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Facilitating Engaging Leadership Communication in a Decentralized Organization Case: Finnish Border Guard

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<p>Many decades have been spent trying to gain competitive advantage by optimizing performance, lowering costs, and relying on cutting edge technology. Now, the buzzword seems to be employee engagement, placing the needs of the employees in the forefront. What does employee engagement offer to organizations that makes it so valuable?</p> <p>Employee engagement appears to offer a number of positive organizational outcomes. Among them are increased employee commitment, improved in-role and extra-role behavior, better service climate, enhanced employee performance, and higher financial returns. Thus it seems that employee engagement is something that organizations should strive for. On the other hand, employees themselves also seem to benefit from engagement in that it is described as a positive psychological state. Employee engagement is a win-win game.</p> <p>The role of leaders in fostering employee engagement is central. This thesis explores that role and delves into how leadership communication can enable engagement. The situation at the case organization is made even more challenging by the decentralized nature of the studied organizational functions. The main purpose of the thesis is to find ways in which the organization can facilitate engaging leadership communication.</p> <p>To find out what needs and concerns the mid-level managers currently have, semi-structured interviews were used. The responses revealed for example that the managers were worried about the distant team members' sense of belonging, and experienced difficulty in dealing with challenging issues with their team members. Ability to cater to all these needs is central for creating an engaging atmosphere.</p> <p>The material gathered from the interviewed managers was utilized to draft a suggestion of an educational event that could help the case organization in supporting its mid-level managers in engaging leadership communication. Very practical topics are suggested to directly target the needs of the case organization.</p>	
Keywords employee engagement, leadership communication, remote leadership, decentralized organizations, transformational leadership	

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1 Introduction

Employee engagement is popping up in more and more discussions when executives are trying to ensure that their business' thrives. Engagement can be described as "a positive work-related psychological state" (Albrecht 2010, 4). With decades aiming at optimizing performance, lowering costs, and relying on cutting edge technology to provide competitive advantage, why are we suddenly paying attention to how the employees feel?

Engaged employees bring more value to an organization. More than that, disengaged employees cause damage to an organization. (Gallup 2013.) In today's world, having a job and getting paid to do it doesn't motivate people as much as it did in decades past. We are expecting to enjoy our work and our work environment, and to be doing work that is meaningful to us. As can be read in chapter 3.1.2, employee engagement is the result of various factors, such as a good fit between the organization and the employee, having a voice and being heard, and having a clear work role and expectations (see e.g. Beugré 2010, Fleck & Inceoglu 2010, Men 2014).

The personnel strategy of the case organization includes a personnel vision - that they should have reliable, professional, and motivated personnel that has a positive attitude towards developing not only their own work, but the entire organization (Rajavartiola 2013). It would appear that in order to reach those goals, employee engagement could be a valuable tool.

Looking at the components that make it possible for employees to engage, the role of leadership seems central. The view of leadership in an organization should not be limited to the highest executives, but the leadership roles in management all throughout the organization should be recognized. The role of the direct supervisor in an employee's work life is significant, placing mid-level managers in a central position in enabling engagement. Engaged managers enable, even create, engaged employees.

It has been said that leadership is communication. There is no leadership task that can be performed without communication, as the core of leadership is to get others to follow you. In order to set clear targets and motivate employees to reach them, leaders need to be able to communicate in a way that resonates with their followers. This is why the role of leadership communication is crucial in enabling employee engagement.

We can all witness in our everyday lives how challenging leadership and communication can be. In decentralized organizations, where employees are not working under the same roof, these challenges tend to be magnified. Remoteness decreases the amount of informal interaction and often prevents face-to-face communication. These factors can cause employees to feel lonely and disconnected. Engaging people over distances and in virtual contacts is even more challenging than in regular office settings. How leaders communicate becomes even more important.

Recognizing these challenges and appreciating the value of engaged employees demands that organizations need to place more emphasis on supporting leadership communication, so that engaging becomes easier for employees. The benefits of engagement, and harms of disengagement, are undeniable.

The case organization recently changed its organizational structure. The change was called centralizing, as all the functions located in different parts of Finland were now managed from one central location. However, in effect the change is decentralization, since new teams and sectors were formed where colleagues and managers are located all over Finland. This is the first time decentralized functions play a significant role in the case organization.

This change has called to closer attention the need for leadership communication skills that help the employees remain, or become, engaged. This thesis aims at identifying the challenges faced by the mid-level managers in these decentralized organizational units and offer propositions on how the organization can aid them in facing these challenges.

The objectives of this study are discussed in chapter 2 as well as the research problem and the sub-questions that support answering the main research problem. The chapter also introduces the case organization and its current state. Chapter 3 offers insight into the theories surrounding the topics of employee engagement, leadership, and communication. The implementation of the study is covered in chapter 4. The results presented in chapter 5 are discussed further in chapters 6 and 7.

2 Objectives and research problem

This chapter offers background information on the case organization and the organizational change that inspired this thesis. Also the findings of an interim report conducted in the organization are presented, as it helps to reveal the current state of mid-level management in the decentralized organization units, explaining the inspiration for this thesis.

Based on the previously mentioned information the objectives of the thesis and the research problem are presented. This thesis discusses engaging leadership in the challenging environment of decentralized organizational units, placing focus on communication practices that may enhance employee engagement.

2.1 Introducing the case organization

The Finnish Border Guard (FBG) is a militarily organized internal security agency operating under the Ministry of the Interior. The aim of the activities is to maintain peaceful conditions in the border areas. The main tasks are to guard Finland's borders on land and at sea, carry out border checks on persons at land border crossing points, ports, and airports, and perform search and rescue operations, particularly at sea. Because Finland is a member of the European Union and a Schengen country, activities focus on the external border of the Schengen area. The FBG employs some 2800 persons located all over the country of Finland as well as some liaison officers in foreign countries. (Rajavartiolaitos 2015.)

The FBG is composed of eight administrative units and the headquarters. Over the course of the organization's nearly 100-year existence the administrative units have enjoyed a great deal of autonomy, leading to somewhat varied sub-organizational cultures. This poses challenges for the mid-level managers who are heading the new cross-organizational sectors and teams. On the other hand, being militarily organized leads to inherent structures, habits, and hierarchy that permeates the organization and offers common ground for all.

The organizational restructuring of the FBG in the beginning of 2014 resulted in decentralization of the administrative and support functions - HR, financial and technical services - and new managers were put into place to lead these sectors and teams. This is the first time decentralized functions play a key role in the FBG. In the past these tasks were handled separately in each of the eight administrative units and the headquarters. Organizationally they all now reside within the headquarters, located in Helsinki, despite the geo-

graphical location of the employees. The restructured functions serve the entire organization instead of the regional locations. Previously the personnel in the customer service duties were quite familiar with the people they were serving as well as any possible local characteristics. Now the aim is to offer uniform service across board in the entire organization.

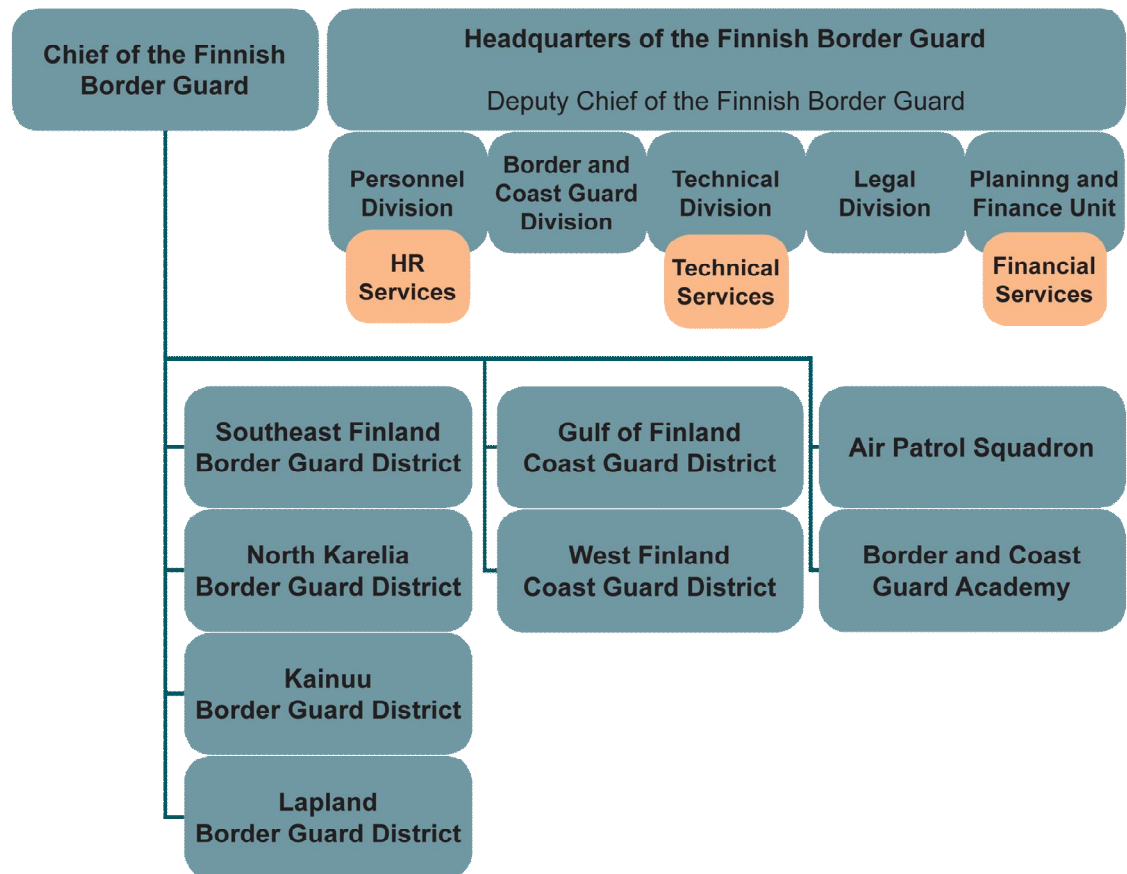


Figure 1: The organization of the Finnish Border Guard, adapted from www.raja.fi (Rajavartiolaitos 2015)

With being militarily organized comes, of course, a long tradition of following hierarchy and orders from those higher up in the chain of command. One might speculate that this affects the way the importance of internal communication and specific efforts at engaging employees are perceived by the leadership. However, over the past ten years more emphasis has been put on interactive or conversational leadership communication in the organization, and the leadership has been educated in the matter using DeepLead methods (Heiskanen, Jokela & Koski 2011, 2).

2.2 Deep leadership in the case organization

Since 2006 the FBG has been cooperating with Deep Lead Inc. that provides a programme of leadership coaching based on Deep Leadership© coaching methods (Deep Lead Inc 2014; Heiskanen & al. 2011, 2). Those methods relate to the transformational leadership style (Nissinen 2004, 128-129). Transformational leadership is a leadership style that appeals to the higher order needs of the followers to motivate them in their work. This calls them to go beyond self-interest for the sake of the good of others. (Bass & Avolio 1997 in Men 2014, 267.) Transformational leadership is discussed further in chapter 3.2.2.

The goal of the training is to improve the quality of management on all levels of the organization by improving interaction skills of the managers. Among other goals there is also an objective of understanding goal-oriented interaction. The training is divided into four phases, where the participants are educated in the topic, are given the tools to understand the profiles that are composed of them during the training, and the profiles are interpreted together with the trainer. The final phase is monitoring, where the topic is revised and participants together with the trainer examine how successful the personal development plans of the participants are. The plans are formulated based on the profile. (Heiskanen & al. 2011, 4.)

The original aim of the organization was that all managers would be trained in deep leadership skills by the end of 2009. This goal was not reached. (Ibid.) Not all of the managers within the decentralized functions that were interviewed for this thesis had received the DeepLead training.

Previously, the Border and Coast Guard Academy was given the task of making a report on the effects, productivity, and costs of the deep leadership training. They were also asked to evaluate whether the training should be continued in the future. (Ibid, 2.)

As a whole, the report on deep leadership training states that while many of the targets set for the training were not met, it has supported the managers' ability to analyze the social environment at the workplace. Two thirds of the managers surveyed for the report felt that the training had impacted the way they interact with others, and 77% believed it had improved their skills as managers. Also, two thirds felt that interaction within their unit had increased with the training. However, more than half of the managers stated that they did not believe that the training had any impact on the work atmosphere. (Ibid 2011, 35, 38.)

Aside from how successful the training is deemed, the framework of transformational leadership is important to consider in this study in order to guarantee that the guidance offered to the case organization is in line with the views it subscribes to. Also the positive outcomes of transformational leadership stated in the literature review in chapter 3 support this approach.

2.3 Results from an interim report on decentralization

The FBG conducted an interim report approximately six months after the decentralization took place. The aim of the interim report was to find out how the customers and service providers viewed the decentralized services and their functionality. There was also a need to gather possible problems and development ideas in to one document. Eleven of the new sector leaders were selected to represent them all and interviewed, as well as twelve of their key clients. Separate surveys for the service providers (sector employees) as well as the wider customer base were executed.

In the interviews the sector leaders expressed, or others expressed on their behalf, the need for extra guidance in administrative tasks and human resource management, as well as issues dealing with the collective agreement for central government. It was also discovered that the situation where a specialist had been made a manager was perceived to be challenging. On the other hand, some advantages were recognized in having a manager who understands the substance content the employees work with. The survey revealed also a deficit in communications through the line managers, or mid-level managers. Additionally the processes needed to be streamlined and decision-making authorizations clarified. (Wahlström 2014, 11, 14.)

2.4 Research problem

In this thesis employee engagement has been recognized as a significant factor in causing positive outcomes for the organization. Thus special emphasis is placed on the leadership behaviors, specifically leadership communication that can enhance employee engagement. Some consider the tendency to become and remain engaged a person's trait (Welch 2011, 335), but for the interest of this study it is considered from the point of view of it being a psychological state that can be affected by the actions of e.g. the organization and its managers (e.g. Nielsen & González 2010, 139). Therefore it is meaningful to explore the topic from the point of view of leadership communication.

The case organization has recently changed its organization to include decentralized organizational units in major functions. The challenges posed by remote leadership and decentralized units are recognized (e.g. Vartiainen, Kokko & Hakonen 2004, 37) and creating employee engagement may prove even more challenging than in traditional settings.

The managers of decentralized units face considerable challenges especially in the beginning stages of implementing decentralization in an organization. That is the time when the different cultural backgrounds and different ways of operating clash the strongest, and the cohesion of the units is the weakest (ibid., 67). With time the issues may be mitigated. Since it is in the interest of the organization to have engaged workforce (Gallup 2013), it is important to support mid-level managers in their leadership communications to help guarantee an environment where engaging is easy for the employees.

From this reasoning the research problem is expressed as:

How can the organization support mid-level managers in engaging leadership communication in a decentralized organization?

To address the different aspects of the topic the following sub-questions were formulated:

- a) What are the needs of the mid-level managers?
- b) What kinds of problems are the mid-level managers facing?
- c) What is the role of distance in managing teams?
- d) How does leadership communication enable employee engagement?

To obtain answers to questions a) and b) interviews of the mid-level managers of the case organization are used. Their point of view is central to defining the needs in this particular case.

Questions c) and d) are addressed in part through the interviews, but also through the literature review in chapter 3.

It is a tradition within the case organization to address different topics in various educational events for different audiences throughout the year. Based on the findings of the interviews, a suggestion of an educational event for the mid-level managers will be drafted. The aim of the suggested event is to benefit the organization and the mid-level managers by addressing specifically the topics they feel the need for support in, trying to incorporate methods they feel are most beneficial. The intention is that by organizing such an event the organization could help the mid-level managers become more able to communicate in

a way that engages employees, which in turn benefits the organization. The suggested event will thus be a concrete suggestion as to how an organization could support the mid-level managers in engaging leadership communication in a decentralized organization.

3 Literature review

In this chapter the key concepts of the research are discussed and defined. These concepts are employee engagement, leadership communication, remote leadership, and transformational leadership.

In recent years the discussion around the topic of employee engagement has intensified. Employee engagement is more than mere employee satisfaction, and can be seen as desirable from the point of view of the organization, since it has been shown to have positive effect on the performance of the organization (Albrecht 2010, 11; Fleck & Inceoglu 2010, 31, 39; Langford 2010, 382-383). The concept of employee engagement will be discussed further in chapter 3.1.

Also in the core of this research is leadership communication. Communication is just one of the many skills required from a leader, but it is pivotal in fulfilling any other task successfully; it has been said that leadership *is* communication. The concepts of communication and internal communication are discussed further in chapter 3.2. In the past, there has been a belief that leaders are born – we tend to cast our minds back to the charismatic leaders we all know from heads-of-states to the likes of Martin Luther King. However, a new consensus is emerging that leadership skills can be learned. This topic is presented in more detail later in chapter 3.2.

Remote leadership often occurs in decentralized organizations, organizational units, or teams. For the purpose of this research emphasis is placed on geographically decentralized organizational units. Other aspects of decentralization, or remoteness, include mobile work, working on different schedules or time zones, temporary teams, diversity of employees, and communication channels used (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 23).

In decentralized units it is challenging for the leader to foster interaction with and between team members. It is also difficult to convey the feeling of being present and approachable to remote team members. These challenges easily lead to the feeling of being isolated. (Koskela 2013, 21, 26.) They can also hamper the basic transmission of messages, posing challenge to remote leaders. This topic is discussed in chapter 3.3.

A relationship has been established between employee engagement, leadership communication as a part of internal communication, and transformational leadership. It has also been established that leaders act as important agents of internal communication. Thus all

levels of management should be given full support from the organization to help them develop their skills in transformational leadership and leadership communication. (Men 2012 173; Men 2014, 280.) The connections built between these theories are also central for the theoretical framework of this thesis.

3.1 Employee engagement

There are various definitions found in research of what employee engagement is. In many of these definitions engagement is seen as “a positive work-related psychological state -- and that engagement is also a motivational state reflected in a genuine willingness to invest focused effort towards organizational goals and success” (Albrecht 2010, 4). The word *state* is key here, as some consider the ability to engage to be a *trait*. Traits are aspects of a person’s personality, and as such relatively fixed (Welch 2011, 335). Since it is the state, not traits, of a person that can be influenced through communication, engagement is considered from the point of view of it being a psychological state in this thesis.

Considered the “academic parent” (Welch 2011, 332) of employee engagement, Kahn (1990, 694) describes engagement as follows: “in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance”. Plenty of academics have built on the original definition of Kahn in the years since. Another prominent definition of the concept is one from Schaufeli, Salanova, Vicente-González-Romá & Bakker (2002, 74), who define engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption”. This definition includes the notion that engagement is something that is positive and fulfilling, emphasizing why it should be strived for, not just from the point of view of the organization, but also from the point of view of the individual.

Kahn (2010, 20) readily admits that even though engagement is instinctively recognized as a goal worth pursuing, the understanding of the deeper meaning of the concept varies. However, the definitions by Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli & al. (2002) seem to agree on how engagement is expressed. *Vigor* is depicted as having energy, being resilient and willing to invest effort in one’s work even when facing difficulties. This aligns with Kahn’s notion of physical expression of self. *Dedication* entails “a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge”, consistent with the emotional dimension of Kahn’s definition. *Absorption* stands for concentration and engrossment in one’s work to an extent where there may even be difficulties with detaching from work. Absorption can be characterized as being similar to the feeling of flow, but more long-term and enduring. Absorption

can also be considered a cognitive component, in line with Kahn's definition. (Schaufeli & al. 2002, 74; Welch 2011, 333.)

The employee engagement concept was originally Kahn's way of describing the varying degrees of self employees bring into their work roles. Previous academic studies had concentrated more on motivation as a relatively steady quality of the employee in question, based on the rewards they received for working as well as intrinsic factors. Yet, an understanding was developing that people's engagement varied according to some internal calculus, causing them to incorporate different degrees and dimensions of their selves to their work roles. The causes of engagement, and disengagement, became the objects of research. (Kahn 2010, 20.) Changes in engagement over time can be attributed for example to changes at work in the form of a new job, changes in responsibilities, or organizational restructuring (Fleck & Inceoglu 2010, 35).

The original work of Kahn names three psychological conditions that are needed for employees to be able to engage: meaningfulness of engaging, safety of engaging, and availability to engage (Kahn 1990, 703).

Employees need to feel that their contributions matter to the organization, that their voices are heard. Ignoring the courageous employee that voices concerns over e.g. company policies can lead to disengagement. (Kahn 2010, 24; Beugré 2010, 178.) Also, it is important for the employee to feel that his engagement is meaningful to himself as well, not just to the organization. Kahn & Fellows (2013, 119-120) go as far as to say that work has to be deeply meaningful in order to produce sustained engagement, and call on leaders and supervisors among others to create conditions that allow for the employees to experience such feelings. This highlights also the significance of how the person and his job and organization fit together (Fleck & Inceoglu 2010, 35). It is far easier to find deep meaning in one's engagement to work, if the job and the organization are aligned with the values of the employee, making them "a good fit".

The role of safety cannot be underestimated. If there were a possibility of punishment for voicing your concerns, why would you do so? Bringing up perceived shortcomings of the policies of an organization to those who created them may seem daunting (Beugré 2010, 174), the fear of retribution rendering employees non-communicative. Feeling secure when presenting one's true self offers the organization the opportunity to capitalize on an employee's skills. Penalties, formal and informal alike, make it less safe to fully engage at work and cause disengagement. Whether the punishment is in the form of a negative per-

formance review or hidden in sideways glances and isolation, the possibility to engage is lost. (Kahn 2010, 25.)

The degree to which employees are available to be engaged varies. Distractions that may lessen the availability of an individual can be related to the work environment such as work related stress, lack of physical and/or emotional energy, and naturally to lives outside of work. Availability is the sense of possessing personal resources to be engaged at the moment – physically, emotionally, or psychologically. However, not all effects of private life events are detrimental to engagement at work, on the contrary. Positive events increase the energy levels of individuals and may increase availability to engage at work. (Kahn 1990, 714, 717.)

3.1.1 The role of leaders in enabling employee engagement

The role of leaders in enabling employee engagement is central. The focus is not entirely on highest executives; leaders at all levels of the organization have influence on how engaged other members of the organization can become. As discussed before, personal availability of the employees does play a role in the formation of engagement. However, it is only natural that employees look up to leaders to reflect the meaning of their work and enable them to engage safely. (Kahn 2010, 27.) It is the leaders at all levels that create the work environment that values the voice of all of its members (Beugré 2010, 178), support employees in their endeavors (Segers, De Prins & Brouwers 2010, 150), and act as central figures to facilitate internal communication (Men 2014, 280).

Being a good leader is not simple. Leaders need to recognize the moments when their guidance and involvement is advantageous, and when it is better to leave an employee to take responsibility of their own actions. There is a delicate balance of abandonment and intrusion, being supportive enough when needed and trusting enough when an employee needs to be making their own decisions. (Kahn 2010, 27.)

The basic needs for an employee to be able to engage with his work are having a clear role and clear expectations. The employees are likely to disengage if their tasks are unclear, the authority of the employee in relation to others is imprecise, and the limits of their mandate to make decisions are vague. (Kahn 2010, 23.) Leaders may also promote good behavior and collective responsibility for reaching a common goal (Nielsen & Gonzáles 2010, 146). By doing so they can further the compatibility of employees' roles and make visible the importance of each role in achieving goals.

However, it is not enough to simply concentrate on the work of the members of one's own team – it is essential to see the organization as a whole, and support the cooperation between units as well. For example hierarchical relations between organizational units may create friction that prevents employees from fully engaging for the fear of getting caught in the crossfire. Therefore leaders should direct focus towards “we”, instead of building the barriers of “us” and “them”. It must also be recognized that despite the best efforts to pull together, differences do manifest themselves between members of organizations and they may even lead to conflicts. The presence of conflicts is not a barrier to engagement, quite contrary. Engaged people speak their mind, which inevitably leads to expression of conflicting ideas. What is needed, however, are rules that allow for healthy management of said differences. After all, expressing differing opinions enables learning. Resulting conflicts should be seen as relating to the tasks at hand, and all parties should be treated with respect. (Kahn 2010, 26-28.)

Mentioned earlier is the need for the voice of the employee to be heard. “Deaf ears make us mute” (ibid., 23). The responsibility of leaders, then, is to listen. The need to be heard by other members of the community cannot be undermined, but supervisors and other authority figures play a key role (ibid., 24). Keen ear is also needed when judging whether the employee is open for and in need of guidance, or if it would be better to leave them to make their own judgments as previously stated. Employees also need validation when they engage at work. Validation and respect can be shown for example by listening to, and especially soliciting, the ideas of employees and really considering them. (Ibid., 28-29.)

A good leader is also able to recognize the diversity in their employees and the implications of that to the actions they need to take. Not everyone responds similarly to certain actions, not everyone is inherently equally able to engage, and not everyone values the same rewards for their efforts. This is also tied to the need to listen in order to find out what motivates each employee, and to find out how best to communicate with them to reach understanding. Enabling diversity at work promotes engagement. Being able to utilize all aspects of their personality in their work roles, employees can engage their full self rather than becoming only parts of themselves (ibid. 26-27).

3.1.2 The drivers of engagement

After exploring what is meant by employee engagement and discussing the role of the leaders in enabling it, it is time to go into what causes engagement. This is integral, since it has also been established that employee engagement is desirable both for the employee as well as the employer. Recognizing the drivers of engagement allows the organization to utilize them for best results.

Reflecting from the topics previously covered it seems to be central that employees are allowed to have a voice, a voice that is heard by the leadership. Such interaction with the organization should feel safe; fear of punishment impedes communication. Mutual respect is vital in communication, and including validation of employees' ideas is important. Employees should receive support in their endeavors as well as in expressing their true selves in their work roles.

These needs seem to revolve around leadership and communication. This conclusion is supported by a study by Halbesleben (2010, 103, 107) that found feedback, autonomy, social support and organizational climate to have a positive impact on engagement.

Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas & Feldt (2010, 126) also found that social support at work plays a key role in engagement. In addition they found job control and security to be central. They acknowledge that the most meaningful job resources vary by the job and by the individual employee. The before mentioned were, however, recognized as universally beneficial for all employees. Adequate job resources facilitate fulfilling the job demands, but also offer the employee a possibility for personal growth and learning. The central role of leaders in fostering engagement is also emphasized in their findings, urging e.g. team leaders to “-- provide positive feedback to employees, help employees set attainable goals, inform employees about important issues, and offer emotional support.”(Ibid.)

This is even more clearly underlined by Ketchum (2010 in Men 2012, 48), naming leadership, communication, supervisor relationship, and work environment as factors driving engagement. Nielsen and González (2010, 139) also emphasize the importance of direct supervisors, or mid-level managers, in engaging employees. Mid-level managers are in the position to clarify the vision from senior management and use it as a frame to present the importance of each employee's role in achieving the common goal (Nielsen & González 2010, 140). As mentioned before, the clarity of the role as well as good alignment be-

tween the values and vision of the employee and the organization enhance employee engagement.

In addition to other organization-based interventions aiming at increasing engagement, Schaufeli & Salanova (2010, 409-410) suggest transformational leadership to be an effective strategy. This is due to the considerate leadership behaviors, such as being supportive and giving feedback as well as being task oriented, that transformational leaders tend to present. Going even further, transformational leaders help their followers to focus on higher-order needs over short term goals. The resulting atmosphere is described as being fair, trusting, open and constructive. (Ibid.) Transformational leadership will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.2.2.

3.1.3 Implications of employee engagement for organizational performance

Why, then, should an organization work for enabling engagement? What are the implications of employee engagement for organizational performance?

The answer seems to be, that there is a number of organizational outcomes that are positively influenced by employee engagement. Among them are increased employee commitment, improved in-role and extra-role behavior, better service climate, enhanced employee performance, and higher financial returns. (Albrecht 2010, 11.)

Fleck & Inceoglu (2010, 31,33) list profitability, revenue growth, earnings per share, low employee turnover, and customer satisfaction as advantages of employee engagement. They make a distinction between engagement-driven behaviors and their outcomes. Often cited positive outcomes of employee engagement, such as effort put into one's work, extra-role behavior, and advocacy are then seen as behaviors that result from being in a state of engagement. Beugré (2010, 177) adds to the list of behaviors persistence, adaptability, and taking initiative. Consequently, the ultimate outcomes for the organization, such as profit, low turnover, and customer satisfaction, are results of these behaviors (Fleck & Inceoglu 2010, 33).

Research has shown that where higher employee engagement is present, revenue is increased and cost per employee is reduced. However, it has not been established that it is employee engagement that causes better financial outcomes, and not vice versa. It has also been shown that better customer satisfaction, innovation, and achieving organizational objectives caused enhanced engagement. The two factors are correlational. The

calculated financial gains are the sum of higher productivity of employees, lower turnover costs, lower absenteeism costs, and lower workers' compensation costs. (Langford 2010, 380, 382.)

To conclude the views presented in chapter 3.1, this thesis approaches employee engagement as a varying state. In addition to an individual's own availability to be engaged, it is perceived that it can be affected by several factors, perhaps most importantly by the direct supervisors, or in other words mid-level managers. They can contribute to an engaging environment by actively listening to their employees and offering them a clear role and goal for their work, within the greater framework of the whole organization. Treating the employees as individuals, such as recognizing each person's need for support and independence, allows managers to respond in an engaging way to each of the employees. This is beneficial not only to the employees wellbeing, but to the organization as well. When employees thrive, they are less likely to leave the company, or actively disengage from their work. This in turn lessens losses. More than that, engaged employees can be perceived to increase revenue and improve customer service, certainly desirable objects for any organization.

3.2 Leadership communication

Communication is just one of the many skills required from a leader, but it is pivotal in fulfilling any other task successfully. It has been said that leadership *is* communication. Studies also show that a lot of expectations are placed on the managers: in fact, the management style and communication skills of a manager are among the most common reasons for resignations (Juholin 2013, 202). Such high pressure!

Communication within organizations can be seen in various different ways. One explanation is offered by Cornelissen (2014, 5) who states that

Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent.

This description pertains to all communication that an organization practices. For the purpose of this thesis the focus is on internal communications. The definition above highlights the key aspects of internal communications as well, maintaining that the purpose of com-

munication is to establish and maintain favorable reputations with key stakeholder groups of the organization - including employees.

Cornelissen (2014, 164) goes on to divide employee communication, or internal communication, into two areas: management communication, and corporate information and communication systems (CICS). For the purpose of this thesis internal communication is considered from the point of view of management communication. Management communication and CICS can both be used to provide information and opportunities for the employees' voices to be heard, but management communication is more central in upward communications within organizations, i.e. allowing employees to send information to the leadership about themselves and their needs and ideas (ibid., 166-168).

The views Åberg (2006, 83) shares on this matter are in line with what is mentioned above: communication is not limited to transmitting information, and communication is not just a process of which the end goal is to send a message. Communication is the exchange of messages between the sender and the receiver. In addition to that communication is producing, sharing, and interpretation of meanings, which in turn are able to create community. (Ibid. 85.)

Several previous studies show a positive relationship between transformational (and authentic) leadership and positive employee outcomes such as employee engagement. An important perspective is the way internal communication mediates this relationship. (Men 2012, 159.) Studies cite that transformational leaders engage followers efficiently (Nielsen & González 2010, 146), causing them to be motivated and determined to reach the goals set for them (Segers & al. 2010, 151).

The difficulty of communication is widely recognized. The sent message may be received as something far removed from the original intention – there may be as many interpretations as there are receivers of the information. How are managers, then, to communicate in a way that enhances engagement as well as the likelihood of achieving organizational goals?

Clampitt (2010, 16-20) proposes numerous issues to consider in order to help guarantee that managerial messages are received with least distractions:

1. Explore the employees' context
2. Manage employee expectations
3. Frame messages

4. Sculpt the proper context
5. Anticipate possible interpretations
6. Be aware of the “law of large numbers” (i.e. when the number of recipients of information is large, even the unlikeliest interpretations of the message may happen)
7. Use the “blackout” tactic to clarify potentially ambiguous messages (i.e. clarify what is *not* meant by the message)
8. Pay attention to secondary messages
9. Recognize the utility of credible sources

The list calls attention to the multitude of hurdles a manager must cross when communicating to employees, whether it be en masse or face-to-face with a single person. The message itself is almost overshadowed by the importance of how it is presented. Emphasis is placed on understanding, and creating, the context in which a message is received. Foresight is also required to predict other possible interpretations of the intended message, in order to be able to use tools such as the blackout tactic to block unwanted understandings.

This recognition of complexity is in stark contrast with the traditional understanding of communication. Traditional communication model relies on two beliefs: that information is neutral and that communication is the transmission of said information from the sender to the receiver. This implies that absolutely correct information exists, and that it is transferred to those who need it. (Juholin 2008, 58.) As is suggested by the first point on Clampitt’s (2010, 16) list, the context in which the message is received shapes the interpretation. Information, then, is not neutral and neither can the sender rely on the idea that merely sending said information would suffice in guaranteeing that it is received as intended. It is however possible to learn how to communicate to enhance the probability of the message being understood. Clampitt (2010, 17) suggests that e.g. Management by Wandering Around, i.e. being present and spending time with employees, will assist in gathering knowledge about the attitudes, environment, needs, and desires of the employees, shaping the way they interpret messages received.

Where as Clampitt’s list suggests a rather one-way view of communication, it does offer insight in to how managers may approach the complexity of communications. It has been mentioned earlier in this chapter that communication is an exchange between the sender and the receiver, thus it is a two-way process. Also Juholin (2013, 212) stresses the importance of interaction and communication *between* individuals, in essence emphasizing the necessity of two-way communications.

As mentioned above, context influences the way messages are interpreted. Understanding the context(s) helps form messages so that the desired effect is more likely to be

achieved. On the other hand, it is also possible to shape the context itself (Clampitt 2010, 18). This is more likely to happen on organizational level, where the values and vision are broadcasted. When communicated effectively, they can form the framework within which employees interpret messages and the meaning of their work. A manager can also be seen as an interpreter (Åberg 2006, 94) who renders the higher-level visions to the employees in a way that helps reinforce the context in which they receive other messages.

The traditional model also meant that information within a work community usually trickled down from the top, from leadership to employees (Juholin 2008, 58). In today's work community this isn't valid anymore – it is everyone's responsibility to find out information, to ask, to participate, and to let others know what they think (ibid. 80). This also affects the role of the manager. Not only are they mediators of messages from their managers to the employees, but they need to deeply understand the messages as well. Simply repeating the messages verbatim doesn't fulfill the needs of the employees to understand what it means for their work. Managers are also important models of how to act. If they themselves are not active in reaching out to employees, it may affect the communication dynamic so that the employees become hesitant in approaching the manager. Even if stated above that it is the responsibility of all members of the work community to actively communicate, one cannot assume that employees will be proactive in seeking answers if that is not the *modus operandi* in the organization. (Juholin 2008, 212.)

The everyday work of the manager is not just to transmit, filter, and frame the organizational messages for the employees. Among the most important ones are also contributing to a positive work climate, motivating the employees, and enabling employee engagement (Åberg 2006, 156). Interaction is key in motivating the employees. Through interaction it is possible to find out which factors motivate a certain employee, is it material or immaterial things, acknowledgment, or even punishment. The current needs of the person also come out through interaction. Knowing the needs helps the manager to motivate the employee through offering a possibility to satisfy them. (Ibid., 163.)

In her bachelor thesis Koskela (2013) examines leadership in public sector, more specifically in an organization that is decentralized. Her research shows that communication as a part of leadership is undervalued, and that leaders and managers are not trained as communicators. However, the role of communication in leadership is well established, as she puts it: "Leadership happens in interaction between people, through which the members of the organization are influenced in a way that the goals of the organization are realized. Through this process of influence leadership can simply be concluded to be commu-

nication". She concludes that the importance of leadership communication is magnified in decentralized organizations. (Koskela 2013, 30, 34.) Decentralized organizations will be addressed in chapter 3.3.

3.2.1 Channels for leadership communication

The changing nature of work and work communities as well as development of technology inevitably changes the channels through which leadership communication, and communication in general, is conducted. Today's working life requires that the sense of community has to be created even when people are not colocated and able to interact face-to-face. Luckily, technological advances have made this possible through enabling interaction, cooperation, decision-making, and information sharing in various organizational setups through virtual channels. (Juholin 2013, 212.)

The cornerstone of internal communication, despite the means of communication, is the interaction between managers and employees. Interaction can be executed face-to-face, or for example online. When considering information the employees need about their own work or unit, personal interaction with the closest manager is important. Research has found a connection between satisfaction with communication and satisfaction with work: those satisfied with communication were also more satisfied with their work. Here, the manager plays a key role. The most important factor in satisfaction with communication had to do with the way the manager was perceived to convey information. (Åberg 2006, 108, 110.)

Even though being in the same physical space to communicate is still valued today, the role of shared virtual spaces is also growing. Whereas communication in direct interaction between people happens spontaneously, web meetings and other virtual forms of getting together demand more effort to ensure everyone has equal chance of being heard. When executed well, virtual meetings help promote a culture that emphasizes dialogue and includes members of the organization in the handling of common issues. (Juholin 2013, 214-215.)

Communication channels are often classified according to the Media Richness Model, where different channel choices lie on a continuum from *rich* (instant feedback, personal focus, multiple cues – such as face-to-face discussions) to *lean* (lack of one or more of the mentioned attributes of rich media – such as flyers) (Clampitt 2010, 107). So is rich always the best choice? That is not the case. Best communicators know how properly use

the array of communication channels. Different channels tend to shape the messages, making way for misinterpretation. (Ibid. 102.) Even though rich channels are said to offer the best possibility of successful communication - both sending and receiving information - efficient leaders know to use them when it counts – when the issues being communicated are complex, there is a need to engage employees, when communicating unpleasant issues, or when managing conflict. Using rich media for all or most of communications in an organization would be a waste of everyone's time. (Clampitt 2010, 107; Åberg 2006, 159.)

Video conferences are considered the richest virtual form of communicating, followed by telephone conversations and e-mail (Åberg 2006, 159). In many cases in decentralized organizations video conference is the “next best thing” to a regular face-to-face meeting. Seeing each other on video helps provide the use of non-verbal communication cues that are characteristic of rich channels. Discussion over video is often not quite as fluent as being in the same physical space, e.g. because of the lag in video. However, the advantages far outweigh the possible cons. Special focus needs to be put on meeting technique in virtual contexts to ensure most fluent experience for all participants.

Richer and leaner channels can also be seen as *who* and *what* channels. Richer *who* channels place emphasis on the communicators, whereas *what* channels highlight the message itself. *Who* channels offer the benefit of social presence; *what* channels do not. (Clampitt 2010, 108.)

Much of the communication today relies on e-mail, a decidedly *what* channel (ibid. 2010, 108). A vast amount of information bombards us daily, e-mail being one of the main channels. So how should this popular channel be used for best results? Clampitt (2010, 106) emphasizes the need to first consider if e-mail is the right medium in the first place – unambiguous tasks and information sharing are best suited for e-mail. Much emphasis is also placed on a catchy subject line; verbs call recipients to action. Short paragraphs and other ways of making the e-mail easy to glance through are encouraged. Also, it needs to be considered that e-mail doesn't convey for example tone of voice or sarcasm, and can easily be forwarded on to other recipients. Compose the e-mail with those facts in mind. (Ibid.)

3.2.2 Transformational leadership

From the perspective of the employees it seems quite obvious that leaders affect employee engagement, yet academic literature seldom addresses this relation. However, a study

by Segers, De Prins, Brouwers & Vloeberghs shows a clear connection between transformational leadership and higher levels of engagement. (Segers & al. 2010, 149.) Men (2014, 173) argues that organizations should support their leaders in acquiring the transformational leadership skills that have proven beneficial.

What, then, are the characteristics of a transformational leader? Tichy & Devanna (1986, in Hawkings 2011, 27) list the following seven attributes:

1. They clearly see themselves as change agents.
2. They are courageous.
3. They believe in people.
4. They are driven by a strong set of values.
5. They are lifelong learners.
6. They can cope with complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity.
7. They are visionaries.

The list above can seem like a tall order. Walumbwa, Christensen & Muchiri (2013, 211) in turn have articulated recommended actions that transformational leaders can use to make work more meaningful for employees. The exhaustive list above represents the features expected of transformational leaders, but the topic may be easier to approach by looking at the actions of a transformational leader that help enhance the experience of the employees.

One should show confidence in the ability of the follower's to meet expectations and to contribute to the goals of the organization. Meaning can be provided to the employees by improving their job variety, identity, significance, autonomy, and feedback. Work should be described in ideological terms, emphasizing higher order values. However, attention should be paid to the differences between what motivates each employee in order to be able to adjust leadership style to work for different people. Finally, a leader should be consistent in words, actions, and gestures as these are interpreted by employees to draw further conclusions on situations. (Ibid.)

All in all, transformational leaders are able to formulate and articulate a clear vision, and formulate goals that need to be met to move towards that vision. By acting as a role model a transformational leader can support employees in reaching these goals and working together. By coaching the followers a transformational leader is able to keep the work challenging. (Nielsen & González 2010, 142, 146.) It has been established that transformational leadership, alongside other positive leadership forms such as supportive and empowering leadership, has both direct and indirect influence on state engagement

through influencing other states like hope, optimism, and self-efficacy (Segers & al. 2010, 152). This finding further supports the notion that training leaders to be transformational may lead to engagement in employees as well as in themselves (Nielsen & González 2010, 146).

The importance of transformational leadership skills can be seen to be in the manner in which they affect the leader's ability to communicate internally. Both the content and the delivery of messages influence employee's attitudes and behaviors. In addition to providing the right information about the activities, values, and goals of the organization, the organization should also train managers at all levels so that they are able to use transformational leadership skills. (Men 2012, 173.)

Segers & al. (2010, 154-156) go on to provide a model for a workshop that facilitates engaging leadership skills, transformational leadership being among the desired leadership styles. The workshop modules have participants reflect on past experience with leaders and recognizing their behavior as positive, transactional, or laissez-faire. In further modules they are educated in the leadership theories, and then make a plan to act upon what they have learned. After that they get to view different leadership styles on video and make videos of themselves enacting different leadership scenarios on which they receive feedback. Feedback is also given based on a questionnaire on leadership styles. (Ibid.)

The learning of concrete leadership skills is emphasized in the following modules, such as active listening, learning to delegate with the purpose of developing employees, finding out the strengths and weaknesses in themselves as well as in their employees, and giving constructive feedback. These skills are practiced through role-play. At the end of the process, they revisit the action plan made in the previous module. (Ibid.)

Obviously the model has its limitations, and must be adapted to the organization in question. Also, the leadership development workshops should not be standalone events, but should be combined with ongoing organizational efforts. (Ibid.) The workshop is quite time consuming, which may cause organizations to hesitate. Is the investment worth the possible outcomes? Referring back to chapter 3.1.3 where the organizational outcomes of employee engagement were discussed, the investment of time is likely to be worth it.

How universally valid, then, is the claim that transformational leadership produces positive outcomes? Leadership is viewed differently by people from different cultural backgrounds, which affects the expectations employees have of their leaders. However, research shows

that some attributes of transformational leadership are endorsed across the world as factors in excellent leadership. (Guirdham 2011, 333.) Included in these are the following features: motive arouser, foresight, encouraging, communicative, trustworthy, dynamic, positive, confidence builder, and motivational (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla & Dorfman 1999, 250).

From the views presented in this chapter it can be seen that communication is an essential tool for mid-level managers. Successful internal communication in this thesis is deemed to be a two-way interaction, since it is not enough to simply spread the message from the top - the voice of the employees needs to be heard as well. Rich channels allow for this more easily, as a discussion is more likely to flow both ways in, e.g. face-to-face discussions, video conferences, and telephone calls. The transformational leadership style is seen as preferable, since it includes skills that improve ability to communicate internally. Employees are influenced as much by the delivery of the message as its content.

3.3 Remote leadership and decentralized organizations

Remoteness can manifest in different forms in different organizations. Units and teams can be remote with regard to location, different schedules or time zones, temporary nature of teams, diversity of employees, and communication channels used (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 23). For the purpose of this research the focus is on location, or geographical remoteness.

It has been established that as distance grows greater, contact with other people lessens. Distance doesn't even have to be great for it to affect the frequency of contact and communication: a study found that when distance between workstations grew to 30 meters and beyond, the effect of distance stopped growing. In essence that means that there should be no difference in the amount of communication whether workers are located 30 meters or 3000 kilometers apart. (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 38-39.) This is arguable, however, as teams located within the radius of hundreds of meters are quite able to gather to joint face-to-face meetings as needed much more readily than those hundreds of kilometers apart.

The issue of distance in preventing face-to-face communication can be mediated through technology (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 38). As indicated previously, leadership, management, and communication form an inseparable package. Traditionally face-to-face communication has been valued in leadership, but new communication technology enables "online

leadership". Online leadership is a form of remote leadership, and is mostly utilized in decentralized units where leaders and employees are physically located in different places. However, there has been seen a tendency to apply these technologies also in communication with those members of the work community who could be seen face-to-face. Discussion has evolved around this topic, questioning whether online leadership has provided modern leaders a way out of face-to-face meetings that can be seen as challenging. The rules of traditional leadership should, nevertheless, apply to online leadership as well. Routine matters can be handled over channels such as e-mail or instant messengers, but difficult, complex, and personal matters demand meeting face-to-face. (Juholin 2008, 190.)

Virtual teams are, however, a part of the everyday life of organizations. The key challenges of online leadership lie in mutual understanding, interpreting matters, and team spirit. Crafting a team spirit is a demanding task, if a team never meets in person. Misunderstandings shadow work and resolving them takes time. There is also a need to foster a will to reach common goals, despite a dispersed team. (Juholin 2008, 216-217.)

Employees in decentralized units struggle to maintain awareness and a sense of presence that comes naturally in a shared physical place. Awareness covers everything from general knowledge of present colleagues, a sense of social interaction, and the roles of others. Versatile communication technology is expected to solve these issues, to help foster a sense of presence. (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 42-43.) Leaders may struggle to promote interaction with and between team members. It is also difficult for leaders to convey the feeling of being present and approachable to remote team members. These challenges easily lead to the feeling of being isolated. (Koskela 2013, 21, 26.) They can also hamper the basic transmission of messages, from mid-level managers to the employees. This was found to be true when an interim report on centralization of administrative and support functions was conducted in the FBG approximately six months after the decentralization took place. (Wahlström 2014, 10.) In spite of the way we perceive the role and abilities of technology, virtual team leadership demands more versatile leadership skills than traditional work communities (Juholin 2008, 217).

The downside of communication technologies such as video conferences, shared virtual online spaces, e-mail etc. is that they are not very good at providing for unofficial, spontaneous interaction. However, technology is developing fast, and so are the capabilities of work communities to use them. The speed and richness of communication is expected to

increase, allowing for more convincing remote presence in the future. (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 48-49.)

The challenges posed by distance in decentralized organization units must be taken into account when considering leadership and leadership communications. Leading decentralized units demands not only managing but also leading people. (Koskela 2013, 10.) The need to master both management and leadership is widely recognized as a prerequisite to success. The role of management in remote leadership seems magnified in relation to leadership, despite the fact that courtesy and acknowledging the remote employees is deemed important in decentralized units. People skills such as empathy and ability to listen are valued, even if management of work performance is emphasized. It is said that assertive and result oriented style is valuable in leading decentralized units. There is a need to make sure that all employees fully understand the goal and stay on track to reach it, even more so than in traditional organizations where a manager can observe more subtle signs of performance and activities to ensure right steps are being taken. It is also important to involve all employees in setting the goals: otherwise you run a risk of creating a separation between the main location and remote locations. In remote locations it is easy to feel that the main location, e.g. head office, dictates the goals, which hinders buy-in from remote employees. (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 84.)

For this thesis the main takeaway from this chapter is the hindrance distance causes in engaging employees. In remote teams members may struggle to feel connected, and the managers don't easily sense whether all employees are staying on target and content with their work. Whereas technology can mediate this issue, using communication technologies doesn't really offer the same possibility for spontaneous communication as being physically in the same location does. It is undeniable that distance has the tendency to lessen interaction. Interaction, on the other hand, is necessary for the managers to engage the employees. Organizations, and mid-level managers themselves, need to be mindful of these issues and actively seek to act in ways that lessen the impact of distance.

4 Conducting the research

The aim of the research was to find out how an organization could support its mid-level managers in leadership communication in order for it to facilitate employee engagement. This chapter discusses the research approach used to reach this aim. The data collection method of semi-structured interviews is introduced as well as the data analysis applied to derive the results. The validity, reliability, and ethical questions of the research are also addressed in this chapter.

4.1 Case study approach

When conducting developmental research, case study is among the approaches often considered appropriate, since it allows the development aspect to be the core of the work. The main aim of case study research is producing researched information of its object. A case study is most often used when a deep understanding of an organization is required to reach the typical end goal of case studies - producing development ideas. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2014, 36-37, 51.) Yin (2014, 4) states that case study is a good method to answer the "how" and "why" research questions, since it allows for a holistic perspective and observation of occurrences in context.

The case study approach is also especially well suited for this research due to its applicability to exploratory research. This research is exploratory in nature, as it seeks to find new insights into the topic and shed new light on the phenomena. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 179, 670.)

4.2 Data collection and analysis

Case study data can be obtained from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. None of the sources indicated here should be considered superior, but they all supplement each other and it can thus be argued that as many different sources as reasonable should be used (Yin 2014, 102,105). The main purpose of a case study is to produce profound and detailed information on the subject of the study (Ojasalo & al. 2014, 52).

This thesis is conducted using a monomethod approach (Saunders & al. 2012, 165), namely semi-structured, thematic interviews of mid-level managers in the case organization. To achieve the multifaceted information expected of case studies, eleven mid-level managers of different branches and backgrounds were interviewed. They were inter-

viewed to find out, for example, how they feel about their capabilities as leadership communicators, what support they have received from the organization for this aspect of their work, and what kind of support they wish they had received.

Semi-structured interview is an often preferred method, since it allows the interviewer to adapt the order of the questions to suit the flow of conversation, and to further explain or repeat the questions as needed (Ojasalo & al. 2014, 108; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 73).

The approach used to analyze the data for this thesis is inductive. This approach is suitable for this research due to its exploratory nature, the aim of the research being to produce suggestions as to how to proceed in the future. (Saunders & al. 2012, 567.)

Some characteristics of narrative inquiry are featured in this thesis. While the interviews were semi-structured, the dialogue was allowed to flow freely in the direction it was going, helped along by the themes designed to be covered in the interviews. The participants were able to provide their view of the situation surrounding the organizational change and their role as a mid-level manager. This enabled the researcher to compare and contrast these narratives. (Saunders & al. 2012, 188.) Analysis of the data involved reading the transcribed data several times, color-coding key issues and themes (ibid. 576). The aim was to discover themes that correspond to different aspects of leadership and engagement presented in chapter 3. After initial exploration the discovered themes were grouped and further analyzed to find issues that come up repeatedly, indicating greater importance. At the same time it was possible to note possible deviations, or differing opinions.

The intention is also to use the information gained through the interviews to draft an educational event for the mid-level managers that would support them in a way that facilitates engaging leadership communication. The issues they face in their work will be taken into account, and feedback on the event plans will be sought by presenting the plan to the mid-level managers as well as representatives of the organization.

4.2.1 Pre-interview survey

A pre-interview survey was conducted in order to chart the previous education, training, and experience the mid-level managers had in managing teams. This information can be analyzed to see whether it has a bearing on the ability of the managers enable engagement, and offer clues to possible training etc. that could enhance that ability.

The survey is attached, see appendix 1.

4.2.2 Interviews

The semi-structured interviews are the source of data for this thesis. The interviewees represent the mid-level managers who were appointed in their positions due to the change in the case organization's structure. The interviews concentrated on the issues of communication and the support offered by the case organization, but also asked the interviewees to reflect on themselves as leaders in order to discover behaviors and attitudes that may affect their communication practices and ability to engage their followers. The semi-structured interview design enabled more natural flow of discussion, as the order of topics was not predetermined. It also made it possible for the interviewees to bring up topics that they believed to be important, and allowed for more extensive discussion on topics as needed.

The semi-structured interview guide is attached, see appendix 2.

The eleven interviewees represent the mid-level managers from the three decentralized functions: HR, financial, and technical services. All of the interviewees started working in their positions when the organizational restructuring was implemented on January 1 2014, however, one of them is no longer working in that position. Some respondents formally started in their position a few months earlier to begin the planning phase, during which time they had no team to lead.

Purposive sampling, suitable for case studies, was used to select the respondents to make sure that all three functions were presented. It was also desired that the respondents represent a variety of different previous management training and experience backgrounds. The sampling method is thus heterogeneous sampling. This method should allow for finding and explaining key themes. (Saunders & al. 2012, 284, 287.)

Table 1. The interviews

Code	Date	Face-to-Face or Video Conference	Duration
A	10.4.2015	Face-to-Face	34 min
B	13.4.2015	Face-to-Face	27 min
C*	14.4.2015	Video Conference	37 min
D	14.4.2015	Video Conference	50 min
E	15.4.2015	Video Conference	28 min
F**	16.4.2015	Video Conference	32 min
G	16.4.2015	Video Conference	27 min
H	17.4.2015	Face-to-Face	29 min
I	17.4.2015	Face-to-Face	37 min
J	22.4.2015	Video Conference	55 min
K***	5.5.2015	Video Conference	63 min

* Only audio

** No longer working in the position at the time of research

*** Video conference interrupted, last minutes of interview conducted over telephone

The interviews took place within one month's period in April-May 2015. When possible, the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Most of the interviews were conducted over video conference. Of the face-to-face interviews two were held in a meeting room at the headquarters, two were held in the interviewees' offices. For the video conferences the researcher was located in her home, and the interviewees in various locations ranging from their offices to their homes. For one of the video conferences the researcher was able to receive only audio from the interviewee, but the interviewee received video of the researcher. One interview was interrupted by technical malfunction during the final minutes of the interview, and it was finalized over telephone.

The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees. They were requested to set aside 60 minutes for the interview, with the length of the interviews varying between 27 and 63 minutes.

4.2.3 Evaluation of the educational event plan

As mentioned earlier, the findings of the interviews will be used to draft an educational event for the mid-level managers. The programme will be planned so that it best answers to the needs that mid-level managers within the case organization have in order to enable them to communicate in an engaging manner.

The event plans will be presented to the interviewed mid-level managers as well as representatives of the HR and education functions within the case organization in order to receive feedback.

The mid-level managers can offer insight whether the event would be beneficial for them and suggest additions they might feel necessary. The representatives of the organization are able to evaluate the feasibility of the plan from the organization's point of view and determine if the organization has other relevant needs that should be addressed in such an event.

4.3 Validity and reliability

In order to produce credible research, the researcher has to pay close attention to the quality of the research. It is rather challenging to measure qualitative research against the criteria originally set for positivist, quantitative research. (Saunders & al. 2012, 194.)

There are four well-established criteria for judging the quality of empirical social research; construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin 2014, 49).

Construct validity of a study requires that the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied be specifically identified. That includes defining specific concepts that are measured, and with which measures. (Yin 2014, 46-47.) *Internal validity* is described as "the extent to which the ideas about the cause and effect are supported by the study" (Walliman 2011a, 104). I.e. is there evidence that event x caused event y, or could there be a third factor causing event y (Yin 2014, 47)? *External validity* is described as "the extent to which findings can be generalized to populations or to other settings". Insufficient sampling and interference of unnoticed factors can compromise both internal and external validity. The external validity can also be undermined if the process is insufficiently described and thus impossible to repeat. (Walliman 2011a, 104.)

Reliability can be defined as "the consistency and repeatability of the research procedures used -- ". It follows that in order to be reliable, the empirical study should be conducted and reported in a way that enables another person to follow the steps from original findings to the conclusions the researcher has made and interpret them the same way. The process is likened to the rigorousness of forensic investigation. (Yin 2014, 127, 240.)

In order to guarantee the best possible validity and reliability the semi-structured interviews performed for this research were digitally recorded, and then fully transcribed. It may still be questioned whether the findings of a single case study can be generalized to wider populations. It is not necessarily the aim of the case study either – the aim is to fully concentrate on that particular organization and that particular topic in that particular setting. Any change to the environment for future studies makes it impossible to repeat exactly the same results.

Indeed, the concepts of validity and reliability are criticized among qualitative research since they hail from the realm of quantitative research. Validity and reliability can be seen as being based on an idea of a concrete reality that the research aims to portray. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 136.) Qualitative research differs in that the data gathered is colored by the feelings, attitudes, and judgments of the people studied (Walliman 2011b, 216).

It is obvious that research is expected to be objective, but objectivity might be more difficult to execute than initially appears. This is an especially relevant concern in the realm of case studies. As the researcher needs to have previous understanding of the topic, there is a danger that they lean towards collecting data that supports their preconceptions. It is stressed that to be a good case study researcher one needs to be a good listener, "hearing" both supportive and contrary evidence. (Yin 2014, 73, 76.)

It should be recognized, that the researcher's background, previous experiences, and knowledge might threaten the objectivity of the research. This should be openly taken into consideration in the process of conducting research. In this research, the researcher has worked in the communications unit of the case organization for over eight years. Being a member of the organization meant that there was a need to make it clear when the researcher was contacting the colleagues as a colleague, and when she was in the role of the researcher. This was made easier due to the fact that all the interviews and contacts related to them were conducted during the researcher's study leave. Thus all contacts were isolated events, making it clear they were initiated for the purpose of the research.

Also, having worked for several years in the case organization, the researcher has gained a significant amount of tacit knowledge of the organization and its culture. It is not in the interest of the research to use knowledge that is gained through other channels than those purposefully used to collect data. Special attention is placed on this issue to ensure that only data gathered for this research is used to draw conclusions on the topic.

It was important to guarantee anonymity to the interviewees, as the topic of the interview easily led them to speak very candidly about their own strengths and weaknesses, their views on the actions of the organization and their superiors, as well as some other issues.

5 Findings of the research

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The results from the interviews of the mid-level managers are mirrored against the theoretical framework set in chapter 3.

The interviewees also responded to a pre-interview survey before the interview. The survey investigated their education, training, and experience as a manager and/or leader. This information is also used when analyzing the interviews.

5.1 Findings of the pre-interview survey

The pre-interview survey was conducted to find out the different basis the mid-level managers were operating from. Some have a military training and a long career in the organization that explicitly prepare them for managerial or leadership positions, some may have no education, training, or experience in this field. Understanding the different situations the mid-level managers are in may help interpret the results.

Two of the respondents (A and K) had no previous managerial experience, nor education or training of any kind when starting in the mid-level management position when the organization restructured in the beginning of 2014 and they became mid-level managers.

Two of the respondents (B and F) had some training, but no experience prior to starting in this position. The training was acquired either through military training or programs offered by the employer, such as DeepLead.

Three of the respondents (D, G, and J) had civilian education in management and/or leadership, as well as military training. They also had previous management experience within the organization.

Three respondents (E, H, and I) had a secondary education or higher-level education in management and/or leadership as well as work experience as a manager.

One respondent (C) had received military training, supported by other training. The respondent also had previous experience as a manager.

5.2 Channels used to communicate

The channels the interviewed managers used to communicate with their employees were quite predictable – e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face conversations were most often mentioned. Video conferences were also popular. Some managers also mentioned using video meetings even when discussing with one person only, in lieu of face-to-face discussions. This shows that the interviewed managers do favor rich channels, as video conferences and telephone calls are considered the next best thing when face-to-face is not possible (Åberg 2006, 159).

Nonetheless, out of these channels e-mail is the most used. However, many of the interviewees express that this is not the ideal situation; their preference would be using other methods. Some respondents seem to take using e-mail to manage the team as par for the course these days.

-- leading by e-mail is how it's done these days --¹

Unfortunately it [managing teams] is done by e-mail these days.²

-- the amount of e-mail [that comes in] is ludicrous --³

-- some things are sent by e-mail so that it can be traced later --⁴

On the contrary, one respondent opposes the use of e-mail, and has directed communications to other channels such as SharePoint, allowing for the tasks and issues to be located at a later time as well.

-- I have to say that at least personally I receive ludicrous amounts of e-mail, so I wanted to get away from "management by e-mail". It does reach you, but then later where do you find it? This is what we have used Share[Point] for --⁵

¹ Original transcript, respondent C: -- kyllähän semmonen sähköpostijohtaminen on nykyaikaa --

² Original transcript, respondent E: Sähköpostilla sitä tänä päivänä on valitettavasti tapahtuu.

³ Original transcript, respondent C: -- sähköpostitavaraa tulee ihan älyttömästi --

⁴ Original transcript, respondent G: -- sähköposti on se niinku millä jää sitte tiettyjä hommia niinku on et jää mustaa valkoselle --

⁵ Original transcript, respondent K: -- pitää sanoa et itselle ainakin tulee älyttömästi sähköpostia niin haluaisin päästä siitä sähköpostiohjauksesta kyllä eroon. Se kyllä tavoittaa mut sen jälkeen et mistä sen löytää niin muuta niin tähän on sitä Share[Point]ia kehitetty --

For most of the managers, telephone conversations are important as well. They are used for example to answer quick questions and catch up with remote team members, when there is no need to have documentation of the discussion afterwards. Also, some teams have members who do not work in an office for the majority of the time. They seem to rely more on telephone calls.

-- our communication [with a remote employee] really has improved, we talk on the telephone almost every morning -- ⁶

If something significant happens a round of calls commences: do you know this, do you know this. ⁷

One interviewee mentions preferring video meetings over telephone conversations for similar purposes as mentioned above.

-- I have started to favor more video meetings than telephone -- you get a different kind of connection. ⁸

The respondents valued face-to-face discussions very highly. Almost all development discussions were held face-to-face, even if that meant a significant amount of travel for the managers. In addition to the yearly development discussions, the managers made efforts to meet with their employees in other contexts as well. One manager travels to meet the team in person at least once a month. Due to the long distances, face-to-face meetings can also be taxing.

-- distances made the face-to-face meetings quite trying -- It takes a lot of time to travel but I do feel that is important to visit on the spot --⁹

-- I make it a point to meet the personnel [from a remote location] every time they visit this location [for training etc.] --¹⁰

⁶ Original transcript, respondent B: -- kyllä se on parantunu se viestintä tosi hyväks et melkein joka aamu puhellaan puhelimessa --

⁷ Original transcript, respondent D: Jos jotakin tähdellistä tapahtuu niin puhelinkierros alkaa et tiedätkö tämän, tiedätkö tämän.

⁸ Original transcript, respondent K: -- olen ruvennut suosimaan paljon enemmän videoitse tapahtuvaa kuin että puhelimella -- siinä tulee toisella tavalla tää yhteys.

⁹ Original transcript, respondent F: -- ne henkilökohtaiset tapaamiset että välimatkat aiheutti sen että ne oli vähän semmosia aika raskaita -- Kyllä ne kuitenkin sitä työaikaa sitten vei tämä matkustaminen että kyllä mä sen koen kuitenkin aika tärkeeksi paikan päällä pitää käydä --

-- I went to get acquainted, in a way the people were familiar from the [unit] meetings from before, but I wanted to visit on the spot --¹¹

I've stressed it to him [successor] that you have to visit the units 2-3 times a year just because showing your face is key. That way when you talk with [them] there, they are not afraid to contact you --¹²

It is quite easy to understand the managers' preference on spending time in person with their employees. As cited before, Clampitt (2010, 17) mentions the concept of Management by Wandering Around, meaning that the manager is present in the everyday work of the employees and spending time with them to learn about their attitudes, needs, and desires. Being able to observe the employees and the environment in which they work helps with formulating messages that truly reach them.

Video conferences are recognized as being important, and many functions and teams of the organization use them regularly. Some managers use them even for one-on-one conversations. Some managers feel that the video contacts are as good as or almost as good as face-to-face meetings. This is especially true, if the manager has previously had a chance to meet the employee face-to-face. Subsequent meetings via video seem more natural with people one is familiar with. On the other hand others feel that video conferences are lacking a personal dimension only face-to-face meetings can provide

Bigger issues we addressed in video conferences, in a way to create a sense of social cohesion. And via video we could exchange more than just formal work related information.¹³

Video conferences in essence are good, but there is a lack of personal touch.¹⁴

¹⁰ Original transcript, respondent J: --pyrin lähtökohtaisesti aina sitte ku täällä on henkilöstöä käymässä ni näkemään myös sit --

¹¹ Original transcript, respondent F: -- kävin tutustumassa, ku olihan henkilöt tavallaan tuttuja [yksikön] kokouksissa oli tavattu aiemmin mutta halusin paikanpäällä käydä --

¹² Original transcript, respondent D: [Seuraajalle] olen painottanut sitä että sun täytyy jalkautua tonne yksiköihin 2-3 kertaa vuodessa ihan sen takia et se oman naaman näyttäminen on kaiken a ja o. Sillon ku puhut [heidän] kanssa siellä ni ne uskaltaa ottaa suhun paremmin yhteyttä --

¹³ Original transcript, respondent F: Isompia juttuja käytiin sitte videoyhteyden kautta että tavallaan sitä yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta tavallaan se videoyhteys ihan voitiin vaihtaa ettei välttämättä aina ihan työjuttuja

¹⁴ Original transcript, respondent H: Videoneuvotteluyhteydet on niinku periaatteessa hyvä mut ei niis niinku siinä jää se henkilökohtainen kosketus sitte vähemmälle.

Video conferences can also be challenging for the participants, especially if most of the team is located in the same place, while only one or a few are attending the meeting via video.

-- when we have these video conferences and they are there alone -- it seems like we have our own spoken language so they are left wondering what a word meant while all of us on the other end seem to understand it. Sometimes the remote team member probably feels like they can't keep up.¹⁵

These findings are in line with the Juholin's views presented in chapter 3.2.1. Much like Clampitt before, she points out that workers value the possibility of being physically present when communicating, which allows also spontaneous interaction in a way that is not possible in virtual teams (Juholin 2013, 214-215). However, the ability virtual meetings have to create a similar experience shouldn't be dismissed.

In addition to the four key channels: e-mail, telephone, face-to-face discussions, and video conferences, also Lync (an instant messaging software that also allows video connections and sharing the desktop), folders on shared drives, and SharePoint collaboration workspaces were mentioned.

There is no indication that the managers' background, i.e. education or experience, has an effect on how they use communication channels.

5.3 Challenges faced by the managers

The challenges the interviewed managers face in their day-to-day lives are varying. Many of the issues that came up in the interviews are centered on the topics of communication and factors affecting engagement.

Most mentioned challenge is that of addressing difficult issues and/or giving negative feedback to the employees. Interviewees mention hesitation in how to bring these matters up, in order to not offend the employees as well as offering them constructive feedback that will motivate them to do better in the future and ensure that no mistakes are repeated.

¹⁵ Original transcript, respondent H: -- kun ollaan näissä videopalavereissa ja hän on yksinään -- niin näyttää siltä että meillä on puhekieli täällä et videoneuvottelussa välilä miettii et mitä toi sana tarkoitti ja sitte videoneuvottelun takaa me kaikki jotka ollaan yhdessä kaikki tiedetään että näin se on että se varmaan se tulee sieltä päin heille niinku etäjohtettavalle semmonen olo että ei pysy kärryillä.

There is no indication that the respondent's background has an effect on whether they feel this is a challenge for them or not.

-- if there's bad news or the kind of feedback that one should improve the quality of their work then you have to think about how to say it so as to not hurt their feelings. Arranging your words so that [the message] is constructive is the skill that's needed --¹⁶

-- if someone exhibits clearly abnormal behavior, do you dare to say it to their face and ask whether they have problems at home, how are you doing, things like that. For that first contact the choice of words is important.¹⁷

It also became evident that the different sub-organizational cultures of the different administrative units or other organizational units were causing issues to the newly formed decentralized sectors. Many managers now had employees originally from several different units, and their ways of working and possibly even rules about working had been different. The managers face the difficult task of unifying the methods used and also the basic rules of the work community. Also on this challenge it cannot be seen that the manager's background would affect their views.

The biggest challenge has been that we all have the same [guideline] that we should follow, and bringing to practice that we should follow it and that we all have the same rules. That has been the biggest challenge, to make the rules the same for all in every administrative unit and that they are all in the same position.¹⁸

Also taxing on the interviewed managers were the administrative tasks and complicated and slow bureaucracy. While not directly linked to communications or engagement, it is easy to understand that having to concentrate much of their time to administrative tasks such as recruiting, handling sick leaves, maternity leaves, and retirement, the time is away from the more key tasks of managers. Lack of time to delve into the management and

¹⁶ Original transcript, respondent B: -- jos on huonoja uutisia tai semmosta palautetta et niinku pitäis vaikka parantaa sitä työn laatua ni sit pitää miettiä et miten sen pystyy sanomaan niin ettei toinen loukkaannu siitä et tavallaan se sanojen asettelu rakentavasti että se on se taito --

¹⁷ Original transcript, respondent D: -- jos jollakin tulee selkeesti poikkeavaa käytöstä ni uskallatsä sanoo suoraan päin naamaa että onks kotiasiat kunnossa, miten sä jaksat, tähän tyyliin, ni sen ensimmäisen yhteydenoton kohdalla ne sanavalinnat on tärkeitä.

¹⁸ Original transcript, respondent A: -- kaikista haastavinta tässä on ollut se että meillä kaikilla on sama [ohje] jota pitäisi noudattaa ja tota noin sen tuominen käytäntöön että sitä pitäisi noudattaa kaikilla on samat säännöt se on ollu kaikista haastavinta näissä hallintoyksiköissä saada ne säännöt kaikille samanlaisiksi että kaikki ovat samassa asemassa --

leadership was also an often-mentioned annoyance. However, an interviewee points out that even though there are challenges in the administrative tasks and bureaucracy, there are also contact persons in the Personnel division to help with them. This is the only aspect where it could be inferred that the background of the manager has a bearing on how challenging they feel it to be. Managers with only civilian education struggled the most with this part of their work.

The most irritating thing is that you have to ask about everything [related to administrative tasks] specifically -- what should I do and what about this thing --¹⁹

Actually it's probably the amount of time that administrative tasks take that has been the most surprising thing about this position. It's quite massive -- almost half of my workday is spent on administration and supervision of work --²⁰

Well, probably the challenges in the communication also stem from the lack of instructions from the start about the employment relationship.²¹

There are also times when the managers feel that they are required to implement unfair decisions made by the organization. These are mostly related to salaries, basis of which are dictated by the estimation of how demanding a job is. The managers feel that the guidelines they have to follow are either unfairly set to begin with, or they are unfairly changed after positions have been staffed on the basis of original guidelines.

Especially the performance appraisals have been very challenging -- the guideline and the job demands are centered on military personnel -- the arguments are not valid for the civilian employees.²²

-- one of the biggest issues has been -- the lowering of the estimations on how demanding jobs are. It's about the only real problem we've had and that reflected on operations and motivation of people and it was really very poorly dealt with, going

¹⁹ Original transcript, respondent H: Tuskastuttavin asia on se että jokaista asiaa periaatteessa jokaista asiaa täytyy käydä erikseen kysymässä -- että mitä mä nyt teen ja miten tää asia on --

²⁰ Original transcript, respondent I: No siis itse asiassa se on varmaan niinku se mikä on eniten yllättänyt tässä tehtävässä on se kuinka paljon menee niinku siihen hallintoon aikaa. Et se on aika massiivinen -- melkein puolet työpäivästä menee tällaseen kaikenmaailman hallintoon ja työjohtamiseen --

²¹ Original transcript, respondent H: No ne haasteet ehkä niinku siihen viestintäänkin tulee siitä että se alun niinku ohjeistus tuki niistä palvelussuhteen liittyvistä asioista oli niinku jäi vähän vajaalle.

²² Original transcript, respondent A: Varsinkin nää kehityskeskustelut on ollu todella haastavia -- se käsikirja ja ne vaatitason arviointitasot on siellä tehty sotilaille -- ja ne perustelut eivät ole siviileille.

and lowering the estimated demands of the job, in effect lowering the salaries, afterwards. Among employees it causes unnecessary confusion and disappointment in the actions we take as managers.²³

The managers felt also that it was challenging to build team spirit when employees are located in different parts of Finland and have not necessarily met in person. They also feared that the employees not colocated with the manager felt loneliness, a sense of being an outsider in relation to the rest of the team.

-- and we know the problem, that we have quite a few of these lonely wolves, some of them feel quite gravely forgotten. And they don't receive enough support.²⁴

-- what I tried to achieve, even though the distances were what they were, is that we would truly have been a team --²⁵

-- it's me that contacts [the remote team member] and then we have [the other team members] here and they forget, they know they are there but then it comes down to that they expect me to [contact them] and them to contact us and that increases the feeling of loneliness.²⁶

The inexhaustible stream of e-mail, and other information, is also somewhat of a burden on the managers. They are in a position where they have to filter much of the e-mail communication from higher up in the organization to their employees, often times attaching their own instructions to the original message. It was even seen by one interviewee as the most important task of the mid-level managers.

²³ Original transcript, respondent C: -- yks suurimpia asioita ongelmia on ollut tämä -- juttu jossa puhuttiin näiden tehtävien vaativuusarvioinnin laskemisesta ja se oli oikeasti se on niinku ainut semmonen ongelma mikä meillä oikeasti on ollut joka poikii sitten kaikissa osissa ja näkyi sitten toiminnassa ja ihmisten motivaatiossa että vähän niinku että se oli erittäin huonosti hoidettu asia jälkikäteen lähetään samasta työstä tehtävien vaativuutta, käytännössä palkkaa, laskemaan ja se tuolla työntekijäportaassa se aiheuttaa ihan turhaa hämmennystä ja pettymystä meidän esimiesten toimintaan.

²⁴ Original transcript, respondent G: -- ja sit tietään ne ongelmat et täällä on aika paljon nyt tätä yksinäisiä susia mitkä tuntee osa aika pahastikin et heidät on unohdettu. Eikä saa tarpeeks sitä tukea.

²⁵ Original transcript, respondent F: -- yritin saada niinku siihen vaikka etäisyydet oli mitä oli että olis semmosena tiiminä toiminu se meidän neljän hengen porukka --

²⁶ Original transcript, respondent D: -- mä pidän yhteyden sinne [etäälaiseen] ja sit meillä on [muut tiimin jäsenet] täällä jotka unohtaa, ne tietää et se kaveri löytyy sieltä, mut sit tulee se tilanne eteen et ne olettaa et mä pidän yllä sen informaation [etäälaiselle] ja hän sit tänne päin ja siinä mielessä se lisää sitä yksinäisyyden oloa.

The way I see it one of the most important tasks of the mid-level managers especially is to filter the messages if it hasn't been done before they reach them, so that we don't push the same, one could say nonsense, further along to the employees --²⁷

Not all issues in communication are limited to what information the managers relay to the employees - it is also the other way around. Many respondents mentioned that they don't believe that the remote team members contact them as freely as those located in the same place. This is possibly due to fear of disturbing the manager, or the feeling that the issue is not big enough to bother the manager with. Therefore there is also a risk of managers missing out on tacit information that would be transferred in traditional organizations. The background of the manager doesn't seem to affect the way this challenge is perceived.

-- so called tacit information is left out when you're not in the same town as the employees, the kind of information you don't get from e-mails and official paperwork --²⁸

-- maybe it was so that they didn't dare to call for the fear of disturbing, it took a while to establish a routine [of calling when needed] --²⁹

-- well here it is easier to just come and ask, there is probably a higher threshold for calling if it feels like your issue is quite small.³⁰

5.4 The support managers have received

Among the organization's effective support methods most frequently mentioned by the respondents at the moment are the support from the direct supervisor, peer support, and being included in the change process. On the other hand one of the respondents noted that there is no support unless you ask for it. Also some of the interviewees felt that their own direct supervisor was lacking in managerial experience and leadership skills, and

²⁷ Original transcript, respondent C: Että näkisin et meillä varsinkin väliportaan johtajien yks tärkeimpiä tehtäviä on tehdä se suodattamistyö viimeistään tässä pisteessä että me ei sitä samaa vähä voi sanoa soopaa työnnetä enää sinne meidän alaisille --

²⁸ Original transcript, respondent E: -- niin sanottua hiljaista tietoa jää pois kun itse ei oo aina sillä paikkakunnalla missä alaiset on et semmosta mitä ei saa noista sähköposteista ja virallisista papereista --

²⁹ Original transcript, respondent B: -- ehkä niin että hän ei ehkä niin uskaltanu soittaa ku ehkä pelkäs että häiritsee ja sitte jonku aikaa siinä meni että tuli se rutiini --

³⁰ Original transcript, respondent H: -- täällähän se on helpompi nykästä hihasta, siin on varmaan korkeempi kynnyks soittaa jos tuntuu että se oma asia on vähän pieni.

were thus not that strong of a support for them. Some had no real connection to a direct supervisor especially at the time they were preparing for the change.

Many respondents mentioned their direct supervisors by name, indicating that their support was pivotal. Much of the support came in the form of being available when interviewees had issues they needed to discuss. Some direct supervisors were more proactive in offering relevant reading materials etc. when preparing for the new role. Managers of all backgrounds shared this opinion.

-- they [direct supervisor] gave me two articles on leadership -- and they had highlighted certain parts --³¹

Well I do have a good supervisor, I can always ask them --³²

-- I do lean on my direct supervisor, that's what they are for --³³

In addition to support from the direct supervisor, the respondents valued the peer support they received. Having other people in the same position with similar understanding of the substance of the work was a valuable source of comfort. It was often valued as highly as the support from supervisors.

Peer support is another thing, it is surely just as important as support from the direct supervisor --³⁴

-- we have always had very good support in one another, we have a [peer] meeting [weekly] -- where we discuss the possible challenges we have faced --³⁵

None of the managers that had military training combined with higher education and managerial experience mentioned peer support when discussing support they had received.

³¹ Original transcript, respondent A: -- hän [esimies] anto mulle kaks semmosta artikkelia johtamisesta -- ja hän oli siihen tiettyjä asioita alleviivannu --

³² Original transcript, respondent H: No mullahan on hyvä esimies, siltä voi aina kysyä --

³³ Original transcript, respondent K: -- minähän tukeudun omaan esimieheeni sitä vartenhan ne esimiehet on --

³⁴ Original transcript, respondent C: Vertaistukihan on sitten tietysti se toinen juttu mikä on varmasti yhtä tärkeä kuin esimiestuki --

³⁵ Original transcript, respondent I: -- meil on ollu aika hyvä tuki niinku toisistamme, et meil on niinku [vertais-] palaveri [viikottain] ni siellä puhutaan sellasista jos on jotain haastavia tilanteita --

One method of support the managers felt was working well for them was being able to participate in the process of change. Many of the new managers were able to start working towards the new organizational structure a few months before the change was implemented. That allowed for them to get to know the new principles and also start planning for how they were going to implement the new model. However, some managers felt left out as they were not able to participate as much as they would have wanted to, perhaps because their direct supervisor at the time was the one that was deemed suitable to attend the planning meetings instead.

-- we did have a lot of meetings as we were heading into this and the procedures were clarified --³⁶

-- I think that everyone has really liked that they have been included in the preparations; that has been a really good thing.³⁷

Probably taking part in the preparations, planning of the change, and participating in the implementation is a part of it [support] --³⁸

The interviewees also mentioned the official courses and trainings they had received. Some of them had attended the DeepLead training offered by the organization either before the organizational change or right after it. There were also a host of other training sessions offered to the managers, including some focused on developmental discussions, one on remote leadership, one on work well-being and other sessions for administration etc. There were some interviewees, however, who felt like no training was offered. Some had also been sent to courses offered outside of the organization, and naturally some had studied these matters on their own.

When all is said and done I think the training [DeepLead] was quite good --³⁹

Nearly all of the managers mentioned receiving some training at work and most of them felt it was useful, if not fully sufficient.

³⁶ Original transcript, respondent C: -- hyvin paljonhan sitä palaveerattiin kun tähän oltiin menossa ja toimintamallit selkiyty --

³⁷ Original transcript, respondent I: -- mä luulen et kaikki on tykänny siitä että on otettu mukaan siihen valmisteluun et se on ollu semmonen tosi hyvä asia.

³⁸ Original transcript, respondent J: Varmaan siihen valmisteluun ja muutoksen suunnitteluun ja toimeenpanoon osallistuminen on osaltaan sitä [tukea] --

³⁹ Original transcript, respondent D: Mielestäni se oli aika hyvä loppujen lopuksi se koulutus [DeepLead] --

5.5 Effect of distance on leadership communication

Many managers felt that remote leadership was a big challenge in their everyday working life. They feared that the remote team members feel isolated and lonely, and felt that they needed to make extra efforts to include them in the team. On the other hand, some respondents said that they saw little to no difference in whether an employee was local or remote. They communicated the key messages to everyone the same way, via e-mail or telephone. One team also participated in the video conferences from their own workstations even if some members of the team could have gathered in the same space.

However, most of the managers acknowledged that they did talk more with the local team members, as they had an opportunity to see them in person more often, or even work in the same office.

As a matter of fact, no [the local member is not in a different position than the remote members], for example I send the same e-mail also to [the local member] because we talk about different things so I consider that [the local member] is in the same position as the rest of them.⁴⁰

For example the weekly video conferences, everyone attends from their own desktop, whether they are near or far the information reaches them the same --⁴¹

The answers do reflect the fact that virtual meetings lack the spontaneity of traditional communications. However, the development of technology has offered, or will be able to offer, similar kind of richness and speed as face-to-face communication. (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 48-49.)

Also as discussed before, the distance causes some information to not reach the managers. Some consider this to be a good thing as the unnecessary “noise” is filtered out. On the other hand, they may not receive the full picture of what is going on in the remote locations and tacit information is lost. Remote employees may hesitate to contact the manager

⁴⁰ Original transcript, respondent A: No itse asiassa ei [lähialainen ei ole eri asemassa kuin etäalaiset] eli mä lähetän sen saman sähköpostin nyt esimerkiksi nyt sähköpostiviestin myöskin [lähialaiselle] siihen koska me puhutaan sitte paljon muuta siinä et eli eli eli katson että [lähialainen] on niinku samassa asemassa heidän kanssaan.

⁴¹ Original transcript, respondent K: Nyt esimerkiksi no viikkovideopalavereissa jokainen on melkein omalta koneeltansa samalla tavalla on onko siinä lähellä vai edempänä niin tieto tulee samalla tavalla --

in the fear of disturbing them. They may also have a higher threshold of getting in touch if they feel that their issue is not “big enough”.

-- I don't see and hear all I should. On one hand it's good and on the other hand it's bad. It's good because unnecessary stuff is dropped but then it's bad because I can't really observe the person's true work ethics and work methods.⁴²

The managers also recognized that they have to take more initiative in staying in touch with the remote employees in order to maintain regular connections and team spirit. They felt that there was a need to be more intentional in sustaining those relationships, as there is no opportunity to meet daily like there is in a regular office setting.

-- because one of the employees is in [another town] you have to be active yourself to further the interaction by calling and asking questions --⁴³

Above two topics were touched on in chapter 3.2, pointing out that managers do need to set the behavioral models for the work community. If the manager doesn't reach out to the employees, the employees may hesitate to get in contact with the manager. Making it clear that the lines of communication are open and contact is expected should enable proactivity on everyone's part. (Juholin 2008, 212.)

Overwhelmingly, the managers all considered face-to-face meetings to be extremely important for them and their teams. Despite the fact that these teams were intentionally set up as remote teams, the managers prefer to meet their employees in person. Some managers fulfill that need by conducting the development discussions in person once a year, one travels to meet their team at least monthly. Most emphasized the need to meet in person especially in the beginning stages of the team's work, in order to get acquainted well with the employees. After the initial meeting, they were more inclined to use for example video conferences to conduct even important discussions, but still showed discontentment in not being able to meet in person. The managers' answers show a strong tendency to value rich channels.

⁴² Original transcript, respondent A: -- mä en näe ja kuule kaikkea mitä mun pitää mut toisaalta se on hyvä ja toisaalta se on huono. Se on hyvä koska tota turha sälä jää pois sillan mut toisaalta se on huono se todellinen henkilön työmoraali ja työtapa ja tapa tehdä töitä jää multa jokseenkin pimentoon.

⁴³ Original transcript, respondent B: -- sit ku toinen on [toisella paikkakunnalla] ni pitää ihan aktiivisesti itsekin edistää sitä vuorovaikutusta niinku soittamalla ja kyselemällä --

-- when we first started we were face-to-face [for the development discussion] and it was really important, but now that we have worked together for a longer time we were able to do it over video as well which is considerably easier because you don't have to travel --⁴⁴

-- as I am the direct supervisor of [the team nearly 300 km away] I aim to visit them once every three weeks, let's say that I manage to make it once a month, even a little more often.⁴⁵

5.6 Engaging behaviors of managers

The aim of this thesis is to explore ways organizations can support the mid-level managers in engaging leadership communication. It has to be acknowledged that the interviewed managers exhibit traits of an engaging leader already. This is evidenced earlier for example by the urge to utilize rich communication channels that facilitate two-way communication (chapter 5.2)

Some of the most often mentioned aspirations of the interviewees were to solve emerging issues immediately and to build team spirit, both essential for a flourishing team. As mentioned in chapter 3.1.1 conflicts are bound to arise in work communities, but they are not barriers to engagement. These managers claim to have the skills needed to manage these conflicts effectively, confining them to the tasks at hand and allowing them to be solved in a timely manner. (Kahn 2010, 26-28.)

We aim to solve issues immediately so that we don't make mountains out of molehills.⁴⁶

-- creating the team spirit and trust that we have so that we can deal with issues and address them immediately, even sensitive ones. The trust has been gained and the people work happily --⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Original transcript, respondent B: -- ku ihan aluks pidettiin [kehityskeskustelu] ni oltiin ihan naamatusten ja se oli tosi tärkeä mut nyt ku on tehty kauemmin yhteistyötä ni kyllä pystyttiin tekemään se myös videoneuvottelun välityksellä mikä on huomattavasti sujuvampi ku ei tarvi matkustaa --

⁴⁵ Original transcript, respondent C: -- kun toimin sen [lähes 300 km päässä olevan tiimin] johtajana ni pyrin käymään siellä kerran kolmessa viikossa, että sanotaanko että toteutuu kerran kuukaudessa hieman useamminkin.

⁴⁶ Original transcript, respondent E: Pyritään solmut avaamaan sieltä ettei tulis kärpäsestä härkästä.

They also aimed for open communications and showing interest in their employees beyond discussions centered on work related matters.

-- some people I call every day, some every other day, but every day I call someone to ask certain things and to discuss --⁴⁸

-- for me the unit meetings are the most important venues where I can show that I'm truly interested in their tasks and developing them.⁴⁹

The fact that many of the respondents strive for open communication, initiate contact, and show interest in their employees offers the employees a chance for their voice to be heard and to receive validation from their managers. This is very important for the creation of engagement. (Beugré 2010, 178; Kahn 2010, 28-29.)

Many of the respondents mentioned enjoying the possibility of sharing their knowledge and helping the employees become better at what they do. Leading by example was also mentioned. Managers who care for their employees in this way tend to have engaged employees.

-- [I enjoy it] if I can share my own skills and they have aha-moments and their skill set grows and they feel that the work is more gratifying --⁵⁰

Adequate job resources allow for the employees to grow and learn, as discussed in chapter 3.1.2 (Mauno & al. 2010, 126). By sharing their own knowledge the managers are providing the employees with resources they need to become better in their field.

⁴⁷ Original transcript, respondent G: -- porukan yhteishengen niinku luominen ja se niinku luottamus mikä on et pystytään käsitteleen asiat asioina ja ottaan ne heti esille ja aratkin asiat niin se on luottamuksen saanu ja porukan tota että ne niinku tekee töitä ja ilolla --

⁴⁸ Original transcript, respondent A: -- joilleki soitan joka päivä toisille joka toinen päivä mut joka päivä jollekin soitan aina kysyäkseni tiettyjä asioita, keskustellakseni --

⁴⁹ Original transcript, respondent C: -- työyksikkökokous siinä ni minusta se on yks tärkeimpiä paikkoja jossa pystyn näyttämään niille työntekijöille että olen oikeesti kiinnostunu heidän työtehtävistä ja niiden kehittämisestä.

⁵⁰ Original transcript, respondent H: -- [nautin siitä] jos mä pystyn antamaan muille tuota jotain siit omasta osaamisesta että heille tulee semmosia ahaa-elämyksiä ja se oma osaaminen kasvaa ja tuntuu et se työ miellyttää enempi --

5.7 Managers' suggestions on future support from the organization

Some of the respondents couldn't articulate any possible ways they felt that the organization could support them in the future. However, most managers had some improvement ideas and even specific training sessions they would like.

The managers requested training on how to deal with the aspect of distance in their work. Being a remote leader is quite demanding for most of them. Also, as mentioned previously, difficult issues and giving negative feedback are causes of concern for many of the managers. Training sessions on how to face challenging situations with employees were suggested.

It was also clear that the sheer amount of administrative tasks is difficult for many of the managers. They requested specific training on HR matters. In addition, many respondents felt that the many different documents pertaining to HR issues, such as the early intervention model, were necessary and useful but that they could use more training in how to implement them. This goes hand in hand with facing challenging situations with employees. This finding is in line with that presented in the FBG interim report conducted in summer 2014, where both the managers and the employees requested support for the managers in administrative and HR tasks (Wahlström 2014, 10).

There were also advocates of peer support networks. Many managers had already seen the benefit of sharing their issues with peers, and suggested the possibility of expanding their use in the organization, and also the possibility of attending network events organized by other organizations.

Also concrete training in the use of different communication channels came up, specifically best practices with video conferences and effective e-mail communication.

The issues raised by the managers relate to the possible barriers they have in their everyday work that prevent them from communicating in an engaging way. Some are directly linked to communication such as the difficulty posed by the remoteness and the issues they have in implementing the communication channels to their fullest potential. Other issues, such as the burden of administrative tasks tax them in a way that makes it difficult for them to dedicate enough time to the leadership role, tying them to the management role. Management is not enough in itself to foster engagement, leadership skills are required as discussed for example in chapter 3.2.2.

The support from the peers was mentioned several times, indicating its importance for the managers. One reason for this could be that it enables managers themselves to engage with their work community in addition to offering a chance to discuss best practices and gather tips from others in similar positions.

6 Draft for an educational event for mid-level managers

Based on the findings of the interviews, an educational event was planned for the mid-level managers of the case organization. This method of supporting mid-level managers in their work suits the case organization, as similar events are held yearly for different target groups on various topics.

The researcher designed a one-day educational event, where the programme concentrates on topics that are designed to remove the potential barriers to effective and engaging leadership communication.

See Appendix 4 for full details on the planned event.

The mid-level managers expressed that they feared that the members of their teams who were not colocated with them felt isolated, and that building a sense of togetherness was difficult. It is necessary for the manager to be able to build a sense of togetherness to enforce the idea that the work of every member of the team is important in order to facilitate engagement. It is also necessary for the manager to be able to fully interact with the employees to engage them through dialogue and find out what kind of support the employees need. These needs are answered through the topic “Together, apart - virtual presence in a decentralized organization” in the suggested educational event, which covers both the technical ability to use different means of communication as well as how to use leadership communication to enable remote participation, which in turn facilitates engagement. These topics were discussed in depth in chapters 3.2.1 and 3.3.

The managers also said that dealing with difficult issues and giving negative feedback were problematic for them. Therefore one of the topics is how to deal with demanding situations at work, including giving constructive feedback, encountering differences, and using the early intervention model that the case organization has specified. The ability to face differences and respond to them constructively is a way to cultivate engagement, as described in chapter 3.1.1. There is also ample time reserved for discussion, as many interviewees mentioned peer support as an important means of seeking support in their work.

Whereas the DeepLead training offered by the case organization steers the participants to reflect on their leadership styles much along the lines of the model suggested by Segers & al. (2010, 154-156), this educational event concentrates more on the concrete leadership

skills that the managers have indicated necessary. This is also in accordance with the Segers & al. model, where the concrete skills are underlined in the later modules of the workshop (ibid).

Feedback on this plan was sought from the interviewed managers as well as representatives of HR and education in the case organization.

It is clear that there are several more topics that could be covered in an educational event for mid-level managers on engagement and leadership communication. However, the one-day timeframe does not allow for a wide range of topics. In the future similar events could be planned to cover other aspects of engaging leadership communication based on the findings of this thesis.

6.1 Feedback from the interviewed managers

Out of the eleven original respondents nine gave feedback on the plans. At the time the feedback was requested one of the original respondents had left the organization, leaving ten possible respondents.

See appendix 5 for the feedback survey.

All nine of the respondents would attend the described event, and felt it would help them to be better managers and leaders. The respondents were also asked to make requests on topics they would like to see covered in such an event, as well as give free feedback. The respondents had several suggestions and ideas, which are presented below.

Many of the suggestions covered topics that are not related to communications, but are otherwise present in the everyday lives of the mid-level managers. This reveals that the mid-level managers feel the need for support in many areas of their work. Beyond the before mentioned, most of the topics raised touched on the subject of remote leadership. One respondent named it as an interesting topic in general, one suggested more detailed topics, such as researched information on how often one should contact remote employees so as to avoid feelings of abandonment, what communication tools could be used for remote leadership, and how to support the remote employees in being self-directed. One respondent requested information on how to act in an inflamed atmosphere. Other respondent emphasized the need for concreteness - no benefits can be realized if the discussion stays on abstract level.

Some of the topics the respondents suggested were already covered by the planned program. This could indicate that the topic is such a large issue for them that they felt the allocated time was not enough to cover it in a way that would suffice their needs.

6.2 Feedback from the representatives of the case organization

Feedback was also sought from representatives of the case organization, mostly as to the feasibility of the plan. The HR representatives and representatives of the educational function were chosen since the topic covered is inherently a part of the HR function of the case organization, so they have insight into how this event should be organized and how well it fits into the entity of education of staff within the case organization. Altogether four respondents gave feedback on the plan. See appendix 5 for the e-mail sent to the representatives of the case organization.

All respondents deemed the educational event possible to arrange as the topic is current in the organization. One respondent pointed out that the FBG has always operated as a decentralized organization per se, but it has mainly been the case for the upper management. Since the decentralization now affects mid-level managers and their teams, more and more people who have been used to a traditional work environment are now operating in remote teams. The same respondent points out that now is the perfect time for this kind of training, since the new operating model has been in use for a while which allows for personal insights on the topic as well as including comments from the team members.

Two of the respondents remarked that the use of lecturers and examples from outside of the case organization was positive, since it allows for benchmarking. The time reserved for discussion and peer support, however, caused discussion in the responses. Two respondents felt that merely a time slot reserved for discussion would not be beneficial. They do not believe that an unfettered discussion would ensue, especially since participants would be from different levels of the organizational hierarchy. One suggested that there should be appointed presenters to start the discussion, or that each participant was required to make a presentation. As one possible improvement the other respondent suggested dividing the participants into more homogenous smaller groups for the discussions. Still, the same respondent points out that most often peer support and networking are the most important offerings of the educational events within the case organization.

The need for concreteness was also brought up by one of the respondents. They call for practical models for working instead of isolated opinions. The need for concreteness was also brought up by one of the mid-level managers, which emphasizes that the mid-level managers are in need of concrete support of the organization in their everyday work.

Interestingly, one of the respondents suggested "Characteristics of leading a decentralized organization - engaging, control, and interaction"⁵¹ as a topic for the educational event. This is the only mention of controlling the remote team members in the entire thesis. None of the interviewees brought up the issue of control at any point of the study. It does not seem like in the everyday work control, or lack of it, plays any major role.

⁵¹ Original transcript: "Hajautetun organisaation johtamisen erityispiirteet - sitouttaminen, valvonta ja vuorovaikutus"

7 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter shares the results of the empirical research. The data analysis of the results is used to draw conclusions specific to the case organization, and some concrete suggestions for improvements are made, so that the organization can support the mid-level managers be more engaging towards the employees in the future. This also includes the removal of barriers that prevent the managers from allocating time and resources into engaging leadership communication. These suggestions also include the educational event planned based on the results, see appendix 3. The limitations of the research and suggestions for future studies on this topic are discussed in the end of the chapter.

7.1 Results

The research question defined for this thesis was *How can the organization support mid-level managers in engaging leadership communication in a decentralized organization?*

The research question covers a wide variety of topics, so to help answer the question four sub-questions were formulated.

As the research was conducted as a case study of an organization, it was integral to find out *What are the needs of the mid-level managers?* The main sources for answering this sub-question were naturally the interviews. One of the main findings was that the managers really wish they would have more time - time to connect with the employees and time to concentrate on their tasks in addition to the managerial duties. Many managers also have substantial responsibilities in developing their function or certain processes while also managing a team. Some were also taken aback by the volume of administrative tasks included in their work as a manager, such as hiring, dealing with vacation times, and maternity leaves. Those tasks take up time they could be using on the things that matter to them more. The respondents also wished to have clear instructions, transparent communications from higher organizational levels, as well as more support in acting as a remote leader. Many were put in a position to manage decentralized teams for the first time in connection with the organizational change in 2014 and have found it to be challenging.

The second sub-question was *What kinds of problems are the mid-level managers facing?* This question is also answered through the interviews, which revealed that the managers find having to give negative feedback problematic; same goes for handling other difficult issues. There were also some issues caused by the different organizational sub-cultures being brought together due to the change in the organizational structure. While unifying these cultures is beneficial for the organization, the managers are left to deal with the con-

flicts caused by these differences. As mentioned before, the role of a remote leader is challenging for many, causing them worry about the well-being of the remote team members and also complicating the daily communication tasks of the managers. Aforementioned burdensome administrative tasks are also an issue. Part of the reason why these are perceived as very straining is that the mid-level managers are not certain as to how to deal with them.

Hence the third sub-question is as follows: *What is the role of distance in managing teams?* This question is in part answered through the interviews, but also through the literature review, in chapter 3.3. It has been stated many times before, that the interviewed managers encounter challenges in leading decentralized teams. However, some interviewees saw no difference in whether they are managing colocated team members or remote team members. Most difficulty is obviously centered on communication, as there is more effort needed to include the remote team members in the conversation. This is also tied to engaging the employees and building team spirit; those become more challenging, as the teams are not able to share a physical space and the convenience of spontaneous discussions. These same challenges have been recognized in the literature regarding the topic. One of the solutions offered is using technology to bridge the gap caused by inability to be physically together (Vartiainen & al. 2004, 38). However, this doesn't change the traditional demands of leadership: whereas routine matters can be handled over channels such as e-mail or instant messenger, difficult, complex, and personal matters require meeting face-to-face (Juholin 2008, 190), be it technology assisted or an actual physical meeting.

The importance of leadership communication in facilitating employee engagement was explored through the fourth and final sub-question *How does leadership communication enable employee engagement?* Finding answers to this question was crucial in establishing that the mid-level managers do indeed play a role in engaging employees, and that it is done mainly through communication. It was established in the literature review that the role of a direct supervisor is central in verifying the meaning of the work done by the employees (Kahn 2010, 27). Managers also help create a work environment that gives voice to all of its members (Beugré 2010, 178). All of this is due to, in large part, the role mid-level managers play in the internal communication of an organization (Men 2014, 266).

It also appears that the interviewed managers are taking actions that are likely to facilitate engagement. They favor face-to-face communication and other richer channels. As we have also learned from Clampitt (2010, 17), spending time with the employees helps

managers to learn about their attitudes, needs, and desires. Observing these factors helps with connecting with the employees on a meaningful level in order to create engagement. Also the managers made it clear that they are interested in their employees beyond their work role, and also initiated discussions that made it clear to their team. That is likely to foster engagement as well.

Through addressing these four sub-questions the research question of how the organization can support mid-level managers in engaging leadership communication in a decentralized organization is answered.

7.2 Discussion and recommendations

One of the factors taken into consideration when analyzing the results was the background of the respondents. As mentioned in chapter 5.1 the interviewees came from a variety of backgrounds regarding their education and experience in management and leadership. Surprisingly, this had very little effect on the issues they viewed as challenges.

As a part of the interview the managers were also asked if a managerial position was something they had aspired to. While many were lukewarm, one manager answered no and five yes. Unexpectedly, this had very little bearing on the results as well.

The background had no effect on the way the managers used communication channels to stay in touch with the employees. It also had no bearing on whether they felt difficulty in addressing complicated issues or giving negative feedback - nearly all struggled with this. Also, the hesitation that the employees might have in contacting the managers was mentioned by a variety of managers. Same goes for the issues faced with different sub-organizational cultures.

Only issue that presented a possible connection to the background of the manager was struggling with the administrative tasks. Those with only civilian management training or very little management training brought up this challenge. It could be concluded that military training and career prepare the manager better for the administrative tasks.

The above findings suggest that the need for support from the organization is not limited to any specific group of mid-level managers. No conclusions of the need for support can be drawn purely based on the previous education and experience of the manager. Rather, the decision should be made based on what the organization wants to achieve.

7.2.1 Use of communication and communication channels for engaging

As stated many times before, without communication there is no leadership. There are also claims that employees do not resign from organizations – they resign from their managers (Juholin 2013, 202). Strong communication skills allow for the manager not only to transmit information, but also to engage and inspire.

Among the central findings of this thesis was that the respondents struggle with remote leadership, feel that face-to-face meetings trump other forms of communication, and that handling e-mail takes up much of their time.

Despite the fact the managers rely heavily on e-mail for day-to-day communications, they exhibit a tendency to favor richer channels, i.e. face-to-face, telephone, and video conferences. Of the virtual communication channels video conferences are considered the richest. Since rich channels can be considered *who* channels (as opposed to leaner *what* channels) they place emphasis on the communicators, offering social presence and a possibility for two-way communication. This bodes well for employee engagement; having their voice heard is one of the key elements that employees need to be able to engage.

The organization could emphasize how to use the available communication channels for maximum effect on employee engagement without wasting unnecessary resources.

Also noteworthy is the issue of managers, and employees alike, being burdened with large amounts of e-mail communications. The organization should examine its communication practices for organization-wide communications, and aim to discover ways of sharing information that is not as cumbersome for the employees. This way e-mail communication could serve the needs of the mid-level managers and employees better, while freeing up the time it now takes to deal with extraneous amounts of e-mail.

The implications of communication channels on remote leadership are discussed in the next chapter.

7.2.2 Investment in remote leadership

Leadership and communication in decentralized units is especially demanding. This can be mediated through the before mentioned communication efforts, but should also receive special attention.

In addition to providing the technical means for the decentralized units to communicate and cooperate the managers, and possibly even team members, should be provided with training on how to best utilize these communication methods in their everyday work. In order to create the atmosphere of a face-to-face meeting via a video conference the leader quite possibly needs some skills that are not needed in traditional communication. It is in the interest of the organization to help teams make the most of these channels.

One of the biggest worries of the managers is that the remote team members feel detached. By utilizing e.g. video conferences the managers can make up for the lack of actual face-to-face meetings. This also allows for the manager to bring the whole team together despite their location, fostering team spirit. Being reminded of how the different roles fit together to produce the desired end product brings value to the individual's work, and helps see the value in other people's work as well. This helps them carry collective responsibility for the success of the team.

7.2.3 Management training to improve engagement of employees

The organization has used the DeepLead method of training managers for several years. Most of the respondents that had received this training felt it was useful. As there is an established connection between transformational leadership and employee engagement, the chosen leadership style is sensible.

To improve the effect of this managerial training, follow-up sessions for those who have been through the training could be organized. This would allow for reassessing the scores given earlier, and also bring together managers from different parts of the organization to share their experiences.

The training should also place emphasis on the fact that managers need to be proactive in initiating contact with the employees. This way they make it clear that the views and thoughts of the employees matter to them. Feeling that their contribution matters makes work more meaningful to individuals, enabling engagement.

There are topics that should be covered in such training more effectively. One of them is how to manage different sub-organizational cultures, and other diversity, so as to not cause a feeling of insecurity that could inhibit employee engagement. There is a danger that the employees feel their way of working attacked if it is not allowed anymore. Also, it

could be beneficial for the organization to consider the different methods used in different parts of the organization. New, better methods could be found and put to use in the whole organization. Also, the managers expressed difficulty in giving negative feedback. The workshop model proposed by Segers & al. (2010, 154-156) includes training on how to give constructive feedback. Some similar exercise could be used in the case organization as well.

7.2.4 Formalizing well-functioning support methods

The interviewed managers expressed several needs that they have along with new ideas for support that would help them in their work. Most effective methods of support seem to already be in use at least to some extent in the case organization. The use of these methods could be formalized in order to show that the organization is willing to put forward effort to support the mid-level managers.

Many interviewees expressed that they found a lot of support in their peers. This could be formalized by organizing networking events for managers throughout the organization. The organization could also consider encouraging the managers to participate in networking events held by other government offices, for example the Ministry of the Interior.

7.2.5 Engaging mid-level managers

There should be concentrated effort on educating the managers on future change processes, and other large projects or special circumstances within the organization. The benefits of including members of the organization are undeniable, and it was also stated by the managers in the interviews. Acting as a role model and fully representing the organization's views to the employees requires that managers understand, and support, the organization's efforts. Thus they need to be the primary audience when deploying new initiatives. By involving the managers they become engaged, and are in turn better able to engage the employees. This procedure also helps to make decision-making more transparent.

The managers also felt the need to have a better working understanding of the permanent documents that steer personnel issues in the case organization, e.g. the early intervention model to be better able to use them in their communication with the employees. There have been some training sessions on these matters in the organization, but their execution should be reconsidered so as to better provide the support that the managers need.

It would also seem that it would be beneficial to arrange more time for the managers to concentrate on the management of the team itself. There could be various ways to approach this, such as training on time management or lessening of administrative tasks. If administrative tasks cannot be removed from the hands of the managers, they should receive training to make the tasks less burdensome. This is addressed in chapter 7.2.6.

7.2.6 Training on administrative tasks for new managers

The sheer amount of administrative tasks comes as a surprise to many new managers. From hiring and firing to maternity leaves and vacation times, there is a lot to manage. These tasks should either be mostly removed from the hands of managers or they need to be trained intensely enough for them to have routines in place for these tasks. The workload from administrative tasks is remarkable and the organization needs to consider whether they want to pay for these managers to struggle with the routine, or to lead their teams in an effective manner.

7.3 Limitations of the research

This research concentrated on the managers and their needs of support. This means that the results only take into consideration the needs the respondents were able and willing to articulate themselves.

Also, this research does not take into consideration the views of the employees. The aim of this research was to specifically concentrate on the needs of the managers, and how the organization can provide for them.

The case organization was not directly consulted in the making of this thesis. The expectations and needs any organization might have for the managers and employees are derived from literature, also some documents from the organization were studied. If the case organization has some specific needs that are not in line with the generalizations made for other organizations and that are not fully covered by the studied documents, this thesis does not provide responses to them.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

Research including employees could provide a fuller picture of the situation, and perhaps introduce deficits that the managers are not able to recognize themselves. On the other

hand, it could also be that the employees are satisfied and able to engage with the organization despite the current behavior of their managers. Taking into consideration the views of the employees and possibly the higher management could provide insights absent from this research.

Research could also be done by the function, i.e. HR, financial and technical services, in order to compare their results, and to benchmark best communication and engaging activities employed by the managers in these different functions.

If the organization decides to employ the development ideas presented in this thesis, a follow-up study could reveal the possible improvement achieved. It would also be interesting to compare such results to the development of the results of work well-being surveys.

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Appendices

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II. Semi-structured interview guide

IV The plan for the educational event

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Tables

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II Pre-interview survey

1. First and last name (not connected with the answers in the thesis)
 2. Previous management training – check box options
 - as a part of secondary education
 - as a part of higher education
 - as a part of military training
 - management training offered by the employer, e.g. DeepLead
 - other management training
 - no previous management training
 3. Previous management experience – check box options
 - in a previous role with the FBG
 - in a previous role with another employer
 - no previous management experience
 4. Location of the team members – radio button options
 - all members in the same locality
 - members in two localities
 - members in several localities
-
1. Etu- ja sukunimi (Nimeä ei yhdistetä vastauksiin opinnäytetyössä)
 2. Aiempi esimieskoulutus – check box vaihtoehdot
 - osana toisen asteen tutkintoa
 - osana korkeakoulututkintoa
 - osana sotilaskoulutusta
 - työnantajan tarjoama erillinen esimieskoulutus (esim. DeepLead)
 - muu erillinen esimieskoulutus
 - ei esimieskoulutusta
 3. Aiempi esimieskokemus – check box vaihtoehdot
 - aiemmassa työtehtävässä Rajavartiolaitoksessa
 - aiemmassa työtehtävässä toisella työnantajalla
 - ei aiempaa kokemusta
 4. Palveluryhmän/vast. jäsenien sijainti – radio button options
 - Kaikki jäsenet samalla paikkakunnalla
 - Jäseniä kahdella paikkakunnalla
 - Jäseniä useammalla paikkakunnalla

III Semi-structured interview guide

Support from organization

- How did you end up as a manager?
 - Is this a position you wanted?
- How did the organization support you in the beginning?
 - Training – what kind? internal/external
 - Support from closest manager?
 - Meetings/such arranged by org?
- Has the support been adequate?
 - What kind of support would you have wanted that you have not received?
 - Have you sought support? From whom?
- How has the organization supported you since?
- What are some of the best practices the organization uses?
- What practices have you observed elsewhere that you would like to see used to support you?

Leadership communications

- What kind of communications has the managerial position introduced to your work? What kind of communication situations do you encounter in your daily work life?
 - Performance appraisals, feedback, supervision of work, allocation of tasks, development of practices
 - Which communication channels do you use? remotely/locally
 - Communication the aims, changes, values of the organization
- How are you doing with your team?
 - Is there open interaction, why/why not?
 - How do you find out what your team is talking about?
 - In what kind of situations are your team members able to talk with you?
 - Is the situation different between the members that work in the same or different location?
- What is most difficult to communicate?
- What issues would you need to take up with employees/ what issues are you hesitant to take up with employees?
- How would you wish the organization supported you in this leadership communication?

Successes in work / engaging employees

- How have you succeeded?
 - What do you do that seems to work? – How do you know it works?
 - How can you see you've influenced your employees?
- What parts of your leadership do you enjoy?

Remote leadership

- How do you feel distance influences working with team members?
 - How does it influence the way you communicate?
 - How do you think it affects the way employees communicate with you?
 - Do the team members understand the messages the same despite the distance or the channel used?
 - Do all team members get the same amount of feedback despite the distance?

Organisaation tuki

- Kuinka sinusta tuli esimies?
 - Halusitko tähän esimiestehtävään?
- Miten organisaatio tuki sinua alussa?
 - Koulutus – minkälaista? sisäinen/ulkoinen
 - Tuki lähiesimieheltä?
 - Organisaation järjestämät kokoukset/vast.?
- Onko tuki ollut riittävää?
 - Millaista tukea olisit halunnut, mutta et ole saanut?
- Oletko itse hakenut tukea? Keneltä?
- Miten organisaatio on tukenut sinua alkuvaiheen jälkeen?
- Mitkä organisaation tukitoimet ovat olleet parhaita?
- Millaisia tukitoimia tiedät olevan käytössä muualla, joita toivoisit käytettävän myös meillä?

Esimiesviestintä

- Millaista viestintää työssäsi on esimiesaseman myötä? Minkälaisia viestintätilanteita päivittäiseen työhösi liittyy?
 - kehityskeskustelut, palautteet, työnohjaus, töiden jakaminen, työskentelyn kehittämisen
 - millaisia välineitä käytät viestinnässä? etä/lähi
 - organisaation tavoitteista viestiminen, muutokset, arvot...
- Miten sinulla menee tiimisi kanssa?
 - Onko vuorovaikutus avointa, miksi/miksi ei?
 - Miten kuulet mistä tiimisi keskustelee?
 - Minkälaisissa tilanteissa tiimin jäsenillä on mahdollisuus keskustella kanssasi?
 - Onko tilanne erilainen samalla/eri paikkakunnalla työskentelevien kanssa?
- Mikä on vaikeinta viestiä?
- Millaisia asioita sinun pitäisi ottaa puheeksi tiimisi kanssa/ mitä asioita epäröit ottaa puheeksi tiimisi kanssa?
- Miten toivoisit organisaation tukevan sinua tässä esimiesviestinnässä?

Onnistumiset työssä / työntekijöiden sitouttaminen

- Missä asioissa olet onnistunut?
 - Mitkä toimintatapasi tuntuvat toimivilta? – Miten tiedät että ne toimivat?
 - Miten koet vaikuttaneesi tiimiisi?
- Mistä pidät esimiestyössä?

Etäjohtajuus

- Miten etäisyys vaikuttaa yhteistyöhön tiimisi kanssa?
 - Miten se vaikuttaa siihen miten viestit?
 - Miten luulet sen vaikuttavan siihen, miten tiimisi viestii sinulle?
 - Ymmärtävätkö alaiset saamansa viestin samalla tavalla etäisyydestä/viestintävälineestä huolimatta?
 - Saavatko kaikki alaiset saman verran palautetta etäisyydestä huolimatta?

IV The plan for the educational event



Rajavartiolaitos
Gränsbevakningsväsendet
The Finnish Border Guard

Order

1 (2)

No record number

Border Guard Headquarters
Personnel Division

1.2.2016

FBG education program 2016 (No record number)

Educational event for managers 2016

According to the Finnish Border Guard's (FBG) education programme for 2016 the educational events for managers are organized in the headquarters of the Kainuu Border Guard District on March 8 2016 and in the Headquarters of the Finnish Border Guard on September 6 2016. The events begin at 0900 and end at 1600. The events address the topics that the managers in the organization have indicated to be challenging for them in different studies. The emphasis is on leadership communication. The programme of the events is attached.

Administrative units command those mid-level managers in the target group of the event to attend. Priority is given to those that have remote teams (unit managers, sector leaders etc.).

Administrative units report the names of the participants by e-mail to the Personnel Division (RVL_VP_RVLE_Henkilöstöosasto) by February 22 2016.

The educational event is led by N.N. from the Personnel Division assisted by the communications manager of the FBG.

Chief of Personnel Division
Commodore

Markku Hassinen

Chief of personnel unit
Lieutenant Colonel

N.N.

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2(2)
No record number

ATTACHMENTS	Programme
DISTRIBUTION	Administrative units
TO BE INFORMED	Communications manager

Educational event for managers, March 8 2016 and September 6 2016

9.00–9.30	Opening words and current issues, coffee	N.N. Communications manager
9.30–11.30	Together, apart - virtual presence in a decentralized organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of different means of communication in different situations • Leadership communication and enabling remote participation • Best practices in video conferences 	professional trainer
11.30–12.30	Lunch	
12.30–14.00	Challengin situations at <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving constructive feedback • Encountering differences • Using the early intervention model 	N.N. Occupational health manager Communications manager
14.00–14.15	Coffee	
14.15–15.45	Discussion and peer support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for the managers to share own best practices, discuss with other participants and share experiences of managing 	
15.45–16.00	Closing words and discussion	N.N.



Rajavartiolaitoksen esikunta
Henkilöstöosasto

1.2.2016

RVL:n koulutusohjelma 2016 D:notta

Esimiesten opetustilaisuus 2016

Rajavartiolaitoksen koulutusohjelman 2016 mukaiset esimiesten opetustilaisuudet järjestetään Kainuun rajavartioston esikunnassa 8.3.2016 ja Rajavartiolaitoksen esikunnassa 6.9.2016. Opetustilaisuudet alkavat klo 9.00 ja päättyvät klo 16.00. Tilaisuuksissa käsitellään esimiesten tutkimusten yhteydessä ilmaisemia haasteellisia työtehtäviä sekä etenkin esimiesviestintää. Opetustilaisuuksien ohjelma on liitteenä.

Hallintoyksiköt komentavat opetustilaisuuteen kohderyhmänä olevat keskipor-
taan esimiehet, etusijalla hajautettuja työyksiköitä johtavat (esim. yksikön päälli-
köt, sektorijohtajat, vast.).

Hallintoyksiköt ilmoittavat osallistujien nimet sähköpostilla henkilöstöosastolle
(RVL_VP_RVLE_Henkilöstöosasto) 22.2.2016 kuluessa.

Opetustilaisuuden johtajana toimii Rajavartiolaitoksen esikunnan henkilöstö-
osastolta N.N. apunaan Rajavartiolaitoksen viestintäpäällikkö.

Henkilöstöosaston osastopäällikkö
Lippueamiraali

Markku Hassinen

Henkilöstöyksikön päällikkö
Everstiluutnantti

N.N.

LIITTEET	Opetustilaisuuden ohjelma
JAKELU	Hallintoyksiköt
TIEDOKSI	Viestintäpäällikkö

Esimiesten opetustilaisuus 8.3. ja 6.9.2016

9.00–9.30	Tilaisuuden avaus ja ajankohtaiset asiat, aamukahvi	N.N. Viestintäpäällikkö
9.30–11.30	Yhdessä erikseen – virtuaalinen läsnäolo ha- jautetussa organisaatiossa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viestintälaitteiden ja -ohjelmien tilanteen- mukainen käyttö • Esimiesviestintä ja alaisten osallistaminen etänä • Videoneuvottelujen hyvät käytännöt 	ulkopuolinen koulut- taja
11.30–12.30	Lounas	
12.30–14.00	Haastavat tilanteet työssä <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korjaavan palautteen antaminen • Erilaisuuden kohtaaminen • Varhaisen välittämisen mallin käyttö 	N.N. Työterveyspäällikkö Viestintäpäällikkö
14.00–14.15	Kahvitauko	
14.15–15.45	Vapaata keskustelua ja vertaistukea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tilaisuus esimiehille jakaa omia parhaita käytäntöjään, keskustella muiden osallis- tujen kanssa ja jakaa kokemuksiaan esi- miestyöstä 	
15.45–16.00	Tilaisuuden päättäminen ja loppukeskustelu	N.N.

V The feedback survey on the educational event for the interviewed managers

1. First and last name (not connected with the answers in the thesis)
 2. Would you be interested in participating in an event described in the order? – radio button options
 - yes
 - no
 3. Do you believe that an educational event such as the one described in the order would help you perform better as a manager? – radio button options
 - yes
 - no
 4. What other content would you like to see in an education event for managers?
 5. Feedback on the order of the educational event for managers (e.g. the time allocated for the event, frequency of organizing etc.)
-
1. Etu- ja sukunimi (Nimeä ei yhdistetä vastauksiin opinnäytetyössä)
 2. Olisitko kiinnostunut osallistumaan käskyn mukaiseen opetustilaisuuteen? – radio button vaihtoehdot
 - kyllä
 - ei
 3. Uskotko että käskyn mukainen opetustilaisuus auttaisi sinua toimimaan paremmin esimiehenä? – radio button vaihtoehdot
 - kyllä
 - ei
 4. Mitä muuta sisältöä toivoisit esimiesten opetustilaisuuteen?
 5. Vapaa palaute esimiesten opetustilaisuuden käskystä (esimerkiksi tilaisuuteen varattu aika, järjestämistiheys jne.)

VI The e-mail sent to the representatives of the case organization

[Dear sirs]

I have tentatively inquired whether I could ask your comments on an (fictive) order of an educational event for managers that I have created as a part of my thesis.

As a part of my master's degree I am writing a research for the Finnish Border Guard. The topic of my research is the way in which organization could support managers in engaging leadership communication in a decentralized organization (research permit RVLD-no/2015/58).

The programme has been designed to address the challenges brought up by the managers that I have interviewed. Your comments are primarily needed from the viewpoint of the feasibility of the plan, and whether the contents address the needs of the Finnish Border Guard. All other comments and suggestions are also welcome.

At the Border and Coast Guard Academy this request may be redistributed to persons that the Head of Education and Planning deems suitable. Please inform me of the recipients of this request.

I would like to thank you in advance. I hope you might be able to deliver your answers to me by the end of July.

Yours sincerely
Johanna Mäkinen
communications specialist

[Hyvät herrat]

Olen jo alustavasti tiedustellut mahdollisuutta pyytää kommenttejanne opinnäytetyöni osana laatimani (kuvitteellisen) esimiesten opetustilaisuuden käskyyn.

Osana ylempää ammattikorkeakoulututkintoani toteutan Rajavartiolaitokselle tutkimuksen, jonka aiheena on se miten organisaatio voi tukea esimiehiä osallistavassa ja sitouttavassa esimiesviestinnässä hajautetussa organisaatiossa (tutkimuslupa RVLDno/2015/58).

Ohjelma on suunniteltu vastaamaan niihin aiheisiin, jotka tutkimusta varten haastattelemani esimiehet kokivat haastaviksi. Kommenttejanne kaivataan lähinnä siitä nähdäänkö tällainen opetustilaisuus mahdollisena, ja vastaako sen sisältö Rajavartiolaitoksen tarpeita. Kaikki muut kommentit ja ehdotukset ovat myös tervetulleita.

RMVK:lla tätä kommentointipyyntöä voi jakaa edelleen koulutuspäällikön sopivaksi katsomille henkilöille. Pyydän saada tiedon kaikista tämän pyynnön vastaanottajista.

Kiitän teitä jo etukäteen. Toivoisin vastauksia käyttööni mahdollisuuksienne mukaan viimeistään heinäkuun loppuun mennessä.

ystävällisin terveisin

Johanna Mäkinen
Tiedottaja