should be honest about the change. He said: “Sometimes, the leaders do not like to talk about threats. Then, employees receive less information about the change and, thus, they might be confused” (19).

Further, middle managers did not see a clear vision of the end state of the change process at first. When taking over the change assignment, they did not clearly understand how the company defined the “change success.” One manager made a comment about this by pointing out the following: “I see unclear expectations of what success looks like. What is the clear picture of the end state?” (5). Another manager added: “We need a clear strategy where we are going. This means to have a clear target in order to know what we would like to achieve. Also, I would expect the top management to be open and show appreciation if we are walking in the right direction or not” (12). Moreover, one informant noted: “The only way to make a behavioral transformation happen properly is to give everyone clarity of how the success looks like. Otherwise, everyone will be continuing investing time in mechanical actions that will not bring any results for the business” (20). Change agents also felt that top managers did not show concrete steps after they assigned the middle managers with the change role. Another change agent pointed out the lack of an end goal and added that he was confused when he received different messages from the top management team. He elaborated on this as follows:

“I see multiple messaging, lack of consistency and ad-hoc activity that distracts and partially undermines the effort of creating a vision.” (17)

A second theme regarding role challenges refers to the time dynamics of change. All middle managers reported that they faced time issues in the change process and that they were not able to balance between giving their employees enough time for the change and keeping the momentum and speed for the change. The following metaphor illustrates this phenomenon:

“We built a spaceship and tried to fly to the moon tomorrow, whereas people lied on the beach and watched the sea.” (20)
Another informant also adds to this when he reports that he had a hard time balancing the amount of time people need to adapt to the change and the time to sustain momentum. He said: “We go into an evolution and really do it stepwise avoiding running too fast so that the people can still walk. Of course it takes time and this is the biggest issue. The question is how much time do you have to shift something?” (18).

As the change process took a relatively long time, one manager explained: “That [the change] is not a one-time event; that is a process. And that process takes personal involvement, hand-holding, and re-confirmation of the change” (1). The fact that in the beginning the headquarters only scheduled three months for the change projects made the change agents anxious. They felt that this goal was not realistic, since they wanted the change to “stick” in the organization’s culture. In their view, a successful change was one “that goes beyond a simple project and, after it has been conducted, sticks to the organization and the people becoming part of the organizational DNA” (8). Accordingly, another interviewee pointed out how long it took to implement the change strategies in the markets:

“We have to clearly admit that the transformations we started are not finished yet in all country organization although they have been worked on for two years now. But this is how it is. Change takes time to happen in organizations. For instance, a customer segmentation that you derive does not mean that the change is completed. As long as you do not activate the segmentation, you will not be able to gain the advantages out of it.” (12)

In addition to the strict time limitation given by the headquarters, middle managers were confronted with balancing short-term and long-term goals. One change agent explained this as follows: “Ultimately, when you look long-term versus short-term sometimes that’s where the friction is between the retail and the grower orientation” (5). With this, the agent indicated that thinking short-term meant to improve the relationships with the retailers in order to increase the direct sales. However, from a long-term perspective, it was also important to strengthen the relationships with the growers. A further participant said: “It is balancing the short-term focus on reaching budget and also having the long-term perspective of how to then develop the business further” (13). These quotes show that the managers were challenged by the tension between achieving operational short-term goals, for instance, increasing sales, versus
fulfilling long-term goals, for instance, creating value for the end-customers. One manager explained this apparent contradiction as follows:

“It depends very much on whether you are short-term or long-term focused. **In a long-term customer satisfaction is a powerful way to achieve your company targets, but if you become short-term oriented you lose this dimension.** And I think this is a big threat we have in this company. If you work in a sales organization, you have to achieve monthly targets, quarterly targets, which of course are important for shareholders, for the company. But the way you filter and moderate this communication at [the] operational level makes the difference on the mindset that you foster.” (11)

The third general theme in terms of role challenges relates to the **lack of change capabilities.** Here, two first-order concepts emerged within this second-order theme (see Figure 16): lack of change skills and lack of change resources. First, middle managers pointed out that both they themselves and their change recipients lacked relevant change skills. In terms of the change recipients, one middle manager said that “their biggest challenge in the transformation is the varying skill sets and varying motivations to change” (5). This factor implied that the organization needed to enhance the skill sets of the organizational members in order to drive the change. In terms of the change agents themselves, another middle manager described his personal challenge about lacking change skills as follows:

“My personal challenge would be more in terms of leadership and change management skills which we learned throughout the program at St. Gallen, but also learning by doing. Another challenge was that our countries in […], they usually **don’t have the required skills and competencies** for most of the transformations.” (3)

Second, in addition to the lack of change skills, the change agents complained about **scarce change resources.** They needed to make decisions about which issues to prioritize: “You cannot serve all. Resources are scarce. You cannot have all you want. You have to choose with your budget and resources how to prioritize. You need
efficiency in your work” (4). At the beginning of the training at the University of St. Gallen, the lack of resources was one of the main discussion topics in the classroom. The managers faced an initiative overload when the headquarters assigned them to be change agents since they faced a double role, as the following statement shows. “I don't think this is resourced appropriately. There is a great deal of work that goes into making these initiatives successful, and time and resources need to be dedicated. This cannot be done well while holding a daily job” (9). As a result of the work overload the change agents were confused about which were the key priorities. “The organization needs to ensure the adequate level of resources as well as show us full alignment about the key priorities” (18). An informant illustrated the resourcing as follows:

“We need to start putting our money where our mouth is. By this I mean it’s still difficult for some management members to decide on new resources or shift of existing ones from, let’s say, sales into marketing.”

(5)

Summing up, middle managers perceived very similar change challenges during their change role enactment. Lacking leadership practices, not knowing how to manage the time dynamics of change, and lacking change capabilities were the most common challenges. Table 13 shows representative quotes for the aggregated dimension “challenges in the change role.”
### (E) Lack of leadership

| Middle managers would like to see more involvement of top managers in the change process | “Senior management needs to be not only sponsoring the project, but they need to understand the piece. If they are too critical of the project, the business will never take ownership. They have to balance and continually engage and challenge the business, the individual department heads and functions to say ‘you’re going to take this over.’” (5)  
“In most of the cases where we still look too much in the site where the roles responsibilities are not clear enough to understand why and how we are doing things or when we continue with a certain silo approach deciding which department should or shouldn’t be running the show.” (8)  
“Executive management visibility in supporting initiatives could be much better.” (11)  
“We do not receive enough support from country management […] not clear country targets for the change.” (17) |

| Middle managers talk about an unclear vision of the end state | “The first thing that should be in the page of any employee in BCS should be why we get up in the morning every day. This is not clearly answered, and we are strongly delivering what should be done but not why it should be done.” (6)  
“We need more coordination around understanding the ‘bigger picture’ of what a successful future looks like.” (11)  
“The transformations cannot be the methodology for continuous improvement. How can we proceed after the first wave of transformations?” (12)  
“Sometimes we do not have a common vision since information lacks. People think that the vision is obvious, but it is not. There can be a mismatch of perception between top and middle management.” (20) |

### (F) Time dynamics of change

| Middle managers feel that change takes much time | “I think that was a journey in the company, this is not something you just do over three months. This is something you have to work on continuously over a period of time to really make it stick in the organization.” (5)  
“Change is a journey and all of us should be responsible for it.” (8)  
“We need time and the understanding of it [the change project] as a journey and we need the willingness to work continuously on it.” (10)  
“You need to accept the period of time people need for the change.” (18) |
Middle managers find it hard to balance short-term and long-term goals in the change

“We built the plane on the flight. A better preparation and alignment of all forces would have been, of course, optimal. But this is something, which you will never achieve in business life, because then you are not up to speed, you are too late. We’re not looking for this perfection thing. We’re looking for something which can be done quickly, which can generate results.” (3)

“I am struggling with balancing the day to day running of the team with the need to look longer term at what will be required in the future.” (4)

“If you’re honest to yourself you must have a short-term detailed plan and a long-term plan, and it takes a lot of discipline to sequence all changes, and keep on changing a long time, and it will pay off. Okay, sometimes you have quick wins and you have to look for quick wins, but you cannot embark in transformation for quick wins. And in some countries that happened.” (11)

(G) Lack of change capabilities

Middle managers think that they lack change skills

“A challenge was that the countries in our region usually don’t have the required skills and competencies for most of the change projects.” (3)

“We have started the journey to build that level of competencies, but still you will see that we have a lot of agronomists that have a very good understanding of all the technical things but that does not necessarily then go into the area of deep understanding of how to really drive your marketing and sales forward.” (5)

“We are conducting many changes at a time, pricing, customer centricity and channel management, CRM partners, seeds integration, organizational health, etc., and in some cases we have been facing some difficulties to set priorities.” (7)

“My biggest challenge is probably the lack of knowledge and understanding on all levels of the organization.” (17)

“You don’t have any experience in doing this. You go into a situation that is new and that you cannot understand.” (20)

Middle managers think that they lack change resources

“The resourcing of the change project is an issue – we are facing an initiative overload.” (2)

“I am lacking resources. We’re trying to do our best within limited resources. However, to be the market leader, we need to invest in resources.” (8)

“I have time and resource constraints due to another two main projects that are also under my responsibility.” (15)

Table 13: Representative Data for Challenges in Change Role

Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis
4.2.4 Three Pathways to Resolving Challenges in the Change Role

Although middle managers may have worked in the same unit and may have had similar work environments, they usually differed in their role enactment and, particularly, in how they resolved the challenges in their role as change agents, challenges which were discussed in the previous section. Specifically, in the analysis of the data, I found three different types of pathways that middle managers used to address the challenges. These three pathways are: (1) role expansion, (2) role integration, and (3) role resignation. The first two pathways led to a successful enactment of the change role, while the third led to an unsuccessful enactment. In this context, I define the successful enactment of the change role as the effective completion of the change projects by the managers.

To determine and to assess the outcomes of these three pathways in detail, I first used indicators from the role performance literature. First, Griffin, Neal, & Parker (2007) capture the individual role performance as task proficiency. In this sense, role performance reflects the degree to which managers meet the known expectations and requirements of their roles (Griffin et al., 2007). Applied to the context of change agents, task proficiency, for example, means to enact the change role effectively in order to realize a sound change implementation. Second, scholars use the rate of upward movement of an employee in the organizational hierarchy as a measure of role performance, because employees who are assessed by their companies to have superior capabilities are promoted faster (cf. Wise, 1975). In fact, scholars have shown that the evaluation of current job performance often plays a crucial role in an organization’s evaluation of an individual’s likeliness to be promoted to a higher position (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Stumpf & London, 1981). Within this thesis, I use staying at the company after the change process as an indicator of successful change outcome, whereas leaving the company can be related to an unsuccessful outcome.

Based on the argumentation above, I assessed the “role performance” of each change agent in the sample. This assessment consisted of the following role performance indicators:

20 In this context, a typology “unites the objects to types that are similar to each other regarding specific dimensions” (Büschges, 1989, p. 249).
21 Role performance is closely related to the concepts “task performance” (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Johnson, 2003) and “job role behavior” (Welbourne, Johnson, & Erez, 1998).
1. Objective indicator for individual change role performance (based on interview with the human resources manager):
   a. Resigning from change role/leaving company (indicates a low performance)
   b. Staying in current job position (indicates a medium performance)
   c. Being promoted to a higher job position (indicates a high performance)

2. Self-rated job performance in the change process on a scale from 0-10 (0=very low; 10=very high; based on interviews with informants)

3. Self-rated change project performance in own unit on a scale from 0-10 (0=very low; 10=very high; based on interviews with informants)

4. Self-rated overall change implementation success (based on surveys with informants)

The first indicator was delivered by the human resources manager at the headquarters who had an overview of all career paths of the participants. The second and third indicators were tackled in the middle management interviews. The fourth indicator was taken from a quantitative survey with middle managers. The combination of objective and subjective indicators was aimed so as to triangulate the data.

In general, those middle managers who followed the first (role expansion) or second pathway (role integration) continued to work for the company after the change process was implemented. However, middle managers who followed the third pathway (role resignation) either left the company or gave up enacting their change role before the change process was finished. Of the 21 middle managers interviewed, four expanded their role, twelve integrated their roles, and five resigned from their roles. These three pathways are presented hereafter.

Pathway to role expansion

The first pathway is called “role expansion” (n=4). The change agents engaged in a role expansion if they used the additional change role as an opportunity to advance their careers by securing promotion. These middle managers outperformed their peers in the success of their role enactment and the implementation of the change process. Precisely why, then, did these managers perform better in their role enactment than their peers although they had similar preconditions and challenges at the beginning of the change process?
Overall, these middle managers showed strong practices of engagement with change initiators, practices for strong change resilience, strong sensemaking practices, and strong practices in learning change skills and achieving role expansion outcomes (see Figure 17). First, individuals who took this pathway had a *good and open relationship with both their top managers and the headquarters*. They said that they were supported by both parties. In the interview, one manager pointed out the following: “We [the change agents] have huge communication flows. We do not have a strict hierarchy here in [country]. We see the top management very often and easily. They are engaged to run the transformations, [...] the top management relation goes very well” (9). The manager further elaborated on the relationship with the headquarters: “The communication with headquarters was very easy. We have a personal contact: the time we spent in St. Gallen or in the projects [...] we built a personal relationship. Every single new project the headquarters had to launch they used us as a pilot country. We could establish a very nice communication flow, even with the top management at the headquarters” (9).
**First-Order Concepts**

- Having a good and open relationship with top managers.
- Having a good and open relationship with headquarters.
- Being able to deal with work overload.
- Being able to deal with organizational politics.
- Talking about “why” one enacts the role.
- Convincing employees to change.
- Having strong relationships with end customers.
- Learning a variety of change skills.
- Learning change skills in the first part of the training.
- Performing change role very successfully.
- Being promoted to a higher job position after change.

**Second-Order Themes**

- **(H)** Strong practices in engaging with change initiators
- **(I)** Practices for a strong change resilience
- **(J)** Strong sensemaking practices
- **(K)** Strong practices in learning change skills
- **(L)** Role expansion as outcome

**Aggregated Dimension**

Pathway to role expansion

Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis
Second, the data analysis suggests that these middle managers resolved their role challenges in the change process by developing strong change resilience (Luthans, 2002). In this context, scholars suggest that resilience predicts an employee’s ability to deal with change (e.g., Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). That is, resilient managers are open to participating in an organizational change process because they can cope well with related change stress (Oreg, 2003). Individuals in the pathway “role expansion” learned to be patient and started to think sustainably in order to enact their change role. The data analysis reveals that change resilience consists of two main components: “being able to deal with work overload” and “being able to deal with organizational politics” (see Figure 17). A manager with strong change resilience argued that it was rather normal to be overwhelmed when the additional role as a change agent was assigned to him. “Yes, [pause] I have to confess that – and it normally happens in all projects that involve lots of people – at the beginning I was a bit overloaded. But I consider this as quite normal. You have some periods that you will be overloaded if you take the challenge in addition to your daily responsibilities. So, I feel good and happy. From my point of view, I was given a unique opportunity to learn about a topic that was within my responsibility” (15). Further, the majority of the managers in this pathway knew how to deal with organizational politics:

“I’ve had great support from the marketing team in the region, but it was a lonely journey when there were political discussions and differences, until we had 87% of the understanding and having the figures demonstrating we were right, it helped to have proof. It was painful, but in the end the figures demonstrated [that] we were in the right direction.” (8)

Third, change agents of the role expansion pathway engaged in strong sensemaking practices. In this context, sensemaking is the process through which organizational members collect and construct meanings about organizational events which are unusual, surprising, or confusing (Cornelissen, 2012; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The data analysis reveals that role expanders talked about “why” they enacted their role, convinced employees by showing the sense of the change, and talked to end-customers to actually see the impact of the change in the field.
Furthermore, managers in this pathway were proud to work for BCS. One manager, for instance, pointed out: “I have a kind of sense of proud to work for Bayer. When I joined Bayer four years ago, we mentioned the word [competitor’s name] more than Bayer. People were always saying [competitor’s name] is doing that [competitor’s name] is doing this. In the last years it has changed a lot. We have a leader behavior. What the hell [competitor’s name]? Let’s do what we need to do. These are the two main attitudes we need to keep fostering in the organization: to be proud working at Bayer and to not give up” (9).

Not only did middle managers in this pathway believe in the new strategic alignment of the company, they also established an overall vision that guided them throughout the change process. For these middle managers, the focus was not only business growth by satisfying the end-customers. Rather, they explained why they took the “burden” of the additional workload. For instance, a change agent said the following in an interview:

“I actually contribute to creating a better life for many people. It’s not just a matter of getting some food into the mouth, it’s the quality of that food, and it’s the security of the supply.” (13)

They created a sense for the change and conveyed this sense to the change recipients in order to help them to make sense of it as well. They were able to inspire the employees and show them why they should change. These managers talked about showing the “what’s in it for me” factor to employees. As such, one informant indicated: “It is important to show to all colleagues how the strategy has changed. Otherwise, they will not understand and they will not aim at being the market leader” (15). Compared to the change agents in the other two pathways, role expanders were more successful in convincing their internal change audience about the change. One of them, when he talked about convincing his peers, argued that it was their job to create the vision:

“We need to create our own vision for our country unit. Martin Luther King did not say ‘I have a plan’, he said ‘I have a dream’.” (8)
Moreover, the data analysis suggests that *talking to the end-customers helped the managers to strengthen their sense for their work* within the change process. One informant described his interaction with the end-customers as follows: “We have events such as grower conventions where we meet the biggest growers. Second, we have partnerships with newspapers where we talk about growers and economics. Third, we organize regional forums. Here, we invite some growers to discuss about their relationship with Bayer. We use these kinds of events to establish a personal contact, to exchange cards. After that we start the more personal relationship. We established a platform with google alert configured. Every time we see news about our customer, we contact the customer and congratulate him” (9). Even though they were located higher in the organizational hierarchy than front-line employees, middle managers in this pathway dedicated some time in their agendas to interacting with the end-customers. This is in line with recent research suggesting that *mid-level managers should engage more often with the company’s (end-) customers* in order to see the business impact, and that positive feedback from customers can motivate and energize managers (Burkus, 2015; Kipfelsberger, Bruch, & Herhausen, 2015).

Fourth, middle managers who expanded their roles showed *strong practices to learn change skills*. These managers perceived the change training as an opportunity for their self-development, and had positive attitudes towards acquiring new skills. During my participant observations, I found evidence that middle managers who followed this pathway were more open in the training than change agents in the other two pathways (role integration and role resignation). The role expanders tried to engage in the training from the very beginning. Specifically, while all middle managers actually received the same training experience, *they used this experience differently and they were differently motivated to learn change skills*. For instance, while all middle managers learned how (1) to communicate and how (2) to use technical skills, role expanders also learned the six additional skills on how (3) to integrate socially, (4) to be authentic, (5) to be critical, (6) to be open about new content, (7) to lead, and (8) to be confident. By the end of the training program, middle managers who expanded their role showed higher levels on all these skills than the other two types. Also, they learned these skills more rapidly than the others. Table 14 shows a vignette\(^2\) about how an exemplary individual in the pathway “role expansion” engaged in strong learning practices.

\(^2\) Writing a vignette is a method to illustrate qualitative data. For more details see Miles (1990).
To summarize, although the additional role as change agents caused role overload and severe challenges for role expanders, they used this new role as an opportunity to advance in their careers. As a result, they were more motivated and successful in implementing the change projects in their units. Middle managers on this pathway engaged with the change initiators, established change resilience, used a sensemaking approach, and were willing and able to learn change skills. Table 14 illustrates exemplary data for the aggregated dimension “pathway to role expansion” and its first-order concepts (strong practices to engage with change initiators, practices for a strong change resilience, strong sensemaking practices, strong practices to learn change skills, role expansion as outcome).

(H) Strong practices in engaging with change initiators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Having a good and open relationship with top managers</th>
<th>“Our CEO is the example of a manager who is ‘walking the talk’. He was here the other day. We had this meeting down there. What is he doing? He is not standing up there on the podium, he stands down there on the floor together with the colleagues and then he is just saying, ‘Please guys, if there’s any feedback you want to give me, throw in.’ And then slowly people started to learn. The first guy said something and then the next guy came in, good things, bad things, and he [the CEO] was saying, ‘Thank you very much. Thank you for giving me this feedback.’ This is the way to do it. And that also gives these guys confidence that it actually makes a difference if you open your mouth or not, if you have something to say. So I feel that we have quite a good feedback culture coming now.” (13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a good and open relationship with headquarters</td>
<td>“I had good support from the global guys. In fact, I am much more focused to three to four global colleagues. Whenever I need their support, they are available. They don’t block us; they are not there to tell us what to do. They support us. My perception is that they have a positive approach.” (15)</td>
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</table>

(I) Practices for a strong change resilience

| Being able to deal with work overload | “Sequencing is so important when we work with the countries. We say, ‘Okay, now let’s look at this and we go here.’ This is what we help the countries do. Then we start linking it to a governance structure and say, ‘Okay, if this is where we want to go, who is then the responsible person?’ Then we use that as a guiding tool and say, ‘If this is what we want and you put this guy on that, how is he going to manage?’ Then you would need more resources and we reflect on that. Either we bring in a consultant to support or we need to apply for a new FTE.” (13) |
Being able to deal with organizational politics

“Obviously, from my perspective, stop with the political games [laughs]. I still see some colleagues saying: ‘You know guys, people in the headquarters don’t want to solve the problem, they don’t think in our needs’. So just tell the global [colleagues] what you expect from them – and also the other way round. The guys in the headquarters tell that the guys in the region want to change many things. Talk to each other and make the things crystal clear in order to build trustful relationships. Why are we thinking and acting in this more political way? Stop that!” (15)

(J) Strong sensemaking practices

**Talking about “why” one enacts the role**

“My motivation and the reason I chose agriculture is to feed the world. If not I would have probably stayed at home on my family farm, but being in a corporation agriculture as a way of life gives me the motivation to live in a world without hunger and with good quality of food. So this is what wakes me up every morning.” (8)

“What motivates me is when I get an increase in satisfaction. It’s almost like these ‘aha moments’ for our customers or even for our organization.” (9)

“We explain how and what we do. We don’t tell why we do it.” (13)

**Convincing employees to change**

“Some people change when they see the fire, some change when they feel the heat.” (8)

“I would like to pass it [the new strategy] to the broader audience out of the small group to create excitement around the new way of doing business.” (8) “It was not taken as a given that when something was rolled out from the headquarters people just said, ‘Aye, aye, sir,’ and then off we go without really asking the question, ‘But what does that mean for me?’ First of all, there was an increasing awareness on the value of this.” (13)

**Having strong relationships with end-customers**

“You should not underestimate the power of an organization that really goes in the same direction at the same time, because the customers will eventually notice.” (13)

Answer to the interview question: “How often do you interact with growers? Please rate the frequency of your interaction from 0-10.” (0=none; 10=very high; individuals in this group show high grower interaction ratings)
(K) Strong practices in learning change skills

Learning a variety of change skills

“When William was informed that he was selected as a change agent in the organization he felt excited. Especially the opportunity to improve his change skills in the training in St. Gallen pleased him. He enjoyed the training program a lot and was one of the first ones to engage in the discussions so that he learned to be critical in his change role. Also, he learned to be authentic and to be resilient in the change rapidly. He participated actively in the poster sessions when he presented his change project. Further, he liked the work-life balance workshop a lot as he learned how to work on his own resilience. For William, engaging with customers was very important. Although as a middle manager he often worked at the office, he created some spare time to visit the customers. He emphasized this many times in the training and tried to learn how to better engage with the customers (e.g., by using different touchpoints). In leadership classes he was open to learn how to be an authentic leader and to gain confidence. Compared to the majority of the group, William was actively trying to learn as much as possible how to be an effective change agent. He was the one who encouraged the other participants to believe in the change and shared his knowledge. He emphasized the importance to learn to ‘play the [political] game’ in the multinational company.’’

(Vignette derived from participant observations)

(L) Role expansion as outcome

Performing change role very successfully

1. Objective measure: promotion to a higher job position
2. “Please rate your own job performance compared to your peers on a scale from 0-10.”
3. “Do you think the transformations in your country have an impact on customer satisfaction and business performance? Please rate the impact on a scale from 0-10.”
4. Answers in quantitative survey about change implementation success

These four indicators were taken into account to justify a role expansion.

(based on objective data, quantitative ratings in interviews and surveys, 0=very low; 10=very high)

Table 14: Representative Data for Pathway to Role Expansion

Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis
Pathway to role integration

The majority of the change agents showed a medium level of role performance as their role outcome (n=12). These managers are “role integrators.” In line with Meleis, Norbeck, & Laffrey (1989), I define role integration as the predominantly successful enactment of both the daily role and the temporary role as a change agent; however, the role performance was less successful than those of role expanders. As such, role integrators did not outperform their peers in their change role as much as role expanders. Rather, they learned to integrate the change role into their daily business over time. These managers had average practices in engaging with change initiators, practices for an unfolding change resilience, average sensemaking practices, average practices in learning change skills, and role integration as outcome (see Figure 18).

First, middle managers who were categorized as belonging to the pathway type “role integration” showed an average level of engagement with the change initiators. For instance, their exchanges with top managers in their unit were rather moderate, as one middle manager highlighted: “I don’t give feedback to top management all the time. But sometimes whenever I feel like giving a feedback, we have some interaction” (6). However, most role integrators struggled to build a relationship with the headquarters. An issue about the relationship was that – according to the role integrators – the headquarters “over-engineered” the strategy implementation process. A middle manager illustrated this as follows: “Do not make things too complicated! The headquarters want to explain all the methodology and processes, but the country only needs the tools for the transformation. That’s it” (16). Further, some individuals in this pathway were skeptical about their low empowerment by the headquarters. For instance, some of them claimed that although they formally received the title of a change agent, they faced barriers to enacting the actual change role attached to this title due to the attitude of the headquarters. An interviewee explained this as follows:

“We were discussing, like ‘you have the title, you are in charge, you are the change agent, [...] but in the end the power is in the head office. If the head office understands the strategy and collaborates with you, the situation is okay. But if not, they say ‘yes’ in public but in the end they say, ‘Ah, be careful on that.’ So, are we only sometimes change agents? Who is actually the change agent? Is it the title, or is to have the power to really head the company in that direction? This is another question [sighs].” (21)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Order Concepts</th>
<th>Second-Order Themes</th>
<th>Aggregated Dimension</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having an average relationship with top managers.</td>
<td>(M) Average practices in engaging with change initiators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a challenging relationship with headquarters.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wondering and asking how to prioritize in change.</td>
<td>(N) Practices for an unfolding change resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being aware of organizational politics and not knowing how to deal with it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talking about “how” one enacts the role.</td>
<td>(O) Average sensemaking practices</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Struggling to create urgency for change.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Having loose relationships with end-customers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning a variety of change skills.</td>
<td>(P) Average practices in learning change skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning change skills by the end of the training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performing change role rather successfully.</td>
<td>(Q) Role integration as outcome</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Staying at initial job position after change.</td>
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</table>
Second, role integrators engaged in *practices for unfolding change resilience*. While the development of the change resilience of these managers may appear similar to that of the role expanders, what made this group different was the lower level of resilience. In order to highlight the unfolding change resilience, one change agent said that they needed to prioritize in order to implement the new strategy (17), while another change agent mentioned that it was not clear to him how to do it: “We have to prioritize. We have to really understand and work on the benefits for our transformations. We ask ourselves the question what to prioritize” (16). Moreover, middle managers of this pathway *did not know how to deal with organizational politics* within their change role. A manager highlighted the possibility that organizational politics might hinder the implementation of an end-customer orientation at BCS: “Politics can happen here. Politics generates so much draining of energy for an organization and that energy comes from the customer focus and the market focus” (5).

Third, role integrators engaged in an average level of sensemaking practice. Among informants in this pathway, *sensemaking remained a challenge* throughout the change process. The first challenge was that they could not convince change recipients to the degree that role expanders could. One interviewee highlighted the perceived obstacle: “Yeah, you can talk to them [to the change recipients], but they think in a very rigid manner. Why should they risk changing anything when we already own 35% market share? It is no necessity; there is no urgency to change for them” (14). Another participant encountered a similar situation:

“It is hard to go out with this new process and to convince people that we need to improve our customer loyalty. Because when you have 25% of the market share, the second one 21% [...] when you have a turnover that increases by 16% and you need to explain that you have to change something [...] why? It works already!” (16)

Moreover, in contrast to the role expanders, the role integrators did not talk about “why” they did their job. Rather, they explained “how” they tried to integrate their *change role* into their daily business. When I asked an interviewee about his motivation for his job role, he answered: “My motivation for my role is to better know the market because the farmers are the market. Then, to be sure that, when you work, you work effectively. If you create a new tool or invent something, it should be useful for the farmers” (16). Compared to the role expanders who talked about the vision that
guided their change role (e.g., “to feed the world and to make the world a better place”), the answers of the role integrators were usually more operational. As a consequence of their comparatively lower sensemaking practice, they were not able to convince their employees of the change objectives as quickly as role expanders did.

Furthermore, the data analysis shows that change agents in this pathway had rather loose relationships with growers. While some change agents reported that they did not interact a lot with the end-customers, others went even further and defined internal members of their organization as their primary customers and neglected the actual external customers:

“I would not really be at this position [to talk to end-customers]. When I used to be the head of sales operations manager, then yes. But now I have very little direct contact with the growers. My customers would be the territory managers and junior management. I used to do customer visits when I was an operational manager.” (6)

Further, role integrators had a pragmatic approach to an end-customer orientation, as one change agent highlighted: “We should act in the interest of the farmer to offer him something special. Of course, we also do this for our own interest. We are a financial company, not a Samaritan’s association” (12).

Fourth, in the change training program, the role integrators were open to learning change skills, similar to middle managers on the role expansion pathway. Managers in both the role expansion pathway and the role integration pathway had learned the same eight skill sets by the end of the training program. However, the participant observations revealed that managers in the role integration pathway learned these skills later than the role expanders. The vignette in Table 15 depicts how role integrators engaged in the learning practices.

To summarize, middle managers on the pathway of role integration showed an average level of engagement with the change initiators, unfolding change resilience, average sensemaking practices, and an average level of learning change skills. Table 15 illustrates additional data for the aggregated dimension “pathway to role integration” and its first-order concepts.
### (M) Average practices in engaging with change initiators

| Having an average relationship with top managers | “Our relationship with the top management is well-structured. They [top managers] should continue to include this [the change] as a strategic topic in the future because it really should be an objective for the company, not only for the department. It is up to the top management to show that it is something we need to work together on.” (16) |
| Having a challenging relationship with headquarters | “What they [the headquarters] do right now is more of a compliance and control: ‘Report back, tell us what you’re doing, tell us if you are on track or not on track, and we’ll put the pressure on if you’re not on track.’” (5) “Actually country organizations do not care that much about the headquarters. The country organizations just need to receive the help and support when they ask for it.” (14) |

### (N) Practices for an unfolding change resilience

| Wondering and asking how to prioritize in change | “I find the Market Leadership Strategy, Must Win Battles and Key Enablers are highly relevant. The question is how to focus our activities on these.” (17) |
| Being aware of organizational politics and not knowing how to deal with it | “There’s always a risk that if you short circuit management and it’s not in line with the hierarchy, they say, and I agree to some extent, ‘Why didn’t you come to your local management?’ But in a case of need from global I think we should all voice what we need, but when it comes to strategic objectives and whether we’re going to hit them or not, that’s where you have to be careful that you don’t create more drama and more energy focused on internal needs and internal negotiation that we need to focus on external needs.” (5) |

### (O) Average sensemaking practices

<p>| Talking about “how” one enacts the role | “I act like a coach for different countries in analyzing their channel data and giving recommendations on the trend edge and leverages. That’s my role.” (7) |
|  | “My role in the customer orientation strategy is to be able to define how we can interact directly with the end-customer, the farmer, and to create a pull strategy.” (16) |
|  | “My primary guiding question to do my job is how do I change the company? How can I help the country organizations to implement the change?” (20) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggling to create urgency for change</th>
<th>“People don’t find anything new in this, which is stopping them to come on board. We need to strongly push the systematic approach in their day to day working style.” (6) “For me, it was very challenging to convince mature and established organizations to change.” (12) “So in some cases when you are working with new guys, with young people they are open-minded, it’s easy to convince them. Convincing experienced people is harder, you have to convince not only with words, but also with facts. This is very important.” (21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having loose relationship with end-customers</td>
<td>“With the growers I might have, face to face, research or interviews or panelists and things like that, an interaction maybe once every two months.” (5) “Sometimes you need to keep a certain distance to customer proximity.” (12) “There is always a dimension in between us [between interviewee and end-customer], that would be the regional and country units. We tend to talk with our colleagues in the office instead of going out and talking to the growers. Honestly, I would like to talk more frequently to the growers.” (19) “For me, it was not that important to help the farmers; my motivation was rather to change the country organizations. That was ok, I can live with that. I have a feeling that our products are good. I wasn’t that sure about that right away but I let myself be convinced in my interactions with farmers. The few interactions I had with them helped me a lot to understand how we should allocate our means in order to ensure quality and profit. They helped me to understand the customer oriented mindset and ask the right questions in the countries in order to enact the change.” (20) Answer to the interview question: “How often do you interact with growers? Please rate the frequency of your interaction from 0-10.” (0=none; 10=very high; individuals in this group show medium grower interaction ratings)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (P) Average practices in learning change skills | “Kate was worried about the workload she would have by taking over the role as a change agent. On top of that, her supervisor wanted her to attend a training program abroad. Especially the fact that she needed to travel during the weekends and that she needed to leave her family alone made her concerned. Hence, she was a little skeptical about the benefits of the training as she
Learning change skills by the end of the training would make an extra effort to attend it. Kate learned four out of eight change skills by the end of the first training week, six skills by the end of the second week, and finally, she was able to learn all eight skills in the last week. She was strong in communicating with the customers and leading a team. Compared to William [example for role expander], she was lower on the skill sets overall. Still, she had a personal drive to enact her role as a change agent and hence, she managed to develop herself throughout the training. After struggling with the challenges of being a change agent in the beginning, Kate finally resolved her role stress and managed to integrate her change role into the ‘business-as-usual’.

(Vignette derived from participant observations)

(Q) Role integration as outcome

| Performing change role rather successfully | 1. Objective measure: staying at initial job position after change  
| Staying at initial job position after change | 2. “Please rate your own job performance compared to your peers on a scale from 0-10.”  
| | 3. “Do you think the transformations in your country have an impact on customer satisfaction and business performance? Please rate the impact on a scale from 0-10.”  
| | 4. Answers in quantitative survey about change implementation success  
| | These four indicators were taken into account to justify a role integration.  
| | (based on objective data, quantitative ratings in interviews and surveys,  
| | 0=very low; 10=very high) 

Table 15: Representative Data for Pathway to Role Integration

Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis

Pathway to role resignation

The third pathway is called “role resignation.” This pathway includes those change agents who were predominantly unsuccessful in their role enactment. Since they were not able to overcome their role challenges, most of these middle managers felt frustrated in the change process and resigned from their role. Overall, this pathway indicated weak levels of engagement with the change initiators, change inertia, weak sensemaking practices, weak practices in learning change skills, and role resignation as outcome (see Figure 19). The following section elaborates on the research findings of the analysis about this pathway of role resignation.
First, change agents on this pathway showed weak practices to engage with the change initiators. For instance, they had a challenging relationship with the top managers and perceived the top management support as rather low. Many of them did not feel enabled by the top management team, as one manager pointed out: “I have a weak position being a [position name], and my position has its own challenges – it’s a little bit of an experiment. I think we could have done much better with this than we’re doing now […] that doesn’t mean I couldn’t add more value. That’s not what I’m saying. I could add significantly more value, but the top managers and the organization are not enabling it” (1). Also, when I asked an informant during an interview how often he interacted with top managers he laughed and replied: “How frequently or how seldom?” (11). Further, managers reported that the headquarters was not involved sufficiently in the change and pointed out that the relationship with the headquarters was challenging as well.

Second, in contrast to the first two pathways (role expansion and role integration), the pathway of role resignation is characterized by change inertia. Inertia refers to the case that an organization has a slower speed of change compared to the speed of change in the organization’s environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1984, p. 151). Applied to the change agents, this means that managers who faced change inertia were slow in adapting themselves to their role as change agents. Change agents in the role resignation pathway were not able to develop change resilience; rather they felt overwhelmed throughout the whole change process.23 For instance, a middle manager struggled to maintain a work-life balance. He got emotional about this topic in the training. It was clear that the change project caused additional workload that he could not handle properly (2). An informant in this pathway perceived the change overload as follows: “Organizational change and initiative overload in our region is rapidly affecting the ability to drive more change and is raising the risk of disengagement or initiative failures” (1).

23 An alternative explanation for having low change resilience could be that managers are not willing to change because to do so might mean admitting that the current way of working is not correct, and thus that change could indicate a “loss of face” in this context (e.g., Zaltman & Duncan, 1977).
Figure 19: Data Structure for Pathway to Role Resignation

Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Order Concepts</th>
<th>Second-Order Themes</th>
<th>Aggregated Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a challenging relationship with top managers. Having a challenging relationship with headquarters.</td>
<td>(R) Weak practices in engaging with change initiators</td>
<td>Pathway to role resignation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that one needs to deal with change initiative overload. Feeling overwhelmed by organizational politics.</td>
<td>(S) Practices for a change inertia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about “what” one enacts within the role. Struggling to create urgency for change. Having no relationships with end customers.</td>
<td>(T) Weak sensemaking practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning a few change skills. Learning change skills by the end of the training.</td>
<td>(U) Weak practices in learning change skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing change role unsuccessfully. Seeking organizational exit.</td>
<td>(V) Role resignation as outcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On top of that, some middle managers on this pathway had severe problems in managing organizational politics (18). A middle manager explained this situation as follows:

“I don’t think a) that my comment would have the impact and b) you know, it’s something that I still think I would be careful about in our organization from a political perspective. I think that if I say that or don’t say that I’m not sure how much difference that would make.” (1)

Third, the data analysis shows that change agents who resigned from their roles showed weak sensemaking practices. In particular, these agents did not mention “why” they performed their change role. Rather, they focused on answering “what” they did in the change process. The analysis suggests that these managers could not convey any sense for the change to others in the organization. Accordingly, the following quote shows how managers who resigned were challenged in convincing people:

“There was a lot of skepticism because people [...] We’ve been doing things the same way for a long, long time and it was a rather [...] With the reorganization that just happened and then having [name of external consultancy company] still heavily involved, people were really skittish about what this meant in job security and lots of other things. There was some hesitation to adapt.” (2)

Further, compared to middle managers on the pathways of role expansion and role integration, the role resignation pathway implies that managers did not have any time to establish a relationship with the end-customers. One middle manager argued that “unfortunately, he could not do customer visits now because he worked in the office. He had a lot of tasks to do. Before this job, it [the amount of customer visits] was more frequent” (4). It seems that middle managers on this pathway felt that it was not their duty to talk to the end-customers, and hence they did not see the direct impact of the change in the marketplace. This may have led to demotivation among these middle managers since they did not notice the outcome of the change (e.g., end-customer satisfaction).
Fourth, change agents who resigned from their roles differed in such a way that they showed weak practices in learning change skills. The analysis indicates that they only learned four skills by the end of the three training weeks. However, they learned these skills slower than did the change agents on the role expansion and role integration pathways. The vignette in Table 16 illustrates learning practices of a change agent who followed the pathway of role resignation.

These change agents gave up on enacting their role as a change agent, as one middle manager pointed out: “The thing that makes me feel bad but also makes me feel better is that there is a number of people now that are raising their voice about that situation [...] so we might have a retention problem there with people, the people we just attracted to us” (1). As a potential consequence of the critical situation with the company and the unsuccessful implementation of the success, follow-ups with middle managers and the human resources manager at BCS revealed that two middle managers on this pathway (eventually) left the company before the change projects were completed. To summarize, middle managers on the pathway of role resignation showed weak levels of engagement with the change initiators, they showed change inertia, weak sensemaking practices, and weak practices in learning change skills. Table 16, further, shows additional data that support the aggregated dimension “pathway to role resignation” and its first-order concepts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>(R) Weak practices in engaging with change initiators</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Having a challenging relationship with top managers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Having a challenging relationship with headquarters</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>(S) Practices for change inertia</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feeling that one needs to deal with change initiative overload</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feeling overwhelmed by organizational politics</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>(T) Weak sensemaking practices</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talking about “what” one enacts within the role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Struggling to create urgency for change</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not having time to establish relationship with end-customers

“I interact with external customers [growers], probably about two or three times a year.” (1)

“The challenge is that I have probably less customer interaction because of the structure of my job.” (1)

“As a [job title] manager you do not have that much time to talk to the end-customer. To have time to do this would be a dream [laughs]. It would be really good.” (4)

Answer to the interview question: “How often do you interact with growers? Please rate the frequency of your interaction from 0-10.”

(0=none; 10=very high; individuals in this group show low grower interaction ratings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(U) Weak practices in learning change skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning a few change skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Harry was selected to be a change agent. His boss told him that he should take part in the change training. Harry felt overwhelmed by the idea to attend a total amount of three weeks of training on top of his marketing role and his change agent role in his unit. This meant even more workload, less time during the next months, and lots of travelling overseas. Throughout the three training weeks he was rather skeptical about the training content. In the work-life balance session he had tears in his eyes which showed that he really suffered from this workload. Harry only learned three skills in the first week. In the second training week, he learned one more skill, and in the last week he had learned a total of four out of eight skills. Harry was overwhelmed by the amount of the training content. Also, he criticized: ‘Pre-training arrangements are delivered too late. We need to receive the information at last two weeks before the training.’ Compared to William and Kate [role expander and role integrator], he learned less skills and he was a slow learner.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning change skills by the end of the training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vignette derived by participant observations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(V) Role resignation as outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performing change role unsuccessfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Objective measure: giving up/ leaving company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “Please rate your own job performance compared to your peers on a scale from 0-10.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “Do you think the transformations in your country have an impact on customer satisfaction and business performance? Please rate the impact on a scale from 0-10.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Answers in quantitative survey about change implementation success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking organizational exit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These four indicators were taken into account to justify a role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To conclude, all change agents in the company faced similar challenges when they started to enact their change roles. However, based on the ability to use four practices – engagement with change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking, and learning change skills – they followed three possible pathways: pathway to role expansion, pathway to role integration, or pathway to role resignation. Role expansion (successful role performance) and role resignation (unsuccessful role performance) are the extreme positions on the role performance continuum. Role integration unites practices and characteristics of both pathways and shows a rather average role performance. Table 17 depicts the communalities and differences between the three pathways by comparing the enacted practices and outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices to engage with change initiators</th>
<th>Pathway to role expansion</th>
<th>Pathway to role integration</th>
<th>Pathway to role resignation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong practices in engaging with change initiators:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average practices in engaging with change initiators:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weak practices in engaging with change initiators:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having a good and open relationship with top managers.</td>
<td>• Having a good and open relationship with headquarters.</td>
<td>• Having a challenging relationship with headquarters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having a good and open relationship with headquarters.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices for change resilience/change inertia</th>
<th>Pathway to role expansion</th>
<th>Pathway to role integration</th>
<th>Pathway to role resignation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practices for a strong change resilience:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Practices for an unfolding change resilience:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Practices for change inertia:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to deal with work overload.</td>
<td>• Wondering and asking how to prioritize in change.</td>
<td>• Feeling that one needs to deal with change initiative overload.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to handle organizational politics.</td>
<td>• Being aware of organizational politics and not knowing how to deal with it.</td>
<td>• Feeling overwhelmed by organizational politics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensemaking practices</th>
<th>Pathway to role expansion</th>
<th>Pathway to role integration</th>
<th>Pathway to role resignation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong sensemaking practices:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average sensemaking practices:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weak sensemaking practices:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talking about “why” one enacts the role.</td>
<td>• Talking about “how” one enacts the role.</td>
<td>• Talking about “what” one enacts within the role.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Convincing employees to change.</td>
<td>• Struggling to create urgency for change.</td>
<td>• Struggling to create urgency for change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having strong relationships with end-customers.</td>
<td>• Having loose relationship with end-customers.</td>
<td>• Having no relationships with end-customers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices to learn change skills</th>
<th>Pathway to role expansion</th>
<th>Pathway to role integration</th>
<th>Pathway to role resignation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong practices in learning change skills:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average practices in learning change skills:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weak practices in learning change skills:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning a variety of change skills.</td>
<td>• Learning a variety of change skills.</td>
<td>• Learning a few change skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 17: Comparison of Three Pathways
Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis

4.3 Conceptualization of Findings as Process Model

This chapter embeds the research findings from the previous sections in the existing literature. The comparative case analyses examined the role enactment of middle managers in a change process towards a stronger end-customer orientation. Of particular interest are emerging similarities and differences across the different types of middle managers’ role enactment as these provide the starting points for generalization and theory development (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to identify and sharpen the emerging novel concepts from the case analyses, new research findings need to be consolidated with prior research. A discussion of both conflicting and supportive literature helps to strengthen internal validity and to qualify transferability of the results of the present research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pan & Tan, 2011).

In building on the research findings from the previous sections and integrating existing literature, I aim at generating a novel process model to explain the role enactment of middle managers in a change process. In order to derive this process model, I use grounded theory building (see chapter 3.4). According to grounded theory, defining concepts is only the first part in the research process (cf. chapters 4.1 and 4.2); in addition to defining concepts, a demonstration of relationships among these concepts is central to explaining a specific phenomenon (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Dubin, 1978).
Following the approach of Nag & Gioia (2012), I therefore integrate the concepts depicted in the last chapters in order to create an empirically grounded process model. This model shows the dynamics between the emergent concepts (see Figure 20).

In order to investigate the individual pathways of middle managers as change agents in the strategic change process and to qualify the generalizability, first it is important to understand the context in which middle managers work. The present investigation takes place in a top-driven change process context and in a multinational company with different market structures. Previous research has highlighted the fact that the unique setting of a multinational company offers the potential for especially strong theory building (Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008).

As detailed in the next sections, the novel process model suggests that all middle managers encountered the same process steps while enacting their change agent role. While middle managers were very similar in the characteristics they displayed in the first two steps, they showed great variations in the last two steps (see chapter 4.2). More specifically, the process model includes the following four steps: (1) change role assignment, (2) challenges in change role, (3) practices for change role enactment, and (4) role outcome. As illustrated in Figure 20, these steps occurred in a sequential order.
Figure 20: Process Model on Middle Managers’ Change Role Enactment
Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis
Key Finding 2:
In a top-driven change, middle managers encounter four process steps when they enact their role as change agents: (1) change role assignment, (2) challenges in change role, (3) practices for change role enactment, and (4) role outcome.

Change role assignment (t=0)
Before the headquarters rolled out the strategic change (top-driven change), middle managers had their specific job role in a marketing division at BCS. When the headquarters announced the change, *they selected middle managers to be catalysts of the change and to implement the change process in their divisions.* The selection process was based on middle managers’ skills and abilities to act as change agents. By assigning the role as change agent top-down, the top management team expected the middle managers to enhance their daily roles (cf. Grant & Hofmann, 2011). In this way, middle managers began to interpret their own role in the change.

Key Finding 3:
In the *change role assignment*, top managers direct role expectations towards middle managers and middle managers interpret their change role.

Figure 20 shows that all managers had similar starting situations; all of them were working at a marketing division at the same company. However, when middle managers began to enact their additional role as change agents, they faced several challenges – as the arrow between the first and second box in Figure 20 indicates. Indeed, literature shows that *multiple roles can cause challenges* and facilitate
individual stress.\textsuperscript{24} For instance, role stress theory argues that individuals often perceive multiple social roles as a burden (Nordenmark, 2004).

Applied to the present case study, the simultaneous combination of a marketing role and a change agent role may have created more demand than a middle manager was able to handle. This, in turn, caused role overload. Role overload is defined as a middle managers’ lack of personal resources needed to fulfill commitments or requirements (Peterson et al., 1995). In this context, the varying expectations directed towards the middle managers might increase the risk of role conflict (Katz & Kahn, 1978). As a result, middle managers struggled to fulfill the expectations of both roles – their role as marketing managers and their role as change agents – at the same time (cf. Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Because such a situation can cause psychological illness for individual middle managers, it is important to actively support middle managers in dealing with multiple roles in the organization (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Lundberg, Mårdberg, & Frankenhaeuser, 1994).

\textit{Challenges in change role (t=1)}

All change agents faced similar challenges after their role assignment, which can be categorized as (1) the lack of vision, (2) time dynamics of change, and (3) the lack of change capabilities.

\textit{Key Finding 4:}

The \textit{main challenges} in the change role are (1) lack of leadership, (2) time dynamics of change, and (3) lack of change capabilities.

First, a well-established body of studies has noted that employees need a vision\textsuperscript{25} of the company’s future during the change process (Kanter et al., 1992; Kotter, 1996; Luecke, 2003). For instance, Kotter (1996) emphasizes the need of a shared vision that

\textsuperscript{24} Stress is defined as a situation when an individual encounters an opportunity, a constraint, or a demand on doing what he or she desires (Schuler, 1980).

\textsuperscript{25} According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2016), vision is defined as “something seen vividly in the imagination, involving insight, foresight, and wisdom.”
clarifies the strategic direction of the change and ensures that employees act in line with it even though the first steps can be uncomfortable at times. In a similar vein, the findings of the present research suggest that the lack of a common vision was one of the first challenges that middle managers perceived during the enactment of their role as change agents.

Second, the process model of the present study proposes that time dynamics of change are another challenge managers faced after their change role assignment. Informants pointed out that the change towards an end-customer orientation took rather a long time, and that they struggled to keep up with the pace of the change at the beginning. This is in line with marketing research, showing that it usually takes several years to implement a customer orientation strategy properly in an organization (e.g., Gebhardt et al., 2006; Kennedy et al., 2003). Also, in line with the present work, existing research has shown that an organization should balance short-term (rather sales-driven) and long-term goals (rather customer-driven) in order to gain a competitive advantage (Ganesan, 1994). Indeed, middle managers often reported that finding the right balance between short-term and long-term goals in the change process towards a stronger end-customer orientation was difficult.

Third, all change agents faced a lack of change capabilities. They complained about limited resources and about not being skilled appropriately to guide the change. In this vein, prior research has shown that change capabilities positively affect the change implementation success (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005). Reshaping capabilities in a change process consists of engagement, development, and performance management capabilities (Turner & Crawford, 1998). Engagement refers to informing and involving organizational members by encouraging, motivating and eventually leading them to commit to the goals of the organization. Development means creating all resources needed to achieve the organization’s change goals, and measuring the performance for intended change captures the performance management capability. In sum, while an extensive body of literature has investigated the change capabilities of organizations (e.g., Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Turner & Crawford, 1998), very little research has examined how managers develop individual capabilities for change over time (e.g., Lopez-Cabrales, Valle, & Herrero, 2006; Stensaker & Meyer, 2011). The process model established here proposes that the lack of individual skills and resources can be a barrier to effectively enacting one’s change role.
Practices for change role enactment (t=2)

In order to deal with the above-mentioned challenges during role enactment, middle managers employed specific practices. The analysis revealed four types of practices that were crucial to all middle managers. In this study, the practices that most influenced middle managers’ change role enactment were (1) practices to engage with change initiators, (2) practices for a change resilience, (3) sensemaking practices, and (4) practices to learn change skills.

Key Finding 5a:
The practices for change role enactment are (1) practices to engage with change initiators, (2) practices for change resilience, (3) sensemaking practices, and (4) practices to learn change skills.

The quality and intensity of these practices determined whether change agents succeeded in their change role enactment or not. Change agents who strongly enacted these four practices engaged in a role expansion after the change projects were finished. Moreover, these agents were more likely to be promoted to a higher job position because they performed well in their change role. However, change agents who showed average change practices followed the pathway of role integration. Although these change agents managed to carry out their change projects successfully at the end, some challenges remained unresolved. Finally, some middle managers enacted the four practices weakly, which led to role resignation. In role resignation, these middle managers gave up and sought organizational exit. The next section reflects on these four practices in detail by comparing them with findings in the existing literature.

The first practice in the process model is the engagement with change initiators. This practice captures the relationship of middle managers with the top management team in their business unit and the headquarters. Middle managers who had a good and open relationship with the change initiators talked about empowerment. Empowerment, by giving middle managers power, enables them to enact the change process effectively (Gill, 2003). However, middle managers who had challenging relationships with either the top managers in their business unit or the headquarters did not feel empowered and
faced a downturn in their change role enactment. Overall, those middle managers who interacted openly with top managers in their business unit and the headquarters were more likely to enact their change role successfully than those who did not interact openly with these two groups of internal stakeholders.

Key Finding 5b: Practices to engage with the change initiators are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration, and weakest for the role resignation pathway.

The second type of practice in the process model is to build change resilience. In general, resilience refers to “the developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, and failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002, p. 702). Resilient employees adapt to changing situations flexibly and tend to proactively prepare for hardships in order to minimize the impact of stressful events on themselves by using their resources effectively (Block & Kremen, 1996; Fredrickson et al., 2008). Research has adapted resilience to various contexts (e.g., London, 1983), for instance to organizational change processes (Shin et al., 2012), and has found support for a positive impact of resilience on key variables such as employee performance in the workplace and employee commitment to change (e.g., Coutu, 2002; Luthans, Vogelsang, & Lester, 2006).

This work defines the practice for change resilience as the ability of employees to bounce back from negative incidents in the change process and to allocate their resources effectively. The data analysis shows that the second-order theme “practices for change resilience” captures the first-order concepts “being able to deal with change work overload” and “handling organizational politics.” Both qualities typify change agents who are highly resilient in the change process. The process model further suggests that resilient change agents are more successful in their change role by achieving a higher role performance.

While change resilience helps to deal with work overload and organizational politics, change inertia impedes dealing with both. Inertia generally refers to one’s inability to enact internal change in the face of significant external change (Miller & Friesen,
1980); therefore, change inertia of middle managers can be defined as their inability to deal both with change initiative overload and with organizational politics. The process model suggests that middle managers can develop change inertia if they are not able to bounce back from hardship during the course of the change which, in turn, can negatively influence the change role performance of a middle manager.

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**Key Finding 5c:**

Practices for change resilience are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration (unfolding change resilience), and weakest for the role resignation pathway (change inertia).

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The third type of practice within a change role enactment refers to sensemaking. Sensemaking relates to “meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempt to develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the intended strategic change” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). It is the process through which middle managers try to understand new events (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) and interpret and enact their roles (Petriglieri, 2015; Weick, 1995). In the present process model, change agents who emphasized why they did their job were more likely to create urgency for others to change. Also, their interaction with end-customers helped them to notice the change impact in the markets and therefore helped them to make sense of the new strategy’s impact.

By engaging in strong sensemaking practices, middle managers were able to convey the sense to the change recipients which is called “sensegiving.” In the present research, sensegiving relates to “sensemaking and meaning construction of others” with respect to the change process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). For instance, by communicating why a new channel strategy is important, change agents were able to persuade their colleagues in the organization. The process model suggests that role expanders show the strongest sensemaking practices, followed by role integrators and those who resigned from their roles.
Key Finding 5d:
Sensemaking practices are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration, and weakest for the role resignation pathway.

Fourth, change and learning are inseparable (Weeks, Roberts, Chonko, & Jones, 2004). In the process model, the learning practice is captured by middle managers’ willingness to learn, particularly by how they acquired change skills in the management training26 conducted at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. This training was tailored to the change context of the company. In line with research that shows strong support for a positive impact of management training on the success of a strategic change (e.g., Gill, 2003), the present research found that effective learning during the training sessions improved middle managers’ role performance. In particular, middle managers in the present study who learned more change skills and who learned these in the first part of the training gained a competitive advantage compared to those middle managers who learned fewer skills and learned them later. Further, middle managers who were “good learners” were more likely to engage either in role expansion or in role integration. Weak learning practices, however, were associated with role resignation. In short, the less change agents engaged in learning change skills, the more they struggled in the change process which, in turn, led to frustration or even to organizational exit.

Key Finding 5e:
Practices for learning change skills are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration, and weakest for the role resignation pathway.

26 Management training is defined as the process through which employees develop the competencies necessary to achieve managerial effectiveness (Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009).
Role outcome (t=3)

The way in which the change agents enacted their role by combining the four practices (practices to engage with change initiators, practices for change resilience, sensemaking practices, and practices to learn change skills) predicted their role outcome. The process model shows that change agents had three possible role outcomes: (1) role expansion, (2) role integration, or (3) role resignation. If change agents were able to strongly engage in the four practices, they were more likely to integrate or even expand their role. If they did not practice these strongly, they were more likely to resign from their role. In the following, I elaborate on the three individual role outcomes by referring to the existing literature.

First, role expansion theory posits that holding multiple roles can be beneficial for individuals (Nordenmark, 2004). For instance, research has supported the contention that multiple social roles can positively influence managers’ health and well-being (cf. Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Hong & Seltzer, 1995; Sieber, 1974). In the present case study context, it may be the case that some middle managers enjoyed holding both a marketing role and a change agent role since they were recognized by their peers for “going the extra mile”. Specifically, I found those middle managers who strongly enacted the four practices of “engagement with change initiators,” “change resilience,” “sensemaking,” and “learning change skills” to be more successful in integrating two roles – their daily role as a marketing manager and their assigned role as a change agent. Importantly, these middle managers were not only more successful in integrating both roles, they also expanded their role in the company after the change process was completed. The middle managers who expanded their role were more likely to be promoted to a higher job position after the change process. In summary, I define role expansion as a role outcome of being promoted after having successfully enacted one’s change role, thereby benefitting both the company and the individual.

Key Finding 6a:
Middle managers who show strong practices in their change role enactment are more likely to have role expansion as an outcome.
Second, compared to middle managers who expanded their role as an outcome of the change process, some individuals managed to integrate both roles, without an expansion, only after the change process. Research has argued that individuals in general seek to integrate multiple roles because integration reduces the efforts to move back and forth between roles (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Applied to the present context, this means that middle managers integrated their usual marketing role with their change agent role. The process model proposes that middle managers who show an average level on the four practices for change role enactment are more likely to be role integrators. In line with these findings, I define role integration as a role outcome of being able to combine the role of a marketing manager with the assigned role of a change agent in the long run without being promoted.

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Key Finding 6b:

Middle managers who show average practices in their change role enactment are more likely to have role integration as an outcome.

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Third, in contrast to role expansion theory, another research stream has found negative effects of managing multiple roles on variables such as employee commitment and employee satisfaction (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). The current works adds to this literature and argues that assigning middle managers multiple (and sometimes conflicting) roles can lead to resignation. Resignation embeds weak, negative emotions, frustration, disappointment, or even sorrow. Organizational members in a state of resignation suffer from tiredness and feel emotionally detached from their organization’s goals. At the same time, they lack excitement or hope (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2003). In line with both this literature and my findings, I define role resignation as a role outcome of not being able to enact the change role successfully and of giving up.

More specifically, I found that middle managers who weakly engaged in the four practices of “engagement with change initiators”, “change resilience”, “sensemaking”, and “learning change skills” resigned from their roles.
Key Finding 6c:
Middle managers who show *weak practices* in their change role enactment are more likely to have *role resignation as an outcome*.

To conclude, the role outcome of role expanders is both a success for the organization and the individuals. It is a success for the organization because role expanders complete their change projects successfully. Also, it is a success for the individuals as they are promoted to a higher job position after the change. Whereas the outcome of a role expansion is both successful for the organization and the individual, a role integration is beneficial only for the organization as the individual stays in the same job position after the change process. By contrast, the outcome of role resignation is neither a success for the organization nor for the individual as the individual fails to enact the change role effectively. Table 18 illustrates both the organizational and individual success for the three different pathways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Success for organization</th>
<th>Success for individual middle manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role expansion</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role integration</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role resignation</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Organizational and Individual Outcomes of Three Pathways
*Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis*

The findings show that middle managers, who have a high or medium role performance, finish their change projects successfully. These managers stay with the company. Individuals who have a low role performance give up and often leave the company. Figure 21 illustrates the role cycle of change agents. The three shades illustrate the three role outcomes. The darkest shade symbolizes a role expansion. The
medium shade shows a role integration. Finally, the lightest shade stands for a role resignation (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: Role Cycle of Change Agents
Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis

4.4 Summary of Research Findings

The fourth chapter addressed the research goals by presenting the research findings on how middle managers enact their role as change agents in a top-driven change towards a stronger end-customer orientation. First, it focused on the organizational change process steps in order to answer research goal 1 (see chapter 4.1). The data analysis showed that, from a middle management’s point of view, BCS encountered seven general steps to enact the change process towards a stronger end-customer orientation: (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) developing a vision and a strategy, (3) creating a guiding coalition, (4) communicating the vision, (5) coping with change conflict, (6) gaining short-term wins, (7) consolidating gains and producing more change.

Second, it derived a novel process model showing how change agents from middle management cope with the assignment of the additional role as change agent (see
chapter 4.2 and chapter 4.3). The change environment is a top-driven change in a multinational company. The middle management enacts the role of an implementer following the strategic direction of the headquarters and the top management team who are the change initiators. Although all middle managers deal with similar challenges after their role assignment, longitudinal data shows that three pathways emerge over time. Depending on how strongly or weakly the middle managers enact the practices (1) engagement with change initiators, (2) change resilience, (3) sensemaking, and (4) learning change skills, they either proceed with role expansion, role integration, or role resignation. The first two pathways lead to the successful enactment of the change role. By contrast, role resignation means that the middle managers are not able to deal with their challenges within their change role and hence give up, and in extreme cases they even leave the company. This process model provides answers to research goals 2, 3, and 4 (see chapter 4.3). Overall, Table 19 provides an overview of all key research findings of my data analysis.
**Key Research Findings**

**Key Finding 1:** Middle managers perceive seven organizational change process steps: (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) developing a vision and a strategy, (3) creating a guiding coalition, (4) communicating the vision, (5) coping with change conflict, (6) gaining short-term wins, and (7) consolidating gains and producing more change.

**Key Finding 2:** In a top-driven change, middle managers encounter four process steps when they enact their role as change agents: (1) change role assignment, (2) challenges in change role, (3) practices for change role enactment, and (4) role outcome.

**Key Finding 3:** In the change role assignment, top managers direct role expectations towards middle managers and middle managers interpret their change role.

**Key Finding 4:** The main challenges in the change role are (1) lack of leadership, (2) time dynamics of change, and (3) lack of change capabilities.

**Key Finding 5a:** The practices for change role enactment are (1) practices to engage with change initiators, (2) practices for change resilience, (3) sensemaking practices, and (4) practices to learn change skills.

**Key Finding 5b:** Practices to engage with the change initiators are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration, and weakest for the role resignation pathway.

**Key Finding 5c:** Practices for change resilience are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration (unfolding change resilience), and weakest for the role resignation pathway (change inertia).

**Key Finding 5d:** Sensemaking practices are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration, and weakest for the role resignation pathway.

**Key Finding 5e:** Practices for learning change skills are strongest for role expansion, average for role integration, and weakest for the role resignation pathway.

**Key Finding 6a:** Middle managers who show strong practices in their change role enactment are more likely to have role expansion as an outcome.

**Key Finding 6b:** Middle managers who show average practices in their change role enactment are more likely to have role integration as an outcome.

**Key Finding 6c:** Middle managers who show weak practices in their change role enactment are more likely to have role resignation as an outcome.

**Table 19: Overview of Key Research Findings**

*Source: Illustration Based on Own Data Analysis*
5 Conclusions and Implications

This chapter presents a general discussion of the results of this dissertation and both academic and managerial implications, as well as a statement of its limitations and recommendations for future research. The chapter is structured as follows. The first part reviews the research gaps addressed in this dissertation and summarizes the results for each of the four main research goals (chapter 5.1). The second part derives academic implications from these findings (chapter 5.2), whereas the third part shows detailed managerial implications (chapter 5.3). This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the present study and recommendations for future research (chapter 5.4).

5.1 General Discussion

In the introduction to this dissertation, I derived and formulated the key research question of this research:

“How do middle marketing managers enact their role in a top-driven change towards end-customer orientation?”

I then divided this key research question into four research goals. The first was described as follows:

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Research Goal 1:
Understanding how middle managers perceive the organizational change process of a top-driven change towards an end-customer orientation.

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In order to understand middle managers’ change role enactment within an organizational change process towards end-customer orientation, I first investigated how middle managers perceive the organizational change process. From a middle manager’s point of view, the findings suggest that the organizational change consists
of seven main steps. First, change initiators establish a sense of urgency in the company to change. Second, the change initiators develop a vision for change and a strategy. Third, they create a guiding coalition by actively involving change agents from middle management in the change process. Fourth, change initiators and change agents communicate the vision throughout the entire company. Fifth, the initiators of change cope with change conflict. For instance, they face pushback from operational units in the country organizations so that they need to adjust the top-driven strategy. This step is a unique finding of this dissertation, as general change models often do not pay attention to the adjustments of top-driven strategies due to employee feedback (cf. chapter 2.1). Sixth, the company gains short-term wins and, seventh, the change initiators finally consolidate the gains and produce more change in the entire organization.

Research Goal 2:
Exploring the challenges that middle managers encounter in their change role enactment when the organization shifts its strategy towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

The results of this dissertation show that change agents from middle management face three main challenges in their change role enactment (cf. chapter 4.2.3). First, they struggle with a lack of leadership. For instance, middle managers expect more involvement of top managers in the change process, and they struggle when there is an unclear vision of the end state of the change. Second, they are challenged by time dynamics in the change process, finding that the change takes too long, and meanwhile they must work to balance short-term and long-term goals. Third, change agents can suffer from a lack of change capabilities. This implies that middle managers may lack resources and change skills.
Research Goal 3:
Exploring the practices that middle managers employ in their change role enactment when they change the organization towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

In order to address the third research goal, this thesis explored four practices that middle managers enact in their change roles. These are (1) practices to engage with change initiators, (2) practices for change resilience, (3) sensemaking practices, and (4) practices for learning change skills. First, engaging with change initiators means that the middle managers establish open and good relationships with both the top managers and the headquarters. Second, practices for change resilience relate to how middle managers deal with both work overload and organizational politics during the change process. Third, sensemaking practices capture how middle managers make sense of their own role in the change and how they convey this sense to other organizational members. Further, the interaction with end-customers is a vital part of sensemaking practices. Fourth, practices for learning change skills relate to how many skills the change agents learn and how rapidly they learn the skills. Depending on how strongly the middle managers engage in these four types of practices, they follow one of three possible pathways in their change role enactment. These pathways are considered in research goal 4.

Research Goal 4:
Explaining why some middle managers are more successful than their peers in the enactment of their change role towards a stronger end-customer orientation.

In particular, the level of enactment of the above mentioned four practices determines which of three potential pathways middle managers take in their change role enactment: (1) role expansion, (2) role integration, or (3) role resignation. Change agents who strongly engage in these four practices successfully complete their change
projects and hence are more likely to be promoted to a higher job position. This pathway is called a role expansion because middle managers expand their roles after the change. Change agents who show average levels of these practices integrate their marketing role with their change agent role. This is a success for the company, but the middle managers do not move forward in their careers via promotion after the change. Moreover, change agents who weakly enact the four practices often resign from their change agent roles and are not able to carry out their change tasks successfully. Thus, they are neither successful from the company’s perspective nor from their own perspective. In the end, they are likely to leave the company because they give up enacting their role.

5.2 Academic Implications

This dissertation makes several academic contributions. It is the first research to show how middle managers perceive organizational steps in a strategic change process towards more customer orientation (see chapter 4.1). Moreover, it is the first work to derive a novel process model of how middle managers enact their role as change agents during this strategic change process (see chapter 4.3). In the following section, the findings of the dissertation are compared to and integrated with the existing literature in order to outline the academic contribution in detail. To that end, I discuss how the dissertation contributes to four research streams: (1) research on strategy, (2) research on leadership, (3) research on the roles of middle managers, and (4) research on customer orientation.

5.2.1 Implications for Research on Strategy

This dissertation contributes to strategy research in various ways. First, an established body of research has examined how companies can best implement strategies (e.g., Gupta & Govindarajan, 1984; Slater & Olsen, 2001). This body of research has primarily focused on success factors in organizational strategy implementation (e.g., Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008; Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978). For instance, it has been demonstrated that management style, strategic alignment, internal communication, and middle management contribution are critical to implementing an organizational strategy successfully (Salih & Doll, 2013). However, to the best of my knowledge, challenges and practices that individual employees, particularly middle
managers, face in the implementation of a strategic change process have not been investigated yet. This dissertation addresses this gap by deriving a dynamic process model that shows how middle managers enact their implementation role in a change. This process model shows that middle managers are challenged by a lack of leadership, the time dynamics of change, and the lack of change capabilities. The model further suggests that engagement with change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking, and the learning of change skills are crucial for effectively enacting the implementation role as a change agent.

Second, middle management’s sensemaking process during a strategic change has received increased research attention (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Teulier & Rouleau, 2013). My research findings contribute to this literature stream and show how change agents from middle management make sense of a top-driven change process. In particular, the findings demonstrate how those change agents who engage in strong sensemaking practices perform their change role better than those who do not make sense of their role. Furthermore, this thesis supports the findings of Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991), revealing elements of both sensemaking and sensegiving. My findings show that change agents with stronger sensemaking practices also engage in stronger sensegiving practices. This means that change agents who talk about why they enact their role (sensemaking) can more easily convince the change recipients of the reasons for change (sensegiving).

Third, the inductive findings of the present study add to existing process models of strategic change by showing how a company develops and implements a change process (e.g., Kotter, 1996; Kanter et al., 1992; Luecke, 2003; see chapter 2.1). Specifically, I explored how the company encountered seven general steps to enact the strategic change towards a stronger end-customer orientation. These organizational steps include (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) developing a vision and a strategy, (3) creating a guiding coalition, (4) communicating the vision, (5) coping with change conflict, (6) gaining short-term wins, and (7) consolidating gains and producing more change. Moreover, in contrast to the organizational level, only little research has investigated the phases that the individual change agent encompasses.

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27 Sensemaking is about how managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves based on the information within the strategic change. Sensegiving is about the managers’ efforts to communicate their interpretation of the change to their peers in order to gain their buy-in (Rouleau, 2005; see also chapter 4.2). A concept or an idea can reach a “sensemaker” through many channels, both spoken and written, and both formal and informal. For instance, sensemaking practices include conversations, documents, and storytelling (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).
during a strategic change process (cf. Isabella, 1990; Jaffe et al., 1994). I add to this literature and examine the individual change role enactment of middle managers with a longitudinal process view. The findings of this investigation demonstrate that middle managers encounter four process steps. These steps are (1) change role assignment, (2) change role challenges, (3) practices for change role enactment, and (4) role outcome.

Fourth, this dissertation contributes to the research stream known as “strategy-as-practice”. Recently, research has called for more work that considers employees in terms of their interests, career aspirations, and a skillful demonstration of their competencies in a strategic change process (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015). In this dissertation, I respond to this call and show how middle managers use specific practices in order to enact their change role successfully and receive a promotion. Rouleau (2005) has shown that middle managers use the practices of translating, overcoding, disciplining, and justifying during a change process. Rouleau (2005) derived these practices by analyzing two middle managers who were store managers in a Canadian clothing company. Specifically, she investigated how these two middle managers marketed a new collection to end-customers of the company. The present study likewise has studied the practices employed by middle managers in a change process. However, the change context was different. I investigated 21 middle managers in a business-to-business company and found four practices that differ from Rouleau’s (2005) practices. These practices are engaging with change initiators, being resilient, making sense, and learning change skills.

Fifth, research so far has studied how strategists use strategic tools in practice (e.g., Antonacopoulou, 2006; Jarratt & Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2013). However, no research has investigated the step before the use of tools and, more specifically, none has examined the skills that middle managers need to learn to become effective strategy implementers – although several researchers have drawn attention to this research gap recently (Bartunek, 2014; Langley & Abdallah, 2011; Whittington, 2006). This dissertation addresses this gap and studies how middle managers learn to carry out strategy (e.g., Whittington, 2006; Wright, Paroutis, & Blettner, 2013). In particular, it explores which skill set must be learned by change agents in management training to enact their change role effectively (e.g., Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015); and, in doing so, the dissertation’s findings add to the learning perspective in strategy-as-practice literature. The results show that successful change agents need to learn specific skills, including how to do the following: (1) communicate, (2) use technical skills, (3) integrate socially, (4) be authentic, (5) be critical, (6) be open about new content, (7) lead, and
(8) be confident (see chapter 4.2 for a detailed description of these skills). In addition, change agents need to learn these skills quickly.

5.2.2 Implications for Research on Leadership

The findings of the dissertation contribute to leadership literature in at least four ways. First, they support leader member exchange theory. According to this theory, leaders develop an exchange with each follower. Because the intensity and quality of this exchange varies with every follower, leaders establish a good relationship only with some followers while neglecting others (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). As leaders exchange with their followers, followers may feel obliged to work harder to benefit the leaders (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). For instance, during exchanges in strategic change processes, leaders (top managers) have the opportunity to clarify how they expect their followers (middle managers) to implement strategic change (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kohli, 1985). In line with this argumentation and findings from Oral, Thaper, Herhausen, & Schögel (2015), the present study reveals that middle managers who have a good and open relationship with their top managers are more likely to be successful in their change roles.

Second, the present study adds to research on organizational energy. Cole, Bruch, & Vogel (2012, p. 447) define organizational energy as the “shared experience and expression of positive affect, cognitive arousal, and agency behavior among unit members in their joint pursuit” of organizational objectives. Bruch & Goshal (2003) derive four organizational energy zones: (1) passion zone, (2) comfort zone, (3) resignation zone, and (4) aggression zone. In particular, one may position role expanders of the present study in the passion zone since in this zone organizations foster strong, positive emotions such as joy and pride in the work. Here, employees are enthusiastic about implementing organizational strategies (Bruch & Vogel, 2005). Further, role resignation likely belongs to the resignation zone because these middle managers have weak and negative emotions such as frustration. Moreover, middle managers who have integrated their roles likely represent the comfort zone, showing “weak but positive emotions such as contentedness, whereas they lack the vitality, alertness and emotional tension necessary for initiating significant change” (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2003, p. 46). The study sample of the present study did not show any evidence for the aggression zone.
Third, this thesis derives findings that increase the understanding of the “inertia trap” and the “acceleration trap” of an organization (e.g., Bruch & Ghoshal, 2003). The inertia trap is the failing attempt of an organization to leverage resources effectively (Bruch & Vogel, 2005). In this dissertation, I have proposed using the construct “change inertia” on an individual level of analysis. I find that individuals who show change inertia are more likely to resign from their change agent roles. However, I further show that strong practices for change resilience help individuals to overcome the hardship of the change process. Hence, when applied to the organizational level, this finding implies that resilient organizations may be more likely to successfully implement their change strategies. Meanwhile, the acceleration trap occurs if top managers drive their organizations beyond their capabilities (“organizational burnout”). In this context, top managers implement major change initiatives without giving their employees a break to regenerate (Bruch & Vogel, 2005). By drawing on the findings of this dissertation, one readily sees that it will likely harm change agents to perform at top capacity throughout the whole change process, as this might move their organization towards an acceleration trap. From an organizational point of view, it is therefore beneficial to balance the ratio of role integrators and role expanders in order to prevent the fall into an acceleration trap.

Fourth, the findings of the present study are linked to leadership styles. In particular, the second-order concept “engagement with change initiators” relates to transformational, transactional, and laissez faire leadership (e.g., Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). Middle managers who engage strongly with top managers have a good and open relationship with them. In such a relationship, top managers are likely to support middle managers in their role as change agents, and hence middle managers are more likely to be successful in their change roles. This outcome is similar to transformational leadership28 (e.g., Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Tichy, 1984), as a transformational leadership style positively impacts middle managers’ commitment to change (cf. Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008). On the other hand, transactional leaders appreciate middle managers’ change efforts only if they act according to top managers’ directions and instructions (Bass, 1985; Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009). In line with this, middle managers who show an average level of engagement with top managers seem to have encountered a

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28 In this context, “the transformational leader […] can choose purposes and visions, can create the social architecture that supports them, can move followers to higher degrees of consciousness” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 218).
transactional leadership style and thus have performed at the medium role level. Finally, *laissez-faire leadership* style occurs if top managers fail to take responsibility for leading (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). In this dissertation, middle managers who resigned from their roles reported that they perceived low support from their top managers, and therefore showed a low role performance. These middle managers seem to have encountered a laissez-faire leadership style by their supervisors.

5.2.3 Implications for Research on Roles of Middle Managers

This dissertation further contributes to research on middle management’s role in strategy in at least three ways. First, the findings add to research about careers and role transitions. Research in this area suggests that roles may change in organizational settings as managers advance in their careers (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). For example, when middle managers move into new roles, these transitions may cause “sub-roles,” which are defined as significant aspects of the role that influence social roles and role expectations (Hall, 1995). The data analysis showed that role integrators and role expanders succeeded in the sub-role of being a change agent. Furthermore, role expanders used this new sub-role to advance in their careers after the change process (cf. Nicholson, 1984).

Second, the role outcomes that emerged in this research (role expansion, role integration, and role resignation) relate to the literature on managerial types (e.g., Mantere 2003). Mantere (2003), for instance, distinguishes between three types of managers in a strategy process: champions, citizens, and cynics. In this context, the performance of role expanders can be associated with champions, the performance of role integrators with citizens, and middle managers who resigned can be categorized as cynics. Specifically, middle managers who are role expanders share similarities with Mantere’s (2003) champion type. Both go the extra mile for their organizations and hence contribute to an effective strategy implementation. Middle managers who are role integrators are similar to citizens in that they are rather successful in terms of their company’s goals but not in terms of their own career goals (cf. Mantere, 2003). Finally, middle managers whose outcome is role resignation share negative emotions with Mantere’s (2003) cynics (e.g., frustration).

Third, the results also contribute to research on individual antecedents of middle managers’ successful role enactment (Wooldridge et al., 2008). For instance, past
research has found that variables such as organizational commitment, risk-taking propensity, network position, and social capital are important to facilitate middle managers’ role performance (Wooldridge et al., 2008). The present dissertation adds to this work and shows that the relationship with the top management team, sensemaking practices, change resilience, and learning practices are other important elements in the middle management’s role performance.

5.2.4 Implications for Research on Customer Orientation

The contributions of this dissertation to customer orientation research are fourfold. First, the study investigates how a business-to-business company moves from an intermediate customer orientation to an end-customer orientation. Shah et al. (2006) propose that the change in organizational structure, culture, financial metrics, and processes of the company influences its customer orientation. However, Shah and colleagues adopt a static perspective and do not consider the dynamics that can emerge during the implementation of a customer orientation strategy. The present dissertation therefore extends this customer orientation literature and applies a process view. Specifically, it examines how a company implements an end-customer orientation over time. The findings show that customer orientation implementation can occur in seven change steps: establishing a sense of urgency → developing a vision and strategy → creating a guiding coalition → communicating the vision → coping with change conflict → gaining short-term wins → consolidating gains and producing more change.

Second, the findings contribute to an emerging marketing research stream by showing how companies can serve the customers of their customers, which implies a shift of resources from retailers to end-customers (Homburg et al., 2014). The present analysis shows that companies can improve their relationship with end-users by shifting the mindset in the organization. For this, it is crucial to activate and convince all organizational levels. In this context, the analysis has shown that mid-level managers as change agents serve as linking pins, and that their contribution is vital to implementing an end-customer orientation throughout the entire organization. Specifically, the present study argues that change agents from middle management have the energy to move a company towards a stronger end-customer orientation. Throughout this process, these middle managers encounter several challenges (lack of leadership, time dynamics of change, and lack of change capabilities) and they use
specific practices (engagement with change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking, and learning).

Third, Noble & Mokwa (1999) were among the first scholars to show the important role of middle marketing managers in implementing marketing strategies. The present study reinforces the vital position of middle management in marketing implementation research by showing how middle marketing managers enact their change role in the entire organization. This study argues that, in particular, middle managers should engage with change initiators, build change resilience, make sense of their role, and learn change skills in order to effectively implement a specific marketing strategy focused on an end-customer orientation. These practices are positively associated with the middle managers’ role performance. Just as Noble & Mokwa (1999) noted that an increase in the role performance of middle marketing managers leads to an increase in the organization’s implementation success, these four practices also are likely to be important for an overall organizational implementation success.

Fourth, Kennedy et al. (2003) have shown how organizations can implement a customer orientation. The authors specifically argue that senior leadership, interfunctional coordination, and market intelligence are important for organizations when they change their units to enact a customer orientation. Apart from senior management support, which relates to the concept of “engagement with the change initiators” within the present study, this study suggests that change resilience, sensemaking, and learning are important levers for effective implementation of a customer orientation.
5.3 Managerial Implications

The research presented in this dissertation offers important insights for change management and marketing practice. Specifically, it provides implications for (1) middle managers, (2) top managers, (3) human resources managers, and (4) change initiators. Figure 22 summarizes the managerial implications for these four groups of stakeholders, and the next sections discuss the implications in more detail.

Figure 22: Overview of Managerial Implications

Source: Own Illustration

5.3.1 Implications for Middle Managers

Implications for middle managers as derived from the findings of the present research are manifold. First, middle managers should be clear about their new role as a change agent and which changes this role will cause in their daily work. Second, middle managers should be open to embracing challenges in their new role. Third, by strengthening specific change practices, middle managers might enact their change role more effectively. Fourth, middle managers should appreciate their change achievement before moving on in their careers.
Be clear about your new role

First, middle managers need to know the selection criteria for their assignment as a change agent. For this, they might ask the top managers or human resources department directly how they selected the change agents. It is important to know why the top management team assigned the role to specific managers and how the selected managers can contribute to the change. If middle managers know the selection criteria for the change agents, they can better assess whether or not they are suitable for the change agent role.

Second, middle managers should clearly know the demands of the additional role as change agent. In particular, fulfilling the change role needs additional resources, such as more working hours, and requires specific capabilities, such as leading a change team. If assigned middle managers think that they do not have the required resources and capabilities, they should provide the top management team with open feedback about their situation. Middle managers might ask for more resources or for support to improve their capabilities. In those cases where middle managers do not believe that they can enact the role successfully due to the above mentioned reasons, they should be allowed to decline the change role.

Third, middle managers can try to change their personal mindset about enacting an additional role as a change agent. In particular, middle managers who resigned from their role as a change agent often emphasized that the additional role was a burden. Thus, instead of perceiving only the burden (such as an additional workload), they may embrace the new role as a personal development opportunity and the chance to receive a promotion to a higher position.

Face your role challenges

After the assignment of an additional change role, middle managers often face role challenges. In this context, it is important that middle managers are aware of these challenges and try to find ways to address and surmount them. First of all, middle managers might try to develop a positive attitude towards the change agent role despite the high workload caused by the double role as marketing manager and change agent. Middle managers should accept the situation and perceive the change agent role as temporary.

Second, middle managers should not keep their challenges a secret. Rather, sharing their challenges with others might open their mind to finding new ways to deal with
new requirements. For instance, monthly scheduled *peer-to-peer conversations* might help managers to share their concerns and find solutions with their peers since they face similar challenges. In particular, “sparring partners” from other country organizations can help middle managers consider other perspectives and take a more objective view on their change role challenges. Sharing good practices might help to overcome challenges as well.

Third, if change agents think that they do not possess the skills, they might *search for suitable training offers*. Oftentimes, companies provide their employees with training programs, such as leadership or work-life balance, in order to develop their skills. Middle managers might talk to their supervisors to acquire the necessary training tools.

**Strengthen your change practices**

This dissertation discovered four change role *practices that help middle managers to enact their change role successfully*. In particular, middle managers should engage with the change initiators, develop change resilience, make sense of their job, and be open to learning new change skills.

First, in order to better engage with the change initiators, middle managers may *improve their communication skills*. For instance, they could train to give elevator speeches in order to convince top managers of the need for additional resources for their change project. Furthermore, middle managers could try to *engage more frequently with change initiators* (i.e., *top management team or headquarters*). This can help them to better understand the motives and expectations of the change initiators. It is crucial that middle managers develop a good and open relationship with the change initiators while being realistic in terms of the empowerment they can receive from them.

Second, middle managers should establish a *sense of what they do in their role* in order to succeed as change agents. For this, they should motivate themselves and create an overarching mission about *why* they perform the additional change role. For instance, change agents in the agricultural industry could follow a guiding vision, such as “I wake up every morning to contribute to a world with less hunger” (BCS Middle manager, 2013).

Moreover, the findings of the present research suggest that middle managers should *interact with end-customers regularly in order to make sense of their change role*. For example, middle managers working in the agricultural business could visit and talk
with growers who use the company’s products and services to survive a drought period. As middle managers tend to be office-based with less autonomy than top managers and less contact with end-customers than front-line employees, the exchange with end-customers seems crucial to making sense of their job.

Also, the results of the dissertation recommend that middle managers create a sense of urgency among change recipients (e.g., front-line employees). For instance, a middle manager working in a country organization that is the market leader can be challenged by the task of convincing other employees to change their mindset and behaviors, since they already perceive their company’s performance as superior. In this case, middle managers could point out that the change is necessary in order to maintain the market position, for instance, because of a volatile market situation and the entrance of new competitors in the market. Moreover, middle managers should be able to show the benefit for every single change recipient in order to get their buy-in for the change. This means that middle managers should explain to employees how a change adoption could help them in their particular daily work.

Third, change agents should develop a certain degree of change resilience. This is useful in two ways. On the one hand, resilient change agents can better cope with organizational politics. On the other hand, they are able to prioritize faster in the change process. In multinational organizations, middle managers in particular might face organizational politics when different stakeholders have conflicting interests. Resilient middle managers prioritize by focusing on the most critical and urgent tasks of their role (e.g., communicating the new strategy in their units, organizing workshops, and implementing change tools). Rethinking the change priorities at certain points might help middle managers to de-prioritize and re-prioritize important tasks. If change agents cannot prioritize due to an increasing work overload over a longer period, they should not hesitate to ask the top managers, the headquarters, or their peers for more resources, as mentioned above.

Fourth, regardless of their tenure with the organization and their past experience, middle managers should be open about learning change skills. Change skills – such as leadership or how to network – are vital in order to be a successful change agent. The findings of this study imply that learning change skills more rapidly than their peers provides change agents with a competitive advantage so that they are more likely to be promoted. Apart from training programs, managers can improve their change skills through “learning by doing.” In this manner, managers should be open about trial-and-error in their change role to figure out what works best in their situation.
Table 20 summarizes recommendations for middle managers who are responsible for the implementation of a strategic change in a company and specifies these recommendations by providing some exemplary actions. In particular, Table 20 illustrates how change agents can (1) engage with the initiators of the change, (2) improve their change resilience, (3) make sense of their role, and (4) develop themselves through change training programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Exemplary Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Engage with the initiators of the change</td>
<td>• In top-driven changes, interact frequently with the change initiators (top managers/headquarters) and discuss the next change steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interact frequently with the change initiators and understand their motives for the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improve your change resilience</td>
<td>• Focus on your goals and do not get trapped in organizational politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Train to prioritize in times of work overload and stick to your prioritization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ask for more resources from your top managers or peers if needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Make sense of your role</td>
<td>• Talk with colleagues about why you would like to change the firm and how you contribute to the change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Convince employees by showing “what’s in it for them” if they adopt the change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interact with the end-customers regularly – even if this is not an official part of your job description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop yourself through change training programs</td>
<td>• Work on your change skills (e.g., leadership, networking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Volunteer for training and play an active role in team work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Acquire change skills as quickly as possible to use the change momentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Try to build informal networks with your training peers who face the same challenges to find joint solutions (“win-win situation”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Recommendations for Change Agents in Their Role Enactment  
Source: Own Illustration
Appreciate your change achievement

At the end of the change process, middle managers should appreciate their change achievement. For instance, middle managers who have successfully implemented change in their business units should make sure that the organization provides them enough time to recharge with fresh energy in between their job roles to avoid a potential burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Further, middle managers who have successfully implemented change in the business unit but do not receive any promotion should be informed why they did not get promoted. In order to avoid misunderstandings and to be able to further commit to the organization, these middle managers should talk to their supervisors and ask for feedback about the promotion criteria. This point is particularly important as the clarification of the promotion policy avoids feelings of injustice among middle managers. Also, middle managers should ask for feedback from the peers whom they worked with in the change process in order to elaborate on their change role performance.

5.3.2 Implications for Top Managers

The results of this research include several implications for top managers. In short, top managers should (1) be clear in the role assignment, (2) be aware of the role challenges, (3) support change agents, and (4) appreciate the change outcome. The next section elaborates on these implications in detail.

Be clear in the role assignment

Top managers should be clear and transparent about how they select the change agents. First, they might ask human resources managers for support in the selection process since human resources managers might be better able to assess the suitability of middle managers for the change role. For this, top managers might first develop a long list of potential change agents, which they then discuss with human resources managers to select candidates with the highest potential for the role.

Second, top managers should listen to feedback from middle managers about the role assignment process. Chances are high that some middle managers are not able to handle the additional workload due to their current job situations. Therefore – even if the change is top-driven – top managers need to be approachable and open about potential strategy adjustments based on suggestions from middle management.
Third, in exceptional cases, top managers should give middle managers a chance to decline the additional role as change agent. Middle managers need to be able to show reasons why they are not able to take on the role because, otherwise, it may cause feelings of injustice amongst other middle managers who accept the change agent role. To summarize, top managers should shape the selection process as transparently as possible in order to gain the trust of middle managers as change agents.

**Be aware of the challenges**

Top managers should be aware of the challenges that change agents encounter in the change process. First, they should develop realistic organizational change goals. This means that top managers should be flexible and adjust these goals if they receive feedback from the change agents indicating that these goals are hardly accomplishable within a given period. For instance, as in the present case study, if top managers dedicate three months to a change project, they should be open to extending it to six months if change agents complain that three months are not sufficient to accomplish a sustainable change.

Second, a frequent challenge in change processes is the lack of resources. If change agents ask top managers for additional resources (e.g., manpower, time), top managers should consider providing change agents with these resources to help them enact the change effectively. For example, top managers might rotate employees from departments with a low workload to ones that are affected by the change and have a higher workload.

Third, the leadership style of top managers is important in change processes. In particular, top managers should communicate a strong change vision consistently. This vision should be applicable to the local work environment of the change agents. Top managers could encourage middle managers to develop a vision specific to their units. With this, they can empower the middle managers and help them to create their own team vision. Also, top managers may act as role models for the change agents. For example, top managers can interact with end-customers by taking part in customer events. By doing so, they would “walk the talk” and signal middle management to dedicate time to seeing end-customers as well.
Support change agents

Throughout the change, top managers should support the change agents by fostering the four practices that leverage the change agents’ role enactment: engagement with change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking, and learning change skills. First, top managers should frequently interact with change agents and exhibit understanding for their work overload. When facing work overload, it is important that change agents perceive high support from their top management team. For this, top managers could create an open learning culture in their organizations. For instance, they may ask change agents in “jour-fix meetings” how the change proceeds and how they can support middle managers by providing specific resources or sponsorship for change projects.

Second, top managers should help middle managers to make sense of the change. By pointing out the specific contribution of middle managers in the change process, top managers can motivate middle managers and thereby improve their change performance. Also, in order to strengthen the sensemaking practices of middle managers, top managers may encourage them to meet the end-customers and interact with them regularly. In this context, top managers could schedule customer events for middle managers in order to make middle managers see the impact of their back-office work at the customer interface. Moreover, top managers could promote “low-hanging fruits” by emphasizing the early successful outcomes of the change (e.g., increased market share or higher customer satisfaction score). This may help middle managers to continue focusing on the change process with high commitment and motivation.

Third, top managers should help middle managers to strengthen their change resilience. In order to do so, they could explain to middle managers how to prioritize their tasks in the change process so as to allocate resources efficiently and effectively. Further, top managers should clearly communicate the focus in the change process. For instance, they could arrange town hall meetings to talk about the new strategy and the company’s change focus for the next year. Moreover, organizational politics weakens change resilience. Therefore, top managers should strive for an organizational culture that prevents organizational politics.

Fourth, top managers should highlight the importance of change training programs for the successful enactment of the role as a change agent. Top managers can act as role models for change agents by attending some training sessions themselves. In this way they can show personal involvement and the importance of training programs. Also, top managers can sponsor tailored in-house training programs for change agents. With
this, they communicate to middle managers that it is important to learn change skills and that they should be open to new change content and methodology. As middle managers also “learn by doing,” top managers should strive for a learning culture within the organization that supports trial-and-error in the change process.

Appreciate the change outcome

Finally, top managers should appreciate the change outcome of their change agents. First, they should clearly explain the human resources policy on why specific change agents receive a promotion or other compensation such as a bonus. Only by doing so can they avoid feelings of injustice among change agents when other managers are not promoted. They should be open about explaining the promotion procedure to middle managers. Also, top managers should give middle managers and the whole organization some time to recharge their energies after the change process is over. Otherwise, they might guide the organization into an “acceleration trap” (e.g., Bruch & Goshal, 2003). This might create exhaustion in the company and dissatisfaction among change agents.

Second, top managers should show recognition and appreciation to all change agents – regardless of the individual outcomes. The additional role as change agent can be tiring due to an increased workload. Therefore, top managers should acknowledge the change efforts of the agents – for instance, in front of the entire organization. This might be a symbolic recognition, such as a certificate, that top managers give the change agents at the end of the change process, or a speech directed to the agents to thank them for their contribution. The recognition in front of others motivates middle managers and increases their organizational commitment and performance (Bradler, Dur, Neckermann & Non, in press).

Third, as soon as the change process is completed, top managers should celebrate the success with all change agents. By doing so, they can end the change process officially and thank change agents and organizational members who contributed to the change success. For instance, they could arrange corporate events to celebrate the success with all change agents – such as outdoor activities or dinner parties. Celebrating change success motivates the employees for future projects.

Table 21 summarizes the phases, pitfalls, and levers in the change process from the perspectives of both middle managers and top managers.
## Table 21: Pitfalls and Levers in the Change Process

Source: Own Illustration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of phase</th>
<th>Role assignment (t=0)</th>
<th>Role challenges (t=1)</th>
<th>Role enactment (t=2)</th>
<th>Role outcome (t=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pitfalls for middle managers | • Not clearly knowing what it means to take over the additional role  
• Underestimating the work overload of the new role  
• Lack of communication with the top managers in terms of what they expect from the middle managers | • Developing negative emotions towards their role and being overwhelmed by their challenges  
• Forgetting that change is a long journey which takes time  
• Expecting too much from the top managers  
• Blaming others instead of working on own contribution | • Not engaging with the change initiators  
• Forgetting what the sense of the job is  
• Not trying to develop a change resilience  
• Developing barriers towards learning in training | • The intensity and quality of the change practices determine the outcome  
• Depending on their change role performance, middle managers are promoted, stay in the current position, or leave the company |
| Role assignment (t=0) | • Top managers assign hand-picked middle managers to be change agents  
• Top managers form role expectations towards middle managers and the latter form their own understandings of the role |  |  |  |
<p>| Role challenges (t=1) | • Additional role as change agent causes challenges such as lack of leadership, time dynamics of change, and lack of change capabilities |  |  |  |
| Role enactment (t=2) | • Middle managers enact practices in order to solve their challenges: engage with change initiators, build change resilience, improve sensemaking, and learn change skills |  |  |  |
| Role outcome (t=3) |  |  |  |  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pitfalls for top managers</th>
<th>Role assignment (t=0)</th>
<th>Role challenges (t=1)</th>
<th>Role enactment (t=2)</th>
<th>Role outcome (t=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Not clearly articulating what it constitutes to be a change agent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being closed for interaction with middle managers</td>
<td>· Not explaining reasons for promotion and hence causing feelings of injustice within the change agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Not listening to the feedback of middle managers about role assignment</td>
<td>· Being too demanding regarding change targets</td>
<td>· Ignoring the need to give sense to middle managers about the change</td>
<td>· Not appreciating all change agents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Forgetting to celebrate the success</td>
<td>· Forgetting that change is a long journey</td>
<td>· Forgetting to foster the resilience of middle managers</td>
<td>· Forgetting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· For role expansion: Making sure that the organization provides enough time to recharge energy in between the roles, finishing the change and making it stick</td>
<td>· Leading the organization into an “acceleration trap”</td>
<td>· Engaging more strongly with the headquarters, trying to find sense in why they do the job, avoiding organizational politics, learning change skills more rapidly</td>
<td>· Forgetting to celebrate the success</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levers for middle managers</th>
<th>Role assignment (t=0)</th>
<th>Role challenges (t=1)</th>
<th>Role enactment (t=2)</th>
<th>Role outcome (t=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Being honest to top managers if they do not feel capable of being a change agent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For role expansion: Continuing to enact all four practices strongly</td>
<td>· For role expansion: Making sure that the organization provides enough time to recharge energy in between the roles, finishing the change and making it stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Asking the top management what the selection criteria for change agents are</td>
<td>· Trying to stay positive about the change process despite work overload</td>
<td>· For role integration: Engaging more strongly with the headquarters, trying to find sense in why they do the job, avoiding organizational politics, learning change skills more rapidly</td>
<td>· For role integration: Understanding why they did not get promoted, talking to supervisors and asking for feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Perceiving this challenge as an opportunity for self-development</td>
<td>· Talking about challenges and sharing them with peers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 21: Pitfalls and Levers in the Change Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levers for top managers</th>
<th>Role assignment (t=0)</th>
<th>Role challenges (t=1)</th>
<th>Role enactment (t=2)</th>
<th>Role outcome (t=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to the feedback of middle managers about the role assignment</td>
<td>Adjusting targets if they are too tight</td>
<td>Engaging openly with middle managers</td>
<td>Explaining the human resources policy why specific change agents receive a promotion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving the middle managers a chance to say no to the role</td>
<td>Freeing up additional resources for change agents</td>
<td>Allowing a trial-and-error culture in the company</td>
<td>Showing recognition and appreciation to all change agents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking the human resources department for support to evaluate the middle managers</td>
<td>Acting as role models and sticking to the vision, which should be related to local goals</td>
<td>Dedicating enough resources if managers ask for it</td>
<td>Celebrating success with change agents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicating consistently a strong vision for the change</td>
<td>Giving middle managers and organization some time to rest after the change journey is over</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- For role resignation: Talking honestly with top managers about their frustration; if they cannot align, then considering to leave the company
5.3.3 Implications for Human Resources Managers

Although the focus of this dissertation is on deriving implications for organizational members who are directly involved in the implementation of a strategic change process (i.e., middle managers, top managers), it also provides insights for human resources managers. In particular, human resources managers can benefit from the findings in terms of (1) helping change initiators to select change agents, (2) drawing top management’s attention to the challenges that change agents face, (3) developing and facilitating skills and competencies of change agents, and (4) helping change agents to plan their career after the change process.

Help change initiators to select change agents

First, human resources managers should dedicate time to support the selection of change agents that are suitable for this role. Potential selection criteria are the managers’ abilities to be resilient in the change and their openness to learn. For instance, if the headquarters initiates the change, the human resources managers might offer their help to the headquarters to select candidates with the highest potential. The headquarters might otherwise select a talented middle manager in a country organization, for example, but this manager could struggle to fulfill the current tasks due to personal challenges in the job environment. Hence, the manager would not be able to successfully enact an additional role as a change agent. Neither the organization nor the manager would benefit from such an alignment. Therefore, human resources managers should play an active role in the selection process of change agents, as the selection is central for an effective change implementation.

Draw top management’s attention to challenges

Second, the human resources managers may assemble joint experiences about change projects. By collecting experiences about the common pitfalls in several change processes, for instance, human resources managers might be able to draw the top management’s attention to typical challenges in this process. This is important, as top managers often have time constraints and prefer to have aggregated information on the change process. Human resources managers might act as “one voice to the top managers” in order to present the challenges of the change agents.
Develop skills of change agents

Third, the analysis has shown that middle managers who interact with end-customers are more successful in enacting their change role than those who do not interact with end-customers. Thus, for middle managers who do not have any end-customer interaction at all, the human resources department may offer “short-term assignments.” Within these short-term assignments, middle managers would work a couple of months for an operational unit in a marketing department to interact with the end-customers. Additionally, for change agents who work at the headquarters, the human resources department should provide opportunities to do job rotations. Managers in global positions could work in regional or country offices for some years in order to get to know more about the customers and business operations. Thus, middle managers would get to know the end-customer and the operational customer business better. This would provide middle managers more understanding of the needs of end-customers, and hence they would be able to make more sense of their contribution to the change. This in turn might increase their motivation for their role.

Moreover, the findings shed light on how human resources managers can develop effective training programs in order to support change agents in enacting their roles successfully. In particular, findings of the present study show that it is important to design training programs where managers learn (1) to communicate, (2) to use technical skills, (3) to integrate socially, (4) to be authentic, (5) to be critical, (6) to be open about new content, (7) to lead, and (8) to be confident. Human resources managers should try to embed these skills in the training program. For instance, human resources managers might prepare settings in the training where managers learn to be authentic by presenting their own created posters or speaking up in front of the group. This may also help managers to gain confidence. Networking events in the training provide the change agents with the opportunity to integrate socially into the change agent community. Additionally, exercises such as peer coaching enable managers’ critical thinking. The keynote speakers should present new content in the training that helps the change agents to be open about using new tools. Also, human resources managers might employ case studies in order to train the leadership skills of managers in the team.

Help change agents to advance in their careers

Human resources managers should closely track change agents’ personal development in order to evaluate their performance throughout the change. They can create joint
career plans in which they discuss potential positions that middle managers can apply for after the change process is completed. By collaborating closely with the top management team, human resources managers can help with promoting change agents who enacted their change roles successfully. Finally, human resources managers might talk with change agents who feel frustrated about their roles in the change process in order to help find mutual solutions.

5.3.4 Implications for Change Initiators

This section provides implications for initiators of a change process. In particular, Figure 23 recommends seven steps for how change initiators can guide a top-driven change process.

First, the change initiators should create a sense of urgency for the change in the organization. For instance, this could be an internal email to all employees about how the company has been losing market share recently. Then, the core change team should form the case for change and build an appropriate project team. For a change towards a stronger end-customer orientation, for instance, this may mean creating a larger marketing department.

Second, the change initiators should develop a vision and a strategy. In this step, it is important to create a concept and a plan for the change process. This could be an analysis of the status quo and the formulation of goals and related change tools. In this step, the change team should define pilot projects and inform the involved units about these projects.

Third, change initiators should create a guiding coalition. This means that they should gather change agents in the organization that advocate for the change and spread it through the entire organization. Change initiators might create a long list of candidates and then inform candidates’ supervisors whether or not their current job situation allows for the additional workload as a change agent. After selecting the change agents, change initiators need to ensure that training programs are provided for change agents so that they can develop and enhance their change skills and hence become able to implement the change effectively.

Fourth, both the change initiators and the change agents should communicate the change vision in the organization. Here, change initiators should encourage change agents to “catalyze” the strategy to their peers and employees. In this process, the
change strategy often confuses employees because they need to change the way they work. In order to avoid confusion, change initiators should communicate the change vision and the goals of the new strategy. In this step, change initiators should be patient because the change strategy often takes time to diffuse through the entire organization – particularly in big multinational organizations.

Fifth, change initiators should be open in dealing with conflicts throughout the change process. Change initiators should listen to feedback from change recipients and adjust their change strategy accordingly. For instance, if the scheduled time frames for the change projects turn out to be rather tight, the change initiators should revise them in cooperation with change agents. Otherwise, this might lead to frustration among employees.

Sixth, change initiators should gain short-term wins in order to motivate change recipients. Change initiators should celebrate first successes by means of so-called “low-hanging fruits” in order to create a change momentum. This change momentum helps change initiators to convince further change recipients and motivate them for the change. Throughout the entire change process, change initiators should appreciate the work of all change agents and recognize their change efforts.

Finally, in the seventh step, change initiators can consolidate the change gains and use success stories to produce more change in their organization. For instance, if a specific customer segmentation strategy worked in a country market, it may be transferred to another country market with a similar size and customer base. An important part of this phase is to measure the change success. With this, the change initiative gains legitimacy in the organization, and the rest of the organizational members can be convinced by these facts, making it more likely that they will embrace the change.
### Managerial Roadmap for Guiding Change

#### 1. Establishing a sense of urgency:
Form a change case and “build it up from scratch”

#### 2. Developing a vision and strategy:
Develop a concept, analyze the current situation, prepare pilots

#### 3. Creating a guiding coalition:
Select change agents and train them

#### 4. Communicating the vision:
Encourage change agents to catalyze strategy, sort out confusion of employees, and let strategy diffuse

#### 5. Coping with change conflict:
Listen to feedback from change recipients and adjust strategy accordingly

#### 6. Gaining short-term wins:
Enhance strategy if needed and celebrate first success stories

#### 7. Consolidating gains and producing more change:
Measure change success and replicate successful change

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**Figure 23: Managerial Roadmap for Guiding Change**

**Source:** Own Illustration
5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation has several limitations that are addressed hereafter. These limitations provide opportunities for future research.

First, I acknowledge that the generalizability of my findings needs to be tested through further research. In this dissertation, I focused on change agents from middle management within one single company and one particular industry (the crop protection industry). In line with Lincoln & Guba (1985), I have provided a rich description of the case setting so that readers can better assess whether and to what extent my findings may be applicable to other settings. Hence, future studies could analyze and compare the change role enactment of change agents from different companies, settings, and industries in order to scrutinize contingency factors. In particular, the implications of this thesis are derived from a business-to-business multinational company setting. Future research may test whether the present findings also hold for small, medium-sized, or business-to-consumer companies. Also, this study analyzed the change role enactment of middle managers in a top-driven change environment. Future research could scrutinize the process model developed in the present dissertation of the middle management’s change role enactment in a bottom-up initiated change process. For instance, it may test whether the derived change agent practices (i.e., engagement with change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking, and learning change skills) are applicable to settings in which the change is driven bottom-up.

Second, the collected data reflect the perceptions of individual middle managers. Specifically, the findings are not based on positivistic objective information, but on the interpretations of middle managers who were interviewed and/or observed for a period of three years. Although I triangulated the data through top manager interviews and objective data (e.g., measurement of the middle management’s role performance), the interpretive perspectives of mid-level managers characterize this research. The individual level of analysis faces limitations because it considers only middle managers as the implementers of a change strategy. Specifically, future research may investigate whether it is sufficient to mobilize hand-picked middle managers as change agents to change the entire company. In order to capture the change process holistically, scholars might study the interactions in the company and the strategy diffusion among several organizational levels (e.g., top managers, front-line employees).
Third, future work could investigate the dynamics between the emerged pathways (1) role expansion, (2) role integration, and (3) role resignation. In particular, scholars could study whether the managers clearly followed one pathway during the entire change process or whether they switched from one pathway to another. Likewise, future work may analyze how role integrators can become role expanders, and how change agents who are likely to resign from their roles may be better able to integrate the change role in their daily work.

Fourth, although this thesis suggests that learning via training is a success factor for role performance, I acknowledge that this is not the only way of learning. As research has shown, “learning by doing” is essential in developing change capabilities as well. Also, one informant pointed out: “I learned leadership and change management skills throughout the training at St. Gallen, but also by learning by doing” (3). Indeed, it may be that learning by trial-and-error has an important influence on managers’ role performance. Within this thesis, I could not elaborate on this aspect, as I did not have access to observing middle managers’ daily work as change agents. In this vein, training observations, site observations, and narratives from the interviews were not sufficient to assess “learning by doing.”

Fifth, future research might investigate personal factors of middle managers that influence their change role enactment. Scholars might analyze how change agents apply effective practices contingent on, for instance, intrinsic motivation, or the national culture (cf. Gailbraith, 1973). Likewise, they could analyze how individual orientations such as self-orientation, task orientation, or interaction orientation may influence a change agent’s role enactment. Agents who are self-oriented are concerned with their own welfare and they emphasize their own interests in human interactions (Sheth 1976). Task-oriented agents primarily try to accomplish the given change task (McFarland, Challagalla, & Shervani, 2006; Williams & Spiro, 1985). Interaction-oriented agents aim at establishing a personal relationship with their stakeholders in the change (McFarland et al., 2006; Sheth, 1976, p. 385). A further factor that influences change role enactment could be a manager’s fear of change. Change threatens an individual’s stability and continuity (Weeks et al., 2004). Organizational members who agree on the need to change still may resist some aspect of the change process, as they perceive it as risky (Tapsell & Law, 1998). Additionally, a fear of failure creates a fear of learning, which may cause a fear of change, and hence managers may be more likely to stick to the present situation (Harari, 1999).

Sixth, this research made the assumption that the middle managers in the study sample had similar skills and experiences when the change process started. Nevertheless, it
might be that some middle managers in the sample were more experienced than others in terms of leading a change process. Thus, these managers might have gained a competitive advantage compared to their peers. Also, the analysis has not addressed how ready an individual change agent was for the change role. However, “readiness for change” could play an important role in terms of dealing with challenges that accompany the additional role (e.g., Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). Therefore, future research may compare the change role enactment of middle managers who are better “prepared” for the change than those who are less prepared.

Seventh, this study investigated middle managers who worked at the same organizational hierarchy level. However, recent research has distinguished between higher and lower middle managers (e.g., Brunner, 2013). In this context, higher middle managers have a formally larger sphere of influence than lower middle managers (cf. Mantere, 2003). Furthermore, the sphere of influence represents the middle managers’ perceptions of the extent to which they can influence the change process (Huczynski, 1996; Mantere, 2003). Hence, future work could explore the contingency variable “lower versus higher middle manager” in order to control for differences in the role enactment between the two types.

Eighth, I investigated the change role enactment of middle managers from a role theory perspective. However, future studies could analyze the change enactment of middle managers from an “identity change” perspective. Because roles are expectations directed by others towards an individual (Katz & Kahn, 1978), they do not clearly show how individuals integrate the roles into their identities. Therefore, future research might study a change process from both perspectives: the roles that are directed towards the individuals, and then also how the individuals perceive their identity when they carry out these specific roles (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004).

Ninth, the measurement of the change role performance variable has limitations. Although I combined three indicators to capture the individual change role performance of the 21 middle managers, two of these indicators were self-rated (self-rated job performance and self-rated change project performance in own unit). These indicators might be biased due to issues associated with self-ratings (cf. Convay & Lance, 2010), such as positivity biases (Pahl & Eiser, 2005). Also, the third, objective indicator of role performance (i.e., promotion to higher job position) faces limitations. Promoting a change agent to a higher position can also be due for other reasons than a superior change role performance. For instance, a “role integrator” might have been eligible for a promotion, but the organization might not have any open positions at that
specific time. Hence, future studies should develop more rigorous ways of capturing the change role performance of the change agents.

Tenth, the qualitative findings could be validated with quantitative methods, such as surveys or experiments. For instance, scholars could develop specific scales for the four change practices (engaging with change initiators, change resilience, sensemaking in change, and learning change skills) and test their impact on change agents’ role performance. Furthermore, scholars could then analyze how the change agents’ performance impacts the overall organizational change performance.

Taken together, the role of middle managers receives increasing attention in change management and customer orientation practice. This dissertation aimed at providing initial and important insights about how middle managers enact their role as change agents in a strategic change process towards end-customer orientation. However, considering the identified limitations, more research is needed to fully clarify how middle managers implement change strategies and how executives may support their change agents. Overall, it is my hope that the present study provides a foundation and motivation for future investigations into the role enactment process of middle managers.
References


Accenture (2007). *Strengthening the Critical Core*. Retrieved from:


Fuller, G. (2013). *Stuck in the Middle: The Role of the Middle Manager*. Retrieved from: https://www.i-l-m.com/Insight/Edge/2013/August/middle-managers [accessed on 08.06.2014]


Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guideline

Note on abbreviations for types of informants:

TM: Top Manager
HQ: Middle Manager working at the headquarters
RM: Middle manager who works for a regional organization and closely with country organizations
MM: Marketing or Sales Middle Manager in a country organization
All: Refers to all four types of informants

1) General Background and Understanding of Customer Orientation

Example Questions on General Background (All)

- How many years of job experience do you have in total?
- How long have you been working at BCS?
- How many hierarchical levels does your organization have?
- What was the turnover in your organization in 2013?
- Please describe briefly your tasks/role within the customer orientation strategy at BCS.

Example Questions on Customer Orientation (MM, HQ, and RM)

- In your view, who is the main customer of BCS?
- Who is responsible for customer orientation? What is your role?
- How often do you interact with your customers? (0=never, 1=annually, 2=bi-annually, 3=quarterly, 4=bi-monthly, 5=monthly, 6=twice per month, 7=weekly, 8=twice per week, 9=daily, 10=constantly)
- Which channels do you use to interact with customers?
- What does customer orientation mean to you? What are examples from your daily life? Could you tell me an anecdote?
Probes: 
- What was so special in that situation?
- Why was the customer satisfied?
- Do you recall a situation where the opposite happened (unsatisfied customer)? Why was that the case?
- What challenges have you experienced to serve the customer?

- How do you figure out what your customers’ current and future needs are?
- If you had three wishes to increase your customer orientation, what would that be?

Example Questions on Transformations (MM, HQ, TM)

- How did the transformation initiative towards customer orientation start at BCS? In which stages have you been involved?
- What were your personal challenges in this process? How did you address these challenges? Could you tell me a specific situation?

Probes: 
- What was so special in that situation?
- How did you manage this challenge?
- Who has helped you?
- Do you have challenges that still exist?

- How does BCS implement the customer transformations in the countries? (top-down/ bottom-up)

2) Practices that Leverage Customer Orientation

Example Questions on Practices (MM)

- What motivates you to become more customer-oriented? Please provide some examples from your daily business.
- Which practices and tools help you to align yourself towards the customer?
- What are the barriers for customer orientation?
- Do you exchange your customer experiences with your peers? If yes, how?
- Does BCS offer marketing & sales training for you?
- Are you assessed by customer satisfaction? How is the incentive system?

Example Questions on Interaction with Colleagues and TM (MM)

- How frequently do you personally interact with the top management team and your regional organization respectively? (0=never, 1=annually, 2=bi-annually, 3=quarterly, 4=bi-monthly, 5=monthly, 6=twice per month, 7=weekly, 8=twice per week, 9=daily, 10=constantly)
Top Management Team

Regional Organization

- How does the top management team support you in being customer-oriented? (What is missing?)
- How do the headquarters or regional functions support you in becoming customer-oriented?
- Do you give feedback to your supervisor/top management regarding the customer strategy? How often? Meeting/mail etc.?

3) Customer Orientation in Different Contexts

Example Questions on National Culture (All)

- How does the way of serving the customer vary in different countries?
- How does the way of implementing the transformations vary in different countries?
- Could you tell me an anecdote about this?

| Probes: | • Which countries can you assess?  
| | • How do customers in Asia and Europe differ?  
| | • How does BCS face these differences, for instance in terms of customer service, local products? |

Example Questions on Organizational Type (All)

- How does the understanding of customer orientation vary amongst countries, regions and the headquarters?

Example Questions on Upper vs. Lower Middle Management (MM, HQ, and RM)

- How does the understanding of customer orientation vary amongst you and your supervisor?
- Could you tell me an anecdote about this?

| Probes: | • What is the difference?  
| | • Could you describe a situation where you did not agree with your manager about your customer strategy? |
4) Outcomes of Customer Orientation

Example Questions on Performance Rating (MM)

- How do you measure transformation success towards customer orientation?
- What adjectives would you use to characterize your country organization? (Examples: aggressive, strong, weak, sophisticated)
- Do you think the transformations in your country have an impact on customer satisfaction and business performance? Please rate the impact on a scale from 0-10 (0= very low; 10= very high).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Customer satisfaction</th>
<th>Business performance</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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- Please rate the customer orientation of your country organization, of your region and headquarters on a scale from 0-10 (0= very low; 10= very high).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Please rate your own customer orientation and job performance compared to your peers on a scale from 0-10 (0= very low; 10= very high).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer orientation</th>
<th>Job performance</th>
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## Appendix 2: Participant Observations and Meetings with BCS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content of Meeting</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hours spent</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants from BCS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kick-off meeting for the project</td>
<td>27.06.2012</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>3 company representatives</td>
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<td>Program design, definition of topics, and session dates</td>
<td>23.07.2012</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Headquarters BCS</td>
<td>3 company representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detailed planning of the sessions</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Leadership, customer needs, segmentation, work-life balance, influencing internal stakeholders</td>
<td>30.09.2012-04.10.2012</td>
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<td>10.-14.02.2013</td>
<td>40</td>
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29 The researcher was not able to take part in two days of this week.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>End Date</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Channel management, key account management, leadership of high-performing teams</td>
<td>07.-</td>
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<td>execution: experience exchange of participants</td>
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<td>London</td>
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<td>process, discussion of empirical findings with managers</td>
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Appendix 3: Open Questionnaire

1) Transformations

- In your view, what is a successful transformation?
- If you are currently involved in a transformation, what is being done well and what needs to be done differently to make change stick?
- What is the biggest challenge to your transformation?

2) Marketing and Sales

- In your view, who is BCS’ most important customer?
- What are the main challenges in your current job regarding marketing and sales?
- Where do you see the biggest growth potential for marketing and sales in your country/region?
- What needs to be done to realise this growth potential?

3) Leadership

- Which trends do you recognize regarding the leadership style at BCS?
- Please describe briefly what good leadership means to you?
# Curriculum Vitae

## Personal information

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Cansu Oral</th>
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## Educational background

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<td>05/2011 – 04/2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>03/2015 – 07/2016</td>
<td>Visiting Scholar, Cass Business School, City University London, United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/2013</td>
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## Work experience

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<tr>
<td>Since 2016</td>
<td>Business Developer, Too Good To Go, United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>05/2011 – 02/2015</td>
<td>Graduate Research Assistant, Institute of Marketing, University of St. Gallen, Switzerland</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/2012 – 02/2013</td>
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<td>Intern, Market Research, Deutsche Messe AG, Germany</td>
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<td>10/2009 – 02/2010</td>
<td>Tutor, Department of Marketing, Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/2009</td>
<td>Intern, Istanbul Stock Exchange, Turkey</td>
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<tr>
<td>02/2008 – 03/2008</td>
<td>Intern, Ziraat Bank AG, Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/2006 – 04/2010</td>
<td>Translator, CeBIT, Agritechnica, Hannover Messe, Germany</td>
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