

Course: SKOM12
Term: Spring 2019
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**The complex spirals of engagement and communication:
A case study about the communicative roles of co-workers
in a corporate incubator**

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Master's thesis



Abstract

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Recently, engagement and communication have started to be researched from a coworker-perspective. Yet, this study problematizes that most research in strategic communication and employee engagement still takes a *managerial* perspective and lacks *critical* and *complex* assessments. This case study therefore aims to analyze coworkers' perceptions of their communicative roles as *team members*, *co-leaders* and *ambassadors* and its communication challenges in a corporate incubator set in Sweden. Based on this, the study strives to understand how employee engagement is both a *product* and a *producer* of communication. The empirical material was collected in 15 semi-structured interviews throughout five weeks. Analyzing the findings with a meta-perspective of CCO (Communication Constitutes Organization), it was shown that coworkers perceive the communicative roles differently. More importantly, the results indicated that communication and engagement do not necessarily follow positive linear directions, but rather take *complex turns* shaped like *spirals* when studied with CCO. This study contributes with further understanding of how stronger engagement and professional autonomy can be products of both lengthy and limited communication, but also weak ambiguous results with no clear guidance. On the other hand, can employee engagement produce a high-qualitative communication but paradoxically distraction and information overload as well.

Keyword: coworker communication, employee engagement, CCO (communication constitutes organization), communicative roles, complex spirals, corporate incubator

Number of words; 21 796

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Acknowledgements

This thesis has been able to finish thanks to several important people. Firstly, I would like to express my very great appreciation to the studied case organization and its corporate incubator as well as my supervisor there for their acceptance, patient guidance and encouragement. Secondly, I would like to thank all interviewees for their participation and honesty. Thirdly, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Mats Heide, my thesis supervisor, for his advice, assistance and essential critiques of this research. Lastly, I would like to thank my lovely family, friends and classmates for their continuous support and encouragement throughout the last five months.

Without your help, this achievement would not have been possible. Thanks a lot!

Lund, 2019-05-20

Max Rasmusson

1. Introduction

Over the recent decades, engagement has turned into a trend in management together with phenomenon like the learning organization, lean management and value-based leadership (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). As a result, employee engagement has been described as an essential tool for managers to control its employees and to increase productivity, financial returns, competitiveness and enhanced reputation (Karanges, Beatson, Johnston & Lings, 2015; Saks, 2006; Welch, 2011). Internal communication has thus played an essential role in management to motivate and satisfy its employees and stimulate their creativity (Ryyänänen, Pekkarinen & Salminen, 2012; van Vuuren, de Jong & Seydel, 2007). Recently, however, new inspirational turns in the field of organizational studies and strategic communication have started to arise. A coworker-centered perspective is studied more frequently in relation to engagement and communication as it improves the understanding of the complexity of organizations (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Kopaneva & Sias, 2015; Heide & Simonsson, 2018).

Because the expansion of knowledge-intensive and post-bureaucratic organizations, the coworker role has recently gained importance (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). Today, coworkers are more seen as an engaged communicative function within organizations who mostly have an overall understanding of the employer's values and strategies, share information in meaningful ways and act as ambassadors to live their organizational brand (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). In particular, coworkers are seen, besides following instructions, as socially competent team members to their colleagues and co-leaders to their managers who are prepared to walk an extra mile (Tengblad, 2006). In line with this, the theoretical notion CCO – “communication constitutes organizing” (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Coheen, 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) underlines that communication forms and builds the organization. According to this notion, organizations and its strategic communication thus become the result of coworkers' daily dialogues, interactions, conversations, texts (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010; Heide et al., 2018) and sensemaking processes (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). In similar ways, communication thus becomes a constitutive component of engagement where it is both “a producer and a product of engagement” (Heide and Simonsson 2018, p. 209).

It is a problem, however, that *research* in employee engagement and strategic communication firstly still take a leader perspective, and lacks a CCO approach as it captures a coworker perspective more easily and “helps us to overcome managerial bias” (Heide & Simonsson, 2018, p. 216). The employee perspective therefore seems to be ignored in previous research in general (Reissner & Pagan, 2013; Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2011). Secondly, it is problematic that *practitioners* limit communication and engagement to single organizational units such as marketing, communication, public relations, etc. and take them for granted altogether. As communication is a *complex process* which involves *all levels* of the organization, it is equally important to consider the *communicative roles* of coworkers with different professional positions as the ones within communication, marketing, HR for instance. (cf. Kunh & Schoeneborn, 2015). Thirdly, I think it is rather uncritical to assume in *research* as well in *practice* that employee engagement always is aligned with “managerial interests and dominating power structures” (Heide & Simonsson, 2018, p. 210), e.g. simplify it as a managerial tool and expect coworkers to get truly excited whenever they are encouraged to initiate insightful dialogues. In general, research about employee engagement and communication has been conducted with a too naive focus without any reflections on its *communication challenges* on a coworker level (cf. Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter 2011). As a result, its linear positive relationships have not been fully *questioned* in research either.

To counter these problems in research as well as in practice, it is crucial to take a critical approach to employee engagement and “embrace the fact that organizational life is messy and nonrational” (Heide, von Platen, Simonsson & Falkheimer, 2018, p. 466). Particularly, regular interactions between coworkers and its superior colleagues as well as external stakeholders since the coworker’s communicative roles are still understudied in qualitative research (Heide & Simonsson 2011; Kang & Sung, 2017; Kim & Rhee, 2011). To do this, it is essential to *firstly* understand how coworkers perceive their *communicative roles*, meaning as *team members* to their colleagues, *co-leaders* to their managers and *brand ambassadors* to their organization (Heide & Simonsson, 2011), and analyze their experiences of its challenges as well. Particularly, in a post-bureaucratic organization set in *Scandinavia* where these roles are most likely to occur (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Møller, 1994; Velten, Tengblad & Heggen, 2017). I believe it is necessary to capture all the *three* communicative roles as they collectively represent coworkers’ internal and external communication responsibilities in post-bureaucratic organizations today. Since Heide and Simonsson (2018) urge for more research on “how engagement is *constituted* and *enacted* in a *broader spectrum* of work-related interactions and relationships” (p. 216), it is necessary to *secondly* describe and analyze these per-

ceptions with a CCO-approach from a coworker perspective. By doing this it is possible to contribute with further research and knowledge in strategic communication how coworker communication is both a product and producer of employee engagement, and how engagement can contribute back to communication not only in linear positive ways but in complex directions. I argue this reasoning will strengthen need for CCO approach which actually meets the requests by Heide et al. (2018) and explains the *order* of the research questions in this study. Put differently, rather than viewing communication and engagement with a causal linear relationship, it thus is crucial to see the concepts as integrated and interdependent of each other in complex ways. That is, embracing the notion that communication and engagement can collectively be both products and producers of each other. Furthermore, it is important to target a knowledge-intensive organization, meaning that the employees' experiences and competences are essential for the operation (Sveiby, 1990), and set in Sweden. More importantly, it should contain a *corporate incubator* that is described to be part of large corporations aiming to boost R&D innovative capabilities, gain new business opportunities and develop an open non-bureaucratic environment (Gassman & Becker 2006; Ford, Garnsey & Probert, 2010). Since coworkers in knowledge-intensive contexts in Scandinavia seem to be well-educated and experienced to take major communicative responsibility (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Sveiby, 1990) it is possible to see the incubator as an *extreme case* and thus fill empirical gaps in research. On a practical level, the insightful findings can help both managers and coworkers to avoid managerial bias, misunderstandings or misjudgments of each other, and improve communication and engagement conditions for coworkers as well as the organizational communication in general.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this research is threefold. First, to describe and analyze coworkers' perceptions of their communicative roles as team members, co-leaders and ambassadors in a corporate incubator. Second, to address and analyze the communication challenges that simultaneously exist within the roles in the context of a corporate incubator. Third, to produce a better understanding of how employee engagement is integrated in coworker interactions and communication processes within the roles according to the communication constitutes organization (CCO) approach. As a result, this will generate new insights in strategic communication research of how employee engagement can be understood by CCO in the context of a corporate incubator in Sweden. A qualitative case study will be conducted and provide researchers and practition-

ers a further complex understanding of coworkers' communicative roles and how employee engagement is constituted in communication from a coworker-oriented point-of-view.

1.2 Research questions

This thesis strives to ask the following main research questions;

- How do coworkers perceive their communicative roles in relation to their coworkers, managers and external stakeholders in a corporate incubator part of a knowledge-intensive organization set in Sweden?
- What communication challenges exist when being an engaged team member, co-leader and ambassador in an incubator according to coworkers' point of view?
- How is employee engagement from a coworker perspective a product and producer of communication processes between coworker-coworkers, coworkers-managers and coworkers-external stakeholders in an incubator?

1.3 Delimitations

It is important to note that this qualitative study will only focus on the coworkers' point of view and talk about their communicative roles, expressed engagement and communication challenges given in interviews. Even if these perceptions will capture communication processes in relation to team, middle or senior management and external stakeholders, the study will not cover the perceptions from the latter four, nor will it focus on close-up observations. Thereby, the findings may not give a fully representative image of the professional realistic context. In addition, the study is only narrowed to Sweden geographically, one knowledge-intensive organization and a corporate incubator which might make the findings not representative to other units, organizations, industries or countries for that matter and cannot not be fully generalized in empirical research. In addition, even if this study considers multiple concepts such as employee engagement, coworkership and ambassadorship, multiple roles and thereby captures a wide breadth, it is possible that the roles occasionally overlap and that it might involve "too much" for a master thesis and thus hinders the research to capture a depth of each concept separately. Yet, as stated, I believe it is important to cover all three roles as

they are integrated in each other and needs to be considered coherently in order capture the complexity of communication and engagement.

1.4 Disposition

This qualitative study is structured in the following way. Initially, the literature review presents previous research about employee engagement and its relation to internal communication, coworkership and the communicative roles as team member, co-leader as well as ambassadorship and the role as ambassador. Thereafter, the theory chapter presents the CCO approach including its three schools of thought and its metatheoretical standpoints related to employee engagement, the “alternative perspective”. The fourth chapter, methodology, describes the epistemological viewpoint, research design and strategy for the qualitative study. The fifth and sixth chapter, present the findings and the discussion of coworkers’ perceptions of their communicative roles and the communication challenges as to discover how employee engagement is produced and producer of internal and external communication processes in the context of an incubator. Lastly, the study concludes with suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of the discussion that has captured employee engagement, its relation to internal communication, coworkership and the communicative roles as a team leader and co-leader, and finally ambassadorship including the communicative ambassador role. The purpose is to give a broad review of what research and empirical studies have touched upon until today (Styhre, 2013).

2.1 Employee engagement and its relation to internal communication

The concept of employee engagement is often associated with a psychological state that relates employees to an organization and develops essential relationships (Saks, 2006). Kahn (1990), a pioneering researcher in this field, argues that engaged employees mostly show emotional, cognitive and physical commitment to their professional roles. According to Saks (2006), employee engagement tends to arise when supervisors provide communicative and thorough support to its subordinates. Traditionally, employee engagement is thus related to positive financial results, work performance and organizational effectiveness (Saks, 2006; Young, 2012; Gruman & Saks, 2011). Moreover, research has proven that employee engagement results in higher customer loyalty (Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005), and competitive advantages since it enhances organizations' innovative performances to larger extent (Welch, 2011). As an effect, the concept has received interest both in academic research as well as in practitioner literature (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

Though research still lacks a universal clarification of employee engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Verčič & Vokić, 2017), some definitions are used widely today. One example is provided by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2002) whom define employee engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (p. 74). Vigor, described as the employee's behavior, means showing great levels of energy and mental flexibility when working – even during difficult times (Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova, 2006). Dedication, the employee's emotion, repre-

sents “being strongly involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge” (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006, p. 702). Lastly, absorption characterizes the employee as being so highly concentrated in its work that it is challenging to distinguish between the private and professional life (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Similar to this and Kahn’s (1990) definition, researchers Truss, Soane, and Edwards (2006) describe engagement in three levels. The first one, resembles to dedication, and represents an emotional commitment to one’s work assignments. The second level captures, similar to absorption, a cognitive aspect which means that an employee focus seriously on its work. Finally, the last one is a physical level of engagement which illustrates the ambition to put in extra effort (Truss et al., 2006). Nevertheless, employee engagement is still limited in academic research as most studies have been conducted by consulting firms with practical rather than theoretical implications and contributions (Saks, 2006). Empirical studies about employee engagement I believe, in line with Reissner & Pagan (2013 and Shuck et al. (2011), has neither considered the coworker perspective to larger extent. Rather, most studies have studied employee engagement as a managerial tool in which coworkers are engaged and positively committed (Kalianan & Advjovy, 2015). On the contrary, however, I believe it is crucial to note that multiple global workforce studies conclude that there is a *strong decline* in the number of engaged employees worldwide. For example, Gallup confirmed with its State of the Global Workplace study covering 142 countries, that only 13 percentage of employees worldwide are fully engaged in their job, which is surprisingly a rather low number (Gallup, 2013). According to another survey by Aon covering more than 60 industries including 1000 organizations worldwide and 5 million employee answers between 2015-2016, 24 percentage of the employees were classified “highly engaged” and 39 percentage “moderately engaged” (Aon plc, 2017). As a result, the study confirmed a total score of 63 percentage of employees globally are highly engaged in their work (Aon plc, 2017).

Today, studies have identified multiple key causes to employee engagement such as recognition of work performance, rewards, great work environment and communication climate (Danish, Sidra & Farid, 2013; Miles, 2001; Saks, 2006). Other explanations tend to be great opportunities to communicate opinions upwards, having a committed manager and getting well-informed about the organization (Truss, et al., 2006). Velten et al., (2017) argue that involvement, participation and possibilities to influence with professional competence are key components of engagement and if neglected, passivity and frustration otherwise tend to arise (Velten et al., 2017). At the same time, however, I agree with Verčič & Vokić (2017) and Karanges et al. (2015) that the association between *employee engagement* and *internal com-*

munication has not been covered fully in empirical research except a few cases. Research seems to be lacking a detailed employee-point of-view of this relationship as well (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Internal communication is defined as the various communication processes, interactions and relationships that occur among employees at all levels in an organization (Welch & Jackson, 2007). A few researchers claim that internal communication is needed in order to increase the level employee engagement (Wiley, Kowske & Herman, 2010). For example, Iyer and Israel (2012) argue that internal communication is one of the largest explanations to higher levels of employee engagement, and that organizational communication satisfaction is positively correlated with employee engagement. Welch (2011) also claims that internal communication has a positive impact on employee engagement levels as communication makes it easier to coordinate employees in line with expected organizational goals and values. In similar ways, Karanges et. al (2015) statistically tested the correlation between employee engagement and internal communication in a survey study covering 200 non-managerial Australian employees with different ages, gender, employment length, educational levels, roles, etc. With a linear regression analysis, the researchers have contributed empirical material for the association and have concluded “that internal communication has a significant role to play in optimizing employee engagement” (Karanges et. al, 2015, p. 342). Yet, I argue that the study did not consider for instance how poor internal communication could have a negative impact on employee engagement nor what kind of communication challenges that may follow when employees are encouraged to get engaged about their work and organization. Nevertheless, the study by Karanges et. al (2015) proved that employee engagement can be related to the concept of internal communication from a coworker-point-of view as the survey study actually covered opinions among employees without official managerial titles. Thereby, I argue that it would be beneficial to consider coworkers’ communicative role and coworkership more seriously in relation to employee engagement.

2.2 Coworkership and the communicative roles as team member and co-leader

Coworkership is a relatively new concept that has mostly been used in Scandinavia and captures the essential attitudes and practices coworkers develop with their *colleagues*, *managers* and *organization* as a whole throughout the worklife (Andersson & Tengblad, 2009). According to Tengblad et al. (2007), coworkership expects coworkers to not only show a higher responsibility or stronger learning interest but also to be socially competent, changeable, be

comfortable with information overload, stress and ready to take responsibility for personal development. Put differently, coworkership rejects the traditional notion of organizational members as being followers or passive recipients whom are ready to be informed, motivated, lead, etc. (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). On basis of coworkership, Heide and Simonsson (2011) thus describe organizational members rather “as active *communicators* who formulate messages, make critical interpretations, and influence colleagues, managers and customers” (p. 202). Therefore, it is essential that employees take the role of *team members* around its colleagues who are ready “to engage in dialogue and, to give and take feedback and to share information in a meaningful way” (Heide & Simonsson, 2011, p. 205). As a result, Heide and Simonsson (2018) urge research to include elements such as initiative, cooperation, commitment and responsibility in the definition of coworkership, and relate the concept with employee engagement even stronger than research have done so far. Since of the popularity of social and new ICT-media (e.g. internal blogs, chat forums, etc) in workplaces for examples, lateral dialogues among coworkers has boosted as well (Cox, Martinez & Quilan, 2008). I agree with these researchers that social media can facilitate communication possibilities and transparency with coworkers in other teams and departments (Heide & Simonsson, 2011), but also result in a complex communication structure which in turn can cause tons of frustration and stress between coworkers and managers (Heide, 2002).

The phenomenon of coworkership has arisen from the change from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organizations particularly in Scandinavia (Fairtlough, 2008; Styhre & Lind, 2010; Thompson & McHugh, 2002, Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Møller, 1994; Velten et al., 2017). In these organizations, managers act as visionary *facilitators*, *dialogue partners* and *supporters* striving to enable its coworkers to be independent *co-leaders* (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Tengblad, 2006). Rather than seeing its subordinates as passive receivers of essential organizational information, managers treat its coworkers as “co-producers and active interpreters of both operative and strategic information” (Heide & Simonsson, 2011, p. 205). In addition, Andersson and Tengblad (2009) strive to neglect the line between managers and coworkers and instead view leadership and coworkership as integrated and constructed into each other. Since of this, they claim that coworkers can equally be seen as decision-makers and can develop organizations further (Andersson & Tengblad, 2009). Yet, I argue as Heide and Simonsson (2011) that it does not mean that “the role or position of formal leaders are not relevant or important” (p. 207) in post-bureaucratic organizations. The organizational structure of post-bureaucratic organization is often viewed as flexible and strive to use values, visions and goals as steering devices (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). In addition, there is a high

level of horizontal dialogue and participation between managers and coworkers when making decisions (Kilhammar & Ellström, 2015). Research has claimed that if an organization is knowledge-intensive as well, managerial leadership is less needed since coworkers highly skilled and qualified (Alvesson, 2004; Pearce & Manz, 2005; Von Nordenflycht, 2010). I agree, though, with Bergman, Hultberg and Skagert (2017) as well as Heide & Simonsson (2018) that the understanding of the communicative elements of coworkership and coworker communication is still limited in research and does not seem to have fully considered the CCO approach nor its effect on employee engagement. Moreover, it seems to be relevant in Scandinavian organizations (Hällstén & Tengblad, 2006; Møller, 1994; Velten et al., 2017) and is normally seen from a leader's perspective (Wikström & Dellve, 2009; Heide & Simonsson, 2018).

Although there are still not too many *empirical research* studies about coworkership or the perceptions of the communicative roles *team member* and *co-leader*, there are a few. Kilhammar and Ellström (2015) have studied coworkership in a Scandinavian context, more specifically how it was implemented in practice and how coworkership and its communicative implications was perceived among employees within two Swedish organizations. Particularly, in one State-Owned intensive care unit and one for-profit State-Owned Information Technology (IT) unit). In the former, the employees' perceptions were rather positive or neutral, whereas in the latter the experiences and conceptions were relatively negative (Kilhammar & Ellström, 2015). This was explained by the fact that when implementing the coworkership programme the employees were not involved from an early idea phase and so many were uncertain about the meaning of coworkership and how it affected the internal communication (Kilhammar & Ellström, 2015). Bergman et al. (2017) have also considered the context of health care when studying the conceptions of coworkership among employees with different professions in a Swedish health care organization. Although the study confirmed that “there were some obvious differences in conceptions between professionals, related to conflicts of interest, ability to exert influence [...]” (Bergman et al., 2017, p. 105), it simultaneously concluded that a well-functioning communication climate is essential for coworkership and to act and communicate as team members and co-leaders. Particularly, in order to speak up, promote trust, improve cooperation between managers and coworkers with various professional roles and enhance professional relationships (Bergman et al., 2017).

In another research project, “The Communicative Organization” (Heide et al., 2018) covering eleven Swedish public and private sector organizations, the communicative roles as team members and co-leaders were highlighted as well as coworkers' reflections of their

communicative expectations and demands. The study showed in quantitative terms that coworkers particularly were positive about taking the role as communicative team member and co-leader and thus create open communication climate (Heide et al., 2018). In the conducted survey, 94 percentage of respondents agreed with the phrase “I can contribute to create good dialogue in my group work” (Heide et al., 2018, p. 462). Additionally, 85 percentage admitted that “I often give feedback to my colleagues” (p. 462). I believe their research project also gave great examples of how being a team member in multinational manufacturing company with decentralized structures can be expressed. Particularly with this quote shared by an interviewee: “If there is a problem, something wrong, I just call this guy right away and we sort it out. I have never needed to involve a superior in resolving our everyday issues or problems” (Heide et al., 2018, p. 462). In line with this Heide et al. (2018) concluded that by allowing interpersonal dialogue and employee voices to be heard, it makes it easier to learn and improve engagement among coworkers.

Despite a small amount of empirical studies covering coworkership and coworker communication, I argue that the research in general has not considered coworkers’ communicative roles as team members or co-leaders nor various employees’ perceptions of it to larger extent in *qualitative research* nor in the *knowledge-intensive context* of a corporate incubator for instance. In general, research has been unable to explain how coworker communication produces and constitutes employee engagement in more complex ways, and how engagement strengthens and contributes back to communication from a coworker-perspective. Simultaneously, I think it is critical to acknowledge that since research has just started to capture coworkers’ perceptions of their communicative *team member* role with their colleagues and *co-leading* role with their managers in organizations, it is as crucial to consider their perceptions of the communicative role in relation to *external* stakeholder as well in order to capture the full complexity of communication and engagement. That is, being a communicative *ambassador* for the organization.

2.3 Ambassadorship and the communicative role as ambassador

According to research by Heide and Simonsson (2011), organizational members nowadays start to take the role as being reliable ambassadors of their organization both in professional as well as private contexts (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). As a result, coworkers are more often required to “live the brand” and act in alignment with the organization's values (Karmark, 2005). Ambassadorship is a concept that captures the employee’s ability to separate backstage

and frontstage behavior (Heide et al., 2018). In particular, ambassadorship represents employee communication with external constituencies and is foremost key for brand positioning (Mazzei & Quarantino, 2017). Falkheimer and Heide (2007) claim that one prerequisite for successful ambassadorship, however, is that there must be clear linkages between strategic visions, work and communication. Ambassadorship also requires reliable and regular internal communication in the organization so trustful internal relationships among managers and coworkers can be developed (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011). In particular, research has shown that listening, openness, participation and feedback are key components in internal communication that inspire coworkers to identify themselves as ambassadors (Mazzei, 2014).

Sirianni, Bitner, Brown and Mandel (2013) have shown that when coworkers take the role as a communicative ambassador and expresses brand ambassadorship behaviors that are adjusted to the organization's brand positioning, it can result in brand equity and brand-building advantage. Thereby, it is actually proven that stakeholders' perceptions of organizations more often get influenced by coworkers' communication rather than PR and marketing campaigns (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). In agreement with this, Heide et al. (2018) concluded that employees who take ambassadorship seriously "contribute to organizational reputation and trust in a multitude of microprocessors, meetings and interactions that feed directly into strategic assets such as reputation, brand, and relationships with external stakeholders" (Heide et al., 2018, p. 463). In addition, a survey in this research project concluded that coworkers in Swedish public and private sector organizations are often likely to perceive themselves as ambassadors (Heide et al., 2018). In particular, it was showed that 65 percentage of the responding coworkers admitted that they normally express great things about the organization, and 77 percentage of them strive to correct false rumors about their organization (Heide et al., 2018). At the same time, the research project claimed that ambassadorship is perceived in very different ways. One of the interviewees, for example, always tries to remember the role as an ambassador every time when the phone is calling, whereas another interviewee underlined the importance to represent the entire organization when communicating with external stakeholders (Heide et al., 2018). Despite these figures and findings, I think it is important to critically stress that these research studies have still neither studied ambassadorship in relationship with employee engagement in *qualitative terms*, nor the knowledge-intensive context as a corporate incubator, nor taken a CCO approach seriously – meaning how being an ambassador and its communication could produce a strong or weak engagement, nor how the produced engagement "contributes back" to the ambassador's communication with external stakeholders for that matter.

Furthermore, I think it is important to understand that although coworkers can take the communicative role of ambassadors and contribute value to its organizations, it is likely, which Heide et al. (2018) also have showed with research, that the same members could paradoxically do the opposite and harm the organizational reputation. Their research (2018) has explained that if organizations encounter for instance turbulent times, competitive markets, decline in profits, a major crisis, etc. and need to make major reforms, it is likely to affect employees in negative ways and make them be either silent, or eager to raise their critical voices. Put differently, act as a “reversed ambassador” ready to damage the organizational reputation internally as well as externally (Heide et al., 2018). Yet, I believe that the study did not consider how these attributes would relate to the ambassadors’ engagement level (in particular passive or fully disengaged levels for instance). Moreover, previous studies have considered that organizations cannot expect all employees in the organization to act and communicate as brand ambassadors either. King and Grace (2009) claim that acting as an ambassador requires, amongst others, the employee to have abilities to turn a brand promise into reality and is comfortable in a role of communicating a brand promise externally. Xiong, King and Piehler (2013), Zerfass and Franke (2013) and Heide and Simonsson (2011) therefore claim it is important to provide training and internal coaching for its employees in order to develop confident brand behaviors, attitudes and communication skills.

2.4 Synthesis

To conclude, there seems to be identical gaps in empirical research about employee engagement, coworkership and ambassadorship and its relations to communication altogether. A coworker-centered focus has not been covered as seriously as the managerial or leader perspective for instance (not even in a knowledge-intensive context like a corporate incubator) nor its underlying communication challenges although an interest for coworkers as team members, co-leaders and ambassadors and perceptions of these roles has started to arise in organizational studies and strategic communication research (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Heide et al., 2018). Empirical research in these fields has generally neither covered how employee engagement is constituted or produced in communication processes nor how engagement is a producer of communication simultaneously. For example, how being a poor communicative team member towards colleagues, or being an average co-leader towards managers, or an ambitious ambassador towards external stakeholders, is perceived and could be an essential and constitutive part of the expressed engagement. All in all, previous research in

these fields has not considered a CCO approach (communication constitutes organizations) to larger extent, and embraced the complexity, paradoxes and challenges that may be perceived by coworkers as engaged team members, co-leaders and ambassadors. Hence, this chapter demonstrates that CCO needs to be considered more seriously in favor for both practitioners and researchers to improve coworkers' communication conditions in practice as well as academic research about coworker communication internally and externally. In the following chapter, the CCO approach and its metatheoretical foundations are therefore presented.

3. Theory

In the following chapter, I will begin by presenting the theoretical CCO approach and give a brief description of its three major schools of thoughts. Thereafter, its metatheoretical standpoints will be introduced in relation to employee engagement which will be of particular interest for this qualitative case study. In detail, “the alternative perspective of employee engagement” inspired by CCO will be described since it will be used as a main theoretical frame for the upcoming analysis of coworkers’ perceptions of their communicative roles, its following communication challenges, and conclusively how employee engagement is a product and producer of communication processes between coworkers and coworkers, managers and external stakeholders.

3.1 CCO – Communication constitutes organization

The CCO (Communication constitutes organization) approach is a theoretical compilation of perspectives that underline the establishing role of communication in organizations (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). The approach has been developed in the interdisciplinary area of organizational studies (Putnam & Nicotera, 2008). The CCO perspective does not argue that organization and communication are equivalent nor does thereby it strive to reduce organizations to social interaction, language, etc. Instead, the purpose with CCO is to “address how complex processes constitute both organizing and organization and how these processes and outcomes reflexively shape communication” (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010, p. 159). Thereby, CCO claims that the social and organizational context is produced and reproduced in communication and interaction (Cooren, Matte, Benoit-Barné, & Brummans, 2013). Unlike similar theoretical frameworks, CCO aims to question *idealized* illustrations of organizations (2010). The idea of CCO originally comes from Weick's organizing theory and sense-making processes, “How can I know what I think until I see what I say”? (Weick, 1979, p. 133), meaning that organization is a result of the communication and not its predecessor (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). Unlike traditional research that treats organizations as *static entities* where information is sent

top-down, CCO distinguishes an organization between an *entity* and *process*. The process-angle claims that the organization is always in a constant course of *becoming*, and the entity-angle rather describes what the organizations finally turn to *be* (Cooren et al., 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2010; Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009).

Today, CCO scholarship consists of three growing schools of thought (Schoeneborn & Vasques, 2017). The first is named the *Montreal School of CCO* and draws a lot of attention to linguistic elements such as conversations, speeches, narratives, texts, etc., and acknowledges that conventions and rules of conversations form roles and status in organizations (Schoeneborn & Vasques, 2017). James R. Taylor is considered to be the founder of the perspective and claims that communication which is formed as text and conversation, constitutes organizations as it involves processes of meaning negotiation (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). The Montreal perspective also acknowledges that; besides humans, materiality plays an essential role in communicative constitutions of organizations. In particular, Latour (1993) and Cooren (2010) claim it is crucial to distinguish between human and non-human entities in their contribution to how communication enacts organizations, and that different kinds of agency have major impact of interactions.

The second school is called the *Four Flows theory* and underline that organizations are enacted in over four various kinds of communication processes (McPhee & Zaugg, 2000). Firstly, *membership negotiation* captures the communication relationships between individual members (in particular newcomers) which consequently constitutes the organization. *Self-structuring* highlights the self-reflective interactions among organizational members and facilitate them to be a part of the organization and develop collective continuity. *Activity coordination* represents communication processes that are adapted to certain organizational expectations and demands, and regards the negotiations members have about roles and tasks. Finally, *institutional positioning* embodies the interactions members have in relation to the external stakeholders or organizations. It stresses in what ways the communication processes can help the organization to get appropriately defined and set in an institutional environment (McPhee & Zaugg, 2000; Schoeneborn & Vasques, 2017).

The third and last school is defined the *Social Systems Theory* approach and considers that organizations are constituted as social systems through circular and linked forms of communication (Luhmann, 2003; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen & Clark, 2011; Kuhn, 2012; Schoeneborn & Vasques, 2017). More importantly, this school claims that organizations take different shapes of social systems depending on if the interactions take place at a detailed micro-level or a larger macro-level (Luhmann, 2003; Schoeneborn & Vasques, 2017).

3.2 The metatheoretical standpoints from the CCO perspective

Although the three major schools of CCO capture a broad, nuanced and complexed image of how communication constitutes organizations, the approaches do not cover CCO research entirely. According to Ashcraft et al. (2009), CCO scholarship is so broad that can it be studied in implicit ways where the initial aim is *not* necessary to consider how the *organization* is constituted by communication. As matter as fact, research by for instance Putnam and Nico-tera (2009), Bisel (2010), Heide and Simonsson (2018) and Heide et. al (2018) have all taken a metatheoretical approach to CCO – meaning that rather than focusing on a specific school they touch upon certain *core assumptions* of the CCO instead. The reason being is, amongst others, to develop further theoretical implications and add “an important layer of reflection to the ontological assumptions underlying CCO scholarship” (Schoeneborn & Vasques, 2017, p. 9). In other terms, a metatheory assists the researcher to know how, when and where CCO perspective for instance applies in general, and has certain assumptions of the world and how elements interact in it. In this qualitative study, particularly, I agree with the previous mentioned researchers and intend to take a metatheoretical standpoint from CCO as well. In the following section, one of the recent metatheoretical standpoints that relate to employee engagement will be described.

3.2.1 An alternative perspective of employee engagement inspired by CCO

A traditional and *dominant perspective* of employee engagement normally sees communication as a transmission between sender and receiver, and handles engagement with a functionalistic management perspective and considers its psychological characteristics. Also, it views organizations as physical static entities (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). Additionally, the dominant perspective strives to uncover other explanatory factors than communication that strengthens employee engagement and enable organizations to progress as entities (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). Recently, however, a theoretical *alternative perspective* of employee engagement has been developed by Mats Heide and Charlotte Simonsson (2018) that treats communication and engagement with a coworker-centered focus as it is based on metatheoretical CCO standpoints. In this particular case study, the CCO metatheoretical perspective of engagement will mostly be used as an indirect guided theoretical frame rather than the three major schools of thoughts.

3.2.2 Communication both as a producer and a product of engagement

According to Heide and Simonsson (2018), the CCO metatheoretical standpoint does not treat communication as a simple variable that impacts engagement, but instead as a fundamental component of engagement. More importantly, these researchers claim the alternative perspective views communication as “both a producer and product of engagement – communication is vital in constituting engagement, but engagement is also enacted in communication” (Heide & Simonsson, 2018, p. 209). In line with this, it is concluded that in order to keep dialogues going, engagement works as an essential requisite (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Heide and Simonsson (2018) also argue that engagement is developed in a process in which the employees take the role as a dialogue partner or communicator. As an effect, it is crucial to consider “the communicative expression or enact of engagement” Heide and Simonsson (2018, p. 210) claim, which this case study in particular intend to do with the context of a corporate incubator and hopefully provide insightful research in this matter. Another important factor to note is that the alternative perspective considers that engaged coworkers take *different communicative roles* on daily basis, such as assisting colleagues, problem-solvers, ambassadors, etc., and this may have different implications on their engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018).

Since of the various roles, the alternative perspective claims that even if coworkers are engaged they may not necessarily be engaged in ways that align with managerial preferences. In fact, the alternative perspective inspired by CCO underlines that employee engagement can be “expressed as *resistance* toward various initiatives from the management [...] as involvement and sympathy with colleagues being seen as badly treated” (Heide & Simonsson, 2018, p. 210). Contrary to the dominant perspective, the alternative CCO perspective therefore rejects organizations as one-sided entities and rather allows a *plurality* of opinions, thoughts, interests and goals among its organizational members as these consequently could be products as well as be producers of employee engagement (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004; Heide & Simonsson, 2018).

3.2.3 Organizations constituted in communication are multivocal and complex

As implied in the previous section, the alternative perspective of employee engagement embraces a coworker-centered focus and thus allows that organizations are multivocal and polyphonic (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). In other terms, this means that organizations are produced and reproduced in and by communication activities and interactions of all organizational members (Cooren et al., 2013; Kopaneva & Sias, 2015). As a consequence, coworkers in

particular are considered as *active agents* whom together in various scenarios interact and communicate which in turn enacts and constitutes engagement in the organization (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). This fundamental reasoning is explained to be inspired by the researcher named Taylor (2009), founder of the Montreal School of CCO, who claims that organizations is constituted from the *bottom-up* instead of *top-down*. In similar ways, Christensen, Morsning and Cheney (2008) state that organizations and its corporate communication should be treated as a *polyphony* with various voices of its members and be built on *strategic ambiguity*, *complexity* and *challenges* since it easier “allows for different ideas and identities to co-exist within the confines of the organizational unit (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 217).

Since organizations are multivocal and handled from the bottom-up according to the alternative perspective, Heide and Simonsson (2018) also suggest that organizations should be seen as “complex, rather messy entities, anything but easy to control and manage” (p. 211). In order to handle this complexity, the alternative perspective thus embraces paradoxes, challenges, tensions and conflict as it helps organizations to be aware of these and to tackle them efficiently (Ashcraft & Trethewey, 2004; Heide & Simonsson, 2015; Heide & Simonsson, 2018). According to Lewis (2000), it is important to understand that *paradoxical tensions* and *challenges* illustrates both the front and back of the *same coin* – on one hand it shows the dark side of a concept like engagement for instance, but on the other side it displays a more truthful reality which may actually be needed in order to solve the tensions and conflicts at the end. Thereby, the alternative perspective considers the arising tensions, paradoxes and challenges in relation to employee engagement and communication from a coworker point-of-view seriously (Heide & Simonsson, 2018).

	<i>The dominant perspective</i>	<i>The alternative perspective inspired by CCO</i>
Ideology and Philosophy of science	Functionalistic, Management-centered	Coworker-centered Pluralist view of goals and interests
View of organization	Organizations as physical entities, characterized by order and rationality	Organizations as constituted in communication, characterized by ambiguity, complexity, and tensions
View of communication	Communication as transmission of existing ideas	Communication as constitutive of social reality
View of engagement	Engagement as a psychological state or trait	Engagement as communicative enactment
View of the relation communication-engagement	Communication as one of many, separate variables driving employee engagement	Communication as an integral aspect of engagement - communication is both a producer and a product of engagement

Table 1: A comparison of two theoretical perspectives of employee engagement (Modified and clarified version of a model by Heide & Simonsson, 2018, p. 207)

3.3 Reflections

The aim of this chapter was to present CCO approach (Communication constitutes organization) and clarify that it is a theoretical compilation of different perspectives (rather than a hands-on theoretical framework) that underline the establishing role of communication in organizations. As it is already quite common to take a metatheoretical standpoint of CCO, meaning to relate certain core assumptions of the CCO instead of applying a certain school, I argue to do the same and in particular ground the study about the corporate incubator on the CCO inspired alternative perspective of employee engagement. I argue it is important to use this perspective in this study as it can enable me to develop a deeper understanding of how engagement is both a product and producer of communication and has thus an essential constitutive part to play in coworkers' communicative roles. As the CCO-perspective treats organization "as being polyphonic or multivocal" (Heide et al., 2018, p. 456), it allows for a pluralist approach of meeting different interests and captures the complexity of enactment of engagement which could be useful for acknowledging the paradoxes, challenges as well as the tensions from a coworker perspective. Also, it facilitates me to view organizations as *complex*

and ambiguous entities rather than static ones, which goes well in hand with the chosen social constructionist epistemology. By using this theoretical perspective, it is more manageable to relate the complexity of engagement to the various communication processes between coworkers-coworkers, coworkers-managers and coworkers-external stakeholders.

Next, the research design, methodology and data collection strategy of this qualitative study, amongst others, are presented.

4. Methodology and Research design

This study has been conducted with a *qualitative* methodology approach as the research purposes were to describe and analyze coworkers' perceptions of their different communicative roles, its challenges, and understand how employee engagement are products and producers of these communication processes in the context of a corporate incubator. In particular, social constructionism has been used as an epistemological and ontological viewpoint since it acknowledges that roles, engagement and processes are socially constructed phenomenon rather than concepts established by nature (Hibberd, 2005). In the following chapter, I will firstly describe the ontological and epistemological approach of the study and then continue with a presentation of the research method, selection of the case organization, description of case organization, interview proceedings and reflections, analytical process and lastly a discussion of ethical considerations.

4.1 Social constructionism

In this thesis, the selected epistemology and ontology is *social constructionism* as the research study focuses on participants' subjective interpretations and perceptions (Gergen, 2009). Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge that strives to critically question our taken-for-granted assumptions of the world and ourselves (Burr, 1995; Burr, 2003; Czarniawska, 2003). Unlike positivism in traditional science, it takes a critical stance towards objective and unbiased observations, and claims that our understanding of the world rather exists in all sorts of social interactions and communication between people (Burr, 2003). Social constructionists view everyday interaction between people as practices that construct shared understandings of knowledge. In other terms, it claims that human beings together create and construct social reality through social practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Therefore, social constructionism treats organizations not as stable entities but as constant changing processes (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009). I argue that social constructionism was relevant for this study as it enabled the possibility to reflect upon how coworkers perceived their social interaction processes between other coworkers, managers and external stakeholders. More importantly, it captured how

these interactions construct the *reality* and communicative *roles* they experience in the corporate incubator. In agreement with conclusions by Berger and Luckmann (1991) and Weinberg (2014), the social constructionist perspective also enabled me as a researcher to reflect upon *what meaning* the communicative roles had to the coworkers and their experiences of the communication challenges, and how their engagement as employees was both a product and producer of the interactions in between.

Although I gained essential insights by studying coworkers' perceptions with a social constructionist perspective, I am aware of Alvesson's and Sköldbberg's (2008) remarks that empirical material can be interpreted and perceived from various point of views. That being said, I want to admit that the coworker perspective as such is not "the correct perspective" or "the only perspective" that captures the actual reality by any mean. My aim was not to study an *objective reality* or truth, but rather to describe coworkers' communicative roles, its communication challenges, and analyze how employee engagement is enacted and constituted in communication from *one specific hierarchical level* in a knowledge-intensive corporate incubator. As such, it is likely that the captured perceptions of the social reality and gained knowledge about communicative roles and engagement may not *fully* represent employees in other hierarchical levels, or coworkers for that matter in other kinds of units, departments, organizations, industries or countries. Since social constructionism criticizes taken-for-granted assumptions of the world (Burr, 1995; Burr, 2003; Czarniawska, 2003), I believe that the viewpoint not only helped me to understand how the coworkers constructed their reality and communicative roles in social interactions throughout the interviews in the incubator and its challenges, but also how these social interactions were the result and creator of employee engagement from a coworker perspective. It was important to combine the epistemological viewpoint together with alternative theoretical perspective inspired by CCO, whose ideology is in fact *grounded* on social constructionism (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), as it enabled me to critically analyze the otherwise simplified linear relationship between communication and engagement, in socially constructed complexed ways, e.g. how communication socially constructs employee engagement, and how the latter constructs and strengthens the former.

4.2 Case study

This qualitative research has been conducted as a *case study*, which means "to gather "comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 447). In detail, I would like to argue that the research has been performed as a *qualitative sin-*

gle case study (Eisenhardt, 1989). The reason being is because the study is narrowed particularly to various coworkers in *one* incorporate incubator, which is used as a contextual case, part of a knowledge-intensive organization in Sweden. To be clear, I argue that this research is *not* a case study about a corporate incubator as such, but rather about coworkers' perceptions of internal and external communication and its challenges as well as its engagement in the contextual setting of a corporate incubator. Normally, qualitative case studies are preferred when the researcher aims to develop a deeper and detailed understanding of organizational members' perceptions within a certain context and focuses on a smaller number of units (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). Also, a case study involves various analytical levels within the same case capturing a holistic image (Eisenhardt, 1989). Since I strived to capture coworkers' *perceptions* and *experiences* of their communicative roles in the particular context of *one* corporate incubator and more importantly on *multiple levels* (in relation to other coworkers, managers and external stakeholders, and not at least it challenges), I argue this research *is* a case study even if the research strategy tends to get overused nowadays (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). Please see [Appendix 2.1](#) for further details of why the case study approach was selected.

4.3 Selection of case organization

I have used *purposeful sampling* (Suri, 2011) as a technique to select an organization and to get deeper insights of how coworkers perceive their communicative roles, its communication challenges and how employee engagement is a product and producer of communication processes. In detail, this type of sampling "requires access to key informants in the field who can help in identifying information-rich cases" (Suri, 2011, p. 66). As the study strived to capture a coworker-point-of-view in a corporate incubator, I particularly chose a specific type of purposive sampling called *criterion sampling* (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). Patton (2002) states that this sampling "involves reviewing and studying all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (p. 238). As such, I used the following criteria when selecting the organization for the case study; (1) has knowledge-intensive characteristics (2) is set in Scandinavia (3) prioritizes post-bureaucracy, e.g. uses in general values, visions and goals as steering devices rather than hierarchical rules and orders in general (4) uses a flexible and loose organizational structure (5) puts emphasis on coworkers without managerial responsibilities, their performance and communication (6) its coworkers variates in professional backgrounds, roles, different employment lengths, educational and cultural backgrounds, nationalities, ages,

gender, etc. These criteria facilitated me to get in contact with a corporate incubator part of knowledge-intensive organization set in Sweden which contained several information-rich cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006) that fitted the purpose of the study well.

4.4 A description of the case organization

A corporate incubator part of a knowledge-intensive organization set in Sweden was targeted for this qualitative single case study. After contacting a senior manager named “Kim”, working in the knowledge-intensive organization (Kim is named something else in reality), I eventually got access to the corporate incubator in the organization. Please see [Appendix 2.2](#) for more details about the gained access. In general, corporate incubators exist in large corporations to boost R&D innovative capabilities and thereby gain new business opportunities (Gassman & Becker, 2006). The targeted corporate incubator was founded in 2015, and is an organizational unit of a large multinational knowledge-intensive technology corporation. The corporate incubator accepted to be chosen as a target case for the study on the condition that both its official name and its corporation would be anonymous. Simply put, the incubator consists of multiple teams that are either research-, technology- or business-driven, that aim to foster innovation beyond the traditional portfolio of consumer electronics. In other terms, the incubator’s mission is to establish a foundation for the larger organization’s business beyond its existing products, that is consumer electronics. In particular, the corporate incubator aims to foster a learning and innovative environment similar to an entrepreneurial startup mentality, and strives to incubate new businesses and technologies within smart new solutions. The corporate incubator consists of approximately 100 employees with various professional backgrounds, titles, roles (such as engineers, researchers, marketers, sales specialists, designers, etc.), different employment lengths, different educational and cultural backgrounds, nationalities, ages, gender, etc.

It is important to understand that as the qualitative study and the following semi-structured interviews were conducted, the knowledge-intensive organization made several major organizational changes. This in turn, impacted its corporate incubator in critical ways. Since decline in sales and business growth, several coworkers in the corporate incubator were informed with unexpected notice of termination. I agree with Heide’s and Simonsson’s (2014) conclusions about that organizations need to be seen as “moving targets” (p. 221) when conducting case studies during longer time – in my case interviewing for five weeks, and that certain adaptations needs to be presented in the research and may have an effect on the quality

of the research. Because of this, I argue that the organizational changes and its impact on the corporate incubator could be a minor contextual detail to consider when reading the following findings and analysis. I would like to clarify, however, that all of the interviewed coworkers were still employed in the corporate incubator as the study took place – meaning they were not informed with any unexpected termination. Also, I made sure to ask the interviewees to give answers and examples based on *previous* experiences and perceptions throughout a longer time period rather than recent ones affected by the organizational changes. Nevertheless, I argue it is impossible to avoid bias caused by the organizational changes fully.

4.5 Interview proceedings

In order to collect empirical material of how coworkers perceive their communicative roles, its challenges as well as how employee engagement is enacted in communication, I used *qualitative interviews* as a primary data collection method. Reason being that these interviews put a larger interest in the interviewee's viewpoint (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and gave me an in-depth understanding of the coworkers' perceptions. Still, it is important to note that in qualitative interviews the interviewees and the researcher collectively construct new knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In order to get clear and insightful answers from the interviewees I prepared an *interview guide* (Patton, 2002; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) in advance. The entire guide is found in [Appendix 5](#). Initially, the interview guide was tested on two coworkers whom both worked in the corporate incubator, but were not included as empirical material in the following analysis. The interview guide was structured in three major areas of interests which in turn were divided into three subparts based on the literature review and the theoretical framework. These were, *Being*; (1) *a team member to your coworkers*, (2) *a co-leader to your managers* and (3) *an ambassador of your organization*. The section for each communicative role was then divided in (1) *perceptions of the communication and the role* (2) *perceived engagement regarding each communicative role* (3) *communication challenges in regards to the covered role*. Although I structured the interviews as mentioned, I did not follow exactly same order of the questions for each role. Rather, I gave room for flexibility and followed up with the detail questions based on the responses the interviewees gave, and went thereby back and forward with an iterative-inductive approach to capture relevant empirical material for the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Flick, 2009).

Since *explorative* and *semi-structured interviews* (Flick, 2009; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) were conducted, I interviewed the coworkers in flexible ways with open-ended ques-

tions and in a familiar setting – regular meeting rooms in the building of the knowledge-intensive organization in Sweden – trying to create a comfortable atmosphere (Patton, 2002). All in all, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted through five weeks with coworkers spread out among multiple teams in the corporate incubator. Please see Table 2 for further information about the sample, and [Appendix 2.3](#) for details about selection criteria of interviewees. A total of nine engineers (software, hardware, research), one project handler, three marketers, one designer, one sales specialist in various ages, gender, nationalities, educational backgrounds (Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctoral degrees), and employment length without any official managerial responsibilities, were interviewed in the incubator. In agreement with Kim, I argue this sample size captured a representative image of the employees in the incubator – a clear majority of engineers for sure. The interviews lasted between 51–73 minutes and were audio-recorded with three different microphones as I had technical difficulties with one microphone during the first interviews. In agreement with the “live interview situation” (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 155), I argue that meeting each interviewee in person enabled me as an interviewer to grasp upon “the interviewee’s voices and facial and bodily expressions accompanying the statements” (p. 156) more easily than if the interviews would have been conducted through online platforms for instance. For more details about the qualitative interviews please see [Appendix 2.4](#).

Job title among interviewed coworkers	Employment length	Interview length
Engineer #1	Short	54 minutes
Engineer #2	Long	52 minutes
Engineer #3	Long	51 minutes
Project Handler #1	Long	58 minutes
Engineer #4	Long	65 minutes
Engineer #5	Short	66 minutes
Engineer #6	Middle	70 minutes
Marketer #1	Middle	73 minutes
Engineer #7	Long	68 minutes
Designer #1	Middle	59 minutes
Marketer #2	Short	67 minutes
Marketer #3	Short	66 minutes
Engineer #8	Short	59 minutes
Sales Specialist #1	Short	57 minutes
Engineer #9	Long	54 minutes

Table 2: An overview of interview sample. In particular, short means having 0-2 years’ experience in the incubator and the organization altogether, medium 3-7 years’ and long 8 years’ or more.

4.6 Interview reflections

While interviewing, I believe the coworkers at times had difficulties understanding the analytical questions about for instance how engagement “contributed back” to their communication or the definition of “co-leader” and “engagement”. In those scenarios, I tried to give general hints rather than in-depth descriptions of the concepts since it probably would otherwise steer their answers and perceptions in too biased ways, I believe. Also, it was challenging to get detailed answers from the interviewees as I covered three major communicative roles and did not have the time to go into depth among all. Another reason was because a few questions involved scenarios which were either too confidential or identifiable, I guess. Thereby, some interviewees got occasionally rather general in their replies. I believe these challenges certainly impacted the quality and accuracy of the empirical material to some minor extent. But since 15 in-depth interviews were conducted targeting only one hierarchical level, I still got a lot of well-articulated and in-depth answers to cover with. Therefore, the quality of this empirical material is solid and would outbeat responses in a quantitative survey study for instance in terms of depth and breadth.

Using the social constructionism viewpoint impacted the interview proceeding in various ways too, I argue. For instance, I knew that I could easily shift from being a researcher to a co-producer of the experiences and perceptions that were shared if certain questions were asked or with a certain tone. Hence, I made it clear already from the beginning of the interviews (even in the information sheet, see [Appendix 3](#)) that my role as researcher was separated from any other professional roles in order to avoid bias, that the questions would be of open-ended character, and that interviews took place in a familiar setting for the interviewees.

4.7 Analytical process

In this study, an *abductive* approach was chosen when the empirical material was coded for the following qualitative *thematic analysis* (Eksell & Thelander, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thematic analysis is frequently used for analysis of qualitative empirical material although it lacks descriptions of how it is conducted properly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The abductive approach, which is combination of deductive and inductive reasoning (Bryman & Bell, 2011), was selected as semi-structured interviews were held. These were firstly categorized on existing concepts and theories beforehand about the communicative roles and the alternative perspective of employee engagement which thereby aligns to the *deductive* approach. Deductive research conceives from existing theory and deduce hypotheses which are empirically tested

and then used to re-formulate the theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Yet, at the same time, I aimed to highlight and identify, in line with thematic analysis, additional new categories, themes and patterns of the communicative roles, its challenges and employee engagement as the empirical material was collected and analyzed which supports *inductive* approach too. Inductive reasoning aims to develop theory rather than test it, and is a rather iterative – meaning going back and forward between data and theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this study, I applied the alternative perspective of employee engagement inspired by CCO (Heide & Simonsson, 2018) on an empirical case not for testing purposes but rather as a theoretical lens. As a result, I developed the alternative perspective further with five school of thoughts (see illustrations in [Appendix 1](#)).

Moreover, I transcribed and analyzed each interview and structured the field notes as soon the they were conducted as it facilitated the analysis to proceed (Silverman, 2017; Eksell & Thelander, 2014). In line with this, I tried to make sense of all collected data by initially sorting and coding it carefully (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In particular, I sorted all field notes and interview transcripts in to a “team member”, “co-leader” and “ambassador” category. Thereafter, based on each individual coworker’s perceptions and interpretations of their communicative roles and challenges as well as their expressed engagement, quotes and field notes were clustered into various themes and subcategories as the thematic analysis evolved (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the same time, I coded and deconstructed the data by constantly looking for relevant meanings, intentions and patterns like “strong” or “weak engagement”, “lengthy” or “limited” communication (cf. Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I started to sketch the illustrations of the findings, in [Appendix 1](#), at this early point as well. Initially, I conducted *open coding* which is “the process of breaking down, examining [...] and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Thereafter, I did *focused coding*, meaning identifying “the most frequent or significant initial codes” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 264) after reading through all transcripts. Moreover, I am aware of that it would be essential to let another researcher study and analyze identified codes and patterns, but because of a narrowed time limit, I did not have opportunity to do this. Instead, I let myself take longer pauses between the first, second and third evaluation of the codes. The beginning of the analysis in this thesis will be relatively *descriptive* and *explanatory* to set the stage, meaning describing coworkers’ perceptions of their communicative roles. Based on given responses and quotes, the analysis will then change to a more *critical and analytical* tone capturing the arising communication challenges, paradoxes and how communication and employee engagement are integrated within all roles.

4.7.1 Translations

The majority of the interviews were held in Swedish. As a consequence, I kept most transcriptions in Swedish in order to maintain the original meaning of the provided answers. When insightful quotes were selected for the analysis, I translated them from Swedish to English. Although translations might involve challenges such as certain words may have a different definitions and meanings in other languages and cannot be translated word-by-word, it was important to allow the interviewees (who mostly were Swedish) to respond in the Swedish language as it enabled a natural flow in their answers. To tackle any potential translation challenges, I made sure (1) to repeat given responses in general to the interviewees while interviewing, and (2) to control selected and translated quotes by providing the interviewees original and translated versions when analyzing the empirical material.

4.8 Ethical considerations

As the interviews were conducted in the corporate incubator, several *ethical aspects* were considered seriously. Firstly, it is likely that an interview for instance may impact the interviewees' opinion of the organization (Patton 2002; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). For that reason, I made it clear at an early stage for the interviewees what the qualitative case study was about, its aim, its potential theoretical as well as practical contributions and whom would eventually have access to it. Also, I reassured the interviews to keep them *anonymous*, meaning not revealing their names or specific titles, the name of organization they worked for nor the dates the interviewees were conducted. In detail, I clarified this in a section named "Ethical Concerns" part of the provided information sheet beforehand (see [Appendix 3](#)). In the information sheet, I also assured the interviewees that the interview would consist of using open-ended questions and focus on experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, I made sure to conduct the interviews in meeting rooms far away from area where the corporate incubator operated in the building to avoid any risk of revealing the interviewees' identities in person.

Additionally, I explained both in the information sheet and right before the interviews started, that each interview would be audio-recorded for transcription purposes and that I would be the only one who had access to these files. All interviewees agreed to be audio-recorded. Furthermore, I asked each interviewee to read and sign a "consent form" right before the interview started (see [Appendix 4](#)). This form clarified that both confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, that the participation was voluntary and that certain question could be avoided if needed and that the given responses would be analyzed and likely be a

part of the analysis for this study. By offering a consent form and treating anonymity seriously, made the interviewed coworkers more comfortable sharing truthful and honest answers, I believe. Finally, I made sure to send every interviewee a transcript covering the recorded interview after it was conducted. I offered all interviewees a two-week time period to review, edit and make changes of the provided material and then resend it to me. In addition, I believe it was necessary to consider “respondent validation” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 396) when capturing the differences between experiences and perceptions and especially the risk of altering, hiding, or censoring certain information. In this qualitative case study, the alterations involved for example protecting names of persons, projects, classified features or solutions, etc. Yet, I am rather positive that these alterations did not affect the true meaning of the provided answers.

All in all, this chapter described the research design and research methodology, the data collection strategy as well as the analytical process and ethical reflections. Next, the findings and analysis of the study will be presented.

5. Findings and Analysis

In the following chapter, findings and analysis are presented of how coworkers perceive their communicative roles to their colleagues as team members, managers as co-leaders and external stakeholders as ambassadors, its communication challenges and most importantly, how the coworkers' engagement are products and producers of the communication processes. The analysis is divided into these three roles, and each subpart contains three to four identified themes whose headlines summarize its main findings. The results indicated that communication and engagement take *complex* turns shaped like *spirals*. The main conclusions are summarized as illustrations for the curious reader found in [Appendix 1](#). For the sake of convenience, the *directing arrows* of the spirals are described from the engagement view but should not be seen as quantitative charts. The spirals are complex schools of thoughts capturing the most essential findings and can be seen as extensions to the alternative perspective inspired by CCO (Heide & Simonsson, 2018).

5.1 Coworkers as *team members* to their colleagues

In this section, the first role of being a team member is covered. It includes four different subsections about various perceptions of the role, its challenges, tensions, paradoxes as well as how engagement is a product and producer of the team member's communication processes.

5.1.1 *Being an engaged dialogue and debate partner*

As stated in the literature review, organizational members are today more seen as an important communicative function in post-bureaucratic organizations and communicate amongst others, as team members in relation to other coworkers more often (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). When interviewing coworkers within various teams in the incubator about this role, it became somewhat clear that the face-to-face as well as digital communication with other team

members appeared to be horizontal, informal and regular. The reasons being that they normally sit closely to each other in small teams and use internal social platforms like Slack, Riot or email when necessary. These findings support previous research that ICT-media facilitates lateral dialogues (Cox, et al., 2008), and that coworkers can contribute to create good dialogue in teams and sharing information in meaningful ways (Heide et al. 2018; Heide & Simonsson, 2011). As a consequence, the coworkers identified themselves as *team members* being ready to be socially competent, take personal responsibility and show learning interests (cf. Tengblad et al., 2007). The following quote summarizes how one interviewee perceived the team member role as a *dialogue* rather than debate partner;

There is no one that hesitates to raise their voice and say what to think and it is usually no problem whatsoever. I believe everyone in the team can initiate conversations, ask and say what they think [...] [...] It rarely drifts in two contradictory ways where people want two different things and thereby it is rarely a debate.

On the contrary, a few engineers, perceived themselves mostly as *debating* team members who normally question and critically challenge other team members which can be explained by remarks by Heide and Simonsson (2011) that coworkers “[...] make critical interpretations” (p. 202) at times. These quotes from two coworkers in different teams captured this finding;

I think [debating] is more stimulating. I use to question things myself, so to speak, if they are not clearly obvious and if I am doubtful about it. Hopefully, something better will come through this. Especially, in those coincidences when there are not given truths [...]

If you are working with a project for a long time then people have the tendency to get too comfortable in their clothes, does not try to give anyone challenges. So, I use to challenge them frequently, give them questions, problems to “trigger” them [...]

Using the alternative CCO-inspired perspective of employee engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), it is possible to understand that these two perceptions of being a dialogue and debating team member reflect the notion that the corporate incubator consists of multiple opinions and perceptions. As a consequence, horizontal communication among coworkers is needed to meet pluralist view of goals and interests in there (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). Separately, the coworkers’ expertise provides just a small piece of the puzzle but collectively it sums up to something larger through both dialogues and challenging debates that move them out of out their comfort zones. It is crucial to acknowledge that with dialogues, debates or discussions within teams it enables the coworkers, according to the Four Flows theory (McPhee & Zaug, 2000), to *self-structure* and *self-reflect* about their thoughts, ideas and opin-

ions more easily which eventually makes them feel like a part of the incubator and organization and eventually more engaged. I argue that the previous quotes capture this necessity; that by communicating, questioning, challenging, listening and giving other coworkers feedback, new perspectives and angles with its unique expertise are brought up which eventually produces a stronger engagement of doing a great effort as an employee rather than managerial incitements which the dominant perspective would suggest (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). I kindly ask the reader to see “School 1” in [Appendix 1.1](#) for an illustration of this reflective spiral effect. The following quote from another coworker illustrates this reasoning too, but more importantly I argue next quote illustrates a CCO theory process-view of organizations more strongly – that the incubator is constantly *becoming* something new rather than *being* something (Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009);

I listen to everyone. I know that we all have different views [...] There are different perspectives of seeing things. No one has the same information. Everyone sits on our “custard slice” of information and the best thing to do is to listen. That is, that we share. I love these “sync-meetings”. Like; “Okay, what do you know? what do you know? Let us merge our pieces of the puzzle together [...].

Because of the constant information exchange, asked questions, given answers, debates and particularly the *listening activities* between the coworkers – new insights, thoughts and lessons are learned constantly which produce and reproduce the incubator and its organization continuously rather than being a fixed entity (cf. Cooren et al., 2013; Kopaneva & Sias, 2015).

5.1.2 Being a disengaged stranger in the team

Yet, on the other hand, it became clear that one interviewee in another team did not perceive itself as a team member role that easily. Applying the alternative perspective of engagement inspired by CCO, it possible to comprehend that the corporate incubator therefore is *multivo- cal, polyphonic* and consists a lot of *tensions, ambiguity* and *contradictions* as well (Heide & Simonsson, 2018; Christensen et al., 2008). As an example of this, the interviewee claimed that there is no clear or regular communication with the rest of the team anymore as it does not sit nearby or speak the national language. This has *challenged* the coworker to take the role as a *dialogue partner*;

It is not much communication, very little. A part of this is because I am not sitting with the most of the team. Just with one other colleague. A bit further away, because there was not as much space where the team sits [...] Another reason is that I am not Swedish and usually people speak Swedish with each oth-

er [...] So, I would not consider myself as a team member. As far as I am concerned, I am not even in our larger team anymore. So, it makes me feel not like an outsider but something “strange”.

As a result, the interviewee continued with a reflection of how it has impacted its engagement;

Overall, I do not feel as engaged as I used to feel here to be very frank [...] This is something that gets me very frustrated at the moment [...] like when people are communicating and shouting at me like “hey, I need this and this”. When I try to get things done that feels like “orders” then I am not as engaged [...] I become the “silent team member”, just staying behind my laptop rather than being that communicative person that chats. That also leads to short strategic meetings and that results in that I get updates from people through emails rather than face-to-face.

When studying this quote with the alternative perspective of engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), it becomes clear that the shouting from other team members whom sit far away and speak mostly Swedish, has made this coworker less engaged. As the quote displays, its communicative expression of weaker engagement is therefore avoidance and silence which in turn has caused less feedback-giving, shorter meetings and less face-to-face communication. In turn, this has created a tense communicated dictating tone between the coworkers which eventually have produced an even weaker engagement in terms of just finishing the tasks but nothing else. When this occurs, I argue it could result in a danger of even less face-to-face meetings and in depth-conversations long-term which certainly are necessary to bring ideas, thoughts and messages further at the end. Using the alternative perspective in this case (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), I believe the quote above therefore supports research by Gallup (2013) and Aon (2017) that coworkers actually are becoming less *highly* engaged today and illustrate a proper example when reality contradicts with managers’ “taken for granted assumptions” of shown strong engagement among its subordinates. At times, coworkers could evidently perceive the *opposite* and this is not because of lack of materialistic and financial incitements but rather since lack of respectable horizontal communication in teams. I kindly ask the reader to see “School 2” in [Appendix 1.2](#) for an illustration of this negative spiral effect between communication and engagement.

5.1.3 Chatty team members as distractions and producers of weaker engagement

In the interviews, the coworkers shared that they are normally placed in teams of either research, hardware or software engineers, marketers, sales specialists, designers – sometimes clustered with same roles and sometimes mixed in the incubator. The office environment is designed with an open-space design intended to inspire and enable coworkers within and

across teams to communicate more easily face-to-face. According to the coworkers themselves, however, the communication in the open space office design has been problematic within the teams and has challenged the possibilities of being an actual engaged team member. In this case, I believe this challenge resembles to the second level of engagement defined by Truss et al. (2006) – that engagement is expressed as a *serious focus* on work. Although the communication seems to be better and lengthy within the teams, several coworkers underlined that the quality of daily communication within the team, particularly face-to-face, has thus varied a lot. According to the alternative perspective (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), the studied corporate incubator is *multivocal* with *contradictory interests* and *tensions* among its members. By considering this, the empirical material showed that face-to-face communication and the dialogue between coworkers are viewed as *distractions* at times. Particularly, when communication is not aimed to a particular receiver or when it is crossing over hearing concentrated coworkers. The following quote from one coworker explains the challenge further;

It is quite of a dilemma with this fantastic open plan office since it gets, on one hand, rather noisy but, at the same time, it is easy to communicate with the coworkers around you [...] But [face-to-face communication] occurs on the expense of open space office [...] It is rather loud volume and bad discipline. Often, other coworkers get to our team's desks and talk loudly and this is not encouraging the creativity [...] I believe it produces an evil circle. Because if somebody does not have any discipline and tries to intentionally keep the level low then out of sudden no one does it, right? Then everyone talks out loud.

Other interviewed coworkers agreed and argued it has hindered longer periods of concentration and focus. Because of the weaker engagement a rather critical and harsh communicative tone is also expressed back;

[...] It is annoying those days when you don't want to get disturbed. You want to sit three hours straight and sink into something, and if you get disturbed every fifth minute or quarter it feels hopeless [...] When it is the worst, it is disastrous [...] Then you can sit and get irritated on that, and if someone ask about something then you might not answer in your best ways. Rather, if you get affected you get into a poor mood because of the disturbing objects and then you respond back in even worse ways.

During one interview, one coworker actually admitted to be accused of disturbance when communicating with other coworkers;

I remember when we were told off when my colleague and I talked nearby this other colleague who become irritated. He just forced us away.

Studying these quotes with the alternative perspective of engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), I argue it is possible to understand the *challenge* and the *paradox* that might be caused by the engaged team member role. On one hand, the coworkers can communicate and act as

engaged team members and dialogue partners, but on the other, the expressed engagement seems to create a lot of distractions especially in the open space office and hinders the discipline, concentration and engagement to grow. Considering the quotes with a CCO-approach, it thereby becomes clear that the incubator both constitutes and is constituted in the complex communication processes that takes place in it (cf. Putnam and Nicotera, 2008) – that is a *constitutive of social reality* among all teams and coworkers (Heide & Simonsson, 2018). But, nevertheless, it also shows that lengthy face-to-face communication in an open-space design costs concentration and engagement abilities. As a result, it gets easily spread to overhearing coworkers whom in turn “talk out loud” and so a weaker desire to be engaged is produced. This is a finding that extends the conclusions by Heide and Simonsson (2018), and contradicts remarks by Wiley et al. (2010), Iyer and Israel (2012), Welch (2011) and Karanges et. al (2015) that internal communication is demanded for *higher* levels of engagement. Rather, I argue based on the findings that lengthy communication of less quality, like small talk, crossing overhearing coworkers at their desks can somewhat be a producer of *less* engagement. The noise resulted of engaged team members in the open space office can thus uncover the backside of employee engagement and thereby illustrate its dark side (cf. Lewis, 2000). As the coworkers feel less concentrated and engaged, it makes them talk loudly too and so an even noisier communication volume and length with less quality has been produced which eventually continue “spin off” even further. Accordingly, the coworkers admitted that chit chatting, passive listening, less concentration abilities and less desire “to walk the extra mile” were all products of their weaker engagement. I kindly ask the reader see illustration of this analytical reasoning in “School 3” in [Appendix 1.3](#).

5.1.4 Less common understanding results in less communication but stronger engagement

Another challenge that the coworkers highlighted about communicating as team members, is when there is lack of common understandings and mutual agreements in the teams. Many teams in the incubator exist, as stated, of coworkers with multiple roles such as hardware, software, research engineers, designers, marketers, sales specialists with various professional takes on the incubator’s business visions. Because all coworkers are experienced in unique areas and are engaged in these fields, I noticed in the given responses that it has simultaneously generated *sufficient knowledge gaps* among the team members as the communication at times is not adapted to receivers in the teams. As a result, it has hindered the coworkers to engage themselves and others to find common ground and consequently produced a weaker

engagement. This finding is illustrated in “School 3” again in [Appendix 1.3](#). By acknowledging the Montreal School of CCO that underlines the importance of linguistic elements like conversations, and considers that rules of conversations form organizational roles (Schoeneborn & Vasques, 2017), it was also evident that each professional role like engineers, marketers, designers, etc. in the incubator has its own “social rules”. While interviewing, it became therefore somewhat clear that the engineers’ expressed terminology and vocabulary is often *not* aligned to the marketers’ or designers’ although negotiation occurs. As some teams are mixed with coworkers with multiple areas of expertise like coding, designing, marketing, sales, it has consequently hindered the coworkers to communicate expectations properly and challenged them to be integrated team members. As one of the interviewed engineers put it;

[...] I have sometimes experienced that if I work with a team that does not really understand what kind of technology I work with, then they have difficulties with relating to how long-time things will take. That they don't understand the complexity itself [...] It can sometimes be hard to communicate the expectations.

In fact, the interviewed marketers shared that the *engineers* in their teams often prioritize *less* communication, particularly face-to-face. Additionally, the marketers argued that because the knowledge gaps, the engineers often do not understand what the marketers do, and in vice versa, the marketers do not understand what the engineers do. As a result, the clear and frequent cross-communication and feedback have been replaced with relatively *segmented communication* between marketers and engineers in some teams in the incubator. Two marketers from two different teams described the following;

I think tech people do not want to talk that much. That is at least my comprehension of this company. I talk more to sales people, but also because my work is more directly related to sales. [...] I do not get that much feedback from the tech team. Like what they think, what they need, what they actually want to have [...]

They [the engineers] don't want to be confronted, I feel [...] So, coworkers in sales and marketing understand each other, whereas the engineers understand each other – but they don't understand what we do, and we don't understand what they do.

A surprising finding, however, was that the segmented communication does *not* necessarily make the coworkers less engaged. Against conclusions about the alternative perspective (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), who states that engagement is developed in processes where employees act as communicators, and Wiley et al. (2010) that it is needed to increase engagement levels as well as the arguments mentioned in previous subsection – the coworkers rather claimed that *less* communication and *silence* at certain occasions could produce and

stimulate *more* engagement. Particularly, when it regards individual tasks and projects that requires strong focused and concentration. In fact, when this is the case it would make the coworkers even more silent and careful in its communication. The following quotes from two engineers summarize and conclude this paradox;

While you are working in the same team and for the same company, people have their personal goal as well. It does not mean that the more you communicate the more you get truly engaged [...] We do not have to wait on someone to engage you, or someone else does not have to wait for you to get engage [...] As long as we [team members] have a good understanding, we do not have to communicate that much [...]

Certain [coworkers] don't manage or want to communicate what they do, or if they want to collaborate. It is easier to sit at your computer. This occupation has got pretty introvert tendencies. It is easier to go along with your task rather than to talk to people, some claim [...] [Name of college] and I, who have been sitting together for quite long and done lots of things – we hardly need to talk. We still know what the other will need to do.

To be clear, these quotes did not relate to all interviewees but rather to several engineers. What can be learned by this finding, however, is that since the interviewees admitted that their occupation in general in the incubator often show introvert tendencies, communication is actually seen as an *obstacle* and *distraction* rather than as a *requisite* for professional progress and goal achievement at times. If a somewhat overall understanding, trust and a professional past exist between the coworkers in the same team, the communication demands appear to be *less necessary*. When interviewing, I also noticed that if there is an independency when conducting a highly advanced task that requires expert knowledge, then communication can be considered as a holdback since, as the interviewee said, there is no need “to wait one someone to engage you”. Besides, with too many emails, meetings and social chats a communication-overload is created which in turn produce less engagement, the empirical material showed. When interviewing engineers in the incubator, it was thereby evident that a stronger engagement was expressed, similar to the definition by Truss et al. (2006), as better concentration abilities but also *communicative silences*. If there is a consistent silence, the levels of getting fully focused and engaged to accomplish a particular task grows, and so the quietness remains if there are no concerns or questions. Please see “School 4” for an illustration of this analytical reasoning in [Appendix 1.4](#). As much as the interviewed coworkers considered themselves as *team members* who provide unique expertise in certain areas to other coworkers, the interviewees in fact identified themselves as *co-leaders* while doing this as well. Therefore, next subchapter of analysis highlights this role – that is being a co-leader to the managers in the corporate incubator.

5.2 Coworkers as *co-leaders* to their managers

In this subchapter, the second role of being a co-leader is touched upon. It includes four different subsections about perceptions of the role, its challenges, paradoxes as well as how employee engagement is a product and producer of the co-leader's communication processes.

5.2.1 *Being a communicative co-leader within an area of expertise*

In the interviews, it became apparent that coworkers do not have regular communication with either their team, middle or senior managers. When it occurs, however, it is productive. To clarify, "managers" in this study are mostly referred to various managers of smaller teams or middle managers rather than executive managers of the corporate incubator as whole. The reason being is because the latter managers have no direct regular contact with the coworkers at the lower hierarchical levels. Because the coworkers in the incubator are specialized into different areas, they often work very independently. To use definitions by Heide and Simon (2011) and Tengblad (2006), most of the interviewed coworkers in the incubator thereby view their managers as *facilitators*, *supporters* and *dialogue partners*. The following quote was shared by one coworker;

I talk and communicate with my managers or my closest manager once a month, during staff meetings but otherwise it is pretty seldom. Very sporadic, you run into them in the corridors. The manager above is even more seldom [...] But in general it does not feel super hierarchical, and especially my latest [closest] manager is very good [...] He lets me work what I want, and tries to steer you in this way.

Although there is absence of managerial communication, the expressed appreciation from superiors makes the coworkers perceive themselves as co-leaders. Particularly, when it regards their area of expertise. Therefore, it seems that the coworkers are trusted in decision-making issues and organizational development particularly in their expert and experience fields which indicates that elements of coworkership definitely exist in the corporate incubator (cf. Andersson & Tengblad, 2009). This quote explains it a bit further;

I think most [coworkers] perceive themselves as co-leaders because the decisions are often made when you are present and when you share your opinions and coordinate. Since most employees here are experts in their area, the manager is just an intercessor. So, when he has to make decisions, he needs to have material for the experts and dare to follow our recommendations.

Given this quote, I interpret the findings as that there are no clear lines between coworkers and managers when it regards making decisions in expertise areas (cf. Andersson and

Tengblad, 2009). In these scenarios, the coworkers seem to be experienced enough to make various choices without major managerial approvals and appears to be more influential than the managers whom in fact need to rather assist with necessary resources and information. In other terms, this finding exemplifies that the incubator and organization actually are, according to Montreal school of CCO, constituted from the *bottom-up* among its powerful coworkers instead of the *top-down* (Taylor, 2009). As the incubator possess post-bureaucratic characteristics such as vision and goal-steered motivations, I also interpret the dialogues and discussions in decision making-scenarios as *horizontal* between the coworkers and managers. A finding that resembles to conclusions by Kilhammar and Ellström about coworkership in two Swedish organizations (2015). Nevertheless, the following two quotes shared by a designer and an engineer illustrate that the coworkers do not perceive themselves as co-leaders in *all* scenarios;

Having a manager who tells you exactly what to do and then you get graded [on your performance] is not how it works here. Rather, tasks come from all directions and is initiated of everyone in the team. [...] I believe I can; make different types of decisions when it regards my area of expertise, inform, coordinate and give feedback to my coworkers in my team [...] It is rarely the case, however, that I and my manager collaborate in leading *other people* [...] You still have respect for the hierarchy. You have a feeling of “after all, this is the person who can fire me” [...]

The co-leader role in a sense that I *lead* someone in our group – it does not happen that often. In our group, everyone is really mature so everyone can be one's own boss. In the same way, as I do. It is not like that I am replacing for my boss as a co-leader.

In the interviews, most coworkers shared that they do not come across as co-leaders that strongly when it regards handling “operative and strategic information” (Heide and Simonsson, 2011, p. 205) that concerns the overall project, team and incubator as a whole. According to the coworkers, this would be above their professional responsibility and pay grades. As the quotes display, co-leadership does not really apply in terms of *leading* other employees in the teams or in areas where they do *not* have any experience in either. Rather, it applies when instructing, informing, coordinating and presenting suggestions about *a part* of a project that relates to one's professional background, expertise and experience. As a result, these findings show that bureaucratic elements and a somewhat hierarchical leadership remain to some extent between managers and coworkers in a post bureaucratic and knowledge-intensive context.

5.2.2 Praises from managers produce stronger engagement and a fear-less communication

To elaborate the previous section, I believe based on the findings that the limited managerial communication actually seems to create room for creativity and stronger engagement among the coworkers if two conditions are met. As long as the managers praise performance and trials briefly, and if there is an overall understanding of where the idea or project is headed. When the team- and middle-managers have *confidence, awareness and respect* for its coworkers' skills and experiences in advanced areas where themselves lack expertise such as code, design, marketing, sales etc., then the interaction processes appears to be built around *complements* instead of critical counter-arguments. As a result, the communication produces an even stronger engagement regarding that area of expertise. Studied from the alternative perspective of employee engagement grounded in CCO (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), the quote below describes this further and highlights more importantly how engagement can therefore be expressed as a *communicative enactment* with managers;

I believe that I build my passion from scratch myself [...] But when I communicate it to the manager who also encourages it, then you get even more excited. If I had not communicated it, then I would not have gotten any encouragement, and then the interest would have cooled after a while [...] This means that by next time you dare to tell more to the managers, suggest more stuff, take more room, and provide even more ideas [...]

As the engagement grows, it is evident that the coworkers also are eager to communicate its engagement with its manager more frequently. As a result, a *fear-less* communication with its managers and a stronger willingness to act as a co-leader in that area of expertise is produced by the higher engagement. This in turn creates a positive spiral effect where a stronger engagement establishes a stimulated eagerness to communicate with its superiors. Please see “School 1” in [Appendix 1.1](#) for this analytical reasoning. It is important to note, however, that the findings suggest that this occurs particularly when the coworkers in corporate incubator are *initiators* of the engaged dialogues with the managers. Studied with the alternative perspective inspired by CCO (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), these dialogues or discussions both face-to-face and digitally thereby produce a higher motivation and ambition to accomplish the discussed task and an ability to say what you really think. Since the communication with managers is still limited and the fact that the coworkers take the co-leading role in the area of expertise, it became clear after a couple of interviews, though, that the coworkers in the incubator rather perceive themselves as co-leaders in relation to *other coworkers* in their team. Reasons being that they have better ability than the managers to reason with the hands-on tasks and, as stated before, to challenge its coworkers. Because of this, and contrary to the

mentioned “School 1”, I argue that limited communication with the managers which is *not* praising at all, could in fact be a producer of stronger engagement *too* but in different ways. The findings show that since limited conversations with managers, the coworkers are given more freedom to accomplish their tasks independently and so less time is wasted on managerial approvals or explanations. Please see “School 4” for an illustration of this reflective finding in [Appendix 1.4](#). This is an insight that supports the research study by Heide et al. (2018) where employees reasoned that there is no need to involve a superior in daily issues. In fact, one interviewee in this study stated that managers often urge the coworker to engage insightful conversations with *colleagues* at the same hierarchical level than with the managers themselves;

He [the manager] always encourage us to also communicate with other group members. He does not expect that everyone must follow or that you always have to communicate your result to him.

Another interviewee reasoned in similar ways and claimed that there is sometimes no need to ask managers for permission;

We, coworkers in my team, work with technical solutions and when we are about to do anything, how we do it – that is something we decide ourselves. We don’t ask for permission among our managers. Partly, because the managers have a strong trust for us making those decisions, but mainly because it would be too time-consuming.

Despite these quotes and strong confidence among the interviewed coworkers to act and communicate as co-leaders in expertise areas together with their coworkers in the team and less demand for the managers’ input and presence it is, nevertheless, important to acknowledge the backside of the co-leader role as well. That is, its *tensions*, *complexity* and challenging *contradictions* with the alternative perspective of employee engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018).

5.2.3 Absence of managerial communication results in less guided co-leaders but produces both weaker and stronger engagement

As much as the middle and team managers’ absence allows coworkers professional freedom and to get fully engaged in their assignments as co-leaders in the incubator, it paradoxically appears to hinder them to do it too, I believe. The reason being is that particular middle-managers in many teams in the incubator either postpone or forget to reply or confirm, are unprepared for meetings, don't even show up at them at times. In fact, the coworkers de-

scribed them as mediocre communicators and facilitators at certain occasions. This is an example that indicates, using the CCO metatheoretical standpoint of employee engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), that communication is not a simple variable that always strengthens engagement in linear ways but instead these are *integrated in complex ways* that are components of each other which eventually can take *positive* as well as *negative* turns. Contrary to the expressed positive opinions in the previous subsection, various coworkers thus shared a dark side about their middle- team managers' communication efforts when asked about it as well. Two coworkers in different teams shared the following;

It could be that they [the managers] postpone answers, forget to answer, don't prepare for meetings with the team. I know a couple of managers whom are really good, but I would rather say that most are a bit poor [...] I am a bit jealous on others who have had managers whom you have heard are really prepared for these team meetings [...] You don't see this engagement in them [current ones], and then you obviously become less engaged yourself. You get engaged yourself when someone else is engaged.

I feel that to be able to do my best work, my manager needs to be present in order to check a couple of things. And then it could get frustrated and stressful when you cannot do this [...] If you have thought incorrectly or different, I work with "Track A" and he says "Track B", then you think "couldn't you [the manager] have said it earlier?"

Due to the absence of team and middle managers, and in this case, poor communication with its coworkers, I argue it hinders the inspiration and facilitation coworkers acquire to communicate as successful co-leaders as well. One of the major reasons is, as stated, because the managers still appears to possess administrative and financial power and legitimacy, and can make sure that proposed suggestions and ideas become more influential and shared across the corporate incubator. If managers neglect the importance of this, the coworkers admitted it challenges them to proceed with projects. Against research concluding that managerial leadership and communication is less needed if coworkers are highly skilled and experienced (cf. Alvesson, 2004; Pearce & Manz 2005; von Nordenflycht 2010), I believe that a significant communication *dependency* with superior managers remains in terms of turning ideas and projects into reality even in a post-bureaucratic and knowledge-intensive context. The following quote highlights this demand further;

[...] there is still a certain hierarchical reasoning where sometimes it is needed to either include the manager or even to ask "could you escalate this to [upper-management], please?". Because it is much more efficient if you [the manager] do it.

The same interviewees continued with that although the coworkers are independent co-leaders in their areas of expertise, there is still always a need of meeting across the hierarchical borders;

“It takes two to tango”. I think this is not realized, partly because not enough time has been taken to explain and understand things [...] but it is also about a willingness to meet and communicate across the [hierarchical] borders. Then it needs to start in a humble tone because you cannot have the entire image yourself. There are things you [managers as well as coworkers] don't have insight in. So, I can feel that there is an improvement potential in this area.

As an extension to the recent research project “The Communicative Organization” (Heide et al., 2018), the empirical material showed that lack of particularly middle and team managers’ presence is a challenge that could have a negative impact on the coworkers’ communication possibilities and perceived engagement. As the interviewees stated; “You get engaged as soon as other are engaged”, and if it this is not realized and respected from higher hierarchical borders it produces easily a contaminated negative spiral among managers and coworkers when it regards their communication and expressed engagement. Given the answers in the interviews, this makes the coworkers in turn a bit *lost* in their co-leading role and its communication at times. Since lack of proper communicative confirmations from managers, the coworkers claimed, it produces a weaker engagement in terms of serious communicative tone over happy one, tension, anxiety, jealousy on other teams where the managers seemed to communicate better. Please see “School 2” in [Appendix 1.2](#) for an illustration of this finding.

Conversely, though, it was shown that delayed or absent managerial communication in fact can produce and constitute a stronger engagement regarding the matter as well. One coworker reasoned as follows;

It is frustration, but I do not become less engaged just because of that. I become frustrated because I am engaged. It is mostly the frustration that increases. But my engagement is the driving factor behind everything I do. I surrender if I am not engaged [...] That is, there are different kinds of engagement levels.

I argue that the quote above is a great example of how engagement, studied from the alternative perspective inspired by CCO (Heide & Simonsson, 2018) and unlike previous research about employee engagement, can also be enacted as communicated *frustration*, *tension* and *resistance* against management. With a too limited and poor communication process between coworkers and managers, a stronger engaged frustration and anger regarding the concerned tasks can be produced. This because the coworker then acknowledges the risks of *not* discussing or debating about it properly which in turn stimulates a desire to find necessary solutions. I argue this is another finding that highlights that organization are far from one-sided entities.

Rather, they consist of coworkers whom have *plurality* of opinions and express evidently different sorts of engagements that may *not* necessarily be aligned to management's perceptions of engagement for that matter (cf. Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Please see “School 5” in [Appendix 1.5](#) for an illustration of this reflective finding.

5.2.4 Ambiguous managerial communication hinders co-leadership to flourish too

When interviewing, the coworkers admitted that while middle and team managers in the incubator praise its subordinating coworkers briefly to be independent co-leaders, it paradoxically comes with *another price* for the coworkers – an assumption that less proper managerial steering, guiding and directing with *clear* visions is needed. Unlike the beginning of this subchapter, I argue this could be seen as *the risk* with the *supporter role* (cf. Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Tengblad, 2006) and the already mentioned “School 4” ([Appendix 1.4](#)), where giving too much responsibility to the coworkers could in turn make the managers become too passive and communicate in too loose and ambiguous terms. Consequently, it can hinder the co-leadership and the engagement to flourish fully in some teams. In fact, coworkers claimed that some managers appeared to communicate in too repetitive and ambiguous ways capturing *loose* overall directions without any clear directions. The following quotes from two coworkers captured this finding;

You just want to get a “go”, either a green or red light. Just because you communicate more it does not mean that things turn better or that you get more engaged regarding your work, or as an employee. Rather, what you *say* and *do* matters [...] If we have a manager who is comfortable and can give accurate notices and can do it with *less* communication, it is much better than someone who talks *a lot*, perhaps listens a lot, but who later cannot communicate clear notifications and stand behind it [...]

[...] I have been at meetings where you repeat what you discussed before. You know exactly how the meeting will proceed, that is with discussions you have at the coffee break [...] If you get to the meeting and the managers talk “fluff”, they draw with the “big brush” instead of saying exactly “this is what we want you to do” [...] then the fluffiness and the unclarity unfortunately becomes a problem [...]

As the quotes display, it is crucial to understand that lengthy communication does not equal high-quality communication. When the managerial communication is too *ambiguous* and long-drawn rather than concise messages about “what to do next”, it appears to be challenging to act and communicate as a co-leader in the incubator. As stated before, a dependency to higher hierarchical managers still remains to proceed professionally although it is a knowledge-intensive and post-bureaucratic context that welcomes professional independency. And so, without any concrete direction and guiding paths – the engagement and information

exchange evidently drop and the resistance arises. I believe this finding exemplifies the conclusions Christensen, Morsning and Cheney (2008) underline, as the alternative perspective (Heide & Simonsson 2018), that organizational voices among organizational members are built on *strategic ambiguity* and is often used by leaders to inspire its subordinates. It is understandable why managers prefer ambiguous messages over too clear ones as organizations are, which Heide and Simonsson eloquently puts it, “complex, rather messy entities, anything but easy to control and manage” (2018, p. 211) and so an expressed vagueness seems like a flexible “runaway” from decision-making. But even if ambiguous expressed visions may hinder managers to be accused of potential mistakes, I simultaneously argue that lack of comprehensible and framed guiding and communication from managers can constitute, as the quotes show, less engaged co-leaders whose communication eventually become *vague* too. And so, a negative contamination starts to spin-off. Please see “School 3” for an illustration of this finding in [Appendix 1.3](#). On the other hand, though, it is crucial that high-quality communication cannot be *too* concrete or *steered* either as then it hinders the scope of coworkers’ creativity and engagement. Rather, it should preferably be relatively *limited* but *guided* in order to make the engagement grow as the first quote in this subsection displayed. Please see “School 4” again for this reflection in [Appendix 1.4](#). As the study was conducted, the coworkers admitted that the managers in the incubator still struggled with communicating the right balance of *ambiguity* and *clarity* in their messages.

5.3 Coworkers as *ambassadors* to the organization

In this last section of the analysis, the third role of being ambassador is highlighted. It includes three various subsections about perceptions of the role, its challenges, paradoxes as well as how engagement is a product and producer of the ambassador’s communication processes.

5.3.1 Being an ambassador for your organization, unit, team and competence

Today, organizational members are not only expected to act as essential communicative functions *internally* for organizations but as amongst others, Heide and Simonsson (2011), Karmark (2005) and Mazzei and Quarantino (2017) have concluded, also *externally*. When interviewed about the third communicative role in this study in the incubator set in Sweden, the coworkers perceived themselves as engaged ambassadors in professional contexts. Reason being that they are proud of their professional work and the fact that it is an incubator mean-

ing that many products and services are at a startup phase which demands all coworkers regardless of role, background, experience, gender, age, etc. to act as ambassadors to boost recognition and reach. As one coworker put it;

I can say that I identify myself as an ambassador in terms of what I represent and work with, and I think it is fun. I am proud of my role and work in general [...] It is an incubator operation and then you do everything. I do everything from develop and code, but it could happen that I visit and meet customers as well [...] It can be very mixed.

This is a finding that supports the research project “Communicative organization” covering Swedish the public and private sector (Heide et al., 2018), where most coworkers in the incubator communicate and build organizational brand equity externally. As an extension to their research, however, it was shown in this study that the interviewees had various opinions about *what* they actually represented and communicated as ambassadors – whether it would be their team project, unit, area of competence or organization *separately* or *combined in various orders*. An insight that elaborates research by McPhee and Zaig (2000) and Schoeneborn & Vasques (2017) as well about *institutional positioning* in Four Flows theory of CCO school. In detail, I believe that multiple members who communicate with different strategic aims, can enable the organization, unit, the team and the unique expertise area to get accepted and set in not only *one* institutional environment, but rather in *several* ones on different *levels*. That is for example in research, technological and business environments, etc. consisting of research institutions, suppliers, collaborators, customers, competitors, and so on. For some coworkers, for instance, the team project and its current technical solutions is more prioritized in external contexts which meant, as an elaboration to the definition by Karmark (2005), that the coworkers thereby “live the brand of their team project” externally rather than the organizational brand as such. Nevertheless, the organization is mentioned briefly when communicating as an ambassador, but rather than representing *it*, some coworkers use it as a strategic leverage tool to gain sufficient recognition and status. One interviewee shared the following about this;

I think it is more the team, the project, and of course it is always under this umbrella name of the major organization. But [the organization] is anticipated as something so different than our project. So, I think the core is the project. And [the organization] comes as the serious brand in which we gain a lot status with. For me it is more the “grown up” serious trustworthy company that stands in the back like “the big brother” of our project.

Another coworker in a different team claimed it represents its unit rather than the knowledge-intensive organization externally;

I am clear with the fact that I represent our unit primarily, and not the organization as a brand because it is there I have my knowledge. Representing the organization as such is something my managers could do better. That is how I see it.

Lastly, in a third team, one coworker perceived itself as an ambassador primarily for the organization, secondly the team and lastly its area of competence;

During an external pitch, we represent [the organization], thereafter our team and lastly my area of expertise or the product area. Personally, I have a clear ambassador-role in the area I am specialized in for the product.

Analyzing these contradictory quotes through the alternative perspective of employee engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018) together with remarks by Christensen et al (2018), it is once more possible to acknowledge similar to the team member section – that the knowledge-intensive organization and its incubator contain various teams and coworkers and are thereby *multivocal*, *polyphonic* and *messy* entities. Therefore, as shown, its coworkers can act with very *contradictory* strategic aims as ambassadors. Since the incubator consists of various teams with hardware, software, research engineers, sales specialists, designers, marketers working with everything from researching and testing concept ideas to selling commercial solutions, it makes sense that different parts of the incubator are represented – thereby its “whole” gets branded externally. Another gained insight that strengthens the concept of multivocality among organizational members in the study was that although coworkers have chosen communicative directions as ambassadors *professionally*, it does not mean that they always do it *privately*. In fact, it is likely that the very same coworker could actually express different voices and opinions in informal social contexts too. On the contrary to the findings in the beginning of this subchapter, one coworker for instance shared this;

I am not really living the brand, no [laughter]. During my free social time, I do not see myself as an ambassador for the organization or team. When it comes to owning the products of [the organization], which would be the easiest way to be an ambassador, I am just not a [the organization X] person. I am an [Organization Z] person. I have [the organization] products for job purposes but that is it. I am not this techy or geeky person that always has the latest stuff.

I argue that this identified distinction of being an ambassador in professional versus private contexts can be seen as an elaboration to the defined “reversed ambassador” (cf. Heide et al., 2018). But rather than damaging the organizational reputation consciously which is not really the case in this point, coworkers is reserve in terms of *not* living, talking or embodying the brand or use its products or services for that matter *when* it is often expected or taken for granted. Using the CCO inspired alternative perspective of engagement (Heide &

Simonsson, 2018), it is thereby possible to comprehend that coworkers *individually*, as organizations, are multivocal and complex creatures themselves with contradictory opinions and interests when it comes to “live their brand” in *professional* versus *private* external contexts.

5.3.2 Finding common ground as ambassador produces engaged and adapted external relationships

When interviewed about ambassadorship, the coworkers made it clear that communicating with external stakeholders produces a stronger engagement as it is fun, exciting and informative. But more importantly, it was showed that engagement can easily be seen as a *communicative enactment* (Heide & Simonsson, 2018) when stakeholders have identical interests and mindsets as the ambassadors. When this occurs, I argue the interaction processes among the coworkers and the external stakeholders spin into natural horizontal flows and get constantly adapted. Consequently, this produces longer professional, personal and so trustworthy relationships which constitutes in an even stronger engagement as both partners find “common ground”. Based on the findings, it successively smooths the external dialogues with even clearer and adjusted individual messages. Please see “School 1” for this reflective spiral effect in [Appendix 1.1](#). I believe this finding was captured as one engineer reflected about its external communication as a product and producer of its own perceived engagement well as the stakeholders’ engagement;

[...] when you communicate with engaged customers you often have common interests and goals, and then the energy level increases and more agreements arise. Then you think “we should perhaps initiate a collaboration, and run it against opponents” [...] Thereby you develop a different sort of relationships, you communicate in completely different ways and then the dialogue feels more natural when I try to sell things to this person. Because you have a closer relationship compared to the first time you meet.

I argue this quote can be explained by remarks by Heide et al. (2018) and partly by Social Systems Theory of CCO (Luhmann, 2003) that it is through a multitude of *microprocessors* and personal individual *meetings* with external stakeholders, as the coworker mentioned above, that personifies the organizational and incubator’s reputation and presence to something “real”. It is possible that these engaged micro-dialogues can produce a more solid brand-building asset long-term than what for example marketing and PR campaigns would have done, I believe. Building brand loyalty through external micro-conversations with individual external stakeholders as an ambassador, can thereby produce tailored external relation-

ships which are appreciated and make the individual engagement among the coworkers increase too.

5.3.3 Engaged ambassadorship can nevertheless produce information overload and challenge confidentiality

While covering the last role in the interviews it became evident that a *information overload* can, however, be seen as a *backlash* to the engagement boost as well. Considering the backs as much as the fronts of the engagement concept (cf. Lewis, 2000), I argue this can be seen as one of the darker sides of over-engaged ambassadorship and the developed “School 1”. Please see [Appendix 1.1](#). In particular, the empirical material showed that lengthy communication with engaged customers, investors or distributors amongst others, can paradoxically at times produce communication *quantity over quality* with too much “babble” and unnecessary details. As one coworker put it;

The challenge is to share the right information and the right amount so it gets short and concise and also clear. When you are an engaged ambassador it can be easy to get too excited or share too much. Sometimes you have felt that you have chattered with too many inessentials, and felt that it has resulted in too much communication and information externally. It can be the results of a strong expressed engagement as an ambassador.

Similar to the team member section where coworkers express their engagement out loud in an open-space office in the organization, the coworkers were honest to admit that lengthy communication can thus be seen as a *distraction* or *insult* in external contexts as well. Particularly, in *corporate cultures* where lengthy chatter for instance is not common. In those scenarios, the coworkers shared it can make external stakeholders less engaged over a potential collaboration. Please see “School 3“ in [Appendix 1.3](#) for this reflective finding. I argue this is critical challenge to consider seriously – especially when coworkers act as “unofficial” ambassadors, who are assigned to actually do “something else” and might lack proper experience of how much to express as an ambassador externally. It is certainly important to acknowledge that external stakeholders demand different kinds of communication compared to the coworkers internally in the incubator. King and Grace (2009) claim that an ambassador is expected to *comfortably* turn a brand promise into reality. Given the findings, I argue that although the ambassador is comfortable, it does not necessarily guarantee that the *external stakeholder* is it if information-overload occurs.

As a follow-up to this, the coworkers highlighted that if communicating with too much engagement externally, minor classified information or details might accidentally get leaked and challenge *confidential policies* as well. It is important to consider that although the corporate incubator uses a flexible organizational structure and vision and goals as steering devices and uses an informal communication climate, confidentiality is still considered seriously. Reason being that innovative smart solutions are constantly developed in the incubator and could involve parts or extended features to already existing commercial products that are highly classified. One coworker reasoned the following about this challenge;

It is different depending on the various projects I have been working for, but in general, there is a lot that is classified [...] The challenge is more what *is* classified and what *is not* classified. In those cases, I put myself on the more careful side and then it can lead to that you are perhaps not as engaged outwards. That is, you can't tell with the strong engagement as you could have done otherwise.

Knowing the exact *line* between what to share and what to “hush-hush” about regarding particularly *minor* innovative details or features as an ambassador – thereby appears to be a challenge on its own in the incubator. On the contrary to the previous section about information-overload, many coworkers reasoned as above. If their external communication would suddenly involve a minor area that “might” be confidential but not for sure, they would minimize the risk of leakage by remaining silent. As the quote indicates, this ambiguity therefore seems to challenge the coworkers to express a full committed engagement to external stakeholders at times. And this can be seen as quite of a dilemma, I argue, as on one hand the coworkers wants to please its stakeholders with honest and new-breaking news as *ambassadors*, but on the other, professional confidentiality, ethics and integrity needs to be considered to fully as an *employee* too. Studied from the alternative perspective of engagement (Heide & Simonsen, 2018), the *ambiguous* line between *exposure* and *confidentiality* therefore seems to produce a cautious and limited communication with less opportunities to express true engagement and passion for external stakeholders. Accordingly, it is not impossible that this can make external stakeholders less engaged about the organization, unit, team or the area of expertise for that matter, as it could be interpreted as something “kept away” from them. Please see “School 2” in [Appendix 1.2](#) for an illustration of this reflective finding. Thus, it seems crucial to find a balance between School 1 and 2 as a coworker in the incubator. That is, to communicate and engage stakeholders and themselves to a level that is neither too lengthy that suddenly reveals confidential details or careful that kills the engagement. Knowing what particular level engagement should be communicated with externally, certainly depends on

involved stakeholders, products, signed NDAs, patents and individual contexts, etc. But, in the end, I believe it is up to every coworker in the corporate incubator to decide how strategic and coherent it aims to be as an engaged employee and ambassador.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this qualitative study was to describe and analyze coworkers' perceptions of their communicative roles as *team members*, *co-leaders* and *ambassadors* in a corporate incubator, its communication challenges, and on basis of this, understand how employee engagement is integrated, e.g. *a product* and *producer* of the communication processes. This study problematized that research in strategic communication and employee engagement has often been studied from a leader's perspective without critical reflections and normally lacked a CCO-approach. By using a meta-perspective of CCO, the alternative perspective of employee engagement (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), I have touched upon a pluralist approach of different perceptions and captured the complexity between engagement and communication with its paradoxes, challenges as well as tensions from *a coworker perspective* among all three roles. The results showed that the coworkers identify themselves to all three roles in various ways. The main contribution of this study, however, was that both lengthy and limited communication can produce stronger engagement and professional independence, but also vagueness with no clear guidance. Vice versa, can employee engagement produce a high-qualitative communication but the opposite too with distraction, information overload and so a risk of accidental information leakage.

6.1 Contributions of this study and to the case

This case study has made several important contributions. Based on the findings, I argue it is compelling, as *a theoretical contribution* to the alternative perspective of employee engagement inspired by CCO (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), to distinguish employee engagement between a *stronger* or *weaker* kind, and communication as *lengthy* or *limited* as well as of *higher* or *lower quality* when viewing them as products and producers of each other. It is also essential to acknowledge that communication and engagement does not necessarily have to follow positive *linear directions* when studied with CCO, but can take *complex positive* and

negative turns shaped like *spirals*. Please see [Appendix 1](#). The most contributing conclusions are further discussed in the following section.

Firstly, in regards to the *team member* role, this study has shown – besides that the coworkers perceive themselves as dialogue or debate partners differently, and that strong engagement produces qualitative communication and thus a *positive spiral effect*, and poor limits interaction and produces a *negative aftermath* (School 1 and 2) – that particularly face-to-face communication in an open space design is a challenge. In fact, it produces a disturbing noise and less abilities to concentrate and thus lower perceived engagement. Contradictory to conclusions in previous research (Heide & Simonsson, 2018; Wiley et al, 2010; Iyer & Israel 2012; Welch 2011; Karanges et. al, 2015) about internal communication being a prerequisite for stronger engagement, some findings of this study rather show the opposite. If face-to-face communication crosses multiple team members who are not initially involved in the particular discussion for example, it produces a *negative spiral effect* (School 3) where others talk out loud which weakens the engagement. Nevertheless, I argue it is possible that the communication-overload as such could be the product of an already established engagement as well. What can be learned from this is that, unlike previous research, *less* communication and *communicative silence* could occasionally (if the task is highly advance and there is less common understanding in teams) produce better abilities proceed professionally as team members and can thus enable the coworkers to express stronger engagement (School 4) while remaining silent. Yet, it is debatable if this *positive spiral effect* could relate to offices and coworkers in other departments or industries that are less driven by technology, research and professional independency.

Secondly, regarding the *co-leader role*, this study has highlighted that the coworkers in the incubator are trusted in the areas of expertise and thus do not have regular communication with their team or middle manager except motivational conversations. As a result, the coworkers are allowed to make decisions in their special areas, e.g. signs of coworkership definitely exists, which results in another *positive spiral effect* with stronger engagement and fear-less communication with managers and evidently a more independent co-leading role with coworkers instead (School 1 and 4). On the other hand, though, the findings contribute with an insightful challenging paradox that can be understood by the alternative perspective (Heide & Simonsson, 2018) and contradicts previous research (Alvesson 2004; Peace & Manz, 2005; Von Nordenflycht, 2010). Particularly, it was revealed that a dependency to upper-hierarchical levels still remains in a post-bureaucratic context, where superior managers appears to have financial, administrative and legitimate authority. I argue this dependency

evidently challenges the co-leadership itself as the coworkers admitted that managerial communication is poorly handled, absent *or* the too lengthy and ambiguous at times. As organizations are multivocal and polyphonic (Heide & Simonsson, 2018; Christensen et. al, 2008) the findings showed that it affects the coworkers' engagement in two contradictory ways. Either, it can contaminate the coworkers' engagement with a *negative spiral effect* which in turn produces an even more tense, vague or lost communicative tone and *less* engagement (School 2 and 3). Or the opposite, it can make the coworkers *more* engaged with critically questioning as it involves frustration and desire to solve the challenge itself, and so a *positive spiral effect* emerges (School 5).

Thirdly, with reference to the *ambassador role*, the study indicates that coworkers in the incubator perceived themselves as ambassadors in professional contexts. They did not, however, necessarily represent the organization as such, but rather their unit, team or area of expertise in a different order externally. This is a finding, studied from the alternative perspective inspired by CCO (Heide & Simonsson, 2018), that elaborates previous conclusions about the modern concept of ambassadorship since organizations are complex entities with various strategic external aims. What can be learned from analysis and can be seen an extension to the "the reserved ambassador" (cf. Heide et al., 2018), is that not all coworkers in the incubator perceived themselves as ambassadors as strongly in *private* contexts as in *professional* ones. Although a minority in the study reasoned in this way and so it is debatable how determining the opinion is, it is still an important *distinction* to consider. Additionally, it was shown that communicating with external stakeholders produces a stronger engagement as well as a *positive spin-off effect* with an ability, understood by CCO, to adapt external conversations on a micro-level if common ground is found in interests and mindsets (School 1). On the other hand, the findings indicated that being an over-engaged ambassador in the incubator can paradoxically produce communication *quantity* instead of *quality* which is a challenge itself, and might easily cause disturbance and less perceived engagement among external stakeholders from other corporate cultures (School 3). If the line between revelation and secrecy itself is also vague, over-engagement and information overload might leak *minor* secrets by accident more easily and so disregard confidentiality. To what extent it then can really challenge confidentiality – if it is to lower like a loose idea or higher like a confirmed technical feature – can certainly be discussed. But regardless, it was showed that coworkers are often "better safe than sorry" as ambassadors, and communicate less externally when it involves sensitive areas. As such, it could limit the strongest engagement to get fully expressed and consequently produce a *negative spiral effect* of the perceived engagement (School 2).

All in all, these conclusions covering three various communicative roles and engagement from a coworker perspective in a corporate incubator, contribute with insightful knowledge and paradoxes to *research* in strategic communication and employee engagement as well as in *practical areas* for both senior, middle, team managers and coworkers to consider in order to improve conditions for organizational communication and engagement. This regards not only a corporate incubator in Sweden focusing on technology, research or business, but also other knowledge-intensive and post-bureaucratic organizations of other areas, sizes or ages set in different industries within Scandinavia.

Additionally, shifting from linear-driven to a more *integrated spirally-formed* understanding of engagement and communication in this study, can eventually also contribute to a *wider societal context*. It is possible that the provided findings can for example stimulate a better understanding of engagement and communication among citizens in societies at large and reject its linear relationships here as well. As coworkers, *citizens of societies* may experience relatively similar complex communication processes which are lengthy, limited or ambiguous, etc. as engaged “team members”, “co-leaders” and “ambassadors” for their societies. Therefore, the findings can inspire researchers and practitioners like politicians and authorities but also citizens and activists to *identify* themselves with the developed complex spirals and connect it with the concept of *citizen engagement*. For instance, in communication processes with other citizens, politicians, governments, authorities, tourists, private sectors or NGOs within local, regional, national, global societies through traditional and social media or face-to-face.

6.2 Suggestions for future research

Due to relatively narrow time frame, this research has been conducted as a qualitative case study together with semi-structured interviews with a rather limited sample size. Thereby, I urge future researchers to conduct similar studies about how employee engagement is a product and producer of communication process, but as *ethnographies*. Combining flexible ethnographic interviews with observations of coworkers communicating as team members, co-leaders and ambassadors during a longer time period, and how engagement is enacted in the roles, could provide a more accurate representation of complex communication processes and also provide more in-depth material to study with CCO. Another suggestion is to conduct similar studies of either larger sample size in *one* unit or organization, or *multiple* organizations or different industries that may *not* be knowledge-intensive but rather *service-minded*

within but also *outside* of Scandinavia. When doing this, it would also be appropriate to dig into *one* particular communicative role per study and conduct more comparative in-depth analyses across organization, industries and countries. Finally, I urge future research to elaborate more on the developed five school of thoughts inspired by CCO-grounded alternative perspective with further empirical material as well as the discovered *opposite turns* between communication and engagement in the study. Additionally, it would be of importance for *quantitative* research to study if the *negative* correlation between communication and engagement is *statistically significant* in knowledge-intensive contexts and analyze what *sort* of communication has the strongest negative impact on engagement.

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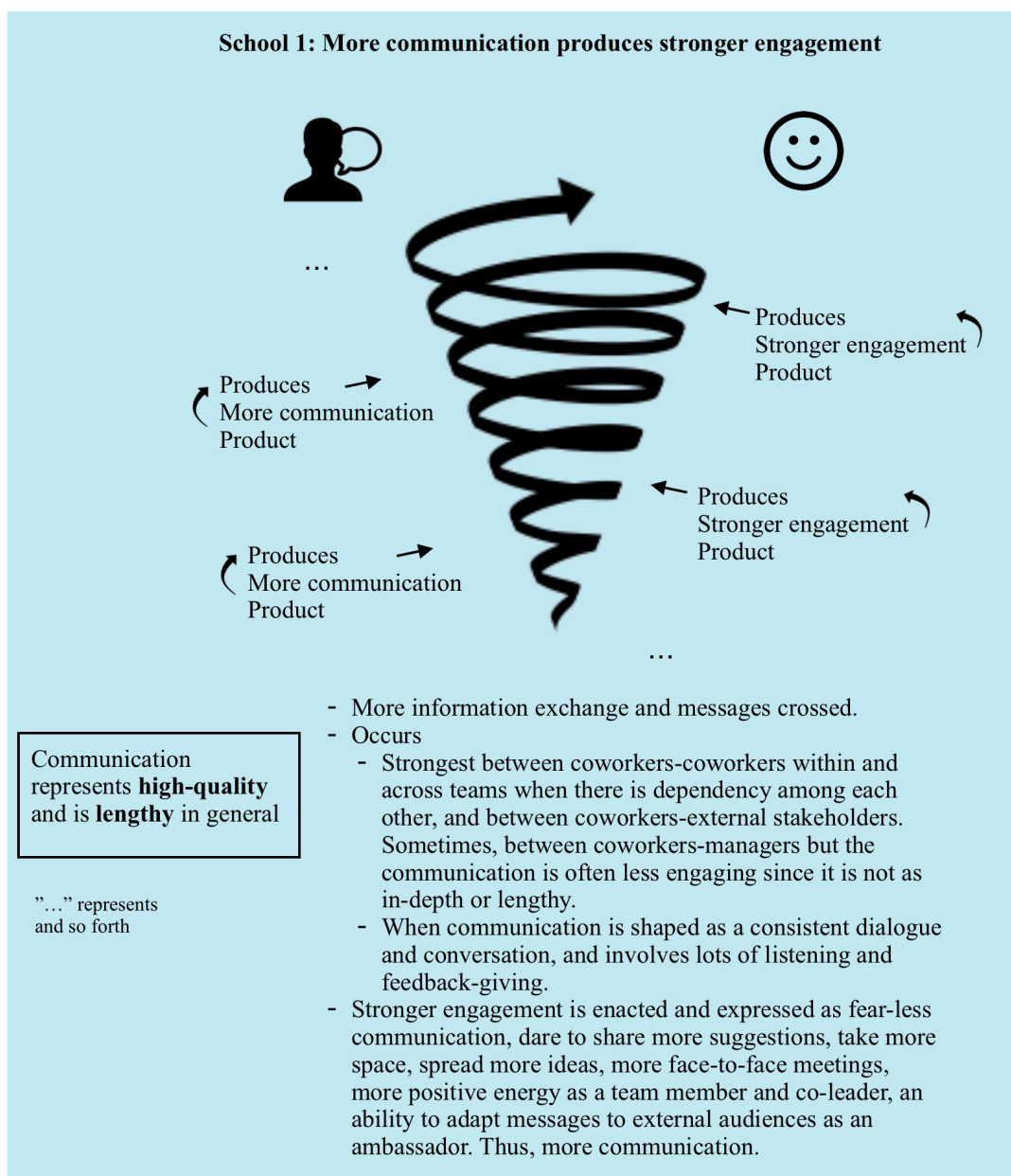
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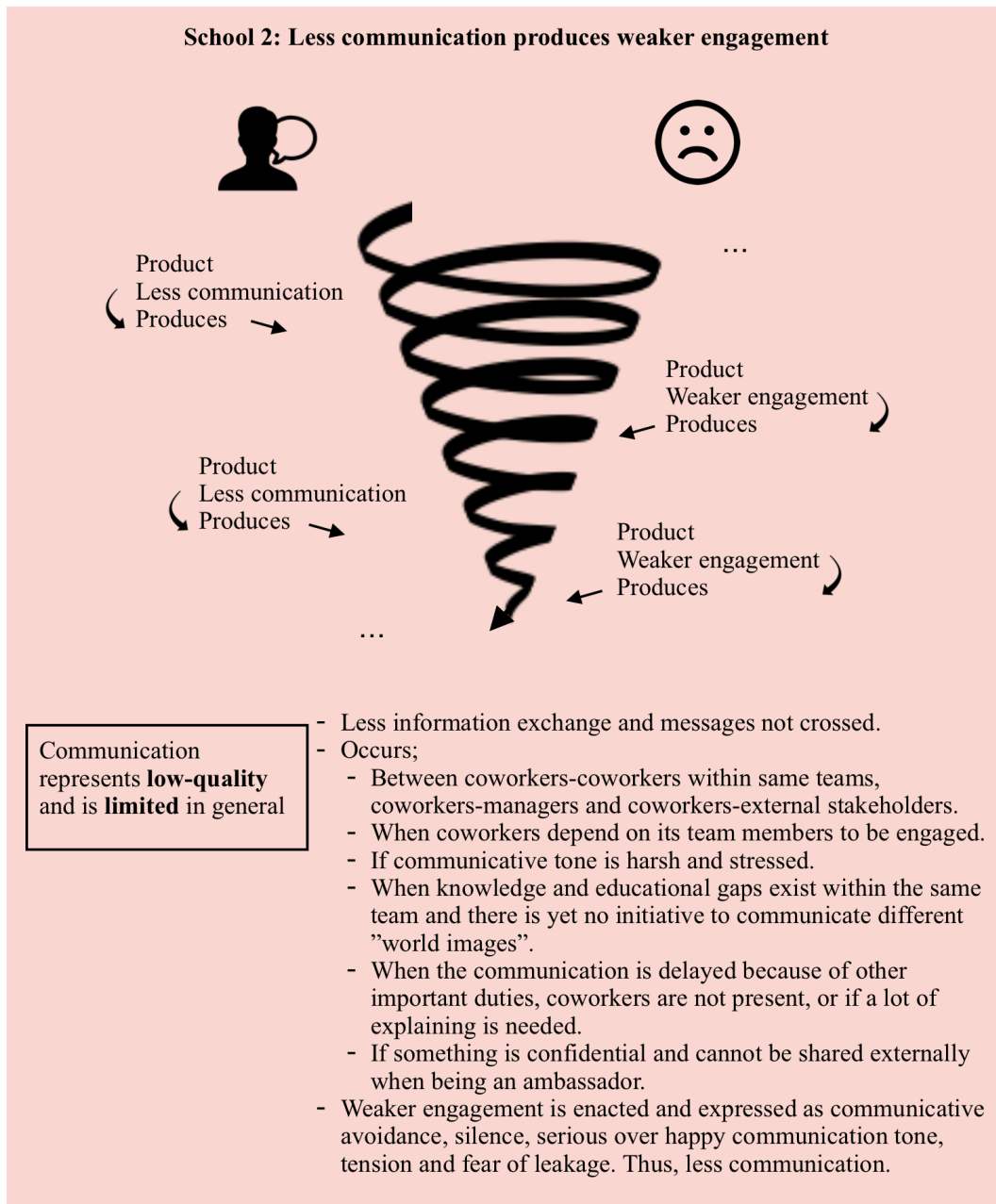
Appendix 1

Illustrations of analytical reflections

1.1 School 1

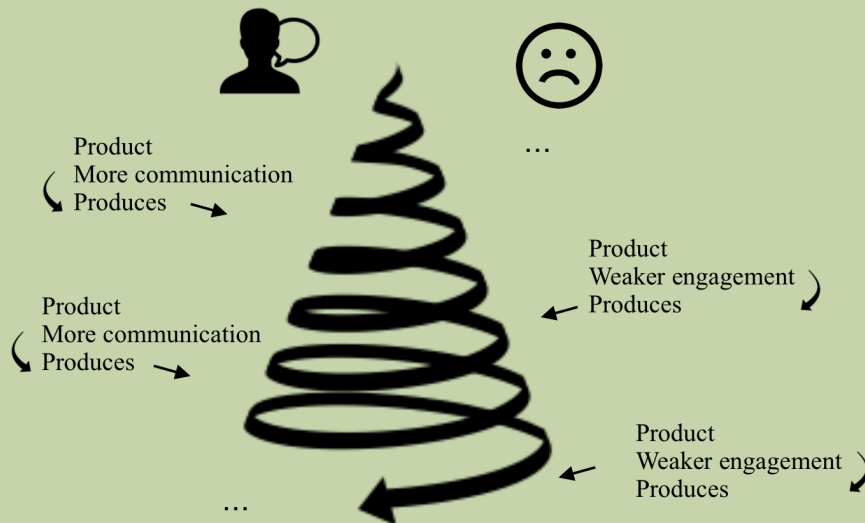


1.2 School 2



1.3 School 3

School 3: More communication produces weaker engagement

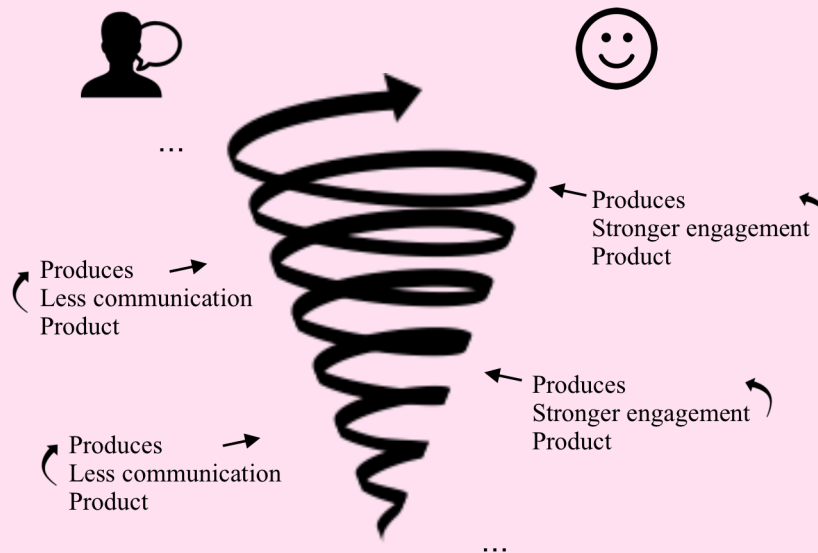


Communication represents **low-quality** and is **lengthy** in general

- More information exchange and messages not crossed.
- Occurs;
 - When it regards face-to-face communication between coworkers-coworkers within same team who sit close, coworkers-managers at meetings, and coworkers-external stakeholders when being an over-engaged ambassador.
 - In open-space offices when the communication is not aimed to a specific receiver in the group – is rather seen as a noise.
 - If big knowledge-gaps exist within the same team and messages are not adapted to the receiver although communication occurs.
 - At meetings with no structure or agenda.
- Lengthy communication viewed as a distraction (with too much details, lengthy and is unprepared, loud, too much "small talk") or an ambiguity (fluffy, not saying the truth, no clarity or accuracy) or an insult (not respecting the receiver).
- More communication is enacted in disturbing chit chat, less concentration abilities, passive listening and less ambition to "walk extra mile". Thus, weaker engagement.

1.4 School 4

School 4: Less communication produces stronger engagement

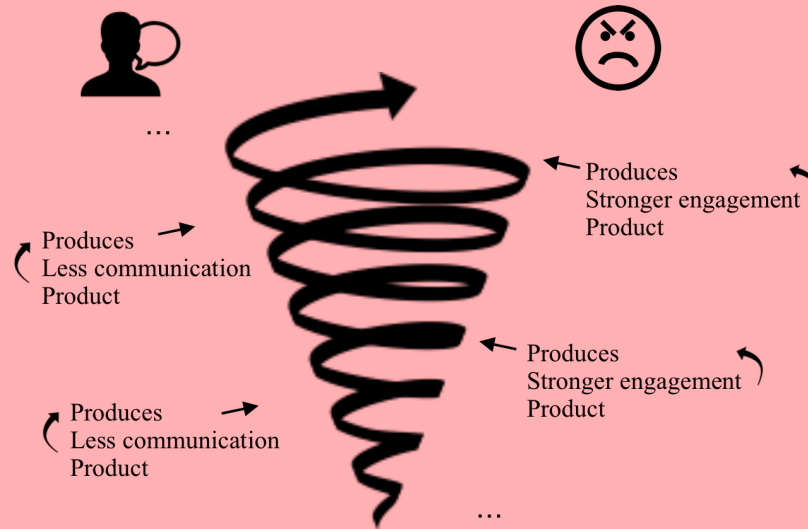


Communication represents **high-quality** and is **limited** in general

- Less information exchange and messages crossed
- Occurs;
 - If coworkers have expertise knowledge and need to accomplish individual and advanced tasks independently.
 - When it regards face-to-face communication among engineers in the incubator.
 - If coworkers within same team have a common understanding socially and professionally of each other.
 - If coworkers are motivated by individual goals rather than overall goals of the organization.
 - Between coworkers-managers if there is trust in the coworkers' performance.
- Limited communication is enacted in strong engagement since professional rather than social progress.
- Stronger engagement is enacted and expressed as strong concentration, silence and concise messages. Thus, less communication.

1.5 School 5

School 5: Less communication produces stronger engagement



Communication represents **low-quality** and is **limited** in general

- Less information exchange and messages not crossed.
- Occurs;
 - Occasionally between coworker-team managers and coworkers-upper management.
 - When information exchange is less rapid and in-depth.
 - When there is delayed replies either face-to-face or digitally.
- Lack of communication produces stronger engagement in a desire to solve and tackle the challenge.
- Less communication is enacted and expressed as strong frustration and resistance. Thus, stronger engagement.

* Note: Unlike School 4, this communication is of lower quality from managers.

Appendix 2

Further reflections on the methodology

2.1 Further motivation of the chosen case study design

Flyvbjerg (2006) claims case studies is a research strategy that gives the researcher a closeness to real-life situations, and provides unique and contextual knowledge. This in turn provides a complexed view of reality and improves “researchers’ own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 13). Although I did not conduct an *ethnographic case study* with observations (which probably would have provided me even closer to realistic scenarios of the communicative roles, challenges and enactment of engagement for instance), nor considered for instance the perceptions of managers or middle managers working in the corporate incubator, which a few opponents could argue is necessary to capture the full complex real-life situation in a case study, I still claim that the multiple semi-structured interviews in the case study enabled me to capture in-depth and detailed perceptions and experiences from different coworkers that would be impossible to collect in a survey for instance otherwise. If perceptions of middle managers and managers would have been covered as well, I do not think there would have been time, room or energy to go that into-depth with perceptions of coworkers either. Thereby, I consider the quality of the collected empirical material of highly reliable, in-depth and unique. Furthermore, the case study did not only enable me to develop a deeper understanding of coworkers’ communicative roles and employee engagement in practice, but also of my role as a qualitative researcher and how to conduct research based on context-dependent experience.

2.2 Access to the organization and the corporate incubator

When the aim of study had been pitched for “Kim” about coworkers’ communicative roles, employee engagement and the following communication challenges in a knowledge-intensive context and adjusted a bit based on feedback, an official contract and NDA were finally signed. Because the corporate incubator faced organizational changes as the study was con-

ducted, creating and signing the official documents took longer time than expected and delayed the planned semi-structured interviews and collection of the empirical data several weeks. But when finally signed, it gave me official access to enter the organization's facility in Sweden and to conduct face-to-face interviews in the building. At the same time, Kim became both my supervisor and contact person for the qualitative study. I believe that my supervisor became very helpful in terms of selecting appropriate interviewees that met the selection criteria in the study, and informed me about the corporate incubator and its business and technology directions, its structure, size, past, etc. I argue that the access gained in the knowledge-intensive organization, and more importantly the corporate incubator, helped me to develop a deeper understanding of coworkers' perceptions of their communicative roles in relation to other coworkers, managers and external stakeholders, how these communication processes enacted their engagement and the communication challenges, in the context of a corporate incubator. I believe this understanding in particular could inspire similar studies about coworker communication, employee engagement, coworkership, ambassadorship or studies about corporate incubators for that matter, and could be what Flyvbjerg (2006) defines *an exemplifying case* since empirical research in these areas lacks both a coworker and a CCO perspective.

2.3 Selection and criteria of interviewees

As for the selected organization, I used *purposeful sampling* (Suri, 2011) and *criterion sampling* (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011) when selecting interviewees for the study – meaning information-rich employees that could share their perceptions of the communicative roles, expressed engagement as employees and communication challenges in thorough ways. Because the aim of the qualitative study was to capture a coworker perspective, I made sure that one of the strongest criteria for selecting interviewees was that (1) these did not have any managerial nor executive duties or responsibilities. In order to get a wide and diversified spread, I also went for the following criteria; employees with (2) different roles and expertise (e.g. engineers, marketers, designers etc.) (3) various employment length both in the corporate incubator and the organization as such (4) different gender (5) different age. These criteria were clearly communicated with Kim at an early stage.

Together with the human resources department, Kim offered a list with relevant interviewees for the study. I argue, in similar ways as Heide and Simonsson (2014), that being assigned a regular contact person that blessed one's study made the interviewees more likely

to accept the interview invitation. Yet, it is possible that a supervisor may pick certain interviewees for certain beneficial reasons or to avoid any critical or negative responses to be shared. At the same time, though, I believe that Kim selected a great spread of coworkers and did not have any concerns with the prepared questions in the interview guide, which made me confident that it was a relatively representative sample rather than a biased one. Although the interviews were conducted in anonymous ways, meaning that no one including the managers could relate a given answer to a certain interviewee, it is still likely that an invitation from a manager though could unconsciously have an impact on how the coworker respond or feeling obligated to participate. Even if the probability may be relatively small, I still think it is important to consider. In addition, I argue it was quite challenging to get a representative sample at first since the organizational changes resulted in a lot of terminated employment contracts and uncertainty. As stated before, I aimed to interview employees who were not informed with any terminations since this would avoid bias to some extent. But in the beginning, we did not fully know who on the actual provided list by HR were informed or not informed with termination, and asking for this information was confidential at first. Finally, however, informed was given and a representative sample chosen. As a result, Kim sent out a short email to three-four potential interviewee candidates about a brief description about the study which I formulated together with him. Thereafter, I followed up with another email together with an information sheet about the study (please see [Appendix 3](#)) including its overall purpose, how it could benefit the incubator in practice by attending the interview, and a suggested scheduled time for an interview. In total, 15 different coworkers were selected and interviewed in the corporate incubator. Additionally, all interviewees were employed as full-time employees by the knowledge-intensive organization except two who were employed as part-time consultants when the study was conducted.

2.4 Further description of the qualitative interviews

Since the research aimed to touch upon coworkers' perceptions of their communicative roles, its communication challenges, and consequently how employee engagement is a producer and product of communication, I conducted particularly *semi-structured interviews* (Flick, 2009). Beforehand, I prepared an interview guide, e.g. "a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467). In detail, I used flexible open-ended questions in the interviews giving the coworkers in the corporate incubator an opportunity to describe how they perceived their communicative roles, their expressed engagement as employees, commu-

nication challenges and areas of improvements. Before touching upon these areas of interest, I briefed the interviewee about myself as a Master's student, the research study, its aim and showed an illustrative table (please see [Appendix 6](#)) of new organizational forms and coworkers' communicative roles in order to set the structure for the following interview. Also, I explained that, on a practical note, the study could hopefully help both managers and coworkers to avoid managerial bias and improve communication and engagement conditions for coworkers. This was followed by a couple of standardized questions about position and role in the incubator, educational background, and employment length in the incubator and the organization as a whole (please see [Appendix 5](#)). In line with Kvale & Brinkmann (2015), I believe it was important to set the interview stage at first so that the interviewees later "allow themselves to talk freely and expose their experiences and feelings to a stranger" (p. 154). In similar ways, each interview was ended with me giving a short summary of the interviewees' key points ensuring that the experiences and examples were captured correctly. Hopefully, this avoided the feelings of anxiety or emptiness afterwards (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interviews were finished with debrief as well (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), e.g. asking if there were anything else that could be of importance to know, asking about the experience of the interview, asking if it was possible to ask follow up questions later on, and if the final publication of the master thesis was requested. All in all, questions on the list were asked (please see [Appendix 5](#)) including some additional ones that was based on certain answers and similar wording was used among the interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Appendix 3

Information sheet

Dear participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study for a master thesis. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and feel free to ask me if you have questions, would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand.

Thank you for reading this!

Kind regards,

Max Rasmusson

Assignment Description/Research Purpose

In essence, the study is about communication between colleagues in everyday work situations.

As you know, communication between people is in general very important to create a good atmosphere. In an organization, beyond the basic “*seen, heard and respected*”, communication is vital to build *well-being, trust* and *engagement*, a fundament needed in all good work places.

Communication between people, however, is normally taken for granted in corporations. Against this background, it is important to consider communication as a complex process among all departments and levels in a company. Co-worker communication is especially important in modern so-called “*post bureaucratic*” organizations with minimal hierarchies and that typically are supposed to be “*learning and innovative*” (sometimes characterized as having a “*startup mentality*”). In such organizations (compared to old style hierarchical organizations), each and every co-worker are supposed to take a higher degree of communication responsibility and act somewhat as a team member among its colleagues, co-leader with its managers and ambassador for the organization as a whole. It seems to me that the corporate incubator will be good to study in this context.

In line with this, this research field is also about how engaged employees are in an office environment. Employee engagement has normally been seen as a tool for managers to increase financial returns, and has thus normally been considered from a managerial perspective. Yet, engagement is also a complex concept as it can be perceived in different ways among employees. Therefore, this study also wants to touch upon how communication relates to employee engagement from a coworker point of view.

On a practical level, the insightful findings can help both managers and coworkers to avoid managerial bias, misunderstandings or misjudgments of each other, and improve communication and engagement conditions for coworkers as well as the internal communication in general.

The research methodology is a single case study and primary data collection will be through deep interviews with participants with different work roles, ages, gender, employment length, culture and educational background, etc. and that currently have no managerial nor middle managerial/executive position in a corporate incubator. As you, based on judgement by researcher fulfil these criteria, you have together with 14 other participants been invited to participate in this research. The interviews will be held in either Swedish or English based on what the participants prefers.

Data Collection Procedures

To achieve this goal, researchers are to engage in the following data collection process.

1. Participant is invited to partake in a 45-60 minutes long deep interview on the subject matter
2. Participant will upon acceptance be sent a formal invitation for the interview
3. Participant can at any time before, during, or after the interview chose to decline participation even though prior consent has been given
4. Interview will, based on consent from participant, be audio recorded
5. Questions will be open-ended questions
6. The interview will be transcribed and sent to participant for review and approval
7. If responses may involve confidential details this part of the transcript will be rephrased or excluded entirely

Ethical Concerns

- **Potential Conflicts of Interest**
The researcher's role is separated from other professional roles and research is conducted from the position of a Lund University student.
- **Confidentiality**
In all cases, company information will be anonymised, no proprietary information will be shared and the privacy of the interviewee will be safeguarded.
- **Reasonably Foreseeable Risks and Anticipated Benefits and Costs to Participant or Others**
There are no foreseeable risks by way of physical or psychological harm to the participant or to others in the organisation. The nature of the research involves evaluation of the organisation so as to principally benefit the organisation. No compensation for participation is offered nor given neither to the organization nor the individual participants.

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me with any question or concerns you may have.

Appendix 4

Consent Form



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Max Rasmusson

**Please
tick the
box**

1. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publication.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I will be free not to do so.
3. I understand that the information I submit will be analyzed and may be published in an analysis of a master thesis.
4. I understand that I will have a chance to review, edit and make changes of the provided transcription within a two-week time period.

Participant Name

Date

Signature

Max Rasmusson

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 5

Interview guide

1. Starting questions

- Could I record this interview with a microphone for transcription purposes? I promise to keep your identity and answers anonymous. (as per the consent form)
- Please tell me about your position and role in the organization?
- What educational background do you have?
- What professional background and experience do you have?
- How long have you been working in this organization (corporate incubator), and with this company?

2. Being a team member with your coworkers (meaning colleagues on same hierarchical level, no subordinate or team/middle/senior-managers)

- How do you perceive your daily communication with your coworkers in your team? (Both face-to-face and digitally) Is it shaped as a dialogue, or rather as a debate or something else? Could you describe when it works well?
 - Would you consider yourself as a *team member* when communicating with your coworkers? (For example, meaning being accepted as part of a team/closest coworkers, listen as much as you talk, invite your colleagues to the interaction, give feedback, etc.) Why or why not? Could you please give an example of this?
 - How do you perceive your *coworkers* in your team when you communicate, when you try to engage, inform, question, and give feedback? (For example, are they actively listening, seeing and respecting you, if so how?)
 - How do you perceive your coworkers' communication?
 - How do you perceive the communication outside your team, in other units?
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- Do you feel engaged as an employee in your organization today? Can you please give an example when you are engaged?
 - If so, how engaged would you say you are today?
 - How do you think the communication you have with your coworkers impact your engagement as an employee? Please give an example.
 - How does your engagement strengthen back to the communication you have with your coworkers?
-

- What challenges exist in the communication between you as a team member and your coworkers in your team, other teams? Describe when it works not so well.
- How does it affect your engagement?
- What improvement areas do you see in your organization when it concerns the communication and engagement between you and your team members?

3. Being a co-leader with your managers

- How do you perceive your daily communication with your managers? (both face-to-face and digitally) Is it shaped as a dialogue, or rather as a debate or something else? Could you describe when it works well?
 - Would you consider yourself as a *co-leader* together with your managers? Why or why not? If possible, please give an example when this have happened and tell how you perceived it?
 - Would you consider yourself as a co-leader when managers are not present? Do you communicate for the manager in this case, and if so how?
 - How do you perceive your *managers* when you act and communicate as a co-leader? For example: are they actively listening, seeing and respecting you, if so how?
 - How do you perceive your managers' communication?
-

- How do you think your role as a communicative co-leader and the communication you have with your managers influence your engagement as an employee? Please give an example
 - Does it make you more engaged than being a team member? Why or why not?
 - How does this engagement strengthen back on the communication you have with your managers? Please give an example.
-

- What challenges exist in in the communication between you as a co-leader and your middle managers/main managers in your team and in general? Describe when it works not so well.
- In what ways does it affect your engagement? Please give an example.
- What areas of improvement do you see in your organization when it regards taking the co-leader role, and the general communication between you and your team and middle manager/managers?

4. Being an ambassador of your organization

- How do you perceive your communication (both face-to-face and digitally) about your organization with;
 - external *formal* stakeholders? (e.g. customers, business partners, suppliers, competitors, investors, universities, etc.)
 - external *informal* stakeholders? (e.g. family, friends, acquaintances, etc.)
 - Could you please tell me when it works well?
 - Would you consider yourself as an *ambassador* when communicating about the organization with external stakeholders? (For example, meaning saying great things about your organization, correcting false rumors, “live the brand”.) Why or why not? Please give an example.
-

- How do you think being an ambassador with external stakeholders affects your engagement as an employee?
 - Are you more engaged when taking the ambassador role rather than team member and co-leader role? Why or why not?
 - How does this engagement strengthen back the communication you have with the external stakeholders?
-

- What challenges exist in the communication between you as an ambassador and external stakeholders in general? Describe when it does not work so well.
- How does it affect your engagement? Please give an example.
- What areas of improvement do you see in your organization of how to become an engaged ambassador and the communication with external stakeholders in general?

5. Closing questions

- Is there anything that you would like to add that could be important for me to know?
- Is it possible to contact you for follow-up questions and clarification?
- Would you like a copy of the final thesis?

Thank you very much for your participation and contribution!

Appendix 6

New organizational forms

A table shown to interviewees in the beginning of each conducted interview.



New Organizational Forms – New Communication Roles for Co-Workers

	<i>Bureaucratic Organizations</i>	<u><i>Post-Bureaucratic Organization</i></u>
Steering device	Rules and orders	Values, visions and goals
Structure	Hierarchical line organizations	Networks, flexible project organizations
Manager	Controller and supervisor	Visionary, motivator
Employee	Passive subordinate	Active co-worker
Co-workers' communication role in relation to <u>colleagues</u>	No clear communication role	<u>Team member</u> networking Dialogue partner Giving and receiving feedback
Co-workers' communication role in relation to <u>managers</u>	Passive receivers of simple operative information	<u>Co-producers</u> and active interpreters of both operative and strategic information Dialogue partner Sharing information in a meaningful way
Co-workers' communication role in relation to the <u>organization</u>	No clear communication role	<u>Ambassador</u> messenger Living the brand

*Table 3: New organizational forms
(A modified version of a table by Heide & Simonsson, 2011, p. 205.)*