Conditions of successful SMTs transformation in SMEs

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Abstract

The organizational landscape is changing profoundly. Classic models of management and pyramidal structures are beginning to crack in their effectiveness and relevance for the current day and age. Management literature has focused greatly on the study of the alternative structure of self-managed teams (SMTs) and the principles of self-organization. Although research endeavors have focused extensively on large-scale implementations, less attention has been devoted to the study of this radical change implementation in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Hence, the aim of this paper was to uncover the variables and factors contributing to a successful change implementation at the SMEs level. For this purpose, nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with leaders and employees from three companies were conducted, and analyzed through the Thematic Analysis and Gioia's methodology. Findings revealed this process to be an extremely relational-oriented one, with the need for high levels of involvement of all company members. Top management needs to provide an unconditional and unwavering commitment to the change initiative and must also be the one starting and supporting the change project in the first place. Companies need to hire external consultants who should play the role of facilitators, coming alongside the top management and the change team to offer support. Additionally, a firm understanding of the necessity to frame this organizational change on a long-term time span is necessary; given that results might need time to show. This research also highlights the various challenges and metamorphoses that both employees and top management need to go through, in order for this organizational structure to thrive; and how company interventions can aid the process of change. Companies need to frame this process as a people-oriented one, making sure that among the various other interventions to be considered, all the employees are actively involved in shaping and contributing to the process of change.

1. Introduction

The panorama in which organizations exist has seen a profound and lasting change in the past decades, a change in which the classic models of management (i.e., top-down approach) have been increasingly perceived as anachronistic (Caldwell, 2003). In the wake of this realization, the focus of companies has been towards moving to ways of managing where the value of human capital is harnessed, and the organizational structure is rendered capable of responding to the challenges that the new turbulent business landscape poses (Magpili & Pazos, 2017). One effective way companies have sought to respond to these new challenges is through the adoption of self-managed teams (SMTs). These are teams where their members *autonomously* arrange workload, work shifts and collectively participate in decision-making (Hoda et al., 2011). Some of the benefits that research has argued SMTs can bring about are: increased job satisfaction, improved communication and shorter decision-making time (ultimately leading to being able to swiftly respond to changes and trends), improved employee self-esteem, lower costs (less need of managers and lower levels of absenteeism or turnover), flexibility and innovation and quality (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003). One exemplary organizational transformation that was drastic and successful at the same time is the one that is built upon the principles of organizational leadership expounded by Ricardo Semler (Semler, 2001; 2004). Semler demonstrated to be a strong believer in the values of trust and company democracy which have led to the creation of a reality where autonomy and self-organization constitute the pillars on which the whole organization is founded. Under Semler's leadership as CEO, the Brazilian company Semco underwent a series of radical changes that would alter the face of the company forever. To give a quick glance into the financial results achieved by the transformation, as of 2003, Semco had moved to an annual revenue of $212 million, an evident growth (of circa 40% annually), given the annual revenues of $35 and $4 million of 1994 and 1982 respectively. The increase of staff employed is a further testimony to the successful transformation Semco went through, recording an increase in employees to 3000 in 2003 from the previously 90 in 1982 (Ricardo Semler, 2020). The results are not exclusively financial. In fact, Semco has since lost the need for a large HR department–which the size of the company would instead warrant under regular conditions–responsible for recruiting new talent. In fact, by word-of-mouth alone, the company receives up to 300 applications per open position (Semler, 2014). Semler's work philosophy was also translated into other domains which have seen the adoption of his leadership principles in the context of hotels (Six Senses Botanique,

n.d.) and schools (Lumiar UK, n.d.). It is after his principles, that the Semco Style Institute (SSI) (Semco Style Institute | Shaping the Future of Work, n.d.) was founded in the Netherlands; with the objective of transforming into reality–for companies in the Netherlands (but also in many other countries)–the transformation that Semco itself went through back in the 80s. Although the literature has provided a fair amount of data that testifies to SMTs effectiveness; positive experiences in organizations transitioning to SMTs, have not been the norm and research on such transformation is rather limited (Magpili & Pazos, 2017).

The low percentages of benefits perceived by companies in actualizing SMTs has been argued to be caused by a lack of planning and implementation (Elmuti, 1997). In addition, Nicholls et al. (1999) go as far as to say that: *"The lessons learned from the Mexican executives suggest that applying self-managed teams is a matter of implementation."* (p.23). Following this strand, scholars have called to investigate those factors that can foster a successful SMTs implementation, over-against the quest for further investigation into SMTs effectiveness or the lack thereof (Magpili & Pazos, 2017; Millikin et al., 2010). Furthermore, the limited studies available on such transitions have focused mostly on large-scale projects (Dikert et al., 2016, Laanti et al., 2011, Sommer, 2019). This poses problems when trying to extend the data gathered from these large-scale studies to other types of organizations, such as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which account for the 99% of all European businesses (European Commission, 2016). Projects conducted in the context of large corporations, face a set of challenges that cannot be assumed to be the same as those that SMEs would face (Ates & Bititci, 2011). The main reason being the different nature of the internal dynamics occurring in SMEs–of crucial importance when addressing the topic of organizational transformation– which, for example, tend to be characterized by a high degree of informality (Santoro et al., 2019). This is expectable given that SMEs tend to be perceived as a reflection of their owners who are usually active part of the company management too, thus blurring the distinction between company ownership and management (Ates & Bititci, 2011). As the name implies, SMEs are different when compared to their larger counterparts in terms of size, and therefore of staff employed, but also in terms of turnover, which has to remain under a certain threshold in order to qualify as a SME (European Commission, 2016). Since literature in the context of SMTs transformation at the SMEs level is scarce and we lack knowledge on its dynamics and intricacies (Eliya, 2022) this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

How can a radical transformation based on SMTs be successfully implemented in SMEs?

By addressing this research question, the following study contributes to the literature in the field of SMTs adoption and change management at the SMEs level in two ways. Firstly, in terms of SMTs adoption, this research answers the calling of scholars into further investigating the under-researched factors leading to successful SMTs implementation in organizations (Magpili & Pazos, 2017). Secondly, the thesis also contributes to expanding our knowledge on the nature of change management in the scantly investigated SMEs setting, highlighting which factors make the process successful and which less so. The results of this research also present valuable and actionable practical contribution for managers and change management practitioners alike. *"It's said that a wise person learns from his mistakes. A wiser one learns from others' mistakes. But the wisest person of all learns from others successes."* (Maxwell, 2009). This quote from notorious leadership writer John Maxwell explains perfectly what the aforementioned managers and change management practitioners will be able to reap from the results of this research. Namely, they will benefit from empirical data to draw on and be inspired by in their own companies journey to self-organization, learning from those who have paved the way before them and succeeded.

The remaining part of this research is structured as follows. In the Theoretical Background, the concept of SMTs is explained further, coupled with the knowledge we have about the process of their implementation. Adding to this is a chapter on the Semco Style Institute (SSI), where the way it operates and its values are outlined. Following is the explanation of the Methodology opted for in this research. The Results section reports the gathered and analyzed data, after which the Discussions point out where the differences or similarities lie between the findings of this research and the current literature. Lastly, after addressing the Limitations and Future Research, the Conclusions end this research.

2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter, three concepts are addressed. A review of the nature of the organizational structure of SMTs is provided, with its benefits and challenges; then an assessment of the knowledge we currently have of SMTs transformation at the SMEs level is expounded; and finally, the values and beliefs that drive and substantiate the Semco Style Institute are explained.

2.1 The traditional approach to employee management

The rise of self-management only makes sense in light of a description of what this new way of organizing work can offer an alternative to, namely, the traditional top-down, task-focused endeavor that characterized the arena of employee management up until the 80s (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003). In the top-down approach, tasks are divided into numerous sub-tasks (Proença, 2010) to be assigned, in turn, to different employees, only responsible for those tasks (Pindur et al., 1995). The subsequent result of this is that employees would not be aware of what happens in other stations of work, where other tasks are performed, and neither are they aware of how the role they play is part of the larger whole that comprises the manufacturing of a product for example (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003). In their work, Frankforter and Christensen, (2003) highlight four areas where the classic approach to employee management is seen as problematic.

Firstly, in terms of inflexibility, given to the fact that employees have become accustomed to performing a single task, which makes it difficult for new tasks–which new trends might have brought about–to be implemented by the employees who are narrowly focused on their usual task. Secondly, while organizations look at the idea of task specialization in favorable terms (imagining how this can increase efficiency), the human need for engagement with one's work is overlooked (Ram & Prabhakar, 2011). In fact, in this traditional form of employee management it is hard to harness employee motivation and channel it towards avenues of interest for the company. Thirdly, companies where this type of employee management is the norm struggle to keep their workforce from either absenting or a quitting prematurely (Lund, 2003). This is due to the reasons highlighted above and to the lack of satisfaction that employees feel when they are treated as almost "human machines". Fourthly, and lastly, for all the reason above, the traditional approach tends to lead to increased overhead expenses. This is due to the fact that–as employees are only responsible (and really aware) of a small part of the whole process–accountability is difficult to track, which makes the presence of functions like supervisors and managers pivotal in order to ensure quality work but also accountability, should things not go the right way (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003).

The paradigm shifts that contributed to the rise of SMTs owe their origins to the efforts of companies such as Volvo (through the plants at Uddevalla and Kalmar), that set out to make human capital their most valuable asset through humanizing the workplace (Adler & Cole, 1993). The concept of employee empowerment–which stands for a true involvement of employees who are allowed to make decisions for themselves–finds its origins in the human relations movement which sought to democratize the workplace and constitutes the foundation

of SMTs (Elmuti, 1997). For empowerment to occur, information must be accessed by all (and therefore shared), so that the decentralization of decision-making possible is made possible (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003; Proença, 2010).

2.2 Teams and Self-Managed Teams

In the literature, a team has been defined as: (1) being constituted of two or more individuals who; (2) socially interact (increasingly virtually too); (3) have one or more common goals; (4) are assembled to perform organizationally relevant tasks; (5) are characterized by interdependence in their workflows, goals and outcomes; (6) have different roles and responsibilities and; (7) form part of a larger organizational ecosystem made of boundaries and connecting points to the broader contextual system and task environment. (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). This description aptly fits the nature of SMTs which, however, do need further specification.

First of all, self-managed teams are usually made of six to ten members (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003); although the number remains difficult to precisely point out, as it has been argued that the *sine-qua-non* characteristic must be that of guaranteeing a number that allows for adjustments to be implemented by team members' interactions, as opposed by higher structures above them (Yang & Guy, 2004). SMTs are divided into two categories: those who come together for a temporary necessity and those who are permanently assembled and work on day-to-day operations (Elmuti, 1997). In terms of the context to which SMTs lend themselves best to, SMTs are more apt for companies that engage in highly complex and interdependent tasks (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003; Poe et al., 2019). The internal social dynamics of SMTs become all the more important, as it is not formal managers the ones who are directing these teams. On the contrary, it is the team itself organizing its own way forward, which makes reaching common focus, mutual trust, respect and the ability to continuously self-organize in order to respond to challenges of crucial importance (Hoda et al., 2011; Rousseau & Aubé, 2010).

At the heart of self-management is a *shift* in responsibility, which is now no longer in the hands of a supervisor in order to bring about behavioral change bur rather individuals assume responsibility for behavior modification (Ferguson & Rivera, 2021). Within SMTs leadership emerges more informally, as opposed to being assigned from the outside (Poe et al., 2019). Furthermore, the leadership dynamics change too–from vertical to horizontal–with the result that managers lose their only prerogative of controlling others and are now required to gain loyalty, credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of their subordinates (Elmuti, 1997). The

implementation of SMTs requires a considerable shift in the minds of management too. In fact, as autonomy and self-determination are key in SMTs, management can no longer expect to be exercising their role in a similar fashion as the way they did in the traditional approach expounded above. In fact, there will need to occur a shift from control to *coaching* (Druskat & Wheeler, 2004; Wageman, 2001; Morgeson, 2005).

2.3 Benefits of Self-Managed Teams

An organizational structure based on SMTs has been argued to lead to numerous benefits. For instance, when organized in SMTs, employees are entrusted with more job-related responsibilities, and report higher levels of job satisfaction and motivation (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003). SMTs allow for increased speed (and efficiency) with which decisions are made (Moravec et al., 1997). In fact, when teams have total say-so over their budgets, hiring and firing and spending, they can easily reach consensus among themselves without the need to look for external approval from a manager. Poe et.al (2019) investigated the effectiveness of SMTs (made of process engineers in a manufacturing company) compared with that of the traditional way of working (hierarchically) and found indeed that SMTs outperformed their counterpart because of the newly gained autonomy in decision-making.

At the same time, however, simply assigning autonomy to a team will not result automatically in team members engaging in proactive autonomous behaviors (Rousseau & Aubé, 2010). To a better decision-making process also corresponds improved communication (Proença, 2010) as these teams are usually made of people coming from different departments of the company, with the result of having information spread through the company much more easily (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003). Moreover, feedback is now flowing in a horizontal fashion as opposed to a vertical one, with the addition of being now provided not by managers or supervisors higher in the hierarchy, but by those informal leaders that naturally emerge in SMTs (Przybilla et al., 2019) and who are close to the day-to-day operations (Poe et al., 2019; Campion et al., 1993). Another benefit that employees experience has to do with the higher levels of self-esteem they develop. In fact, they are no longer a mere cog in the much more complex machine, but rather they become crucial *players* in the survival, sustenance and thriving of the team they are part of and of the general well-being and growth of the company (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003, Liu et al., 2011). In other words, they experience their work to be meaningful as it is actively contributing to the organization success (Poe et al., 2019).

Together with individual-level benefits, there are also positive results, at the organizational level to be attained through the introduction of SMTs (Elmuti, 1997). Frankforter and Christensen (2003) argue for four of these. The first relates to cost control, and they argue that companies that introduce SMTs end up needing fewer monitoring and supervising personnel, and as a result, the rate of scrap production or absenteeism and turnover significantly decrease. The second relates to the speed that companies employing SMTs now see at their disposal. Speed in terms of decision-making, of pivotal importance when thinking about the changes and evolutions occurring in the environment in which companies find themselves in (Yang & Guy, 2004). In his work on organizations metaphors, Morgan (1986) talks about the metaphor of organizations as organisms. And just as organisms need to respond properly to change in order to survive, in the same fashion Morgan argues that framing organizations in this way, means seeing them as responsive (or failing to do so) entities that–willingly or unwillingly–must always be ready to reinvent themselves as they go, should new circumstances warrant this. Thus, following this metaphor, the speed that SMTs confer seems to lend itself very well to the ever-changing environment in which companies now find themselves in (Botha et al., 2008).

To stress this point even further, it is sufficient to remember giant corporations such as Kodak, whose failure to recognize the necessity to change, coupled with the sole (successful) focus in the film industry–what the authors refer to as "core rigidities"– cost them the opportunity to become leader in the digital photography industry (Lucas & Goh, 2009). Another benefit of SMTs for which Frankforter and Christensen (2003) argue relates to what was just discussed, namely, the flexibility that SMTs grant and that, in turn, enable organizations to be swift in embracing innovations; and tackle organizational changes (Hoda et al., 2013). The last benefit for which Frankforter and Christensen (2003) argue is an increase in quality which they connect to the pride of ownership (Campion et al., 1993) that members of SMTs feel as they have become the only ones responsible for a particular service or product (Liu et al., 2011).

2.4 Self-management transformation at the large-scale level

The work of Magpili and Pazos (2017) summarizes, through a literature review, all the extant knowledge from the literature in the field of successful implementation of SMTs in general. In their work the authors organize the results in three categories: individual, team, and organizational level. Given the scarce presence of studies that specifically address radical transformation in the context of SMEs, the findings in this chapter will serve as a benchmark on which to compare the results of SMTs implementation gathered from the interviews

(conducted with SMEs). At the individual level, six variables are addressed: individual autonomy, individual roles, leadership, skills, resistance to change, and work experience. At the team level, five variables are distinguished: external leadership, peer control, task characteristics, team autonomy and team-level diversity. And finally at the orgaNnizational level, eight variables are discussed: corporate culture, corporate policies, national culture, organizational goals, organizational structure, training, resources and rewards (Magpili & Pazos, 2017).

Individual Level	Team Level	Organizational Level
Individual Autonomy	External Leadership	Corporate Culture
Individual Roles	Peer Control	Corporate Policies
Leadership	Task Characteristics	National Culture
Skills	Team Autonomy	Organizational Goals
Resistance to Change	Team-Level Diversity	Organizational Structure
Work Experience		Training
		Resources
		Rewards

Table 1 Variables affecting SMTs implementation at the three different levels (Magpili & Pazos, 2017).

2.4.1 Individual level

The first variable, individual autonomy, has provided results that are dependent on different contingencies, meaning that individual autonomy has been linked to both positive and negative outcomes in successful SMTs implementation (Magpili & Pazos, 2017). For example, for highly interdependent tasks low levels of individual autonomy have been argued to be beneficial as opposed to high levels of autonomy (Langfred, 2005). This seems to be a seemingly counterintuitive finding given that autonomy is really part of the very fabric of self-managed teams. Also, members of a software development company who were used to high levels of autonomy, did not benefit from it when the company then tried to implement self-managed teams, further demonstrating the high complexity of such transition (Moe et al., 2010).

The second variable relates to the individual roles of team members in the self-managed team. Opposed to the classic structuring of organizations, within self-managed teams

employees tend to be assigned a variety of roles which may change at the rhythm of new and unexpected changes in the environment and are assigned on a *best-fit-to-the-role* basis (Bernstein et al., 2016). Furthermore, this allocation and variation of roles on a need basis has caused some problems in companies that work with self-managed teams. In fact, as the workload increases so does the difficulty of employees in deciding where to focus their attention and which tasks to tackle first. With such a variety and abundance of tasks, appropriately compensating employees for their (one-of-a-kind) contributions becomes problematic too, as the method to use for reaching a right compensation becomes vaguer and blurrier. Lastly, hiring becomes challenging too, as new tasks and assignments are quickly added onto employees' shoulders, who need to find someone else to help them cope with the workload (Bernstein et al., 2016).

The third variable at the individual level deals with leadership, which one would immediately wonder what type of it might be warranted in such an organizational structure. Literature has argued that SMTs lend themselves to a type of leadership called *transformational*, where leadership emerges as the result of the contribution provided by an individual, as opposed to being inferred to someone by virtue of formality or compliance to the job description of a leader (Eseryel & Eseryel, 2013). In addition to this strand of research, scholars have called the attention to another type of leadership that emerges in SMTs, which is the shared one. Within this leadership style team members would take on leadership roles (although not all of them) that were once the exclusive prerogative of the leader; depending on the level of team maturity (Spiegler et al., 2021). Eseryel and Eseryel, (2013) argue that transformational leadership differs in the context of SMTs from that in the context of hierarchical structures in that leaders do not start by communicating a big vision they want to work towards, but rather get down to work to achieve the visions they have, inviting others to join. Also, the personal contribution brought about by the transformational leader plays a role in further distinguishing that person from the others and eventually qualify him/her as a leader in the eyes of other team members (Eseryel & Eseryel, 2013).

The fourth variable Magpili and Pazos, (2017) point out are skills, which the authors further divide into three categories: self-management, general and team-work. Starting from the first, it is necessary that leaders be ready in providing team members a *"leadership gap"* where hierarchies are done away with and team members are allowed to fill those roles as they may see fit (Spiegler et al., 2021). Once this gap exists, in order to implement SMTs, scholars have called for the focus to be on acquiring certain skills such as the ability to take responsibility and show initiative, coupled with a shift towards employees showing high

degrees of self-management (Rubio Andrés et al., 2015). Literature has also shown that the ability to self-manage, specifically through self-initiated task redesign, contributes to effective performance in teams; further contributing to shedding light into the value-adding dynamics that affect positive enactment of SMTs (Millikin et al., 2010). To testify to the very thin line between the right amount of individual self-management and an unbalanced amount, Millikin et al. (2010) also show evidence of how an excessive degree of individual self-management can actually prove detrimental to team performance; especially where team unity and group cohesion levels are low. Autonomy has also been linked to team members' individual efforts, and specifically the efforts were fostered by the influence of a transformational leadership style, which were conducive to better internal and external communication (Driedonks et al., 2014). Good team performance will also necessitate the development of resilience among team members for those times when faced with great uncertainty in their tasks (Gray, 2012). The second level of analysis addresses the general skills that SMTs need to show in order to succeed. An example of these is the ability to solve problems collectively, having conflict resolution abilities, being able to communicate ideas to both fellow team members and management, set own goals, show leadership attitudes over team work and team members and start off change initiatives (Nicholls et al., 1999). Of particular importance is the ability to solve interpersonal problems, who were reported to occur on a much higher basis within SMTs than more common organizational structures; due to the fact that SMTs tend to be a better "hiding structure" for misdemeanors that would otherwise be noticed much earlier in formal organizational structures (Wall et al., 1986). Adding to this, is the expectation that members of SMTs should be able to effectively cover multiple (and diverse) roles as the need calls for (Hoda et al., 2013). The last level of analysis relates to the importance of teamwork skills. SMTs members, given the absence of formal authorities, need to be agents that foster an environment of genuine trust, and must be ready to share information on a regular basis with each other; so that the team is ready for adapting to new eventual conditions the environment might require (Banai et al., 2000).

The fifth variable addresses the resistance to change that teams can face, which has been argued to be present in employees regardless of the level of commitment and persuasion exercised by management in their change initiative (Proença, 2010). To "oppose" this view, research has argued that employees might not be aprioristically averse to change, but that they might indeed respond differently to different role configurations of middle management and top management in actualizing the process of change (Heyden et al., 2017). Resistance may occur, for example, in the process itself of transitioning to SMTs, where anticipated distributive

justice was found to feed resistance to the change process (Shapiro & Kirkman, 1999). Another factor affecting change management initiatives has to do with the previous history of change of an organization (Bordia et al., 2011).

The sixth and last variable at the individual level is the work experience of team members. This is crucial, for example, in the process that naturally leads to the emergence of those team members that end up covering a leadership position (Eseryel & Eseryel, 2013); and are able to offer initial guidance to the team (Hoda et al., 2013). On the other hand, experienced team members can also be more prone to retreat to old working patterns compared with fresh team members, but have the maturity to be able to cover two roles in a team (Hoda et al., 2013). This chapter has highlighted the numerous and different dynamics that literature has argued individuals deal with in the process of SMTs implementation.

2.4.2 Team-level input variables

Moving onto the next-level variable, Magpili and Pazos (2017) address five variables that operate at the team-level. The first is external leadership, and an example of how to apply it comes from Semler. In its company transformation process, Semler strived to create an environment that would be conducive for others to make decisions, as opposed to him being the one to whom people would turn to in order to move forward (Semler, 2001). It can be noticed from this example that the appropriate leadership for enacting SMTs is one that *facilitates* the process of becoming self-organized (Ayas, 1996; Manz & Sims, 1987; Spiegler et al., 2021) rather than one that offers guidance to the team for moving forward. Although the concept itself might strike as counterintuitive, research has shown that the role of the external leader is crucial as linkage point between the team and the organization at large; and in offering functions such as coaching (Morgeson, 2005), championing the team to executives and facilitating access to resources (Druskat & Wheeler, 2004).

The second variable is peer control. The emergent motivational state of peer-based control at the rational level (but also at the normative level) has been found to lead to increased performance both at the individual and collective level of SMTs (Stewart et al. 2012). One the other hand, peer pressure was depicted as a coercive feature of SMTs in the context of team achievement of goals and bonuses (Proença, 2010).

The third variable at the team level has to do with the characteristics of the task for which SMTs are employed, which have been argued (SMTs) to lend themselves better to a contingency view than to a universalistic view–therefore not suitable in *all* scenarios (Rousseau & Aubé, 2010). Indeed, a dimension that literature has argued to influence the performance of

SMTs is that of task routineness which, if present, makes the adoption of SMTs superfluous; which instead would be a thriving option towards team performance and team viability (sustained success of team over time) in those cases where teams are faced with highly uncertain, nonroutine tasks (Rousseau & Aubé, 2010).

The fourth variable at the team-level is team autonomy. This is a tricky aspect of any SMTs that needs proper balancing; given that research has provided mixed results in terms of the linkage between team autonomy and performance (Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2014). It is especially crucial from the perspective of external leaders (the ones guaranteeing autonomy to teams or failing to do so) who, research shows, felt caught in the middle between the SMTs and management; where the former were accusing them of providing too much guidance and the latter too less (Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002).

The fifth variable at the team-level–which Magpili and Pazos (2017) further specify as "team-level diversity"–is skill diversity. Research has argued that heterogeneity among team members, both in terms of skills and experiences, is linked to STMs effectiveness; and to an increased level of learning (from each other) among employees (Campion et al., 1993). Team diversity has also been linked with self-management attitudes, which in turn leads to readiness to changing situations (Nerur et al., 2005). Moving the angle of focus from the individual perspective to the team-level one, this chapter has highlighted the dynamics that literature has argued teams face when implementing SMTs.

2.4.3 Organizational level variables

The next set of variables that Magpili and Pazos (2017) analyze is at the organizational level, where research has argued that a conducive environment is necessary for the actualization of SMTs (Spiegler et al., 2021). The first variable of corporate culture really acts as an all-encompassing aspect that, with its influence, permeates at all levels of SMTs implementation. The right corporate culture is crucial for the development and endurance of teams shared mental models; and for supporting a successful implementation of SMTs (Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002). The unfit between an organization culture and the desire to implement SMTs may be so significant to warrant a process of organizational culture change (Tata & Prasad, 2004).

The second variable refers to the corporate policies organizations adopt; which have been argued to influence the implementation of SMTs in the form of management style, policies and company traditions (Proença, 2010). Also, high degrees of centralization have been linked to SMTs being perceived as more of a nice concept than a transforming reality

(Tata & Prasad, 2004). SMTs operate more effectively where team members are involved in decision-making at the task level and where less rules and procedures are present (Tata & Prasad, 2004). Rules and regulations have been argued to slow down people and hamper the realization of innovation (Semler, 2001).

The third variable addresses the type of culture of a certain country, and its influence on the implementation of SMTs. Although national culture has been argued to not be an insurmountable barrier to SMTs implementation (Moravec et al., 1997); some remarks are helpful. An apt example is the dimension of power distance which refers to the extent to which a country accepts power to be distributed in the hands of few and the recognition of positional status (Hofstede, 1980). High levels of this dimension are easily perceived as problematic given that the idea behind SMTs would be for managers to relinquish control–and therefore their status–and for employees to collectively work on an assumption of equality. In a country that scores high on power distance like Mexico, it was found that the involvement (and therefore the endorsement) of the initiative of transitioning to SMTs required the support of top management in order to be perceived as *credible* in the eyes of employees (Nicholls et al., 1999). The influence of power distance was also found to operate at the individual level on employees coming from cultures that score high on power distance; indeed these employees struggled more in the process of exercising control and discretion over their work, given that they were used to management guidance (Liu et al., 2011).

The fourth variable is that of organizational goals, which are critical in moving towards effective team performance; it was found that having clear goals acts as a sort of *gate* to team performance, a gate which however opens only when teams have autonomy coupled with feedback on their performance (Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2014).

The fifth variable addressed is organizational structure, which has been argued to pose the most challenging obstacle to overcome in the implementation of SMTs, given that the latter requires a total shift–both in management and employees–towards empowerment (Nicholls et al., 1999). Also, some organizational structures might be more ready than others to implement SMTs (Nerur et al., 2005).

The sixth variable assessed is training. SMTs require its members to undergo training for the implementation phase (Nicholls et al., 1999) and learn new skills in the context of group functioning such as being able to evaluate each member's contribution, the team processes and team deliverables (Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002). Training has also been suggested to be necessary for employees who, given cultural influences, are more reluctant to exercise control over their jobs (Liu et al., 2011).

The seventh variable is resources, which literature has argued to be connected to team effectiveness in that access to them allows teams to work properly and move towards self-management (Tata & Prasad, 2004).

The eight and last variable addressed is rewards, which scholars in the field of change management emphasize as a crucial part of sustain any change endeavor (Kotter, 1995). Furthermore, in the context of the implementation of a network structure for project management based on SMTs, rewards have been argued to be the main motivation for achieving performance (Ayas, 1996). Revising the rewards system might also prove helpful in bringing about self-management attitudes in employees who might find this more challenging given their cultural background (Liu et al., 2011). Zeroing in to the characteristics of the organization that intends to implement SMTs, this chapter has outlined those characteristics that are conducive for a successful implementation process and those which might hamper it. Now that a theoretical basis for SMTs and their implementation variables has been established, it is possible to move onto describing the values and beliefs that drive the actions of the Semco Style Institute (SSI) in leading organizations in the journey towards self-management.

2.5 The Semco Style institute

As already stated, in 2016 the Semco Style Institute (SSI) was born; with the aim of bringing to a larger audience the new way of working that Semler enacted in his own company back in the 80s. A five-principals framework, the Semco Style Framework, guides the actions of the SSI (Semco Style Institute | Shaping the Future of Work, n.d.). The five principles that the SSI strives to guide companies to are: trust, alternative control, self-management, extreme stakeholder alignment and creative innovation.

Starting form trust, the aim of the SSI is to bring to workers that dimension that is already theirs in all other spheres of life apart from work, namely, that of being treated as *adults*–not present in a lot of manager-employee dealings happening in a lot of traditionally organized companies (Semler, 2001, Wall et al., 1986). What this means is that employees are given the same room of say-so (this time at work) which is already theirs in all other areas of their lives. The realization of a trust-based environment is also contingent upon employees having access to the right information and to lower levels of power distance. For trust to be built it is crucial that all forms of social/status-based differences be done away with in the company so that communication happens smoothly and informally. But also, information must be shared without filters to all; so that the company does not keep decision-making authority

stuck in the hands of few. Employees need to be able to *process* this information too, in addition to just receiving it. This means that they might be called to learning new skills through targeted trainings. The importance of trust has been highlighted in research, which has argued that where it is lacking, employees are more likely to experience low level of job satisfaction, increased attitude towards leaving and eventually higher levels of exits from the organization (Bordia et al., 2011). It is therefore clear how important, especially financially in this case, developing a trust-based environment can be for a company.

Alternative controls are another pillar of the SSI. At the heart of this pillar is the belief that traditional system controls (pyramidal command-and-control) really only offer the illusion of being in control; and that controlling your employees is not really necessary in order to ensure that control that is surely healthy and necessary in any given organization. What was argued in previous chapter helps to shed light on this as it was shown how autonomy, by means of SMTs, allows for true freedom of action for employees in their day-to-day jobs (Hoda et al., 2011). Also, another way advocated by the SSI and found in the thought of Semler (Semler, 2001), is that of putting a premium on a *natural* way of acting guided by common sense as opposed to being directed by strict procedural norms. From this, it follows that management needs to grant this freedom–in the form of influence over company decision-making–and assign specific shares of responsibilities to employees and teams. Establishing an environment that can foster such vision among the workforce is of course of paramount necessity.

The element of self-management will not be addressed specifically as it is already been addressed above and below in the description of the rise, functioning, benefits of self-managed teams and the variables that influence their positive implementation. The only element advocated by the SSI that might warrant further description is the importance of making sure that, what Semler addresses as the *"reservoir of talent"* (Semler, 2004), is used up to its full extent, meaning that people are allowed to take part in those jobs to which they feel the most accurate match for and are also given permission to revisit it (match to a job) in time. To illustrate this point, at Semco people are free to wander around the company until they find their best position to cover and are also free to move again as they realize they have lost the interest that was once there. Semler states that this comes out of "selfish" motives because he believes that the company will perform best when its employees are made capable of pursuing their interests in a way that benefits the company too (Semler, 2004).

Extreme stakeholder alignment refers to the importance of having all sorts of stakeholders–such as the client or the external and internal ones–aligned in the actions they pursue. A widespread awareness of what things a specific department is responsible for needs

to be present, and also of how everyone is pursuing the agreed-upon goals (i.e.: does a team's walk match its talk?). In order to realize this, it is crucial to attain a common ground between stakeholders, meaning that different and possibly "contradicting" needs must find a common ground where they can be reconciled. In addition to this, is the necessity of involving the external stakeholders in the organization as much as possible, so that a fresh understanding of the needs and wants of the client can be renewed, and unpleasant surprises of irrelevant solutions/products can be avoided.

The last pillar, creative innovation, is really a byproduct of the application of all the previous pillars of the SSI, as the environment is made conducive for entrepreneurial and innovative behaviors to blossom. Some remarks for creative innovation to occur follow. Firstly, it is crucial to ensure that habits that foster creative innovation, such as a commitment to continuous improvement, are part of the fabric that makes the organization culture as opposed to being sporadic occurrences. People need to be aware of how the company functions holistically and must be given room to innovate as they see fit; with the obvious consequence of accepting the possibility, or really the necessity, of mistakes. Finally, all interactions with clients and other stakeholders should be made use of, as these might give rise to innovations; and when innovations are indeed deemed worthy, time and resources should–in a Semco way (democratically)–be assigned to them. Now, that a description of the SSI and the values that drive it have been provided, it is possible to move to the last part of the theoretical background where the context of SMEs is addressed.

2.6 Characteristics of SMEs

Given the focus of this research on investigating the specific and arguably different context of SMTs implementation in SMEs, this chapter zooms in into those aspects of SMEs that make them different from their larger counterparts

One of the characteristics of SMEs relates to their focus, which is mostly concentrated on the technical and operational issues of day-to-day business, with the consequence that less energy (if any at all) can be devoted to other issues which, although important, might not appear as such in the hectic daily atmosphere of work (Ates & Bititci, 2011). This scenario is the direct result of another aspect peculiar of SMEs which is their limited resource base, in terms of money–especially during the rapid-growth-stage (Dean, 1986)– access to personnel, and the ability to diversify risks (van de Vrande et al., 2009, Lazarević-Moravčević et. al., 2014). The difficulty in accessing finance has been credited as one of main reasons behind the failure of SMEs (Asah et al., 2015). SMEs tend to rely on their internal resources as the source of

competitive advantage and are unlikely to be able to influence their environment (O'Regan et al., 2004). Given the fact that SMEs are usually owned by their managers, decision-making and the crafting of strategy tends to usually be a one-sided process (Van Gils, 2005), with the general presence of a command-and-control culture (Ates & Bititci, 2011). Different styles of leadership–although acknowledging the uniqueness of each scenario–have been found to be linked to different measures of performance; with a transactional style of leadership being linked to short-term outcomes and the transformational and human resources style being associated to most performance measures and to long-term performance (O'Regan et al., 2004).

SMEs are characterized by a much more informal way of functioning than larger organizations (Ates & Bititci, 2011, O'Regan et al., 2004), where codes and manuals orient one's way in dealing with different contingencies. This informality is also the reason why these companies tend to possess high levels of tacit knowledge, residing in the hands of employees and being harder to pass on or imitate (Ates & Bititci, 2011, Ngah & Jusoff, 2009). Another aspect of SMEs–this time in the context of change– is that SMEs tend to *react* to change, as opposed to drive it. And particularly Ates & Bititci, (2011) argue that SMEs engage in change when the external environment demands it and more specifically their customers. Another aspect that Ates and Bititci (2011) address relates to how, when growth in SMEs does indeed occur, management skills do not seem to follow the same track of growth (improvement) that the company experiences, but rather tend to remain on a poor level. This constitutes a major roadblock in front of SMEs development, as managerial skills have been argued to be linked to managers' ability to realize changes in the environment and address them as they unfold (Asah et al., 2015). Finally, the last aspect addressed by Ates and Bititci (2011)–which once again is the consequence of the very first characteristic of SMEs described above–concerns their attitudes, which tend to be very much entrepreneurial (Lazarević-Moravčević et. al., 2014) and opportunity seeking, sometimes with less consideration to how something should be planned, let alone acted upon (Ates & Bititci, 2011).

2.7 Self-management transformation in SMEs

Perhaps given the lower expected financial returns of change initiatives in SMEs compared to those in large organizations, the focus of change management models has notoriously been on the context of large corporations. This not only led to a shortage of academically rigorous work in the context of SMEs, but has also led to the assumption that the work that scholars produced in the context of large companies was smoothly and directly applicable to SMEs (Ates & Bititci, 2011). To this, Ates and Bititci (2011) oppose themselves strongly, arguing on the other

hand for a significant number of differences that characterize SMEs specifically as opposed to their larger counterparts (O'Regan et al., 2004, Lazarević-Moravčević et al., 2014).

SMEs differ greatly from their larger counterparts and this, mainly in terms of resources–which are really the running fuel of every company. As their resources–as well as access to them–are limited, SMEs are more parsimonious with the resources they do have at their disposal. This means that risk is managed in a much more thoughtful manner than larger companies, who might afford embarking in higher-risk projects (Meyer et al., 2020). On the other hand, being an SME does carry some advantages (not present in large organizations), such as being able to swiftly respond to market changes, staying flexible (Lazarević-Moravčević et al., 2014) and being better prepared–given their usually flat structure–to deal with organizational cultural change (Meyer et al., 2020). This last aspect in particular, is of crucial importance given that transitioning to SMTs means embarking on an all-encompassing change for an organization (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009).

As already mentioned, SMTs transformation at the SMEs level is scarcely studied. To the best of the research knowledge, only a paper from Fazzari and Mosca (2009) explored SMTs transformation explicitly connecting it to the context of SMEs. The authors describe the process of implementing SMTs at a manufacturing company made of 350 employees. The initiative started from the deep commitment of the CEO who wanted to create a healthy and collaborative organizational environment. This is already an element worth notice, since the literature–although in the context of commitment towards CSR–confirms the crucial importance of commitment from the leader for bringing about change in SMEs (Cantele et al., 2020). The process at the company described by Fazzari and Mosca (2009) was born out of and sustained throughout by the HR department who created *ad hoc* a sort of spin-off team that would be responsible for bringing about the intended changes. After this, teams were created on a departmental basis and were encouraged to start meeting at least once a week, being supported at this stage still by a facilitator–much similar to the mentor role in Hoda et.al. (2013). The implementation of teams found the perplexed reactions of its members who were not used to this at the beginning, and found it awkward.

As time progressed it became clear that, within these teams, it was not the technical skills for a particular job that were missing but the soft-skills in dealing with team dynamics (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009). Having perceived this necessity among its workforce, the company proceeded to create a center that would be responsible for developing those missing skills, again coming back to the importance of training for implementing SMTs (Nicholls et al., 1999; Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002; Liu et al., 2011). This center provided trainings that were aimed

at developing people into highly effective contributors to the new organizational structure. And where an interest was shown in assuming a leadership position inside these teams, then a further training needed to be done. Next, the authors describe the new process of hiring new candidates. Although the process is indeed described in the paper, the authors did not focus on the implementation process but rather seem to describe the mechanics of such process (this applies to other processes described in the paper too).

Therefore, drawing from the descriptions, an overall idea as to what way the company went about introducing this new way of doing recruiting can be inferred. Table 2 below illustrates the steps described subsequently. More specifically, candidates were immediately introduced in the company to get a taste of it through an introductory course and once this was done the final decision would be made by the team in concert with the HR department. Thus, the employees composing the various teams became active part in shaping the process of recruiting; as opposed to have it being imposed on them. This is especially relevant given that, ultimately, the employees themselves will be the one working either side-by-side with new recruits (new team members) or being directed (new leaders) (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009). Coming to the topic of compensation, the company shifted towards a solid recognition and rewarding of team-based efforts, that would be rewarded on a number of parameters such as productivity, quality, customer delight and attendance. And this would happen publicly at company-wide meetings. Shorter-terms financial rewards (biweekly) were also introduced, and finally a peer-backed process of compensation (monthly) was added too; where employees could nominate colleagues which would be evaluated by a cross-functional team and awarded publicly at company gathering (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009). A further action taken was to solidify the team-level thinking and this, once again, was done through rewarding those teams that had implemented and showed progress in the area of safety on the job: a win-win situation (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009). The following move made sense specifically in the context of SMEs given their smaller size in terms of employees. The company, in fact, proceeded to tackle aspects that would contribute towards a better work-life balance for its employees, organizing events that would involve all family, from spouses to kids (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009). Once again, this was a win-win situation that fueled a virtuous cycle as the company made efforts towards improving the work-life balance of its employees which in turn made those same employees healthier people, and as a consequence better workers too. To round up, Fazzari & Mosca (2009) offer suggestions on how to best implement SMTs, arguing that the context of employee involvement needs to be enhanced if the organizational structure of SMTs is to work. Also, management should be careful in intervening as time progresses and the teams have been

established-a delicate balance already addressed by Druskat & Pescosolido (2002) which, however challenging, still needs to be found. It is the very nature of the SMTs to run autonomously and therefore less intervention by management, when the urge is felt, will actually prove productive on the long-run with increased performance by SMTs (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009).

Furthermore, the authors note how companies that intend to embark on this journey must be sure that this transition is approach strategically as a long-term objective; given that if the initiative is not well established as such, but more as some new approach to give it a try, then it shall surely fail to deliver all the benefits it promises (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009). Finally, it is important to note the emphasis that Fazzari and Mosca (2009) put on the role of HR as a catalyst for the realization of such transition. This sheds light in how one should view external help (consultancy) in such projects in SMEs. Namely, that the eventual role of a consultant should be that of support to the HR department or whoever will be in charge of the transformation, as opposed of that of catalyst of change.

Deal with the awkwardness of first-timers
Address lack of soft-skills present in teams
Have new candidates get a feel of environment straight away
Involve team members in the recruiting process
Shift to team-based compensation (also short-term ones)
Recognize publicly the successes of teams
Rely on peer-based initiatives for compensation
Foster team-thinking in creative ways
Have a holistic impact on the life of employees
Commit to long-term efforts in realizing the transformation
Harness the potential of the HR department

Table 2 Steps for implementing SMTs in SMEs according to Fazzari & Mosca (2009)

This chapter has expounded the process of SMTs transformation in a SME, and has summarized what were the steps taken by the company, highlighting some of the possible differences between a large-scale transformation and a smaller one.

3. Methodology

In this section, an explanation of the methodology adopted for this study will be provided, coupled with characteristics and rationale of the chosen sample. To conclude a section on how the data were analyzed is provided.

3.1 Research design

The objective of this study was to investigate how the process of a SME embarking in a transformation to SMTs looks like. In particular, this needed to be put over-against the knowledge we have at the large-scale level transformation. As a result of this comparison, specific insights could be gathered about the change process at the SME level. In light of the deeply intricate phenomenon that investigating the implementation of SMTs poses to the one who wants to research it, a qualitative approach–apt for investigating participants' attributed meanings to a phenomenon–was chosen and more specifically a mono method qualitative study through semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2019). Considering the under-researched topic, and therefore the exploratory nuance of this research, a qualitative approach which is apt for new ideas generation and revelation (Gioia et al., 2013) was deemed the most suitable. The scarcity of current literature on the topic, is also the reason for the choice of a multiple methodology, an inductive mixed to an abductive one. In fact, an abductive approach allows for the richness of any given phenomenon to be made justice to (Doz, 2011), whilst at the same time, it allows for the *best* among the possible explanations of a phenomenon to be chosen, and therefore provide a considerable degree of immediate usefulness/application to practitioners (Nenonen et al., 2017). That is why among the factors that affect the implementation of SMTs (Magpili & Pazos, 2017), expounded above, this study allows for the validation (or not) of those factors (for SMEs) with the possibility of finding out, among those, which may indeed affect the process and which not.

3.2 Data sampling and characteristics

Since the Semco way was chosen as an emblematic case of SMTs transformation, the researcher reached out to a certified Semco consultant from among the network of the SSI. The relationship, through email at first, was successfully established leading in turn to the opening of new doors for the advancement of the research. After having got in contact with another certified Semco consultant, an agreement was reached on which companies, with which he had

worked for, should be contacted for the purposes of this research. Going back to the research question, the aim of this research was to investigate the successful implementation of the Semco way/SMTs at the SMEs level. The initial hoped-for collaboration did not hold in time and adjustments to the initial plans were made. Namely, the researcher's first connection to the Semco network provided the contact of two Italian SMEs that had embarked on the journey towards self-organization. Although not strictly through the SSI, these companies embodied the philosophy that underpins the Semco way and were therefore a suitable substitute for the connections to the other companies that failed to happen. Only one connection to an Indian company (large organization) happened through the work of the SSI, hence the reason behind the chapter 2.6. In total nine interviews were conducted, with a fair distribution of positions inside the company and different industries. Each interview lasted from a minimum of fifty minute to a maximum of one hour and twenty-five minutes. All the interviews apart from the ones with the company in the cleaning sector (conducted in English) were conducted in Italian.

No. of interview	Position of interviewee	Gender	Age	Firm sector
Int.1	Founder	M	53	Cleaning services
Int. 2	Manager	M	36	Cleaning services
Int. 3	COO	M	46	IT
Int. 4	Senior Developer Front-end	M	42	IT
Int. 5	Purchasing & Continuous Improvement	F	47	Furniture Manufacturing
Int. 6	Founder & Manager	M	58	Furniture Manufacturing
Int. 7	Team leader Production team	M	42	Furniture Manufacturing

Int. 8	E-commerce manager	M	24	IT
Int. 9	E-commerce manager	M	49	IT

3.3 Research instrument

The research instrument chosen for this study is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews carry some advantages and some disadvantages. One aspect that has been argued to necessarily be present at all times for an instrument such as semi-structured interviews to function properly, is the ongoing social "*negotiation of meanings*", during the interview process, between researcher and participant (Mojtahed et al., 2014, p.88). Semi-structured interviews are good in allowing the researcher to openly, and in a discursive fashion, enquire about various meanings that participants attribute to particular scenarios (Flick et al., 2004). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews grant a greater degree of flexibility and adaptability, in that they allow for follow-up questions to occur and for the conversation to adapt and be tailored to whatever contingency may occur or to whatever else the researcher may see fit (Saunders et al., 2019). On the other hand, interviews require great efforts for their application. They need to be crafted to the specific aspects than need to be investigated; then they need to be conducted, which ends up being a time-consuming endeavor; and then they need to be transcribed (Saunders et al., 2019). Also, during the interviews, this type of research method carries the risk of the conversation ending up in an unfruitful direction as participants may not grasp the intended meaning of a question and therefore take a non-value adding direction with their answers. At that point it is up to the researcher to politely bring the conversation back to the right track.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interview questions were developed on a general reliance upon the work of Magpili and Pazos (2017), trying to capture in them the three levels of influence they have argued SMTs implementation deals with. This approach lends itself to the theoretical thematic analysis where the research takes into account previous work on the topic–indicating its abductive nature–to see how the newly developed knowledge might fit (or not) in it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the six steps that Braun and Clarke (2006) offer for conducting thematic analysis,

after the interviews were transcribed–done through software–two readings of the whole data corpus happened, so that familiarity with the data would ensue.

The second step is to develop codes under which data extracts from the interviews are categorized. These codes, which are relatable to the 1st order concepts of Gioia et al. (2013) are very much informants-based. In this phase a large number of codes might arise, which could have an overwhelming effect, but that is on the other hand a necessary part of the journey (Gioia et al., 2013). Codes are more detailed categorizations of the data than the themes are, which are the object of focus of the next step.

In phase three, when looking at all the earlier codes, themes can now be developed. The codes are moved around according to the main overarching theme to which they best fit. This phase allows for a certain degree of uncertainty regarding what to do with some non-categorized codes; which goes to show the iterative nature of the process that might end up looking as something very different from what one had initially started with. This phase, again, has some resemblance to the development of the 2nd order themes in Gioia et al. (2013), where the previously crafted 1st order concepts are categorized.

After this, the fourth phase comprises a process of reviewing the formed themes, with two levels of analysis. At the first level, the themes are considered against the *coded extracts* they comprise; ending with a refinement process that can either be satisfactory or call for the fine-tuning of some themes, the belonging of some codes in them, or even the collapsing or discarding of a theme. The second level of analysis takes into account the whole data set, to check whether the *themes* accurately tell the story of the content in the data set; or if further coding or theme development happens to be needed. Before explaining the last two phases expounded by Braun and Clarke (2006), it is worthwhile noticing that Gioia et al. (2013) go a step further in the process by organizing 2nd order themes. The authors further group the 2nd order themes into aggregate dimensions, that serve to tell the story of the data in the amplest way possible. Then, 1st order concepts, 2nd order themes and aggregate dimensions are visually represented into a data structure, that is further enhanced by arrows that show how the concepts and themes relate to one another, contributing to building new theory (Gioia et al., 2013).

The fifth phase entails an individual look at the themes to search for their essence and the story they individually tell about the data set. At this point, themes are given names, accompanied by a short caption. It is important that themes do not overlap too much. If a theme captures a too rich amount of data, then such a theme can also be organized with sub-themes. It is at this point, when developing new theory, that one should stop the previously initiated *"enforced ignorance"* (Gioia et al. 2013, p.21) that was conducive to avoid biases in 1st order

concepts/codes development; and engage again with the already present knowledge in the literature to see how the new insights might confirm or disconfirm previous knowledge or lead to the realization that new understandings in the field have just been reached.

At this point, comes the sixth and final phase of the analysis where the thematic map developed is arranged in a write-up that illustrates the story those data are telling. Examples from the data extracts help to prove one's point and allow the reader to see the rationale adopted in the phase of coding and theme development. During this phase arguments are advanced in relation to how the data provide insights to answer the research question, which needs to happen in the most convincing way possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gioia et al., 2013).

4. Results

4.1 A practical categorization

The aim of this research was to investigate the nature of the change process that a company goes through when wanting to implement a radical transformation based on SMTs and aimed at moving the organization towards self-direction and autonomy. From the interviews, two macro dimensions affecting the process could be identified, namely: *pre-change factors* and *change process dynamics* (see figure 1). The following sub-chapters address specifically the results obtained from the interviews in the context of SMEs. As a final note in this chapter, two interviews in the context of larger organizations are addressed, and specifically only the codes that were developed in them but did not overlap in the interviews in the context of SMEs. This can provide more solid ground to the results obtained for SMEs as it is possible to realize the differences in terms of dynamics that occur in a different setting and how the context of SMEs calls for specific attention in certain areas as opposed to others to which their larger counterparts might call for.
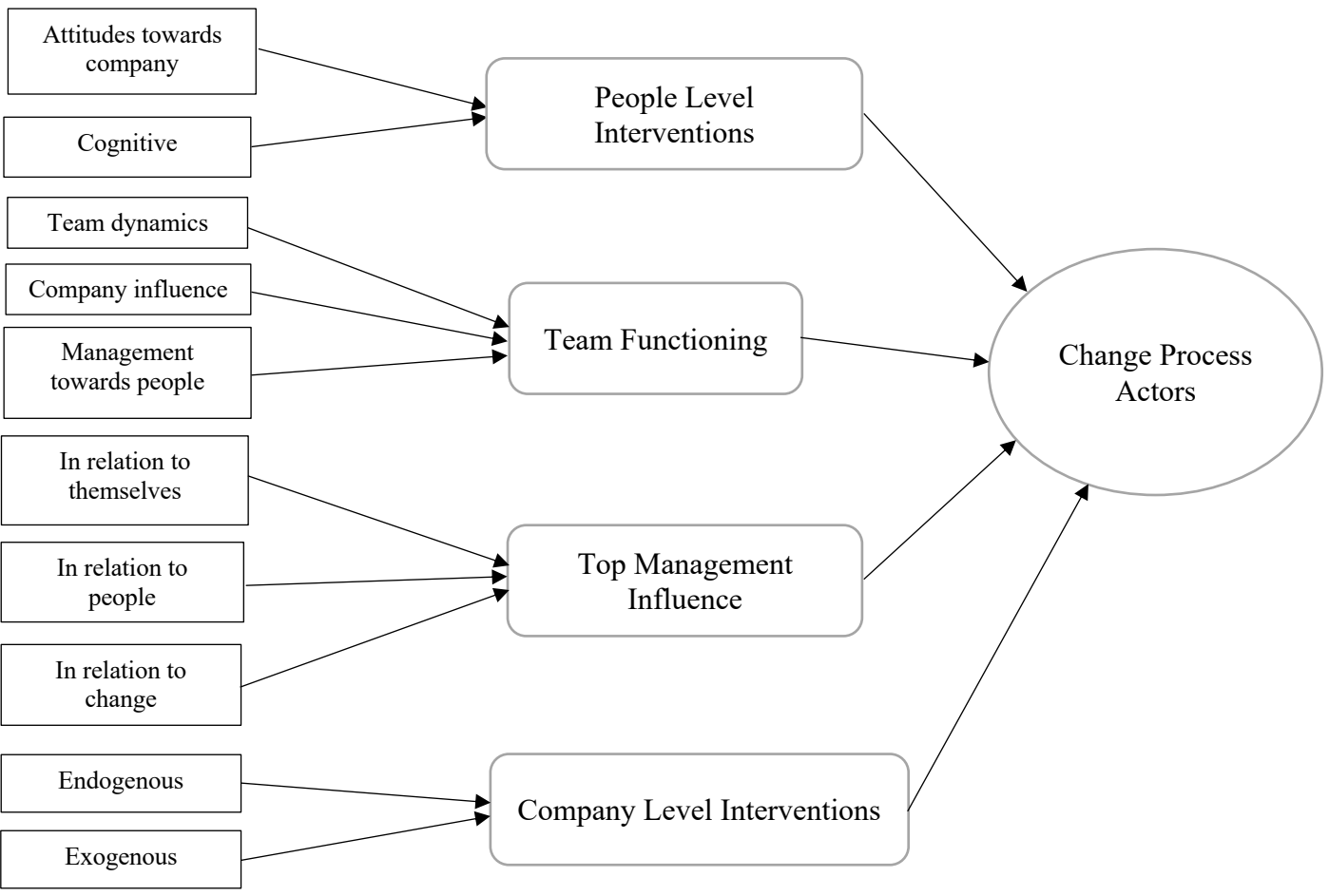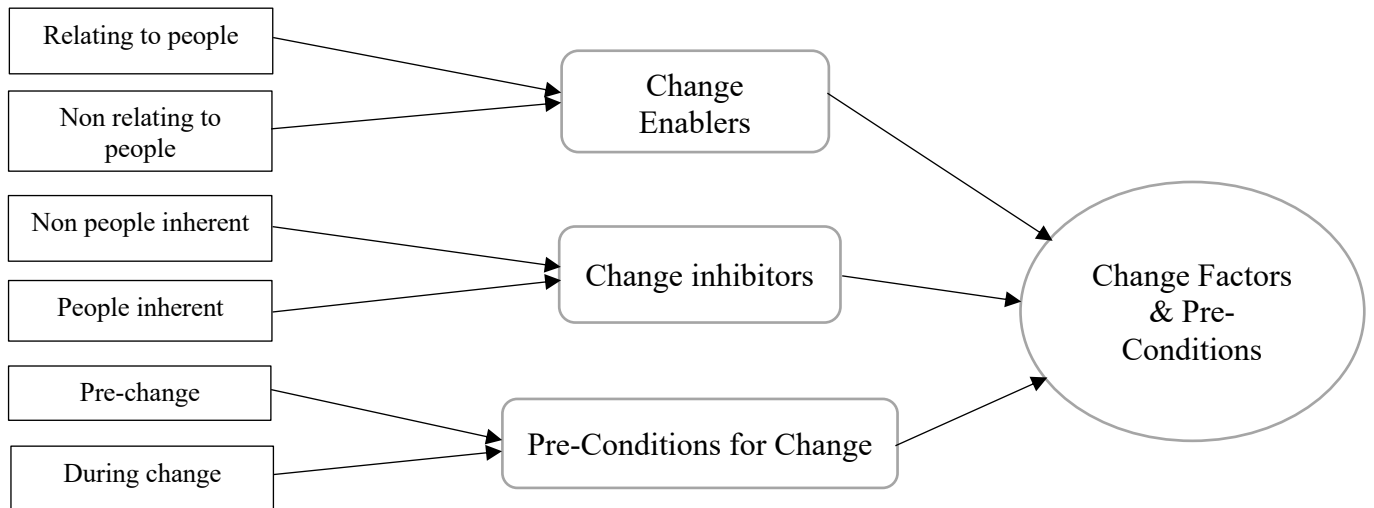
Relating to people → Change Enablers
Non relating to people → Change Enablers

Non people inherent → Change inhibitors
People inherent → Change inhibitors

Pre-change → Pre-Conditions for Change
During change → Pre-Conditions for Change

Change Enablers → Change Factors & Pre-Conditions
Change inhibitors → Change Factors & Pre-Conditions
Pre-Conditions for Change → Change Factors & Pre-Conditions

Attitudes towards company → People Level Interventions
Cognitive → People Level Interventions

Team dynamics → Team Functioning
Company influence → Team Functioning
Management towards people → Team Functioning

In relation to themselves → Top Management Influence
In relation to people → Top Management Influence
In relation to change → Top Management Influence

Endogenous → Company Level Interventions
Exogenous → Company Level Interventions

People Level Interventions → Change Process Actors
Team Functioning → Change Process Actors
Top Management Influence → Change Process Actors
Company Level Interventions → Change Process Actors

Figure 1-Data structure

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4.2 Change factors & Pre-conditions

The aggregate dimension of pre-change dynamics comprises in itself the three second-order themes of *change enablers*, *change inhibitors* and *pre-conditions for change*. The rationale of this aggregate dimension aims to provide elements of analysis that companies thinking about implementing such change can consider *a priori* to the change

4.2.1 Change Enablers

Starting from the second-order theme of change enablers, the first-order themes that were used to generate it address all those aspects that establish a positive relationship of influence on the outcome of change, they highlight those variables that can *aid* the change process positively. Within the second-order theme of change enablers, the one first-order theme that showed the most recurrence was the need to foster company-wide transparent communication. To illustrate this, is respondent number four who gave a snapshot of the outset of the change and the way the people lived it: *"[...] also because then these meetings that we held monthly prompted us to speak in front of the others. They pushed us to talk about the problems we felt or the strengths we saw"*. We can see here that there was no space for ambiguity or misunderstandings. The project started by letting everyone have their say in what was the current state-of-affairs of the company, before ever addressing any change initiative. Again, addressing the way the CEO at the prepared the way for the consultants and therefore the start of the change, participant number three reiterates this saying: *"In my opinion this was really the... this communication that he gave in a very human way before the ... as preparation before the arrival of the last consultants"*. And after this, he further strengthens the point regarding the benefits brought about by this humane and clear communication, this time in the written form by saying: *"This putting in writing reassured a bit everyone... because maybe they perceived that they were not just straws in the wind"*.

Another point that participants raised related to the importance of creating a change team that would be responsible for the change activities. Participant number four said: *"But if he had not put himself in the hands of this pool or in any case would have not entered in the perspective of delegating his functions a little, nothing would have worked ... it is not that it wouldn't have worked, but that nothing would have been triggered"*. To this, respondent number seven adds by highlighting the role that the change team played in speeding up the change: *"with the accompaniment of the consultants, we were also able to go very fast and to create a team that was called the core team, which is the one that was responsible for designing all the*

frameworks with which to work". To add to this is a quote from respondent number one in the context of the large organization, and therefore finding support for this aspect both at the SMEs and large organizations level: *"One of the big things that I realize is that before you go on any change management, you need to first recruit or have a basic enough team to start the process"*. Having addressed the variables that aided the change process, the focus now shifts to those that do not.

4.2.2 Change Inhibitors

Within this second-order theme, the change inhibitor that showed up the most was related to the resistance that people showed towards the change efforts. Some specific categories of people also emerged from the data as showing the most resistance. One of them was the category of managers that, according to respondent number six, was the one facing the toughest challenge in this change initiative, in that managers were called to a reinterpretation of what had been their role up until the change started. Respondent number six stated: *"So according to self-organization the most difficult task is on the management that has to change role and therefore if it is able to carry out the change of role as from management to support it is an opportunity"*. Adding to this is participant number five who when asked about the impact of the previous hierarchical structure on the change, she replied: *"there are people who have hindered this process, of course. And it was perhaps the people who were important in the previous situation"*. With the previous situation meaning that the people that could make use of control to steer the team in a certain direction and that were now called to give that up for the sake of the new organizational structure.

Another category of people that were linked with change resistance were those who had a longer tenure in the company. These people perceived the change as less insightful or value-adding because of their having grown accustomed to the way things had always been done up until that point at the company. Starting form respondent number one (large organization), he said: *"And there were a lot of people who… we were very proud of the fact that we had long tenures of work at the company. But we saw that what happened is some of these people now were not participative in the change"*. To illustrate this point further is respondent number seven noted: *"The theme of age counts a lot in changes, that is the acceptance of change in the person now mature from the working point of view… he/she almost says… being almost at the exit of the world of work and says "how would it be change now?! Even no, in short!"*. Participant number five adds weight to this explaining it by saying: *"When a person has always*

done the same thing in the same system, it is difficult to make him change his mind". This finds one more time confirmation in participant number nine who, asked about the remaining factors that he deemed crucial but that maybe the interview had failed to address, said: *"probably one was strangely enough the fact that there has been a bit of staff turnover. A generation understood not in terms of chronological age, but as people who had been in this company for some time. A generation, however, that has left the company and that in any case probably in that context would have been more reluctant to change".* To add another nuance to the topic of resistance in people who accumulated years at a company, participant number three explains how people who had been through previous change management initiatives would find it harder to commit to a new one, especially when the previous did not amount to much: *"people were already ill-disposed and with a prejudice about the coming of the consultants because they already expected what had happened in the past. That is: "oh well, it will be a flash in the pan, nothing will ever change, it is to give us the one-off". Ok, so in this sense, in my opinion it took a little bit more effort because the barriers that had arisen from the past had to be thrown down a bit."*

Something else that deserves to be pointed out too is the emphasis that a particular department inside a company was argued to show the most resistance to change, namely, the production unit. Again, this was due to having developed habits during the years which were harder to let go in favor of something new. For instance, respondent number seven pointed out: *"among other things the production team in my opinion is also one of the most difficult teams to be involved in self-organization issues".* Once more respondent number seven provides more details saying: *"People in production are clearly a little more reluctant to change and often carry concepts such as "we have always done this why should we have to change?""* These quotes provide interesting food for thought for those companies that are product-based and therefore have a manufacturing department.

Another topic that emerged and that poses a challenge to those who want to implement this organizational structure is that of the national culture, which permeates the change process dynamics and can play a hampering role. Respondents four and nine (from an Italian company) reported how the culture of a single founder running the company challenged the new way of working in which according to respondent number four the CEO is now called to surely continue to cover a position of influence but now *"accepting that the opinion of who you have at the base counts much more than the perception you (CEO) have";* or to the fact that this

type of organizational structure calls for the elimination of the binomial "company is equal to owner" and that the company, to use respondent's nine words, is now called to *"move on independently of him (Owner)"*. To illustrate how the Italian culture can challenge the change process in the way just addressed is a quote from participant number four: *"Here in this region we have many micro companies, it is the home of shoes and manufacturing, and the companies are all family-run and therefore basically there is the owner who commands and decides everything. And I believe that even for companies like ours this culture is inherent because the company is directed by a single person"*.

Another aspect that arose and posed a great challenge to the implementation of the change–and that led to people deciding to leave the company was the new role to which managers were now called, namely, that of support or consultation, instead of direction and strict management. From a cultural standpoint, this revealed itself to be challenging due to identity attachment that some people felt to their role inside the company, namely, that of being a manager and therefore responsible of others "beneath" you. Respondent number six illustrates: *"here in Italy we are very fond of roles. So, you know the roles give status, they give... if one has this image here of one's role within the company... that is the most difficult thing"*. Lastly, another aspect of the Italian culture that was reported to negatively confront the change efforts was that of the little propensity to collaborate, opposed to the higher one instead of competing, which needless to say stands in stark opposition to a self-managed teams-based company structure.

To conclude this section, another point that participants raised related to the level of psychological safety they experienced before the organizational change occurred. This was deemed as a factor hindering the realization of what the change intended to bring about. Addressing the level of psychological safety, participant number five reported: *"It wasn't like that before. Before it was much more rigid. So, before it used to be said: "oh well, he said it, he's responsible for it…" and so on, right?"*. This finding was corroborated by the owner too (participant number six) who said: *"the atmosphere that I described to you in 2018 was a very negative one, and very conflictual too. So, let's say that that was an obstacle for people to open up. And people had reservations about expressing themselves"*.

4.2.3 Pre-Conditions for Change

Participants noted that embracing the change was not something obvious and that some factors were playing a crucial role in dictating the *pre-conditions for change*. The first-order themes

coded under this category highlight those conditions that seem to play a *sine-qua-non* role in the success of the change. For example, one among the most recurring themes under this second-order theme had to do with the commitment to the change itself, meaning that in particular the top management needed to show relentless and unwavering commitment to the direction (change process) that had been chosen. Illustrative in this sense is the answer of respondent number four to the last question where he was asked if there was anything that maybe was missed in the questions asked up until that point, but that he still recognized as crucial in bringing about this change and therefore wanted to add. This is what he stated at the outset: *"Surely the willingness from the top management to embrace such a structure"*.

Another element that frequently came up from respondents' answers was the realization of how time-demanding this type of organizational change was, and how it required to frame the successful outcome of such project on a longer time-span. Changes are not quick to show and any expectation or promise of fast results delivery should be frowned upon. To support this point are two quotes, with the first coming from respondent number one who, referring to the change started in his company, said *"in the first six months we did not see great progress"*. To confirm the consistency that is necessary on companies' side that want to embark on this re-organization, this quote shows how six months of aimed and purposeful efforts had not brought far. And a further confirmation comes from respondent number seven who stated: *"years are necessary in order for people to trust that that is the right structure, to start changing their vision a little bit"*. This quote further proves the point by stretching the line even further to call companies to mentally set aside even years before some of their efforts will ever start to pay dividends.

4.3 Change Process Actors

The results expounded in the following chapter address those dynamics that play a role in the context of the happening of the change itself, once the process has started and time and resources have been committed. It aims to illustrate what could help in bringing about the correct functioning of such an organizational structure and as a reflex exposes those company practices that act as deterrents to a well implemented change. Within this aggregate dimension, four second order themes were grouped: people-level intervention, team functioning, top management role, and company level interventions. It is possible to note how this categorization fully encompasses the whole spectrum of actors involved in the change process, which actually make up the company itself, delving into the change as a single unit. These are:

the individuals facing the change (people-level interventions); the individuals in their relating to one another and therefore constituting the unified entity of a team, the backbone of this organizational structure (team functioning); the human change agents, responsible for making the change happen (top management role); and the non-human change agent of the company (company level interventions) which influences the change in all its written and unwritten rules, procedures and policies.

4.3.1 People-Level Interventions

This second-order theme groups within itself those interventions that companies are to work at in the context of their individual members. The most recurring first order theme was the need for companies to *"foster a sense of ownership"* among their people. This refers to working at bringing about and fostering a sense of responsibility in people towards the job they perform, and a sense of commitment towards the tasks at hand. To elucidate this point is the quote from respondent number four who said: *"If your task is "bring me this piece from here to here", maybe ask "but why do I have to bring it from here to here?" are we sure it should be brought from here to here?"*. This shows the sense of ownership that people need to show if such an organization is to succeed; the call for an attitude of curiosity for what is at hand, with the aim of wanting to realize what one's action is contributing to. Another first order theme that showed frequently was the need to *"foster attachment to the company"*, meaning by that the sense of pride to belong to the company and to be willing to sacrifice for its success. To exemplify this point is a quote from respondent number five who, responding to questions in the context of the use of rewards to facilitate the process of change, said: "*But there must be a fertile ground underneath which cannot be compensation. But it must be your way of seeing the company, of embracing it, of serving it too, isn't it?"*. Respondent number five goes as far as to link this attitude of attachment to the company to the "*fertile ground underneath"* that is the building block of a successful change process. And it is even more interesting to see how this is put in contrast to the use of extrinsic motivation in the form of rewards, perhaps testifying to the fact that the best and long-lasting changes are those that draw from an intrinsic source of motivation.

4.3.2 Team Functioning

The journey towards the self-organized company transformation addressed in this research has at its heart the arrangement of the company in autonomous teams. The establishment of a team working structure is paramount to the mechanics of an organization structured in this way. This second order theme addresses the dynamics that are at the basis of a correct and healthy

functioning of teams, to what has been defined as the performing stage of team development (Tuckman, 1965). Under this second-order theme, the first-order theme that incapsulated the highest number of quotes was *"foster social interaction"* that referred to all those times in which respondents highlighted the presence or desire of constant and harmonious social interaction with their colleagues. A quote from respondent number eight helps illustrates this point: *"even if there are multiple groups, even if everyone has his/her own environment, his/her own team, you have no difficulty in going to that other team to discuss with them or interrupt them, ask for an opinion even simply. So yes, this is precisely how easy it is to communicate with everyone. There are no, let's say, barriers or blocks that prevent you from doing so"*. This quote shows how pivotal it is for companies to foster this type of environment where people are approachable and willing to help. Participant number five reported how this willingness to help was made easier to implement with the implementation of the teams, which she argued had her covering multiple tasks, given the need: *"And anyway I helped to pull the information of...in case of a lack of information, of something that maybe wasn't my job, I did it anyway because I saw that it gave everyone an advantage. A project belongs to everyone, it's not mine alone"*. A nuance of this type of environment that the company is called to encourage relates to the way people interact with each other. When asked about the role that trainings played in making up for the lack of skills that this organizational structure might have now required, respondent number three pointed out: *"yes if you want now, we are all a little more commercial, because we have to negotiate with other people on the team, while in a company where you are given an order and you execute it, compared to one where you can agree, the difference is considerable, right? You have to develop the skills for the deal to be, not as favorable as possible for you because it must always be win-win, right? But the ability to tear that extra point even inside (the company) you have to master it"*.

Within this rife second order theme, another point of attention regarded the need that individuals and teams have of feeling like they are in control of their work and that their decisions really do matter and contribute to moving towards a certain direction as opposed to another–which *the team* has decided to go for. Once more, to illustrate this point is a quote from respondent number seven who, when asked about the role of rewards within the company, explained how the reward (in this case a sum of money) is allocated by the company, or better how it is not: *"the sum [of money], which then will arrive in the team, and will be divided, let's say among the team members, depending on ... a logic maybe that the team itself can choose on how to divide, right?"*. From this quote it is possible to notice how after the delivering of the reward, the top management who gave it exits the scene to let the team decide for

themselves on how the sum will be apportioned. As respondent number six pointed out, some teams decided to divide the sum on an egalitarian fashion, whereas others based on performance frameworks of the various components of the team. But always based on a logic that the whole team had freely agreed upon.

Another important part of the dynamics that teams face relates to the interactions with their team leader. First of all, it was important to note the way in which such figures would emerge. Respondent number seven said: *"the team leader will come out of, let's say, one of these current teams that exist and that has shown, has revealed a bit what it takes to take on this role."* Of great importance too, is what participant number seven once again highlighted regarding the role that such team leader is expected to play within the team. He stated: *"the team leader, as we understand it, is a truly supportive function and of coordination. It is not a figure you could associate with a boss or someone who decides or authoritarian. These are functions that are often very mixed in the teams and also with each other".*

4.3.3 Top Management Influence

The second richest second-order theme addresses the nature of the involvement of top management in the change process. From the interviews it emerged that probably the role that the top management covers is one of the most delicate and crucial, and should therefore be extensively thought through. Their role has even been addressed to as a *necessary condition* for the change to happen in the first place and could therefore, in this regard, overlap with the previously addressed pre-change dynamics. Unpacking this point is a quote from respondent number seven who, when asked about other aspects that contributed to the change process–that had not been addressed up until that point–he replied saying: *"Let's say it works if whoever believes it first is the property itself, indeed it is a necessary condition."* To this same question, participant number four too felt like pointing out the same aspect stating: *"Surely the willingness in top management itself to embrace such a structure".* And to further elaborate on this, is another quote from respondent number three: *"it is very difficult/perhaps impossible to adopt it (referring to the organizational structure) if the top management or the CEO first... does not take charge of it and does not believe in it. It cannot be adopted if the CEO is the first to be convinced by others. That is, it is difficult for it to be a process that starts from the bottom and manages to reach the top. That is, maybe there is a department, it starts doing it on its own, then other departments see it and then something would form between departments... and this then takes you upwards (skeptical emphasis added). It is very, very unlikely."* This quote provides evidence to the pivotal role that the top management plays and to the high unlikeness

that this company transformation could be a bottom-up initiative or that credence should ever be given to any other actor apart from those who represent the top management.

Another aspect worthy to be mentioned relates to the *new* role that top management is called to embody under this new way of working which is that of enabling others. This means that the top management will no longer be involved in a directing/managing fashion, but rather it is now called to give up the control they could once exert on their people and confer trust to them. Respondent number six helps to shed light into this: *"So perhaps our task is to act as a coach, to help, let's say the reduction of the centrality of the managers and instead bring out the personality of the others, of the other team members"*. We notice here the call for top management to set themselves aside in order to favor the prospering and thriving of the team.

Lastly, another aspect of great importance for the top management to consider is that of the role of control, or rather the absence of it–when framed in the classic terms of managerial control. In fact, the interviews showed that under this organizational structure there was no way around management having to give up controlling attitudes in favor of delegating with full trust. Respondent number four aptly illustrates this when, considering the metamorphosis that the top management had to go through, he says: *"thinking about accepting, being delegitimized, of having to accept the fact that you are no longer the supreme boss and accept it"*. This quote illustrates the change of mental framework that the CEO in this case needs to accept and the type of control that must be let go of. However, this is not to say that any sort of control is to be discarded. The interviews provided in fact data on the *new* type of control that is to be aimed at. For example, respondent number seven outlined how despite the team having a leader being approved and recognized by the team, it is not the team leader that exercises control. Rather he described a different kind of control that is based on mutual accountability of one team member towards the other. He stated: *"in reality it is not the team leader who controls, that is, within the team it is the team that controls itself. That is, a person within the team will not respond to the team leader, he responds to his/her colleagues"*. To this answer, respondent number five offers more insight given her position as team member saying: *"it is important that it is there (control), it is fundamental. But it is very invisible. I mean you don't feel it much. And this is important because when people feel controlled, they feel a breath on their neck in my opinion they tend to perform much less right?"*. Finally, a quote from respondent number three helps to further understand this new type of control in practical way. When asked about the degree of current managerial involvement in day-to-day scenarios, he

recalled of a time where the repartition of work among the team did not happen in the most ideal fashion towards a newly arrived employee that had received the most challenging part of the work to be done. Participant number three talks about how the team-leader in this case did not intervene, even in the face of unfavorable circumstances for the company: *"So he (team-leader) said "well, now I'll let them do and then I'll see. I take some time and then I'll talk to them again and see if they realize for themselves, if they grow in this respect".*

4.3.4 Company-Level Interventions

This last second-order theme refers to that set of interventions that is on the company to implement. Among the first-order themes grouped, two in particular stand out: the *"role of consultants"* (exogenous) and the necessity to *"involve all levels"* (endogenous). Regarding the former, this first-order theme groups together all the consultants' actions that interviewees reported to have benefited the change. A particular aspect of the consultants' contributions emerged more than once and this was their playing the role of *facilitators*. To establish this point is a quote from respondent number nine who reported what the consultants said when they embarked on this project: *"And they clearly said we don't come to give you a method, a formula, we come to see what needs you have and to help you, help yourself to find a method that works within your company".* Consultants were not there to take over and strongly lead the way, wearing the hats of the experts who are the only recipients of the knowledge that will guarantee a smooth change process. Instead, they were there to support and enable the people who were going through the change to live the best possible change experience. No one-size could fit the specific contingencies of the company, but a tailor-made approach had to be followed.

Another aspect to be addressed in the midst of the change efforts regards the need for the company to include all levels in the change endeavor. Respondent number three illustrates this describing the early stages of the change process: *"Change groups were built, specifically at the time six change groups were made by dividing the whole company to work on these six change groups. Here, too, everyone freely chose which change group to participate in. Then each change group presented the results of their work to all the others, so it was all a participatory process".* These change groups encompassed within themselves the whole people making up the company, meaning that everyone took active part in shaping what was to come of their company in the future.

Another aspect that companies should ensure relates to fostering an environment of information exchange. Although this aspect was strongly correlated to the correct functioning of teams, and therefore should have theoretically been addressed above, it was chosen to be included under company level interventions because of a connection spotted in the data. Namely, that the possibility of information exchange was linked to interior design aspects of the office, and more specifically to the open space environment. Thus, although not establishing a direct cause and effect relationship, the actualization of information sharing did appear to be linked to this office arrangement, raising a point that deserves the consideration of whoever wishes to embark on this journey of change. A quote from respondent number three, asked about aspects of the company culture that might have helped the change process, explains this: *"in my opinion previous factors that helped the change, which were however more endogenous factors than anything else, were the low number of people, whose location was in an open space. And given that even while growing we remained an open space, this continuous exchange of ideas, this continuous confrontation that there was already. I think it has favored the change"*. Also, coming back to the aspect overlapping with the second-order of team functioning, the fostering of an information sharing company was reported be useful towards healthy inter-team relationships and optimal team functioning. In the first case a quote from respondent number nine explains this: *"and instead now there is greater knowledge and therefore also greater coordination. Because maybe, if I know that my colleagues in the development department are extremely busy on a very important development that they have to deliver after two days. Maybe me to my client I do not give as a promise to let him have a change of something on the site the next day because I know that maybe my colleagues will not be able to do it"*. This quote illustrates how knowledge exchange leads to more conscious colleagues' relationships, which the respondent would later in the answer explain how this was not the case before, where instead tasks would be assigned to colleagues regardless of their current level of busyness, and leading to fractures and misunderstandings among team members. Regarding the correct functioning of teams, sharing information was linked to a higher feeling of ownership among people working, as respondent number seven points out in the following quote: *"If you also tell him what's behind what you're asking... If I tell you "You have to do that"... I mean, it is one thing to say "you must do that", another to tell you why you have to do it"*. Thus, people are to be active and conscious parts of the company processes, as opposed to mere gears in an indecipherably complex machine.

4.4 Comparison to a larger organization

This last section aims to provide the reader with the unique results that were gathered from two interviews not conducted in the context of SMEs. This means that the results that are addressed in this section *did not* find overlap in the interviews conducted with SMEs. Some codes did find confirmation in the other interviews at the SMEs level and those were therefore coded along with the other codes from the SMEs interviews. The ones that were instead peculiar to the large organization were marked and analyzed separately in this section. Although this was not the idea originally, the challenges of a turbulent data collection phase led to this. Right in the middle of the first interview it was discovered that what was assumed to be an SME, eventually revealed itself to largely fall out of the scope of the criterion of size for what makes an SME (addressed in chapter 2.6). In order to provide the reader with an idea, the company interviewed employed, at the time of change, approximately 2500 employees and had multiple locations spread throughout India. These data alone serve to point out how different of a change process this was. Firstly, given the difference in size, which for the other two Italian companies was of around 40 and 70 employees; and secondly in terms of office which in the case of the two SMEs it was a single one in Italy. Given this short introduction to the large company it is now possible to assess the data that emerged from the two interviews with the CEO and a manager. Finally, the reason why these interviews were chosen to be kept for analysis lies in the fact that addressing those dynamics that were only present at the level of this large organization can only contribute to shed light and provide more insights (addressed in the discussion part) to the uniqueness of this change process at the SMEs level. It is as if by pointing out the differences between the two, you happen to realize more about what makes SMEs truly different.

A topic that emerged from the interviews and that was coded under "social bureaucracy", addressed the formality that the company had to tackle during the change process. And this started from the smallest things such as first names, which the CEO interviewed reported to have asked everyone to use in lieu of the formal "Sir" with which he used to be approached. To further elaborate on this point, the interview with the manager addressed the formality that was running in the company operations and how they worked at it: *"So, therefore if everything meets the boundary conditions, there won't be any approval needed. There won't be any permission needed. Right? […] So, you give just some boundary conditions, but inside those people are free to decide however they want"*. This quote helps to see how the company moved from a procedural framework made of specific checkpoints to be achieved, to a more free-

flowing company made of boundaries but that is capable to allow people the freedom to move in them however they see fit. As a final note on this, the manager also pointed out how providing clarity in the roles that each person had, also contributed to people feeling more empowered to take decisions autonomously, with the manager *"not needing to tell them anything"*.

Another aspect that emerged was coded with *"apparent change",* and referred to what the CEO noticed in some older employees who the company, during the change process, tried to give the opportunity to grow into a management position. He reported how, on the surface, these people seemed cooperative towards the change efforts, only for the company to later realize that nothing had really changed. Something else that emerged was the role played by the releasing of people that were not adapting to the change. The interviewee reported that taking this position helped with moving the change forward. And as a flip side he also addressed the role that the introduction of new people played. He explained how the company purposefully selected people that were in line with their values, and how these people were given extreme clarity regarding the role the company expected them to play. This also acted to expose unfitting practices still lingering in the company as respondent one stated: "*But now there are people who are taking notice of it, especially the newcomers because, now they see, you know? They've come in here for a purpose."* These quotes show the strategic importance that the management of human resources played for this company in moving forward with settling the new organizational practices. Now that a reporting of the results obtained from the interviews has been established, it is possible to move onto discussing them.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The goal of this thesis was to explore the variables affecting the successful organizational transformation of a SME moving towards a self-management-based structure. This was done by answering the following research question: How can a radical transformation based on SMTs, be successfully implemented in SMEs? By doing so, this thesis contributes to the literature on self-management adoption and change management in SMEs literature by further investigating the under-researched factors leading to successful SMTs implementation in organizations (Magpili & Pazos, 2017), as well as by highlighting which factors make the process successful and which less so in the scantly investigated SMEs setting (see Figure 3).

5.1.1 Change Factors and Pre-Conditions

This research found contrasting results regarding the use of rewards. The use itself of rewards as an aspect of proper team functioning has found confirmation in this research too–even though not as a motivating factor towards the implementation of the change itself, in stark contrast with what literature argued (Ayas, 1996). Indeed, this research highlighted how the sum of money the company would distribute to each team was managed by the team itself *autonomously* as opposed to be apportioned according to schemes the company would find adequate as in Fazzari and Mosca (2009). This difference constitutes an area of team autonomy that the change implementation that Fazzari and Mosca (2009) describe has not granted to their team members. This might be due to the bigger size of the company addressed in Fazzari and Mosca (2009) work, namely, of 350 employees. Intuitively, as the head count of a company grows, so does the urge to exert more control over the ever-increasing complexity–although ample description of the nature of control under this organizational structure has been already provided. This might be why this research highlighted a higher degree of autonomy in this respect among teams. The companies interviewed might have felt that they had a deep knowledge of what they were dealing with, and therefore thought that teams were capable of successfully handling rewards apportionment.

Keeping the focus on the team level, the table in Figure 2 highlights some points of discrepancy with the findings in the literature expounded in the Theoretical Background. At the team-level, results did not show the difficult spot in which management found themselves caught in the middle between SMTs and exerting too much guidance, as c pointed out. This might most likely be due to the fact that in larger organizations it is difficult to get the family type of vibe that it is instead possible to notice in SMEs where people know by name almost everyone for example, and day-to-day operations are characterized by high levels of informality (Ates & Bititci, 2011, O'Regan et al., 2004, Richbell et al., 2010, Santoro et al., 2019). Therefore, even in large organizations that decide to follow the self-management principles, a certain degree of formality still hovers in the company. This is where managers that were once used to exerting control might find it challenging to suddenly have to let it go and see it being distributed among team members (Tata & Prasad, 2004). Also, in smaller companies a higher degree of mutual accountability, even at a personal level, is more likely to occur with management.

An aspect that can be noticed from this research finding confirmation in the work of Fazzari and Mosca (2009) too has to do with the relational-oriented nature of this change in

SMEs. In their work, Fazzari and Mosca (2009) talk about how the company would make use of company-wide gatherings, and how these events were extended to employees' families too. These are part of the values that the company wanted to express through the use of these rituals (Alvesson, 2002), which in this case were the events organized for the whole family. This shows the importance of caring for your people, and the value of relationships in company smaller in size (Richbell et al., 2010). At the SMEs level, this change seems to be greatly relational in nature, meaning that the most important asset to exploit are the human connections inside the company. This change seems to lead to success to the degree that people are interwoven in its shaping and sustenance. Thus, this change should not be framed as something that happens to people at the company, but rather as something that happens *with* and *because* of the people at the company.

Types of organization	Individual Level	Team Level	Organizational Level
Large Organizations	Individual Autonomy	External Leadership	Corporate Culture
	Individual Roles	Peer Control	Corporate Policies
	Leadership	Task Characteristics	National Culture
	Skills	Team Autonomy	Organizational Goals
	Resistance to Change	Team-Level Diversity	Organizational Structure
	Work Experience		Training
			Resources
			Rewards
	Individual Autonomy	**External Leadership**	**Corporate Culture**
	Individual Roles	**Peer Control (presence confirmed)**	**Corporate Policies**
	Leadership	**Task characteristics**	**National Culture**

SMEs	Skills	Team Autonomy	Organizational Goals (confirmed at the change level)
	Resistance to Change	Team-Level Diversity	Organizational Structure
	Work Experience		Training (not for change implementation purposes)
			Resources
			Rewards (presence confirmed, found opposite effect)

Figure 2-Comparison table large organizations/SMEs Bold=confirmed red=not confirmed/differences from (Magpili & Pazos, 2017),

5.1.2 Change Process Dynamics

Drawing back once more to the work of Fazzari and Mosca (2009)–the only one making the connection between this company re-organization and SMEs–this research finds confirmation of multiple aspects highlighted by the authors. At the forefront a strong link is found with the crucial role played by the CEO/top management in bringing about the change, which in the results section was highlighted as one of the a priori factors for the success of this transformation by multiple participants' quotes. Although more culturally nuanced way, literature has highlighted the crucial role that management involvement has in infusing credibility to the change initiative (Nicholls et.al., 1999). Another aspect that found confirmation in this research was that of the importance of framing such organizational efforts in a strategic/long-term perspective. This means that such change initiative–apart from being born from the top as already addressed–must be understood as a company objective to which all the necessary resources need to be allocated as opposed to being an experimental response to a managerial fad which might deliver or might not deliver the promised results. Allocating the necessary amount of resources might result particularly challenging in SMEs which are mostly focused on operational issues (Ates & Bititci, 2011) and have less resources available especially when experiencing growth (Dean, 1986). This becomes even more challenging given

that a poor allocation of (already scarce) resources might lead to SMEs going out of business (Asah et.al., 2015). Therefore, the following proposition can be advanced:

Proposition 1: *Addressing the pre-conditions for change, namely the pre-change and during change factors, is likely to determine the successful change implementation of SMTs in SMEs*

Another aspect finding confirmation relates to the necessity of putting together a team that would be responsible for implementing the change. This helps to see how this is not a process initiated and sustained by the CEO alone, but rather it requires the contributions of multiple players. In the case of Fazzari and Mosca (2009), this role was played by the special team that the HR department created, whereas in the case of this study, this role was played by the CEO in unison with a pool of people and the support of consultants. It should be noted however that putting together this team responsible for the change constitutes a challenging aspect in the context of SMEs, being used to a single-handedly decision-making (Van Gils, 2005). Therefore, the following proposition can be advanced:

Proposition 2: *Change enablers, namely the relating to people and non-relating to people ones, positively moderate the relationship between the pre-conditions for change and the successful implementation of change in SMEs*

Another factor the current research finds support in Fazzari and Mosca (2009) work relates to the role of the team-leader, which plays a function of facilitator, of enabler and contributing agent to a well-functioning team. Furthermore, this finding strongly aligns with those pointed out at the larger organizational level (Ayas, 1996; Manz & Sims, 1987; Spiegler et al., 2021); showing how irrespective of company size the role of the team-leader remains the same, and a crucially important one in establishing a healthy and sustained team functioning. Although this finding came from respondent number six who was one of the owners of the company (and therefore not an immediate team-leader), this study finds strong support to what Morgeson (2005) argued regarding the team leaders who are called to play the role of coaches for their teams; and finds again strong support to the role of the mentor highlighted in the work of Hoda et.al. (2013). This study also sheds light on the crucial role of leadership: on the one hand, transformational leadership, by pointing out the importance of letting leadership figures *emerge* as opposed to be appointed (Poe et.al., 2019); and this by virtue of the fact that such people have demonstrated the ability to embrace this role (Przybilla et al., 2019) by the contribution

they offered (Eseryel & Eseryel, 2013), and because they have garnered loyalty, credibility and legitimacy (Elmuti, 1997). On the other hand, shared leadership, by underlying how leadership gets distributed among team members who are now responsible for tasks that were once the leader's prerogative (Spiegler et al., 2021). Therefore, the following proposition can be advanced:

Proposition 3: *Team functioning positively moderates the relationship between the pre-conditions for change and the successful implementation of change in SMEs*

Interesting results were also found regarding the role of consultants, even though in a more indirect fashion. This research findings highlighted the position of consultants as a role of *support*, of coming along the people at the company to sustain what originated in the company. Fazzari and Mosca (2009) describe the key contribution brought about by the HR department and in this it is possible to infer–although the connection is never made explicitly–that it is the people inside the company that are expected to be the real catalysts of change. The importance of this finding helps to see where the emphasis of the efforts should be aimed at. Something that is addressed on a more practical nuance in the next chapter. The following proposition can be advanced:

Proposition 4: *Company-level interventions, such as the hiring of external consultants, positively moderate the relationship between the pre-conditions for change and the successful implementation of change in SMEs*

Another strong point of alignment between this research and the work of Fazzari and Mosca (2009) addresses the need for higher levels of involvement among employees that this research has found, from employees being involved and lively contributing to shaping the process of change itself, to the fostering of ownership attitudes in their day-to-day jobs so to guarantee an increased understanding of the contribution of one's part to the strategic whole. This aspect finds alignment with the fifth and sixth value of the SSI which, stressed the necessity of employees to become aware of the holistic functioning of the company. This finds confirmation in the work of Ferguson & Rivera (2021) too, who have argued for a shift in responsibility for behavior modification, no longer on management's shoulders but on each individual.

These aspects revolving around the world of employees find their meaning when put against the backdrop of literature that addressed the antecedents of positive attitudes and intentions

from the employees' side towards the organization–and therefore organizational changes too–which found that fostering employee engagement was one of them (Ram & Prabhakar, 2011). Therefore, the following proposition can be advanced:

Proposition 5: *People-level interventions, such as employees' attitudes towards the company, positively moderate the relationship between the pre-conditions for change and the successful implementation of change in SMEs*

The findings of this research also find alignment in the literature to what scholars have called their attention to in the context of intra-team members dynamics, where a high degree of social skills in communicating to one another was highlighted (Nicholls et.al., 1999). A further point of alignment with the literature, in the context of proper team functioning, lays in the importance of fostering information exchange so that team members are ready to adapt to new circumstances that might have developed (Banai et.al., 2000), and decentralization of decision-making would ensue (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003; Proença, 2010). Further confirmation of Fazzari and Mosca (2009) work was found in the form of the new managerial role in the context of this organizational structure. Namely, this must be a latent one where employees are not strictly controlled and where real autonomy is granted to the team at the expense of the possibility of management to interfere to change a course of action that is not deemed optimal (Yang & Guy, 2004). From the participants' answers alignment can also be noticed with regards to the shift that literature has argued management is called to undergo, namely, that from control to coaching (Druskat & Wheeler, 2004; Wageman, 2001; Morgeson, 2005). Therefore, the following proposition can be advanced:

Proposition 6: *Top management influence positively moderates the relationship between the pre-conditions for change and the successful implementation of change in SMEs*

Finally, another point of alignment with the literature regarded the topic of resistance to change which the participants addressed in multiple facets but that specifically confirms what Bordia et.al. (2011) argued in relation to having to address the possible baggage that might result from previous change management efforts. Furthermore, results confirm the findings of Rousseau and Aubé (2010) in that the type of task performed was indeed found to be more challenging to adopt in those units (production) characterized by a high degree of task routineness. Also,

the ones where harder-to-break habits are most likely to form. Therefore, the following proposition can be advanced:

Proposition 7: *Change inhibitors, such as resistance to change, negatively moderate the relationship between the pre-conditions for change and the successful implementation of change in SMEs*

Having responded to the call of scholars to investigate the scantly researched area of the factors leading to a successful SMTs implementation (Magppili & Pazos, 2017). The next chapter highlights the practical contributions of this research.
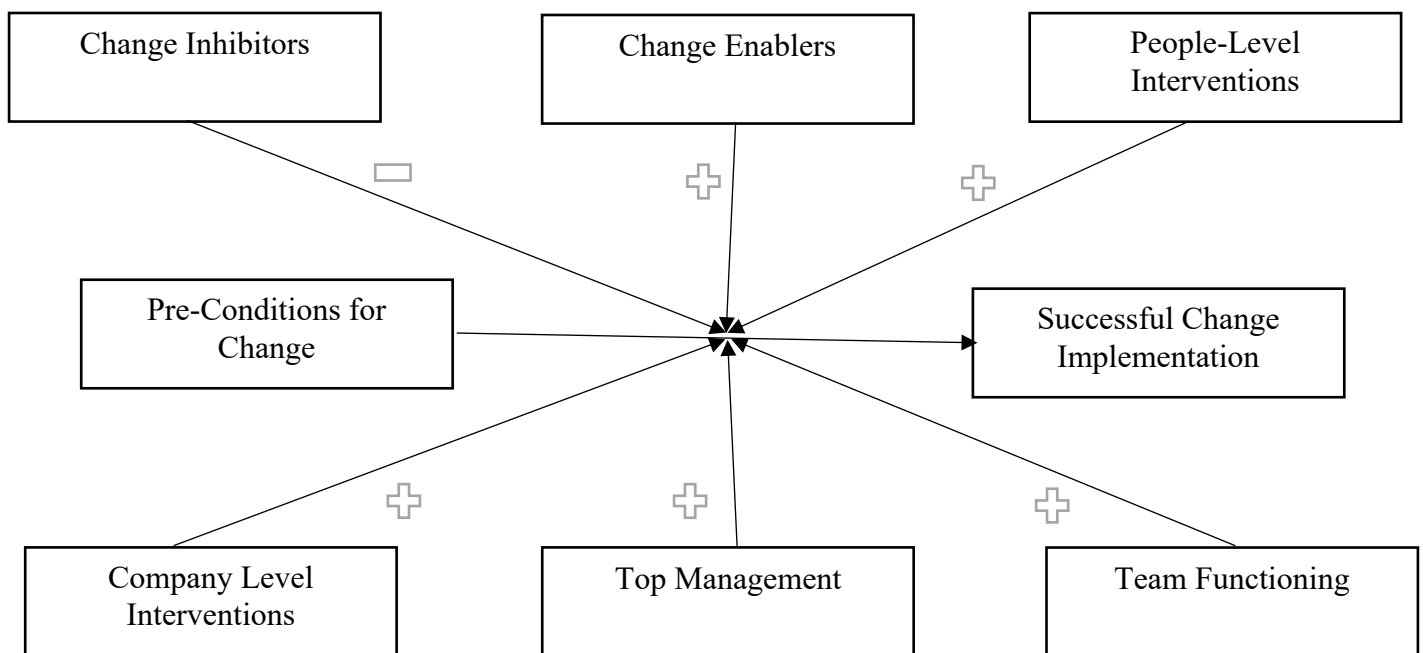
Figure 3-Research model

5.2 Practical Contributions

• Transform adversities into opportunities
• Address psychological safety and centralized decision-making
• Create win-win situation in highly likely change resisting people
• Make use of work-related personality tools to strategically source new talent
• Ensure heterogeneity inside the company
• Appoint a pool of people responsible for the change implementation
• Strategically complement the change team with consultants
• Avoid committing resources to formal change implementation trainings

Figure 4-Practical contributions at a glance

This chapter highlights a number of practical contributions that can be looked at from different angles and as a consequence serve the purposes of different actors. Thus, the elements here can be scanned by management for their presence or absence, or the degree of their presence or absence. In case an element is already present, a boost can be provided so to guarantee an even smoother change process. In case the company came to the conclusion that an element is absent, adjustment measures can be taken so to "prepare the soil" for the change process that the company intends to embark on.

Results from both companies have brought to the front more clarity on the antecedents that lead companies to embracing this change. In fact, the two companies interviewed chose to delve into this change in a time of crisis. The challenge they faced acted as a road forking that put management in front of two choices: either embrace the change or exert higher degrees of control. This was especially true in the case of one company as they started growing in the number of employees. This means that this type of transformation seems to deliver the best results when, paradoxically, approached in times of need for a company. Given that this is a change that greatly engages people, it might make sense that it is in times of questioning the status-quo and where this had led to, that a company will be the most receptive to the promises that this change project holds. Thus, companies that wish to embark on this journey might make good use of what could be regarded as adversities under normal circumstances, and use them as the context in which to frame the introduction of the company transformation. This will not only act as the good soil under which to plant the seeds of change but–given the company wide

awareness that things are not going for the best–will also serve as the opportunity to encourage the unveiling of the problems that people are facing. In this way transparent communication is brought about, and problems that might have lied under the surface are addressed too, by giving people the chance to open up about them and so guarantee an even smoother implementation of the company re-organization. In this regard, it should be pointed out that literature argued that SMEs are driven by external factors in bringing about change (Ates & Bititci, 2011), further confirming that a time of crisis might indeed be the best to start laying the foundations for this re-organization.

An aspect that will prove beneficial in assisting the change process and in sustaining it relates to fostering a higher degree of psychological safety or working at developing it, should it be absent altogether. The change implementation phase–as well as the ongoing continuation of this organizational structure–requires the involvement and contribution of everyone in the company, which means that fear of expressing one's opinion should totally disappear. Companies should therefore work at fostering an environment where genuine talk about the state of the company as well as the way people are experiencing it, is guaranteed. This means that there is no more space for a central decision-making structure where people are simply informed of the direction taken as opposed to be active contributors to the company life.

Another way for companies to clear the road that leads to success is by addressing the aspects of change resistance. Results have shown that change resistance laid in people that had a long tenure at the company and that had solidified in the ways the company had worked and thought up until that point (Frankforter & Christensen, 2003). A way that one of the companies interviewed addressed this, was to move these people from the operational spectrum to the training/teaching one, harnessing the knowledge they had acquired in their years of experience. Companies can therefore engage in this win-win situation as the people who might be most resisting to change–who would find it the most challenging to adapt to new ways of working– are dealt with and therefore the change process is aided (without having to fire them for example), but also their precious knowledge acquired through the years of experience is exploited, and can be put to use for training the new incoming recruits for example. An alternative to this is worth considering. Literature has argued that SMTs adoption finds the best rational in those cases where the type of task performed is an uncertain, non-routine one (Rousseau & Aubè, 2010). Therefore, as an alternative option to dealing with this type of resistance, companies might consider the idea of avoiding altogether the involvement of the people most likely to resist the change in those aspects of the re-organization that they would find the most challenging anyways. This would mean, for example, that companies might avoid

disrupting the whole process of manufacturing removing its command-and-control leadership; and instead opt for involving these people only in those aspects of self-organization that everyone would appreciate under all circumstances such as the possibility of allocating the work days among team members in an autonomous and democratic fashion.

Connecting back to the topic of recruitment, this too can play a huge role in achieving and sustaining the change process. This is especially true in SMEs where there might not even be a HR department, and where mistakes in recruiting would prove the most costly and time-consuming. This organizational structure is wholly based on the correct functioning of teams and therefore the presence of people that are team players. Therefore, companies and consultants alike might find tools to profile and categorize working personalities as extremely helpful in assessing if a candidate would indeed prove fitting for such an organizational structure.

Another aspect that can prove strategic in implementing the change relates to the degree that companies–and therefore the people who shape it–are open to different perspective and outlooks. These differences might be expressed in terms of nationality, age, religion or any other aspects that make humans different from one an another. This variability among people trains them to keep an open mind and realize the differences present in the world. As a consequence, people that are exposed to these differences will likely develop higher social skills–whose importance was shown in the results section–as they need to relate to people coming from different walks of life; and therefore, a different way of thinking about organizational structure will be welcomed more receptively among a workforce that is high on social skills and that has already been used to approach things from multiple perspectives. Thus, either in the time prior to implementing the first changes or during the change itself, once the need for hiring shows, companies would do well to consider being deliberate in creating a heterogenous pool of people inside the company. Although not making an explicit reference to these differences at the human level, literature has indeed argued for the benefits that an heterogenous workplace can contribute to the SMTs implementation efforts (Campion et.al., 1993; Nerur et.al, 2005); making the translating of the concepts argued in the literature possible to the differences above expounded too.

Literature in the field of SMEs has highlighted their opportunity seeking attitude but has pointed out too, how such attitude has often been found wanting in terms of planning skills to drive action (Ates & Bititci, 2011). In this context, therefore, the results regarding the adoption of a change team responsible to drive the change forward become all the more relevant. Indeed, it is a crucial step for the CEO or top management to appoint a change team

who is to respond to the challenges the change implementation will bring forth, and to be responsible for the change efforts.

To complement the contribution of the change team, another point of great importance relates to the role that consultants play. Firstly, it should be clear that consultants are not called to play the role of the expert delivering the missing piece of information they alone possess (Schein, 1990), but rather they are called to come alongside the CEO and the rest of the team he/she has chosen for the task and act as *facilitators*. They are called to assess the intricacies of each change case and to support the organization in finding a *tailor-made solution*; given that this type of organizational transformation cannot be implemented in a one-size-fits-all fashion. In SMEs in particular, their role is crucial for two reasons. As already argued, they are not there to deliver knowledge that will transform the change into reality, but at the same time they are educated in the field and can quickly bring the knowledge that the organization would need resources and time to invest in order to build in-house. They also carry the added value of their experiences from previous change projects. The second reason relates to the fact that consultants play a role that fosters credibility to the change project as–especially in a smaller company that has been operating for a long time in a certain way–people might be more reluctant to be guided in the change by the same people that have shaped the reality from which the company now seeks to depart from.

Finally, results have shown that the context of SMEs does not seem to call for investments in training for the purpose of actualizing this change. This finding stands in stark contrast with those at the larger-level (Nicholls, et.al., 1999; Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002), even though further investigation is warranted for the findings of Liu et.al., (2011) in the context of cultural variables hampering the change implementation. Trainings for change implementation seem to be a more formal procedure suitable for larger companies, which might find the process of advancing the change in an organic and natural way more challenging than SMEs. Therefore, a way in which this could be interpreted is that for SMEs change leaders can avoid crafting expensive budgets to be channeled towards formal trainings. The involvement of employees in the change process, the lower headcount and the more easiness of disseminating the change initiative philosophy throughout the company might prove to be enough for bringing about alignment in employees to the new way forward the company is striving to implement. Results from the interviews at the large organization level seem to further confirm this insight given that it was only in those, that this research highlighted the presence of social formalities (social bureaucracy above) operating in the company; and the presence of what seemed to look like progress in terms of change (apparent change) which

eventually revealed itself void of any substance. Therefore, it seems that in larger organizations there is a higher chance of the change initiative to not reach all facets of the company; thus warranting the use of training to homogenously spread the change philosophy throughout the company.

6. Limitations and Future Research

As all research this research presents some limitations. Firstly, having nine interviews makes it more difficult to extend the generalizability of the results. However, it should also be noted that all interviews were in-depth and a rich source of data, and that each interview lasted from an hour minimum to an hour and a half maximum. Indeed, it was noticed that saturation was reached. Furthermore, the research amply showed the scarcity of publications in this field which made it way more difficult to find companies that matched the criteria of having gone through this transformation–which remains a marginal phenomenon in the global spectrum of companies–plus the added criterion of being a SME. Furthermore, some degree of generalizability lies in the fact that both a service-based company and a manufacturing one were interviewed, and therefore the data offer insights from both types of industries. In light of this, further research could try to extend the sample of companies and provide an heterogenous sample in terms of positions inside the company so to allow for insights from multiple perspectives to emerge.

Another limitation rests on the fact that seven out of the nine interviews were conducted with two Italian companies offering a single background perspective. This is especially relevant when thinking about the challenges posed by the nuances of different cultures on this transformation, which makes them all the more important to be addressed, in order to gain further understanding of what this company transformation might entail in different countries. Originally, the sample included three companies from India, the Netherlands and Argentina but issues out of the researcher's control did not allow for the connection with the ones from the Netherlands and Argentina to occur. Therefore, future research could focus on ensuring a multicultural sample, where possibly the highest number of continents is represented.

Lastly, the interviews were coded by one researcher only, which could have had an influence on the reliability of the data. Although discussions were organized with the supervisor of this thesis so that it was possible to reason and reflect about the coding procedure and labels, future research could focus on ensuring a double coding process by two independent individuals in order to increase the reliability and validity of these findings.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the variables that contribute to a successful implementation of a Semco transformation or of a "non-Semco" one but still based on the same underlying principles at the SMEs level. This study highlighted multiple variables that influence the outcome of the change process. At the SMEs level, this change process is a very much *people-oriented* one. Given the smaller number of people making up the company, this process should be embarked on a *we-are-in-this-together* fashion. It is a process that cannot originate from anyone apart from the CEO or the people that represent the higher levels. It requires a strong commitment from the CEO and the top management coupled with a firm realization that the change project cannot be approached with time-bound strings attached but rather as a strategic objective that might require years to fully come to fruition. It requires deep changes in both the top management, called to re-invent themselves, and in people, called to become active participants to the change process itself and to the previously unknown dynamics of company life. This can only be made possible by a strong company culture of information sharing where people are aware of what is happening in other parts and how theirs and others' contributions make up the whole functioning of the company. This company transformation will also need to find a congruent and consistent match even in the way the office itself is structured, namely, in an open space where the environment itself is conducive to the new practices the company is striving to bring about. Finally, in addition to the formation of a change team that will be responsible for translating the change into reality, companies need to make use of consultants to aid the process of transformation and to come alongside the change team to act as facilitators and enablers of the change journey. Embarking on this company transformation is not an easy or straightforward endeavor and there is no *one* way to implement it. However, the potentialities that it carries–from the type of working environment that it creates above anything else–make it surely a worthwhile to embrace.

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Appendix - Interview protocol

Conversation-starter
- How's your day going so far?
- How did you find yourself in the position you currently are at the company?

SMTs/Semco style transformation
Individual level questions
In terms of you as an individual, we want to investigate how you experienced the process of transitioning to SMTs and what were some factors that helped you and some others that you felt were obstructing you. For example:
- Did you feel you were given enough autonomy over your tasks?
- To what extent did the original roles undergo changes (workload, responsibility) as a result of the organizational change?

- To what extent did the need to show leadership attitudes arise as a result of the organizational change?
- To what extent do you think your skills were a good match for the "new" position?
- To what extent did you or others show resistance to this change initiative?
- To what extent do you feel your work experience helped you in integrating in this new way of working?
- What factors did you feel were instead affecting, either positively or negatively, others around you as individuals?

Team-level questions

Switching to a team-perspective, again, we now want to investigate what factors worked well in fostering the correct functioning of the teams and what factors less so. For example:

- Did you feel the team had enough autonomy over the tasks?
- What was the relationship like among you peers in a SMT context?
- Did you feel the leaders were exerting too much control or too less?
- To what extent do you think the diversity (roles, skills) in teams, or the lack thereof, contributed to the organizational change implementation?
- What can you tell me about these same questions, but considering now what other teams in the company faced?

Organizational level questions

I want you to think about the company now. We want to address the aspects already present in the company that contributed to the successful implementation and those that did not. For example:

- Was the level of psychological safety (explain) adequate before the change process?
- What effect do you think the company culture had on fostering or inhibiting the change process?
- To what extent the different cultures (if present) had a positive or negative impact on the change process?
- To what extent did the presence of organizational goals helped/motivated in moving forward with the efforts of the organizational change?
- How do you think the structure (hierarchical, flat) helped or hampered the change process?

- How do you think training (if present/the lack of it) sustained/made it more difficult the change process?
- To what extent do you feel that the access to resources, or the lack thereof, contributed to the successful organizational change?
- To what extent, if present, did rewards play a contributing or hindering role in the change process?
- What do you feel was the impact played by the consultant?
- Also, as the company announced the change and started implementing it, again, what new interventions do you think contributed positively to the process and which have instead hindered it?

Closing

- I imagine you might have caught the underlying idea behind my questions. In light of it, is there anything that we have not touched upon but that you feel it would contribute to this research?