Making sense of communication about change management:

How do peers constructively communicate with one another?

By

Rachelle Fischer

Submitted to the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in Communication and Technology

August 25, 2017

Acknowledgments

I will be forever grateful for all the amazing people in my life that have supported and helped me throughout my academic journey.

This research couldn't have happened without my academic advisor Dr. Rob McMahon. Thank you Rob for guiding me through this process, helping me to narrow my focus, providing me with meaningful feedback and improving my writing development. Thanks also to Saint John Ambulance for opening their doors to me for my research project. I also had the best cohort one could have asked for, with a special thanks to Matty and Trish. Having the ability to share ideas, frustrations and success with you all kept me on track and allowed me to get 'er done!

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my family (Tammy, Rod, Brandon, and Travis) and friends. Thank you to my family for always believing in me and offering endless encouragement, especially to my mom who was willing to drop anything at a moment's notice. Thank you to my friends for listening to my struggles and always up for destressing over countless wine nights. You all played an important role through this academic journey and I couldn't have done it without you!

Table of Contents

Abstract

Informal communication about change in the workplace can be both constructive and negative for organizations. However, research literature places an emphasis on the negative components of informal communications during change communications, which creates a knowledge gap in the literature by neglecting to examine the constructive impact of communications. Accordingly, this research examines informal communications by analyzing the role of peer-to-peer communications and how it is used to make sense of managed change in the workplace. Specifically, this research applies a sociocultural lens to understand: "How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace." The research uses a single case study of a change management project: the implementation of Microsoft Dynamic Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software at an Edmonton not-for profit organization. Applying a qualitative methodology through the use of semi-structured interviews with a sample of employees, content analysis was used to analyze the data and develop key themes of peer-to-peer communication. These findings provide insights to understanding peer-to-peer communications and their role in sensemaking, which can be used to inform future change management projects.

Keywords: change management, employee engagement, workplace culture, internal communication, formal and informal communication, gossip, sensemaking, sociocultural theory

Chapter 1: Research Investigation

Change is the act of adjusting and growing to become something else, a constant component of life. It is inevitable that every person will go through change at one or many points during their life. Depending on their previous experiences of change, people will view change as either good or bad. This perception of change is no different when it takes place in organizational settings. Organizations are constantly adjusting to their environments, incorporating changes to meet the needs and demands placed on them. Ultimately, managers of organizations will make changes to their organizational structures, employment positions, and technologies. As a result of this, employees must make sense of the changes and adjust how they do their job in order to meet the new expectations put on them. These periods of change can create uncertainty for employees in which they turn to their colleagues to make sense of it all. Depending on experience, they will view the change as good or bad, with their interpretation contributing to either resisting or accepting the change.

Change and communication are inextricably linked; you cannot have one without the other (Johansson & Heide, 2008). Although the goal of change management is to improve the organization as a whole, the communication that occurs amongst employees during these changes is a determinant to the success or failure of the change management project. Understanding how employees constructively communicate with one another can aid in successful change management projects.

Purpose of Study

This research project examines, “How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?” Understanding how peers communicate with one another in constructive ways will add to previous literature on organizational change communication, and provide insights to increase the success of future change management projects.

This research project analyzes how peers make sense of managed change in the workplace. Sociocultural theory suggests human development is socially situated and knowledge is created by interactions with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygostsky, 1978). Peer-to-peer communications can impact and affect the choices made by employees, through contributing to their interpretation of change management through discussion with their colleagues. Thus, understanding how peers communicate amongst each other with a focus on constructive communications is highly important when it comes to implementing change within the workplace. What employees understand about the change and how they talk about it with each other will play an important role in the success of the changes implemented. With this context in mind, the following research question and sub questions directed this study:

RQ1: How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?

RQ2: Why do peers communicate with each other about managed change?

RQ3: What purposes do peer-to-peer communications have?

RQ4: What channels do peers prefer to use to communicate with each other?

Preview of Literature

Communication literature in the area of change management identifies communication and change management as inextricably linked, identifying social interactions as a major contributing factor to the success or failure of a change management project within the workplace (Johansson & Heide, 2008; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygostsky, 1978). Previous research explores internal communications and the various ways to deliver messages to internal groups, such as employees. In the next chapter of this research, I review historical literature on communication during change management and the various impacts it may have on both the organization and the individual to better understand peer-to-peer communications and their effects on the organization. Change management and workplace culture literature was studied to understand how employees react to and cope with change. Internal communications was analyzed to identify where gaps in literature existed and to identify existing strategies of peer-to-peer communications. Lastly, a range of theoretical approaches was referenced to provide a context to the importance of peer-to-peer communications during managed change in the workplace.

Preview of Methodology

Drawing on sociocultural theory, this research uses a qualitative methodology to explore how peers constructively communicate with one another to make sense of managed change in the workplace, specifically the implementation of CRM software at Saint John Ambulance (SJA). Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted and the findings were examined through content analysis. The content was analyzed to develop key themes of peer-to-peer communications to better understand the purpose, frequency and channels used by peers to communicate with one another. Overall, these findings provide insights into the importance of peer-to-peer communications during change management projects and further provide a foundation for future research.

Summary

This research uses a qualitative methodology in conjunction with content analysis to analyze employee interviews, which explore peer-to-peer communications during a period of change at SJA. The findings from this analysis are examined to answer the research question, “How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?" This analysis can be used in part to aid in filling the knowledge gap in research on internal informal communications. This study offers foundational research and provides future recommendations for research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Organizations are constantly adjusting to their environments by incorporating changes to improve performance and address key issues to meet the pressures of supply and demand (Johansson & Heide, 2008). Incorporating change management processes to any or all of the following factors - divisions, organizational structures, employment positions and technologies - are only part of the equation. It must also be recognized that employees will have to change and adjust to how they do their work in order to meet new expectations. Change is difficult for employees and will affect each of them in different ways. Employees become engaged, unengaged or disengaged with the change process (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). Focusing on internal communication approaches used by management to implement change and learning how employees understand these communications will be key to support change management in a positive way. How and who communicates changes to employees has a strong impact on employee engagement levels (Cao, Bunger, Hoffman, & Robertson, 2016). When employees are engaged, a healthy workplace culture is reinforced. When employees are unengaged or disengaged, an unhealthy workplace culture is reinforced. If done properly, communication about changes will keep employees engaged, fostering innovation and a healthy workplace place culture. Employees are the backbone to any organization, and if they are not on board, the change will not be as successful as planned for.

Communication research in the area of change management generally focuses on two areas: (a) external communications, which examine how to transmit information about the organization to those in their surrounding environments (clients, suppliers, investors, shareholders, etc…); and (b) internal communications, which explores how messages are delivered to internal groups, such as employees. The focus of this literature review will be internal communications.

Traditionally, internal communications literature has focused on delivering messages from a top-down approach; management sends information to employees without receiving input from their employees. This one-way flow of communication limits an employee's ability to understand the managed change. With no opportunity to ask questions or provide feedback, employees often feel like their voice has been lost and they have no control during periods of change (Miliken, Schipani, Bishara & Prado, 2015). This uncertainty and role ambiguity leads employees to talk amongst each other to try and make sense of the managed change (Henfridsson, 2000).

In this project, I examined the role of peer-to-peer communication in internal communications activities attached to change management. Very little existing literature has placed emphasis on constructive peer-to-peer communications. The literature that does exist has a negative connotation attached to it – for example describing peer-to-peer communications as informal, reflecting gossipy behaviours that occur spontaneously in environments where there is uncertainty about change (Altuntas, Altun & Akiyl, 2014). I could find little known research regarding constructive peer-to-peer communications.

To address this gap, this literature review will: (a) identify common theoretical approaches used within the field of change management; (b) define change management as a branch of organizational change and examine the overall goals of the change management process; (c) analyze how employees are affected by change, exploring both effects on the individual and organization; and (d) identify common internal communication approaches currently used during change management, discussing their negative and positive traits. The next section presents the methodology used to search and identify the literature, a description of theoretical approaches and a review of key themes and limitations of the research.

Identifying the Literature

This literature review is structured around a research question. It takes the shape of a narrative by combining the findings of studies and analyzing key themes throughout the literature. This analysis will be the foundation of my capstone project exploring the research question:

> **How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed changed in the workplace?**

Search Strategy. The literature available pertaining to the topic of communications during change management is vast. To sort through available research, I developed a systematic technique to identify and categorize literature that looked at change management within organizations, affects of changes on employees and communication approaches used. For the purposes of my larger research project, the literature search broadly targeted communication during organizational change within the public sector before narrowing down on key themes and methods used.

To retrieve relevant literature, I conducted searches in Google Scholar and EBSCO, a worldwide premium database, which led to more specific searches in specialized databases such as, *Business Source Complete, Business Source Elite* and *Journal of Change Management*. This was done to find literature of high relevance on this topic. To manage the amount of available literature, the search strategy used Boolean logic and various combinations of keywords, including: ‘change management,’ ‘employee engagement,’ ‘workplace culture,’ ‘internal communication,' 'formal' and 'informal communication,' 'sensemaking' and 'gossip.' In addition to academic literature, I examined grey literature (materials produced outside of academic publishing) such as Prosci (change management certification course) and news articles. During this initial search phase, focus was given to articles that provided broad overviews to the literature. This step helped identify main themes in the literature and key articles.

Literature was gathered from a variety of social science disciplines, including but not limited to business, communications, sociology and psychology from English speaking countries. The broad literature scan was conducted only in the English language and may have limitations as to the insights of studies from countries with alternative languages. With the massive amount of academic literature available on this subject, some studies of importance may not be discussed.

Selection Criteria. As a vast amount of academic literature exists on this topic, the following criteria was used to determine a source's fit: (a) studies evaluating the strengths and limitations of change management in organizations; (b) studies examining employee reactions and behaviours to change management; (c) studies discussing various communications approaches and tactics used during change management; (d) peer-to-peer techniques used in other fields of study that could demonstrate effectiveness in organizational change.

Literature was selected based on recency and relevance. Recency was established by choosing literature from the mid 2000s onward, with the exception of foundational researchers pertaining to the chosen theories (sociocultural and social network literature), and topic areas (change management and communication). Reputation, expertise, credentials, contributions to the field identified and number of published and/or peer reviewed articles were considered to identify foundational researchers. Relevance of the literature was established by identifying a number of criteria. Particular attention was paid to the researchers' previous contributions to the field, strength of argument and methodology, as well as how many times the article had been cited by other academics. Key articles were used to identify frequent researchers within the field.

Theoretical Approaches

Organizational change has been a hot field of research since the 1980's, providing a widespread discussion on different communication perspectives over the years (Krone, Jablin & Putnam, 1987). The most commonly known and frequently referenced research on organizational change can be divided amongst functional, interpretive and critical perspectives towards the role of communication (Putnam, 1983). Historically, organizational researchers viewed communication as a function; a tool used to simply transmit messages downward, upward and across an organization (Doolin, 2003). Communication was believed to be for information purposes only, placing an importance on the different channels used to deliver information, and their strengths/weaknesses.

More recent literature acknowledges communication as interpretive, identifying the fact that an employee's social reality is created through the use of 'words,' 'symbols' and 'actions; ' from this perspective the meaning and context of communication have become more important than the function (Johansson & Heide, 2008). Employees can interpret messages differently and it is these combined interpretations that create (and re-create) an organization's workplace culture. A critical communications perspective agrees that communication is interpretive to an individual, but reflects on the whole of the organizations communication approach to help influence or create social change (Craig, 2013). For example, examining communication amongst groups of employees or between different hierarchical levels will discover what works well and what doesn't work well. Strategically using this information can enhance an organizations communication approach. In this project, I incorporated an interpretive lens to examine how peers communicate amongst each other.

Sociocultural Theory. The interpretive and critical communication perspectives fall under and align with the broader understanding of sociocultural theory. Craig and Muller (2007) define sociocultural theory, "… as a symbolic process that produces and reproduces shared social cultural patterns," (p.83); it is the belief that communication shapes our environments and works to explain how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional and historical contexts. Social interactions and activities within an organization will create the workplace culture and is understood with two distinct, but similar areas:

Social Constructivism. Berger and Luckmann (1966) established the term social constructivism, believing human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interactions with others. It is these interactions that form a culture of shared artefacts with shared meanings. Applying the theory of social constructivism to change management suggests it is the conversations employees have with their peers that establishes the conditions of the working environment, which in turn will facilitate the success level of implementing the change.

Social Constructivist. Vygotsky (1978) suggests learning is both social and cognitive processes that are created by the shared interactions of the group; effective learning will only happen if an interactive process of discussion, negotiation and sharing takes place. During change management, when managers deliver messages using a top down approach, learning is constrained because employees are given minimal opportunity to interact with the information.

These two frameworks are very similar, in that both see people working together to construct artefacts. However, Berger and Luckmann's constructionism focuses on the artefacts created through social interactions, where as, Vygotsky's constructivism focuses on the learning that takes place due to the interactions of the group.

The way that the Google organization operates is a prime example of how employees shape the culture of an organization. Google prides themselves on maintaining an open innovative culture by giving all employees the opportunity to be hands-on contributors to creating products. The ability to work together to come up with new ideas and products fosters a healthy work environment. Google has accomplished this through weekly "all hands" meetings (all employees gather together to brainstorm ideas), emails and open space café times in which they can converse with their peers and directly with the CEO's and executives of other companies (Google Company, 2016). This open workplace culture sparks conversations, increasing innovation. Pursing this line of thought, it becomes imperative to focus on how peers constructively communicate amongst each other within the organization. This example sets the stage for my own research focus. By identifying constructive elements of peer-to-peer communications during their interactions, techniques can be developed and applied during change management projects to help foster a healthy workplace culture. A working assumption is that: the healthier the workplace, the more successful the organization will be. Sociocultural theory will inform my research as communication explains how the larger organization (macro-level) is created and transformed by individual interactions (micro-level) (Craig & Muller, 2007). I will analyze how constructive peer-to-peer communications are used to make sense of managed change in the workplace.

Social Network Theory. The functional communication perspective, using communication as a tool to spread information, can be understood by exploring social network theory. Within organizations, social networks are made up of individuals and groups of people.

They are studied by exploring the ties and social interactions that exist amongst all members. Granovetter (1973) analyzed social networks and their effects on micro and macro levels by exploring strong and weak ties through information diffusion with mobility, opportunity and community organizations. Granovetter's findings concluded that an individual's personal experience is closely bound with large scale aspects of the social structure; weak ties are responsible for the overall structure and transmission for information, whereas strong ties move in the same circle as one another causing the information in that group to overlap or stay within that group (1973). This approach illustrates how peer-to-peer communications become an essential part of spreading information throughout an organization.

Shirky (2008) goes on to discuss small and large networks. Small networks are densely connected with people that have similar likes and interests; everyone knows and interacts with each other. In an organization this could be representative of a team or unit. Having these close bonds can prevent information from moving outside of that particular group. On the other hand, large networks are sparsely connected with people that have different opinions; it is a bunch of small clusters with similar interests that become informed through many different connections (2008). In an organization it is important to establish both small and large networks to have information diffuse seamlessly across the organization. Peer-to-peer communication between coworkers is essential to this.

To establish networks it is critical to understand who has influence and how behaviours are spread with both face-to-face and online interactions. With face-to-face interactions, Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, and Labianca (2010) identified that an employee's relationship and structure of their social network have implications on the spread of gossip. Those with expressive friendships who bond on a personal level, will engage in both negative and positive forms of gossip, where as, instrumental friendships who focus on completing job related tasks and establishing workflow ties are connected to positive forms of gossip only. When it comes to positive gossip, employees place a high importance on having their peer's approval. With online interactions it has been noted that some individuals have more influence over others: young over old, men over women, and women tend to influence men more then women (Aral & Walker, 2012). In regards to behaviours, recent literature has replicated that emotional states can be transferred to others through emotional cognition, allowing others to experience the reader's emotional state (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock 2014). For example, text messaging services are now being used to send inspirational messages to people with anxiety and depression, where more than 75% of participants reported an enhanced quality of life, feeling more connected and supported (Snowdon, 2016).

All of this information suggests peers and peer-to-peer communication are critical components of spreading and influencing how colleagues receive information in organizational settings. If positivity is fostered, it is most likely to create a healthy workplace culture, influencing the organization's overall productivity and response to change management projects. Leveraging social networks amongst peers in a positive way can help increase an organization's social capital, placing emphasizes on the productive benefits of their collective values of social capital (Baym, 2013).

Change Management

Change dynamically occurs across organizations of any kind, regardless of industry, location, size and age. The complexity of managing these changes has become increasingly difficult and has a higher importance in today's society (Hayes, 2014). Organizational change has been defined and viewed from a variety of perspectives. Veldsman (2002) defines organizational change as moving an organization creating two separate locations in time or space. Simply put, it is moving an organization from its current state to future state. Organizational change is concerned with breaking down existing structures and creating new ones (Weeks, Roberts, Chonko and Jones, 2004). This type of work involves the continuous updating of processes as the organization moves towards long-term goals; some changes will happen quickly, over short periods of time, where as, others will happen gradually, over long periods of time, allowing the organization to evolve in order to meet their end goals of increased productivity and efficiency (Hayes, 2014; George & Jones, 1996). To summarize, organizational change is: a) always present; b) affects all organizations; c) transitions from one state to another; d) is dynamic; and e) increases productivity and efficiencies.

Kotter (1990) suggests change is crucial to success: “Major changes are more and more necessary to service and compete effectively in new environments (p.13).” What was done yesterday will not guarantee success tomorrow. Economic pressures and instability have increased the degree and frequency of implementing organizational change (Fugate, Prussia, Kinicki, 2012). Organizations are constantly being challenged to build the capacity for change not only in response to downsizing, restructuring, competitiveness, job roles and technological changes, but also in anticipation of those changes (Kerber & Buono, 2005). These changes can put a tremendous amount of stress on employees, leading to negative outcomes, such as absenteeism and voluntary turnover. As Fugate et al (2012) writes:

> While change is a strategic imperative for employers, it also is vital to note that (remaining) employees determine the ultimate success of such changes. Put another way, negative employee reactions are potentially highly consequential as they can severely impede the realization of the intended benefits to change. (p.891)

Change management is the process of developing a planned approach to change throughout an organization, dealing primarily with the human/social side of things (Kerber &

Buono, 2005). Much of the literature recognizes that management will plan, organize and control the change, while leadership will take on the process of motivating employees to change. Employees that understand the change and the need for it are less likely to resist the change (Prosci, n.d.). While incorporating changes, change management focuses on the wider impacts of change, looking at how both individuals and groups of employees adapt to new processes. From an organizational level, change management is a leadership competency for enabling change; a strategic approach designed and implemented to increase change capacity and responsiveness (ibid). Change management becomes the application of a structured process and is a set of tools for leading the people side of change to achieve a desired outcome within an organization. The goal is to maximize the collective efforts of all people involved and minimize the risk of failure while implementing the change. From an individual level, change management "attempts to create the conditions for people to become more involved in the change process" (Kerber & Buono, 2005, p.27). It is important for employees from all levels to understand the change, as they are the most essential factor to having a successful change (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). If employees are not on board with the change, it will most likely fail.

Workplace Culture. Change management processes are often implemented for the good of an organization, but the results of change can be unpredictable. With a steady failure rate of 60-70% since the 1970's, people question if change management really works (Ashkenas, 2013). The effects of change on an organization are like a double edge sword when it comes to variables, such as productivity, attitudes and relationships. On one hand, changes can bring improvements to employee productivity with the use of new technologies and streamlined processes. If employees buy into the change, the effectiveness of the change and the change process will be maximized. For example, relationships between the employer and employee can be strengthened by internally recruiting staff to fill new positions. On the other hand, workflow can slow down or stop altogether if issues arise while the change is being implemented, decreasing productivity. Some employees may like the idea of change, but it is more likely they will resist the change, leading to a decrease in job satisfaction. Employers may decide to merge companies or outsource work, further damaging the employment relationship.

Workplace culture is representative of employee attitudes and behaviours. If employees embrace the change the organizations workplace culture will foster positivity, if employees resist the change the organizational workplace will foster negativity. A negative workplace culture will inevitably decrease the success of the change, where as a positive workplace culture will inevitably increase the success of the change. Amabile (1998) indicates if an employer can influence the organizational culture, leaders can affect employee attitudes to work related change and motivation, representing a collective social construction. Cartwright and Copper (1993) highlight the importance of involvement from employees at all levels. If efforts of involving people in change management are concentrated at the highest-level only, senior management, different cultures are likely to emerge throughout the organization (1993). Employees will have different interpretations from senior management and each other causing employees to use their peers to make sense of the managed change. This form of sensemaking attaches meaning to an employee's individual experience rather than the organization as a whole; different workplace cultures will collide, further slowing down the adjustment to the new workplace culture (1993). Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006) identify that when employees recognize cultural differences between senior management, increased human resources issues will be experienced throughout the organization. Cultures of tension and mistrust are formed, upsetting performance and productivity. Employees can be a part of the change if given the opportunity to engage with the processes, offering suggestions and providing feedback.

Engagement. Workplace culture will be affected by how engaged employees make sense of the communications about managed change. Mone and Landon (2014) define a engaged employee as, "someone who feels involved, committed, passionate and empowered and demonstrates those feelings in work behaviour" (p.17). Engaged employees will foster a positive workplace culture and be innovative with change (Crabtree, 2013). However, employees may become unengaged, contributing minimal effort, or even disengaged, becoming a strong liability to the organization. Employees easily become unengaged or disengaged due to the causes and consequences of stress from workplace change. Contributing factors of stress can include, but are not limited to: 'psychological demands,' 'lack of decision latitude,' 'lack of social support,' 'physical demands,' 'job security,' 'lack of control,' 'low reward,' 'unfairness,' and 'inappropriate values,' which often result in physiological, behavioural, emotional and/ or cognitive consequences (Smollan, 2015). All of these factors affect employee engagement levels and have consequences on both the individual and organization.

Individual Effects. Consequences of stress on employees can affect their physical, mental and emotional health, as well as their behaviour. Side effects can range from headaches to cancer, poor concentration to memory loss, anxiety to depression and aggressiveness to absenteeism (Smollan, 2015).

Organizational Effects. Employees experiencing stress are more likely to have lower work performance and higher rates of absenteeism and turnover (Smollan, 2015). Not only do these factors contribute to the employer having additional costs to meet production, recruit and train new staff, but also damages working relationships amongst employees. When employees decrease their work ethic or fail to come to work, the workload will fall onto others, creating a workplace culture that fosters unfairness and resentments.

Frenandez and Rainey (2006) argue that, "failure to provide adequate resources in support of a planned change leads to feeble implementation efforts, higher levels of interpersonal stress and even neglect of core organizational activities and functions" (p.172). Overall the literature suggests engaged employees have higher retention rates, lower absenteeism and increased productivity with the opposite effect occurring when one is unengaged or disengaged. Smollan (2015) indicates that stress occurs and is exacerbated by the change management process before, during and after implementation, creating periods of uncertainty throughout. During times of uncertainty it is common for employees to talk amongst themselves, trying to make sense of what is happening. Strategically utilizing constructive peer conversation will keep employees engage and help foster a healthy workplace culture.

Internal Communication

Change management cannot occur without communication; they are inextricably linked together (Lewis, 1999). Barrett, Thomas and Hocevar (1995) indicate the success of change management will depend on how changes are communicated to employees affected by the change. The communication delivery will affect employee reactions to the information and ultimately their engagement levels with the change. During change, it is not uncommon for employees to seek information from multiple sources; this could include their managers, supervisors, colleagues or even contacts outside of the organization (Hargie & Tourish, 2000). These information-gathering practices contain both formal and informal communication channels within an organization.

Formal Communication. Formal communication is the easiest way to communicate within an organization as it has been intentionally established by the organizational structure and is governed by those at the top (McQuail, 1987). There are both written and unspoken rules about what appropriate channels to take and topics to avoid. Organizations have written rules so employees are aware to: use certain channels; take orders and direction from those above them and to follow a chain of command if problems need to be escalated. Formal channels of communications are often displayed as written polices, procedures, rules, formal authority, and duties (Melcher & Ronald, 1967).

> The formal network or channel refers to information that is officially derived, and hence sanctioned, and is usually represented by an organizational flow chart corresponding to the established hierarchy of command. By virtue of its control over frequency, form, nature and directional flow of communication, the formal channel establishes control systems for the transmission of information throughout an organization (Michelson & Mouly, 2004, p.189).

However, many unspoken rules also exist, such as, how to: bypass formal lines of communication, avoid talking badly about your peers or superiors and use sound judgement on what and when to share with peers. This informal communication is discussed below. Literature on formal communications during change management discusses two common communication approaches: programmatic and participatory (Cao et al., 2016; Johansson & Heide, 2008; Russ, 2008, 2010). The programmatic communication approach resembles a one-way flow of information from the top down, leaving employees with little opportunity to ask questions or provide feedback (Russ, 2008). Management tries to control the communication by strategizing what, how and when a message will be communicated. This approach creates a workplace culture in which employees have very little voice. Employees may not feel comfortable speaking to their managers or if employees do speak with their managers, these employees fear there could be repercussions, such as job loss or feel like nothing will change; so they give up all together (Milliken et al, 2015).

To over come this problem, many organizations have begun to implement a participatory approach in addition to the programmatic approach. The participatory communication approach resembles a two-way flow of information between most or all employees, to learn their views and perspectives during the implementation processes (Russ, 2010). Applying a participatory approach to deal with feedback and feelings is beneficial for engaging employees in the change process, providing employees with a sense of control over their daily activities, minimizing employee resistance and increasing employee satisfaction (Russ, 2012). Overall, formal communication is an important tool for organizations to use during change management as it has been recognized to improve productivity and job satisfaction, while it reduces conflict by reinforcing trust and satisfaction (Chiou, Hsieh, & Yang, 2004).

Informal Communication. Unfortunately, unspoken rules are not always understood or followed when it comes to communicating in the workplace and when employees seek clarity on organizational change. Employees will use other channels, not intentionally disseminated by the organization, such as social committees or the grapevine to get some form of clarity (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998). In these instances, informal communications, which have fewer restrictions, will often take over. Informal communication leaves no record and frequently crosses boundaries within an organization, separate from workflow. It can occur between people who do not work together directly, but share a common interest in the work they do or share motivations to perform their job well. They can occur in any direction and take place between workers of different statuses and roles.

> Informal channels of communication, often referred to as the grapevine, emerge spontaneously and are situationally derived. The informal network supplements the

> formal network and, depending on a range of factors may either support or run counter to the official channel (Michelson & Mouly, 2004, p. 189).

Informal communications often gets associated as gossip, which is commonly known to take place in the workplace. Employees throughout all hierarchical levels, will produce, hear or participate in sharing information amongst their colleagues (Foster, 2004). Gossip can include exchanging information about a third party that isn't present. Literature from both the United States and Western Europe identify that over 90% of employees will engage in some form gossip at work (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Libianca, & Ellwardt, 2012). This percentage most likely rises during change management as employees experience uncertainty. Current literature suggests gossip has either negative or positive functions (Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Michelson & Mouly, 2004). Rumours have been found to mimic collective concerns, such as, staff turnover, job security, advancement opportunities, working conditions and compensation (Bordia et al., 2006; DiFonzo, et al., 1994).

Negative. Historically, literature has given workplace gossip negative connotations, being viewed as a socially destructive activity. Rumours are spread under conditions that create anxiety and uncertainty, such as change management (Bordia et al., 2006). Employees use rumours as a form of sense making to help reduce anxieties. During these stressful times it is not uncommon for employees to neglect to assess credibility, resulting in the rumour to spread faster and further then it would in a stable working condition (Bordia et al., 2006). This has resulted in management viewing the behaviour as harmful to the organization and communication approaches have been representative of trying to eliminate or control gossip.

Positive. Although, informal communications is widely known as the domain for gossip, this word of mouth channel has in recent literature proven to have positive functions. Lewis (2006) identified gossip as the most common way to receive information and provide input within an organization. It has also been noted, that there is value to employees gossiping to make sense of their roles and responsibilities amongst their peers.

Also, Maruping and Mangi (2015) suggest that uncertainty is representative of role ambiguity from a team context, a major factor of change management. When employees are given the opportunity to explore new processes and systems, working with each other to incorporate them into work practices is believed to help employees adapt to changes that best meet their needs and foster creativity and innovation (Maruping & Mangi, 2015; Henfridsson, 2000). For these reasons it is important that peer-to-peer communications are supported during change management. Therefore, my study focuses on this area.

Summary of the Literature

This literature review identifies the importance of change management and illustrates that the workplace culture created through social interactions is a major contributing factor to the success or failure of change processes within an organization. Employees become critical to an organization's success. Specifically, the literature teaches us about the characteristics of employee engagement (causes/ consequences of stress) and illustrates how change management processes are affected through various communication approaches.

A large portion of internal communications literature, including Johansson and Heide (2008), focuses on formal communications, such as, top-down, programmatic communications, being delivered in a one-way flow, directly by management, and participatory communications, two-way flow, initiated by a supervisor. Both of these approaches limit employees' opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback, creating a level of uncertainty and role ambiguity. When employees are unclear it is more likely they will engage in conversations with their peers. The literature disproportionately focuses on informal communications, framing it as representative of gossipy behaviour, which needs to be controlled. Although, some recent literature recognizes there are both positive and negative functions of gossip, there is still very little known about constructive communications that occur amongst peers. My research will fill in this literature gap by exploring what constructive peer-to-peer communications look like and how peers use these communications to make sense of managed change.

Klonek et al. (2014) suggest informal conversations that occur between peers in the workplace can predict employee's future behaviours; whether they are resistant or receptive to the changes. My research will focus on constructive peer-to-peer communications during change management and how it is used to make sense of communications about managed change in the workplace, examining what channels of communication create constructive exchanges between peers. My research will address the following question:

> **How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?**

I will use a qualitative method to conduct semi structured one-on-one interviews, which will be analyzed through content analysis. By using a qualitative method, I will explore employees' experiences of constructive peer-to-peer communications, staying close to the data to establish content discussed and channels used to help or keep employees engaged, fostering a healthy workplace culture during change management. Qualitative description based on an analysis of interview data will allow for a greater understanding of what constructive peer-to-peer communications are and the influence they have on workplace culture.

Chapter 3: Research Design & Methodology

Research Questions

Change management is a planned approach to implementing change throughout an organization that addresses the human/ social side of change (Kerber & Buono, 2005). Kerber and Buono acknowledge that organizations frequently experience change in response to downsizing, restructuring, competitiveness, job roles and technological changes; a change management approach can anticipate how employees may react and be affected by such changes (2005). Employees play a critical role in the success of change management projects; employees need to be informed, understand and accept changes before they change can be successful. Change management communication is most frequently delivered from a hierarchical, programmatic top-down approach, in which management will deliver messages to their employees about decisions that have already been made.

It is important to understand how employees take the information they receive from management about managed change and constructively communicate amongst their peers to make sense of it and to further carry out job related tasks associated with the change. Having an understanding of what employees do well amongst each other can be used to help employees make sense of the change, assisting in future change management projects. From a social constructivist perspective employees are communicating with one another to make sense of and to learn new processes or tasks resulting from the change communications management delivered. These employee discussions often take place through informal communications channels with their peers, due to the limited ability employees have to ask questions of or provide feedback to management when a hierarchical, programmatic top-down approach to change management is taken.

In times of uncertainty, such as managed change peer-to-peer communications increases. Constructive peer-to-peer communication is demonstrated when all parties have a willingness to listen to each other, share a common problem, validate one another and are descriptive and specific in their interactions (Wakeman, 2014). The goal of constructive communication in the workplace is to preserve healthy relationships between communicators while they are discussing organizational processes and job related tasks. During change management implementations, the employees' role is to make sense of the communication about changes provided to them by management focusing on employee understanding between peers.

In a workplace, change is facilitated through human interactions and communication's which will produce and reproduce employees' realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). When a new process is put into place uncertainties exist due to the one-way direction in which management delivers communications to employees. Employees immediately start to talk to one another about the information received in order to understand and make sense of it. Communication shapes our environments and works to explain how individual mental functioning is related to institutional contexts (Craig & Muller, 2007). Peers in the workplace can be identified as those between coworkers in lateral positions who have no or limited formal authority over one another, (Putman & Mumby, 2013, p.381). These social interactions amongst peers help them makes sense of managed change communications. This study explores how constructive communications occurred amongst peers in the workplace. Specifically, my study asks:

How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?

Further, understanding the following sub questions will provide a richer appreciation of the role of peer communication patterns during change management changes.

During change management:

RQ2: Why do peers communicate with each other about managed change?

RQ3: What purposes do peer-to-peer communications have?

RQ4: What channels do peers prefer to use to communicate with each other?

The exploration of constructive communication amongst peers was investigated through a case study of a change management project at St. John Ambulance (SJA) using qualitative description. After two years of planning in March of 2015, SJA implemented new software, Microsoft Dynamics Customer Relationship Management (CRM), to help them manage their different client relationships. CRM is software used to track courses, classes, student registrations, quoting, invoices and volunteer management.

To learn about sensemaking among peers in this context, I interviewed six employees working in a variety of lateral positions at SJA. To illustrate how this research was conducted, this chapter will discuss the parameters and rationale for: (a) research design; (b) participants; (c) setting; (d) instrument used to collect data; (e) procedure on how the study was carried out; and (f) how the data was collected, analyzed and stored.

Research Design

The theoretical lens of social constructivism was central to the development of this study. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain, human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interactions with others. These interactions – and the common understandings that emerge from them – can contribute to the formation of a workplace culture with shared meaning. Applying the theory of social constructivism to peer-to-peer communications during change management suggests that employees talk with their peers to exchange information to make sense of change (Putnam & Mumby, 2014). Comer suggests employees rely on their peer coworkers for information more than any other source as they often share similar tasks (1991). Peer-to-peer communications is an informal sensemaking process used in hopes to resolve uncertainties and role ambiguities that can be a result of implementing a workplace change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). This approach explored how employees make sense of change management processes instated by management and how their perception and understanding of it affect the final outcome (Alvesson & Sveningson, 2015; Helms-Mills 2003).

This research project is a case study of constructive communications amongst employees of SJA, a not-profit organization, which implemented CRM software. I conducted content analysis on the responses collected through semi-structured interviews with employees of SJA about their experience of constructive communication with their peers during the CRM software implementation. Content analysis of interview data allowed me to stay close to the employee experience and interpretation. I hope that this study can be used as an aid in implementing future change management initiatives.

Participants

SJA has a number of offices throughout Canada, but for this research study's purpose all research was conducted out of the provincial centralized office located in Edmonton, Alberta (AB). SJA had gone through a continued state of change since the implementation of CRM software in March 2015. The Director of Human Resources (HR) made initial contact with the potential research participants. The researcher than contacted each potential participant individually to determine which employees had basic customer serving responsibilities with no or minimal supervision of other employees. The researcher excluded managers and supervisors from the selection process, as their communications with peers (those in lateral positions with no authority over one another) was minimal. Using a targeted sample method, the researcher invited participants through personal contact, via email, to be interviewed.

As the intention of qualitative description is to sample ideas rather than people, it was important to gather in-depth data on how employees constructively communicate with their peers. Participants were selected using representative or criterion sampling, "selecting participants who closely match the [inclusive and exclusive] criteria of the study," (Rudestam, 2007, p.107). The inclusion criteria for the study was participants: (a) who were employed at SJA when changes occurred; and (b) must have had no or minimal formal authority over other employees. The exclusion criteria was: (a) new employees (those hired after March 2015); and (b) managers and supervisors as they have formal authority over most employees. All participants were informed prior to the onset of the interview the intention of the research, their participation was voluntary and they could choose to leave the study at any time without being penalized.

Setting

For participants' convenience, interviews were conducted within an enclosed office or meeting room at the SJA office in which the participant was employed or a mutually agreed upon location. Using the participants' office space provided a familiar and comfortable environment for them, as well as ensured easy access, eliminating the need to take a lengthy amount of time off from work and incur unnecessary travel time. Anonymity of participation could not be guaranteed for this study, however necessary precautions were taken. Anonymity may have been at risk if management or other employees saw participants entering the room and the HR Director could potentially identify participants as he participated in recruitment by providing the researcher with the potential participant list. Participants may have responded differently to interview questions knowing others knew they were participating. The researcher mitigated this risk by having the HR Director sign a confidentiality agreement and explained that the nature of the interview was for graduate research at the University of Alberta and had no implications towards their work performance.

Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from employees about their experiences with constructive communication amongst their peers. Individual interviews took place in person to capture both the verbal and non-verbal cues of participants and lasted for approximately 30 minutes. Prior to the interview process I developed a semi-structured interview guide that helped facilitate the interviews. Interview questions were created and informed by the completed literature review and reviewed by this researcher's academic supervisor. Finalized questions were than tested and reviewed by the HR Director at St. John Ambulance to highlight readability and commonalities; adjustments were made to reflect common language at the workplace. The interview guide included open-ended questions with the ability to remain flexible; allowing divergence from the interview guide if additional questions were asked based on the participant responses.

Questions were developed strategically to first build rapport and establish context. Next I asked questions about the following topics: (a) situations in which the participant felt they benefited from communications with their peers; (b) what those benefits were; (c) what topics influenced them to talk to their peers; (d) what channels were used during those communications; and (e) timing of those communications. These types of questions highlighted the participants' experience of constructive peer-to-peer communications generating richer data.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain the richest data by ensuring the views of the participant were maintained which was accomplished by the flexibility of both designing and refining the interview guide and questions while conducting the interviews (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004). This process gave me a degree of freedom to explain my thoughts and highlight particular areas of interest to explore certain responses in greater depth.

Procedure

Prior to conducting interviews, approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board (REB) was granted and the HR Director at SJA reviewed the study's research design and confirmed their organization was ready to proceed with the REB approval. After approval was received, I approached potential participants about voluntary participation, discussed the intended purpose for the research, explained that the HR Director helped put their name forward and has reviewed the interview questions, defined how their confidentiality was protected and elaborated on the process that would be used.

With agreed voluntary participation, arrangements were made to conduct six face-to-face interviews in a private office at SJA. Before the interviews began, I reiterated that participation was voluntary and participants could leave at anytime with no penalty, discussed intentions of research and explained procedures taken to protect confidentiality. With permission, I audio recorded and took notes throughout each interview to help maintain accuracy during the transcribing process. I ensured all electronic files were password protected and handwritten notes were locked in a drawer to protect participant confidentiality. Interview questions were also designed to protect participant confidentiality by excluding questions with any identifying features, such as, demographic, employment position and role specific tasks. Interviews took place and data was analyzed concurrently, (Merrigan, Huston, Johnston, 2012). The point of saturation was reached; meaning no new themes arose, after six interviews.

Further to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality, names were removed from transcripts and identifying information was not linked with any quotes. All data collected was password protected on my personal computer.

Research Concerns. Change in the workplace often creates uncertainty and periods of anxiety and high stress that results in the use of peer-to-peer communications to make sense of the changes imposed by management (Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan, & Difonzo, 2006; Smollan, 2015). Based on the sensitive nature of this topic, participants may have expected to see certain outcomes and/or changes in their workplace from this research. To reduce this expectation, participants were informed before the interview began that the research was for the purpose of graduate research through the University of Alberta.

Talking about stressful situations poses the potential for participant discomfort and stress. To minimize this risk the research focused solely on constructive communications amongst peers in lateral positions and how it was used to make sense of workplace changes. Unfortunately, cueing participants to think about constructive communications may lead them to think about the opposite. If participants discussed deconstructive/negative communications or communications across hierarchal levels the researchers questioning was reframed to explore what worked well in that situation. This protected the reputation of the participants and the organization.

Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded using the *Audiopo* app and I jotted down scratch notes in a journal throughout the interviews to highlight key points and common themes. Additional thoughts and notes were added to the journal after the interview was completed.

To analyze the interview data I used content analysis. The data was collected and analyzed concurrently, meaning it was analyzed at the same time as it was gathered to allow for new leads and to explore negative cases in the next interview (Merrigan, et al., 2012). I than transcribed each audio recording and reviewed interview notes in detail to become familiar with the content. Next, I identified what stood out in my data by highlighting key words, phrases and concepts. Than I categorized the data into groups, examining what did and did not fit together. When I discovered a negative case it was explored in the next interview. The group categories were continuously reviewed and compared with new interviews to establish one or two common themes across the interviews to tie all the data together (Merrigan, et al., 2012). Once there were no new categories identified in the interviews, the saturation point had been reached and the data collection was completed.

Reliability. It was important for this study to be easily replicated in other organizations under similar circumstances. To ensure reliability I created an audit trail by writing out detailed procedures for recording, transcribing and analyzing data (Rudestam, 2007). I developed a coding table to input key words and phrases, as well as, their frequencies. This helped me continuously refine my research; converging on themes until I reached the point of saturation.

Validity. Validity ensures that you measured what you intend to measure (Rudestam, 2007). Using qualitative description allowed me to gain rich data from a small number of participants. I strengthened the validity of the interview process by seeking feedback from my academic supervisor and pilot tested the questions with the HR Director at. The questions were adjusted based on their feedback. Once interviews began, collecting and analyzing data concurrently allowed me to explore new leads and negative cases as they arose, ensuring the line of questions continued to reflect the participants' experiences (Merrigan, et al., 2012).

From a social constructivism perspective, validity is established by evaluating the trustworthiness of participants (Rudestam, 2007). Using face-to-face semi-structured interviews gave me the advantage of observing the participants' social cues, including: voice, intonation, body language and gestures (Opdenakker, 2006). I made note in my journal of any noticeable social cues that were later taken into consideration when making inferences on the data collected.

Research Limitations. Qualitative research is most often concerned with researcher biases. It is not uncommon for the researcher's personal views, ideas or lens to be reflected in the interview questions, which in turn jeopardizes the studies reliability and validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To reduce researcher bias, an organization was selected in which the researcher knew little about and all participants were unknown to the researcher. Further, the interview guide was pilot tested with one of my fellow classmates to address any biases and checked for: appropriate sequence of questions, feedback on ambiguities or question difficulty, timing, adequate range of responses, question interpretation and answerability (Chenail, 2011).

Summary

Qualitative description with the use of semi-structured interviews was used for this research project to provide the researcher with the richest data in exploring an employee's experience of constructive communications amongst their peers in order to make sense of change in the workplace.

The interviews were administered to a representative sample of participants that were employees of SJA during the time that the CRM software had been implemented and participants had no or minimal authority over other employees. Data was analyzed concurrently with each interview to allow for flexible questioning and to address negative cases in upcoming interviews. These research methods provided a strong foundation to inform the research question:

> **How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?**

The next chapter will discuss the data findings and outcomes from this research design.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This study sought to find how peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace. To do this I explored the purpose, channels and frequency of peer-to-peer communications. The study will strive to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?

RQ2: Why do peers communicate with each other about managed change?

RQ3: What purposes do peer-to-peer communications have?

RQ4: What channels do peers prefer to use to communicate with each other?

This chapter examines data from six interviews guided by the overall research question and three sub questions that were conducted with employees of the Edmonton not for profit organization, SJA. It should be noted, the participants in this study consisted of peers; that is, front line employees who held lateral positions to one another with none or minimal authority over one another. The interview was separated into two sections; participant perceptions of management change communication and peer-to-peer communication of managed change in the workplace. This case study analysis was guided by sociocultural and sensemaking theoretical perspectives. Using inductive content analysis, themes emerged from reviewing the interview transcripts and applying an iterative coding process to that data.

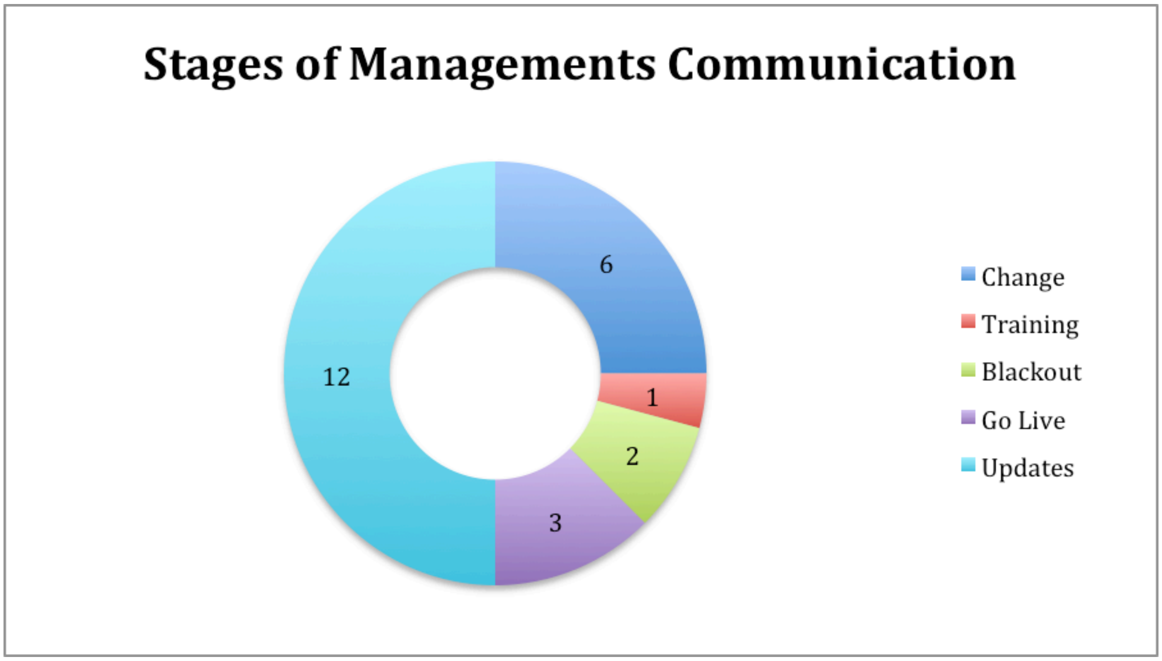
This chapter first analyzed the findings of how employees perceived management change communication and discussed overarching themes. This helped identify the gaps in organizational knowledge that may have generated a need for peer-to-peer communications after a change – specifically the implementation of the new CRM software – was communicated by management. Secondly, feedback about peer-to-peer communication was analyzed and overarching themes discussed. Thirdly, I applied theory to determine how constructive peer-to-peer communications are used during change management initiatives. Lastly, I summarized my research findings and proposed future research discussions.

Managements Change Communication

Overall, all participants consistently noted that they knew change was coming because management had informed them ahead of time. Some of the people interviewed indicated they received information over a period of time. For example, “It was in the works for quite a long time” (Interview C). Others recalled more specific information, such as one person who stated that: “They advised us that we’re going to be moving to a new database” (Interview F).

Content. SJA change management project consisted of the implementation of new software, the Microsoft Dynamics Customer Relationship Management (CRM), as a part of a national initiative. The goal of the CRM software was to enhance the customer experience by tracking courses, classes, student registrations, volunteer management, quoting and invoicing. Participants interviewed reported the information they received from management regarding the CRM software implementation fell into five distinct stages: (a) change; (b) training; (c) blackout period; (d) go live and (e) updates. Figure 1 demonstrates the approximant overall timeframe for each stage of change communication during the CRM implementation process.

Figure 1: Approximate amount of months for each stage of management's communication throughout the CRM implementation.



All participants noted that they were informed about the ***change*** well before it happened, indicating they knew not only that change was going to be happening, but also why it was happening. For example, one person said:

> "They told us that all SJA offices throughout Canada would be switching over to the CRM software. At the time, each province and even one off offices were using their own systems. The change would allow us to do it all the same way making it easier to provide services and collect data." (Interview F)

Many participants mentioned that there was a delay with the implementation of the CRM software, but this time change was also communicated:

> "We were bumped two to three times for sure. It was suppose to be implemented January than it went to February than it went to March. Management would tell us every time there was going to be a delay." (Interview E)

However, all participants expressed the communications they received were clear, straightforward and remained consistent throughout the CRM implementation.

After the change was communicated to all employees, management provided employees with ***training***. All participants discussed that they received one to two days of face-to-face training in which they were provided with access to a mock practice website, as well as given a printed resource binder. Participants had mixed reviews regarding the training. Some participants found it valuable highlighting the relevance to their specific job duties. Employees were trained with their departments with those in similar roles to them, and some enjoyed the extended connections they got to make with SJA employees across Alberta.

Whereas, other participants questioned the usefulness of the training they received. For example, "The people training us didn't have practical experience before hand because it was brand new software. No one had used it live before it was launched so not all of our questions could be answered" (Interview C). Other participants commented that it was a lot of information to retain in a very short period of time. With the delay between the training and the go live stage the information was hard to recall and the resource binder wasn't very practical to use as a reference guide with multiple participants stating it was huge, overwhelming and difficult to read.

All participants but one discussed Super Users, who were employees of SJA in lateral or hierarchical positions that received extra training so they could provide CRM support to peers when needed. The majority of participants identified Super Users were a good resource because they taught them how to do things in the CRM software and found solutions to reoccurring issues. However, one interviewee provided feedback that the Super Users needed to be spread fairly throughout the office, such as having one located on every floor.

All participants shared they went through a ***blackout period*** for approximately a month in which SJA had no software as they transitioned from Unity to CRM. During this time, management informed participants they had to keep written records of all tasks that would later need to be imputed once the CRM software went live. Most participants identified that during the blackout period management began to send out broad instructions on how to complete tasks in the CRM software. Despite receiving instructions, some participants still felt ill prepared. Interview C stated: “We were aware there was going to be a one month blackout period, but we couldn’t have been prepared for the two to three months of data entry that happened afterwards.”

All participants discussed the ***go live*** stage as the period when the CRM software was implemented. They began to complete new tasks and manually enter information from the blackout period into the CRM software. Many participants identified they felt ill prepared for the go live stage due to the volume of work, entering data from the black out period and completing regular job duties, on top of learning a new system despite all of managements communications. Interview B stated: “We were told it was going to happen, but when it did we had no real set plan. The fallout couldn’t have been predicted.” Interview D similarly expressed: “When the go live happened, craziness ensued.”

However, despite the challenges all participants made references to feeling supported by management during this hectic time indicating management recognized the large work volume, helped escalate issues to the national office and showed appreciation by thanking them and brining in lunches/ treats. For example, interview A shared, “Management told us that they recognized the large volumes of work we had and encouraged us to keep going. If errors were made they could always be fixed.”

All participants discussed that up until this day, two years after the implementation of the CRM software, they still receive ***updates*** about the system- email notifications that issues are being worked on/ resolved or that system capabilities are being expanded. Participants had mixed reviews on managements communications about the updates received. Some of the people interviewed stated they weren't very useful. For example, interview B said, "They send general emails so I just kind of look them over, scanning them quickly or don't read them at all. I usually know the information already and would probably be fine without them." However some people like being aware of the changes, "I like to know what's going on in areas other than just mine. So I like to see the update emails. They help me see the bigger picture" (interview F). Most participants noted that the frequency of these emails has decreased substantially overtime as the issues got resolved faster once employees became more familiar and comfortable with the system. Interview B identified, "People that are here are all familiar and comfortable with CRM now. So these little changes aren't as dramatic as when we [first] switched. The need for constant communication isn't there anymore."

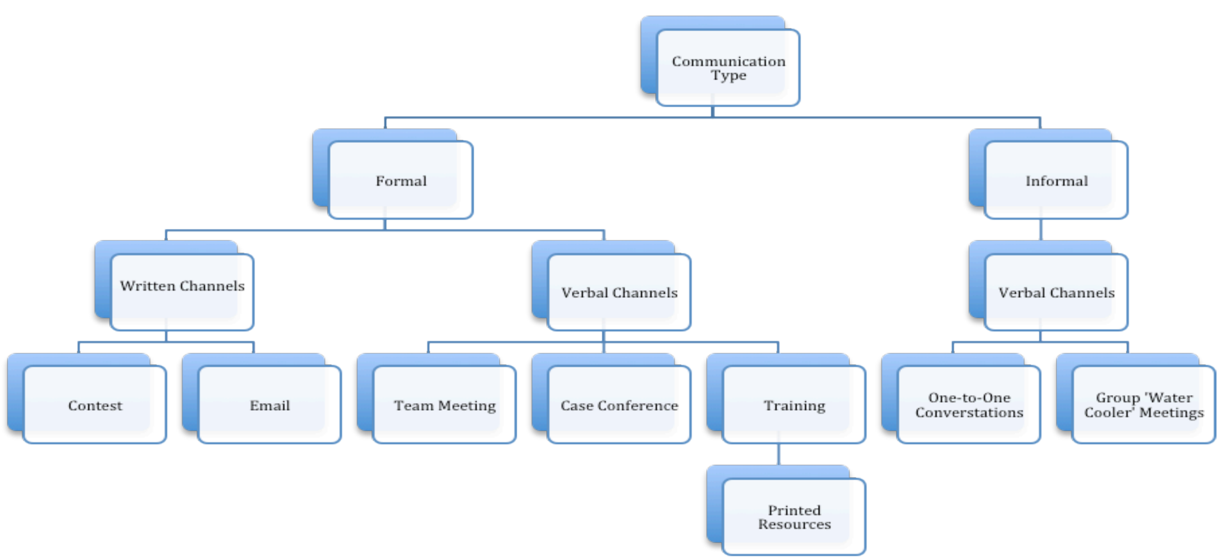
Overarching Themes of Content. Based on interviews with employees two prominent themes emerged around employee perceptions of the content of managements change communication: ***awareness*** and ***preparation***.

First, management's change communication created ***awareness***. Management communicated not only that change was going to be happening, but also what the need for change was. Employees were made aware of the business opportunities that could result from the change, as well as the risks of not changing. This suggests that employees were provided with the knowledge needed to create a desire to change. With a desire to change, employees are more likely to be accepting, rather than resistant of the change. Employees were made aware of the different stages of change and kept up to date as changes occurred throughout the rollout of the CRM software. It was evident, management messages on this topic reached employees through multiple channels.

Secondly, managements change communication ***prepared*** employees by providing access to information. This was done through a variety of tools: training, mock website, printed resource binder and designated Super Users. These tools were provided to help employees carry out job related task. Despite having access to all of these tools employees expressed feeling ill prepared as the CRM software rolled out. This uncertainty led employees to communicate amongst their peers.

Channels. Participants discussed a variety of channels that management used to inform them of the CRM software implementation and the updates that occurred along the way. Channels included both formal and informal communications. Figure 2 illustrates the channels participants mentioned management used to communicate with them.

Figure 2: Management Communication Type and Channels



Each participant remembered a different channel that management used for the first time to communicate that change was coming. Some participants remembered formal written channels, such as an email going out to participate in a naming contest or an announcement for the new software. Others remembered formal verbal channels, such as a team meeting or training. Others identified informal channels, such as an individual conversation with management or an impromptu to group meeting. Participants that discussed informal channels noted that they were normally followed up with an official email that was sent out to the whole office. All participants identified that as the CRM software rolled out; email became the main channel of communication used by management.

Overarching Themes of Channels. Based on interviews with employees' one prominent theme, ***diverse***, emerged around managements change communication channel***s***. Management incorporated a variety of channels, both written and verbal, to deliver communications on the CRM software implementation. Management recognized that different communication channels have different strengths and weaknesses. The fact that participants all remembered different communication channels suggests that each employee was more receptive to one communication channel over others. It is crucial to provide communications through multiple channels to ensure every employee is reached and it is evident management did so in this case.

Peer-to-Peer Communications

Overall, participants shared most employees at the Edmonton SJA office have unique roles and responsibilities from one another, frequently with only one or two other peers performing similar job tasks to them, or sometimes even no one at all. Some participants discussed that the role diversity amongst their peers was a barrier to adjusting to the CRM software implementation, indicating they would usually try to figure things out prior to asking their peers for help. For example, Interview B stated, “Since we were all learning at the same time at the same level I wouldn’t say there was a ton of support from person to person within the organization. Also, our roles are really different, so we are always doing different things in the database.” This was confirmed by interview A when they indicated, “We could talk about little things in the office like name entry and stuff like, but when it came to our own departments we were kind of lost.” Interview C similarly said, “I kept going and going and if I made a mistake I would try to figure it out on my own before asking a Super User.” However, many participants identified that they had peers in similar roles at other offices throughout Alberta that they would communicate with. “I talked to someone at another office who also sends out mass emails to see if what I was doing was right or if there was a quicker way to do it” stated interview B. Despite the unique roles and responsibilities all participants acknowledged a need for their peers, identifying that most of the departments were interconnected and that they relied on each other to get everything done.

Purpose. All participants discussed communicating with their peers for four main purposes throughout the implementation of the CRM software: (a) job related tasks; (b) system; (c) people; and (d) socializing.

All participants identified that they would communicate with their peers for ***job related tasks***. Many of the people interviewed identified that there were multiple ways to do the same task within the CRM software. They acknowledged they would get together with each other to share and exchange ideas on how they do things within the CRM software. For example, interview B said, “We found an easier way to transfer a person to a different class and other small stuff like that.” Participants also mentioned that they rely on their peers to complete tasks within the CRM software that they did not have access to do so themselves. Some scenarios suggested by participants were: knowing what method of payment to take, generating specific searches, or creating classes. Interview B identified, “I go to a Super User if there is something I can’t do. Creating specific searches helps me complete tasks faster, but I don’t have access to do this. So I just go to the Super User to request it.” Participants shared that they will ask their peers for help when they have to do tasks that they don’t do regularly or when they need a demonstration on how to do something. Also, participants mentioned they would discuss their status of work with their peers to ensure there is cover off when peers are gone or to offer assistance if it’s busy. Interview A informed, “We get weekly duties and it can be easy to run behind. I can help out by doing things like entries or registration. Than when I’m busy others will offer their help.” Job related tasks not pertaining to the CRM implementation were also brought up. Participants discussed relying on their peers to make sure training was booked, classrooms were fully stocked and supplies were ordered.

All participants noted discussing the ***system*** with each other. During these times, participants indicated they would communicate with their peers for many different reasons, including information and confirmation. Participants shared they would get information from their peers by asking or answering questions. For example, interview A stated, “We found that sometimes the steps are the same as in Unity, but CRM just uses different terminology. I would show them what I was doing and ask them if they were doing it the same way as me.” Participants also indicated they would walk around and chat with one another to see if anyone else’s system was down before alerting management of the problem. Interview E confirmed, “If 2 or 3 people don’t have it working we will call management and ask them to call the national office.”

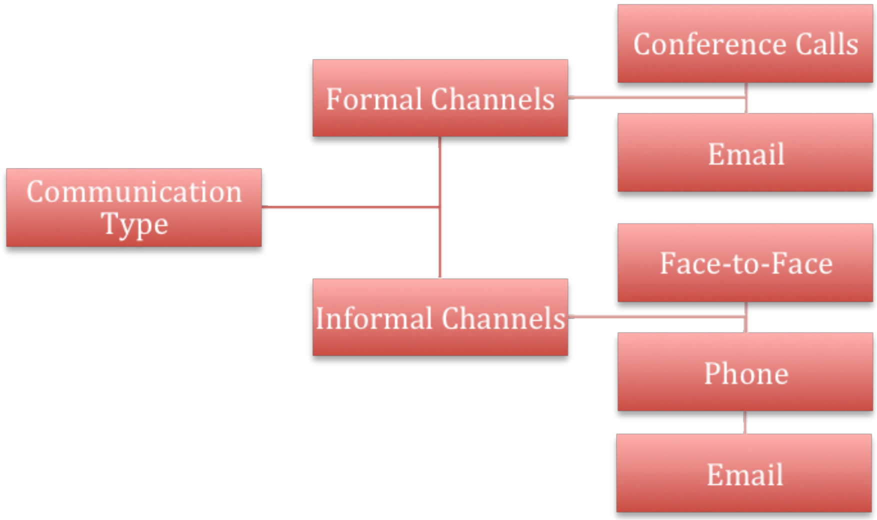
It was interesting to note that all participants expressed that they most frequently go to their peers to discuss ***people*** related issues, such as the effects of the CRM implementation on each other and customers, as well as strategies for improvement. For example, interview D indicated, “The computer system was the easy part. The real challenge was adjusting to people with varying levels of computer knowledge. Everyone learned differently and required different levels of support.” Participants shared they would often discussed how they dealt with telling customers of changes and customer reactions as a result of the CRM software implementation. It must be noted that all participants identified people situations that were not related to the implementation of the CRM software. Participants frequently discussed going to their peers for advice when they needed to handle an issue that may have come up regarding instructors, students or volunteers. In these situations participants acknowledged they mostly just listened to their peers or in cases where they had experienced a similar situations would often offer advice.

Participants identified that they ***socialized*** more due to the CRM software implementation. All interviewees talked about engaging in personal conversations with their peers throughout the day; starting their day off by greeting their peers and discussing each other’s lives outside of the office. However, with connectivity issues and glitches in the system, participants identified they would socialize more often because they were unable to complete their job duties. For example, interview B said, “We can’t really do work so I will go around and chat with the others” and interview C stated, “When CRM goes down were mostly complaining to each other about the system because we can’t do our job without it.”

Frequency. Overall, participants noted that leading up to the implementation of the CRM software there was little communication with their peers about the change. The communication that took place was mostly from management and than employees would discuss it with their peers in passing to see if anyone knew something they already didn't know. During the blackout period managements change communication increased. Employees were not only notified about implementation dates, but also informed about new processes and how to do them. This caused the frequency of peer communication to increase as employees began to learn the CRM software. Interview F noted, "We were given instructions on how to do things in the CRM software so that generated some conversation. Some people aren't very tech savvy so you could see they weren't very comfortable with the change." Once the go live period began, participants acknowledged peer-to-peer communication became critical. Some participants identified initially having multiple communications within an hour about the CRM software with it decreasing overtime as everyone became comfortable with the system. According to interview D, "For the first little while the questions were hourly. It was like a full-time job! But, they diminished overtime. Now when we have updates or crashes there will be a lot of questions again for approximately two weeks and than it dies down again."

Channels. Participants discussed using multiple channels to communicate with their peers throughout the CRM software implementation. Channels mainly focused on informal communications, however some formal channels were also mentioned. Figure 3 illustrates the different communication channels peers used to communicate with one another.

Figure 3: Peer-to-Peer Communication Type and Channels



Formal. Participants discussed using formal communication channels with each other when there was a need to problem solve or escalate a situation to management. Participants acknowledged that in the beginning there were a lot of questions about the capacity and use of the CRM software. To work through these problems, ***case conferences*** were held on a biweekly to monthly basis in which peers generated the agenda by outlining issues. These case conferences were made up of employees within the same position in all offices across the province. Interview A explained the case conference process, "We had so many questions. So we decided it would be good to meet fairly regularly. Everyone would put their ideas and questions on the agenda and we would case conference with the other offices once or twice a month. Pretty much whenever we needed to." Many participants also discussed using ***email*** as a formal communication channel, stressing it was used to create a paper trail of ongoing issues that needed to be escalated up to a higher level.

Informal. The majority of participants identified the most commonly used approach of communication amongst their peers was indeed informal channels, such as face-to-face conversations, phone or email. Participants noted ***face-to-face*** conversations as the most frequently used, identifying it as the easiest way to communicate due to their proximity to one another, the simplicity of the need and the speed of the response. As Interview C shared, “If I have questions I usually need them answered pretty quickly and there usually not big enough for an email trail.” Participants brought up using the ***phone*** to interact with peers at other offices, indicating that having a verbal conversation gave them the opportunity to ask questions and get clarity in a timely matter. Interview B mentioned, “Talking just seems quicker and easier. I would call peers from another office to see if there was another easier way to do a task.” Additionally, participants identified also using ***email*** as an informal channel with their peers as a way to prioritize work and retain knowledge. Some participants suggested that getting peer questions emailed often meant it wasn’t a time sensitive issue and that it gave them time to look around in the CRM software to see if they could resolve the problem. Interview F said, “I like doing detective work, but I’m usually pretty busy with customers. If people email me for help I will try to figure it out when I have some downtime.” Some participants used emails as an information tool as it provided them with the ability to refer back to it or fan it out to other staff. Interview E shared, “I like email because people can reply or add on to what you have said and after a few months, when you forget about it, you can always go back and look it over.”

Participants had split preferences for the channels used to communicate with their peers. Some preferred verbal well others preferred written. The majority of participants expressed a preference for having some form of verbal conversation, whether if be face-to-face or phone because of the quick response time and the ability to demonstrate step by step how to complete a task in the CRM software. Many participants mentioned they learn and retain information better if they have a visual attached to the instruction. According to participants, Super Users even incorporated using visual demonstrations along with a verbal conversation by using a *'show and share'* technique to peers asking for help. "If they can't describe the issue I could just log into their computer and see what they were working on so they could describe to me on the phone what they needed" said Interview D.

Some participants preferred communicating with their peers in written channels expressing that email could act as a reference point. A document that could be saved printed and shared with others on a need to know basis. Interview F stated they preferred it as it made it easier to prioritize work:

> "… Lots of times I could be in the middle of something or with a customer so I can't really stop what I'm doing to chit chat or talk on the phone. I have such a high volume of work that when I have conversations I may forget to follow through. If I see an email I will remember about it and email back. This way there's also a paper trail."

Overarching Themes of Peer-to-Peer Communications. Based on interviews with employees, four prominent themes emerged when analyzing how peers communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace: ***efficiency***, ***problem solving***, ***validation*** and ***hierarchy***. The first two themes, ***efficiency*** and ***problem solving***, are practical factors concerned with the action of doing something or completing a task. This suggests peers communicate with each other to get quick responses and learn from one another. ***Validation*** as a theme is a supportive factor in which peers offered reassurances and encouragement. Whereas the ***hierarchical*** theme suggests employees incorporate a factor of protocol when communicating amongst their peers.

Firstly, participants repeatedly mentioned ***efficiency***, as a benefit of peer-to-peer communications. Participants would go to their peers with questions because they were able to receive a more timely response than going through the appropriate channels to communicate with management. Even if peers didn't have a solution to the need or question, the quick response time allowed colleagues to seek out another peer to get a solution. This pattern would continue until the issue was resolved or if unable to be resolved, escalated up to management. Peer-to-peer communication was identified as the initial step used to get information and it was recognized the majority of asks were resolved at this level, with no need to go up the chain of command.

Secondly, ***problem solving*** was a reoccurring theme. Participants identified communicating with their peers to get issues resolved or learn new tasks. SJA was the first organization to launch the CRM software live, leaving them susceptible to working out glitches as they arose and also to learn its true capabilities. Peers would inform each other and work together to identify flaws in the software, as well as brainstorm and share ideas on how to resolve any flaws. Some participants were admittedly more technologically savvy than others and this open form of collaboration and teamwork lead to enhanced problem solving.

The next theme, ***validation***, was a supportive factor, suggesting peers communicated with each other to provide reassurances and offer encouragements. Participants consistently mentioned going to their peers prior to speaking to management. In the case of CRM connectivity, participants would walk around to their peers to confirm if they were experiencing the same issues. If they were reassured others were experiencing a similar situation they would then escalate the issue to management. The same processes occurred amongst peers when they were problem solving; they would experiment and bounce ideas off of each other before bringing it to management's attention.

Lastly, a ***hierarchical*** theme suggests employees follow certain protocols even when engaging in informal communications. Participants indicated they would mostly go to their peers about little things that didn't require a paper trail. When problems couldn't be resolved they would than escalate the concern up to management, following the appropriate channels. Participants also applied this hierarchical pattern of communication when communicating with their peers. They acknowledged they would pick and choose which peers they would communicate with depending on their need. They would first go to a peer that had worked at the organization longer or had more experience, perhaps someone who had transitioned through more than one employment position. If that didn't work they moved on to a Super User or someone with more technological competence. This process was continuously used amongst peers and things were only escalated to management if the issue couldn't be resolved amongst themselves.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The above findings highlight the main themes derived from inductive content analysis of my interview data. The study's main goal was to discover how peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace. This chapter discusses the research and each of the three sub questions in detail, incorporating both the literature review and research findings to answer the research question:

How do peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace?

RQ2: Why do peers communication with each other about managed change?

First, findings from this study revealed that employees are likely to constructively communicate with their peers throughout the implementation of managed change when organizational gaps exist. The social and communicative peer process is a form of sensemaking amongst peers that is heightened during managed change in the workplace to help fill in the gaps (Weick, Stucliffe and Obstfeld, 2005). In general, participants perceived management's change communication as intended to create awareness, reflecting what the literature identifies as the most commonly used formal approach- a programmatic, top-down approach, which resembles a one-way flow of information (Cao et al., 2016; Johnson & Heide, 2008; McQuail, 1987; Russ, 2008; 2010). This perception mimics previous studies suggesting the programmatic approach leaves employees with little opportunity to ask questions or provide feedback (Russ, 2008). Participants filled the organizational gap of one-way communication by communicating amongst each other.

Further, participants identified management provided them with a wide variety of tools that could be used to help learn the CRM software. Despite the preparation management offered, participants questioned the tools usefulness or practicality. The tools provided remained individually focused, a practice mock website and printed resource binder, that offered the same one-way flow of information. To generate a two-way flow of communication, peers would ask each other questions and offer support to one another thus filling in the organizational gap. Nevertheless, despite the organizational gaps managed change in the workplace will always bring, participants have demonstrated they use each other to fill those needs. This resembles previous literature that recognizes informal communication channels as the most common way for employees to receive information and adds value by helping them make sense of their roles and responsibilities (Lewis, 2006; Maruping & Mangi, 2015).

Secondly, this study's findings revealed that peers are most likely to communicate with those in closest proximity to them or who have more experience than them. In general, participants identified the need to have a quick response, stressing that peers offered guidance faster or were willing to go the extra mile to help them figure something out. These perceptions contradict historical literature that views informal communication channels as a form of gossip, stating that it is a negative function mostly used as a socially destructive activity during periods of change management in the workplace or that peers neglect to assess credibility when receiving information from their peers (Bordia, et al, 2006; Difonz, et al., 1994). These findings align with the current literature that recognizes informal communication channels need to be endorsed as there are many positive functions to them (Lewis, 2006; Maruping & Mangi, 2015). Despite the stressors of incorporating managed change, participants focused on constructively communicating with their peers, as well as using peer-to-peer communications to increase efficiencies and problem solve. Participants also discussed the hierarchal process they would use to get information from their peers, going to those who they recognized as more knowledgeable or had seniority.

Thirdly, findings from this study indicated peers communicate with each other to learn from one another. Generally, participants discussed going to their peers when they couldn't figure something out on their own. These findings align with an interpretive communication perspective suggesting the meaning and context of communication is more important then the function itself (Johansson & Heide, 2008). For instance, researchers have argued that human development is socially situated and knowledge is created by interactions with others; learning is an interactive process of discussion, sharing and negotiation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). This study reaffirms Berger and Luckman's theory on social construction that identifies meaning cannot be delivered, but is rather created through interactions because it illustrated peer-to-peer communications main function to be learning (1966).

RQ3: What purposes do peer-to-peer communications have?

After exploring the main purposes of peer-to-peer communication, findings from this study revealed four main categories: (a) job related tasks; (b) CRM software; (c) people; and (d) socializing. In general, participants expressed having constructive communications with their peers identifying that they were mostly used for problem solving and job task completion. These perceptions support previous studies findings on role ambiguity and team context. For example, researchers have argued the importance of ambiguity with the adoption of new information and technology in the workplace. Some of the benefits of role ambiguity suggest fostered creativity and increased efficiencies (Henfridsson, 2000). Given the opportunity to explore new systems and processes with each other to incorporate them into work practices helped employees adapt to changes that best meet their needs (Maruping & Mangi, 2015). Participants identified using trial and error processes to learn the system and working as a team to figure out complicated tasks and identify easier ways to do things. Additionally, these findings suggest participant's communications with their peers helped create innovative solutions to problems and helped to keep them engaged with the CRM implementation project (Carbtree, 2013).

In regards to people, participants acknowledged going to their peers only after trying to find the solution on their own. These claims back up the relevance of sociocultural theory when implementing change in the workplace. Knowledge is constructed through interactions with others and effective learning will only happen if an interactive process of discussion, negotiation and sharing take place (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). A process that must occur with employees at all levels, not just messaged from the top down. Participants continuously confirmed throughout the study that managements change communication was a stepping-stone to generate further conversation amongst their peers to learn the CRM software. Further, participants sought validation from their peers suggesting SJA has a positive inclusive workplace culture according to previous studies on workplace culture and engagement (Carbtree, 2013; Cartwright & Copper, 1993; Mone & Landon, 2014). When employees care about how their peers perceive them it demonstrates they are engaged employees because they want to be involved (Mone & London, 2014). Additionally, it must be noted that all participants identified people situations that were not related to the implementation of the CRM software. Participants discussed frequently going to their peers for advice when they needed to handle an issue that may have come up regarding instructors, students or volunteers. In these situations participants acknowledged they mostly just listened to their peers or in cases where they had experienced similar situations they would often offer advice.

Lastly, participants increasingly socialized with each other, helping one another learn the CRM software or engaging in camaraderie when the system was down. Linke and Zerfass (2011) suggest this socialization brought on by change helps to build a community or rather a team environment. Based on this analysis of categories participants illustrated a variety of constructive characteristics with their peer-to-peer communications, including but not limited to: information sharing, collaborative, teaching, innovative, and supportive. This aligns with five social functions: "collecting and disseminating information," "creating a sense of belonging to a group," "bringing people together," "learning about expectations, and organizational rules," and "entertainment, satisfying emotional needs and escaping boredom," identified by Altuntas, Sahin Altun, and Cevik Akyil (2014, p.110).

RQ4: What channels do peers prefer to use to communicate with each other?

Participants had split preferences for communicating with their peers; the majority preferred verbal, whereas the minority preferred written. Based on participant's preferences, results demonstrated that verbal communication was connected to learning (problem solving functions) and socializing, where as written communication illustrated organization (job task functions). This is not surprising when applying sociocultural theory. Learning is a complex adaptive network that is driven by a desire for knowledge achieved through sociability (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). Verbal communication allows for the sociability to occur at a much faster pace, giving the opportunity to ask questions and clarify throughout interactions - enabling feedback. Learning cannot happen without feedback and written communications delays that process.

The artifacts generated from verbal communications, such as rules, tips and best practices could be shared after the fact amongst all as a resource to complete job tasks. Written communications were used amongst peers when making job related requests. This served as a paper trail and reminder for them. Additionally, those that preferred verbal communication appeared to have reached acceptance of the CRM implementation change management project, while those that preferred written communications still display signs of resistance to it. Klonek, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Kauffeld (2014) identified that ‘change talk’ illustrates acceptance of change and is representative when employees talk about the necessities to change or steps that have already been carried out. Participants that preferred verbal communication illustrated change talk by identifying what aspects of their jobs have change and noticing efficiencies. Whereas, ‘sustain talk’ is representative of resistance to change and illustrated by employees who talk about reasons to sustain from the change or lack of abilities to make the change (2014). Participants who preferred written communications illustrated sustain talk identifying the CRM software couldn’t be used for certain functions, identified fear of job loss due to the new technology and at times used sarcasm throughout the interview.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is the timeframe in which the change management project occurred. SJA’s implementation of the CRM software started approximately two years prior to when this research was conducted. Although the project was still in an active state of change during data collection, memory from the beginning stages of this implementation could be blurred or distorted. This may affect the generalizability of findings. Another drawback involves the organizational structure of SJA. Peers in lateral positions from on another tend to have unique roles and responsibilities from one another. Given such role diversity, it maybe difficult to generalize the findings to all lateral positions.

Although this study’s sample size was adequate, participants may not have fully represented the range of lateral employment positions with in the SJA organization. This could have negatively impacted the reliability and validity of the results. Also, this study was a case study of one SJA location alone and may not be generalizable to the organization as a whole.

Summary of Discussion

This study illustrated that peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace. Most participants identified that they communicated with their peers when they were missing pieces of information, confirming past research that states employees sensemake during organizational change to help fill in the gaps (Weick, Stucliffe and Obstfeld, 2005); overall peer-to-peer communications at SJA appeared constructive. Findings from this study revealed a variety of purposes discussed amongst peers that can be grouped into four categories: (a) job related tasks; (b) CRM software; (c) people; and (d) socializing. These categories mostly illustrated constructive characteristics of peer-to-peer communications that fall under the themes of ***efficiency***, ***problem solving*** and ***support***. However, the individual and organizational benefits of peer-to-peer communications require further research.

Understandably, participants have individual preferences when it comes to communicating with peers. Providing employees with multiple channels to communicate could allow the employer to enjoy the benefits of increased learning and employee engagement, helping to create success of change management projects. A new finding illustrated, participants most accepting of the change preferred verbal communications, whereas resistant participants referenced written communications as their preference. Further research is needed to support the validity of this finding.

This study's aim was to explore how peers constructively communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace. These findings can help not for profit organizations to understand the opportunities and benefits to relinquishing control over peer-to-peer communications. Further, insights illustrated in this study and previous literature can aid in the development of a toolkit of peer-to-peer strategies that can be utilized during change management implementation projects.

In the next chapter, concluding remarks are provided based on the analysis of the research questions as they pertain to the case study illustrated in the above chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The study set out to explore how peers communicate amongst each other to make sense of managed change in the workplace. In particular, it sought to discover why employees communicate with their peers, the purpose of these communications and the preferred communication channels. The study has also sought to understand if peer-to-peer communications can be constructive during change management projects. Lastly, the study focused on a case study using a sociocultural lens to further understand how peers communicated with each other about managed change during the CRM implementation at SJA.

The study found that peer-to-peer communications are used during managed change to fill in organizational gaps that are created when management uses a formal programmatic (top-down) communication approach demonstrated to have a one-way flow of communication. The data found that peer-to-peer communications helped create a two-way flow of communication allowing employees to gain feedback and enhance their learning, choosing to communicate with those closest in proximity to them and/or to those with more experience/seniority for efficiency reasons. The data also found four purposes for peer-to-peer communication: job related tasks, CRM software, people and socializing, and that overall there was a preference for verbal communications amongst peers.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, as well as previous academic literature the research was able to identify how individuals communicate with their peers about managed change in the workplace, specifically the CRM implementation at SJA. Although findings are valid within the research population, it would be beneficial to include focus groups in addition to the interviews to observe how peers communicate amongst each other. Ultimately, sensemaking becomes an individual process from peer communications. Conducting focus groups to observe how individuals influence their peers' sensemaking would expand this research. Future research may also consider investigating peer-to-peer communications and how they contribute to people related issues.

In conclusion, this study offered a qualitative set of data through semi-structured interviews that could be used in combination with previous literature to help develop communication strategies and toolkits to be used in future change management projects to better shape peer communications for a successful change implementation.

References

Altuntaş, Serap, Özlem Şahin Altun, and Rahşan Çevik Akyil. "The nurses' form of organizational communication: What is the role of gossip?" *Contemporary nurse* 48.1 (2014): 109-116.

Alvesson, M., & Sveningsson, S. (2015). *Changing organizational culture: Cultural change work in progress*. Routledge.

Amabile, T. M. (1998). *How to kill creativity* (Vol. 87). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Aral, S., & Walker, D. (2012). Identifying influential and susceptible members of social networks. Science, 337(6092), 337-341.

Ashkenas, R. (2013, April 16). Change Management Needs to change. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2013/04/change-management-needs-to-cha

Balogun, J., & Johnson, G. (2005). From intended strategies to unintended outcomes: The impact of change recipient sensemaking. *Organization studies*, *26*(11), 1573-1601.

Barrett, F. J., Thomas, G. F., & Hocevar, S. P. (1995). The central role of discourse in large-scale change: A social construction perspective. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *31*(3), 352-372.

Baym, N. (2013). Data not seen: The uses and shortcomings of social media metrics. First Monday, Vol. 18(10). Doi:1.5210/fm/v18i10.4873

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). The social construction of reality New York. *Garden City*.

Bhuvanaiah, T., & Raya, R. P. (2015). Mechanism of Improved Performance: Intrinsic Motivation and Employee Engagement. *SCMS Journal of Indian Management*, 12(4), 92.

Bordia, P., Jones, E., Gallois, C., Callan, V. J., & Difonzo, N. (2006). Management Are Aliens!. *Group & Organization Management*, *31*(5), 601-621.

Bosio, C., Graffigna, G., & Scaratti, G. (2012). Knowing, learning and acting in health care organizations and services: challenges and opportunities for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, *7*(3), 256-274.

Cao, Y., Bunger, A. C., Hoffman, J., & Robertson, H. A. (2016). Change Communication Strategies in Public Child Welfare Organizations: Engaging the Front Line. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 40(1), 37-50. doi:10.1080/23303131.2015.1093570

Cartwright, S., & Cooper, C. L. (1993). The role of culture compatibility in successful organizational marriage. *The Academy of Management Executive*,*7*(2), 57-70.

Chenail, R. J. (2011). Interviewing the investigator: Strategies for addressing instrumentation and researcher bias concerns in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *16*(1), 255.

Chiou, J. S., Hsieh, C. H., & Yang, C. H. (2004). The effect of franchisors' communication, service assistance, and competitive advantage on franchisees' intentions to remain in the franchise system. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *42*(1), 19-36.

Comer, D. R. (1991). Organizational newcomers' acquisition of information from peers. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *5*(1), 64-89.

Crabtree, S. (2013). Worldwide, 13% of employees are engaged at work. *Gallup, last modified October*, *8*.

Craig, R. T., & Muller, H. L. (2007). *Theorizing communication: Readings across traditions*. Sage.

Craig, R. T. (2013). Constructing theories in communication research. *Theories and models of communication*, *1*, 39-57.

Crampton, S. M., Hodge, J. W., & Mishra, J. M. (1998). The informal communication network: Factors influencing grapevine activity. *Public Personnel Management*, *27*(4), 569-584.

DiFonzo, N., Bordia, P., & Rosnow, R. L. (1994). Reining in rumors. *Organizational Dynamics*, *23*(1), 47-62.

Doolin, B. (2003). Narratives of change: Discourse, technology and organization. *Organization*, *10*(4), 751-770.

Fernandez, S., & Rainey, H. G. (2006). Managing successful organizational change in the public sector. *Public administration review*, *66*(2), 168-176.

Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. (1995). The role of conversations in producing intentional change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 541-570.

Foster, E. K. (2004). Research on gossip: Taxonomy, methods, and future directions. *Review of General Psychology*, *8*(2), 78.

Fugate, M., Prussia, G. E., & Kinicki, A. J. (2012). Managing employee withdrawal during organizational change the role of threat appraisal. *Journal of Management*, *38*(3), 890 914.

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(9), 1408.

George, J. M., Jones, G. R., & Sharbrough, W. C. (1996). *Understanding and managing organizational behavior*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Google Company. (2016, November 26). Our culture. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/about/company/facts/culture/

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American journal of sociology*, 1360-1380.

Grosser, T. J., Lopez-Kidwell, V., & Labianca, G. (2010). A social network analysis of positive and negative gossip in organizational life. *Group & Organization Management*, *35*(2), 177-212.

Grosser, T. J., Lopez-Kidwell, V. L., & Labianca, G. J. (2012). Hearing it through the grapevine: Positive and negative workplace gossip. *Organizational Dynamics*, *41*, 52-61.

Hargie, O., & Tourish, D. (2000). *Handbook of communication audits for organisations*. Psychology Press.

Hayes, J. (2014). *The theory and practice of change management*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Helms-Mills, J. (2003). *Making sense of organizational change*. Routledge.

Henfridsson, O. (2000). Ambiguity in IT adaptation: making sense of First Class in a social work setting. *Information Systems Journal*, *10*(2), 87-104.

Horton, J., Macve, R., & Struyven, G. (2004). Qualitative research: experiences in using semi-structured interviews. *The real life guide to accounting research*, 339-357.

Johansson, C., & Heide, M. (2008). Speaking of change: three communication approaches in studies of organizational change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 13(3), 288-305.

Kavanagh, M. H., & Ashkanasy, N. M. (2006). The impact of leadership and change management strategy on organizational culture and individual acceptance of change during a merger. British Journal of Management,17(S1), S81-S103.

Kerber, K., & Buono, A. F. (2005). Rethinking organizational change: Reframing the challenge of change management. *Organization Development Journal*, *23*(3), 23.

Klonek, F. E., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., & Kauffeld, S. (2014). Dynamics of resistance to change: a sequential analysis of change agents in action.*Journal of change management*, *14*(3), 334-360.

Kotter, J.P. (1990), A Force for Change: How leadership Differs from Management. New York: London.

Kramer, A. D., Guillory, J. E., & Hancock, J. T. (2014). Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *111*(24), 8788-8790.

Krone, K.J., Jablin. F.M. and Putnam, L.L. (1987), "Communication theory and organizational communication: multiple perspectives," in Jablin, F.M., Putnam, L.L., Roberts, K.H. and Porter, L.W. (Eds). *Handbook of Organizational Communication*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA. pp.18-40

Lewis, L. K. (1999). Disseminating Information and Soliciting Input during Planned Organizational Change Implementers' Targets, Sources, and Channels for Communicating. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *13*(1), 43-75.

Lewis, L. K. (2006). Employee perspectives on implementation communication as predictors of perceptions of success and resistance. *Western Journal of Communication*, *70*(1), 23-46.

Lewis, L. K., & Russ, T. L. (2012). Soliciting and Using Input During Organizational Change Initiatives What Are Practitioners Doing. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *26*(2), 267-294.

Maruping, L. M., & Magni, M. (2015). Motivating Employees to Explore Collaboration Technology in Team Contexts. *Mis Quarterly*, *39*(1), 1-16.

McQuail, D. (1987). *Mass communication theory: An introduction* . Sage Publications, Inc.

Melcher, A. J., & Beller, R. (1967). Toward a theory of organization communication: Consideration in channel selection. *Academy of Management journal*, *10*(1), 39-52.

Merrigan, G., Huston, C.L., & Johnston, R. (2012). *Communication Research Methods*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University.

Michelson, G., & Suchitra Mouly, V. (2004). Do loose lips sink ships? The meaning, antecedents and consequences of rumour and gossip in organisations. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *9*(3), 189-201

Milliken, F. J., Schipani, C. A., Bishara, N. D., & Prado, A. M. (2015). Linking workplace practices to community engagement: The case for encouraging employee voice. *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, *29*(4), 405-421.

Mone, E. M., & London, M. (2014). *Employee engagement through effective performance management: A practical guide for managers*. Routledge.

Opdenakker, R. (2006, September). Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 7, No. 4).

Prosci. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.prosci.com/

Putnam, L. L. (1983). The interpretive perspective: An alternative to functionalism. *Communication and organizations: An interpretive approach*, 31-54.

Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2007). The method chapter: Describing your research plan. *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*, 87-117.

Russ, T. L. (2008). Communicating change: A review and critical analysis of programmatic and participatory implementation approaches. *Journal of Change Management*, *8*(3-4), 199-211.

Russ, T. L. (2010). Programmatic and participatory: Two frameworks for classifying experiential change implementation methods. *Simulation & Gaming*.

Shirky, C. (2008). *Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations*. Penguin.

Smollan, R. K. (2015). The Personal Costs of Organizational Change: A Qualitative Study. *Public Performance & Management Review*, *39*(1), 223-247.

Snowdon, W. (2016, November 22). Inspiration delivered: Alberta psychiatrist pioneers positive text messages 'It's more beneficial than trusting that people will reach out for help on their own.' Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/inspiration-delivered-alberta-psychiatrist-pioneers-positive-text-messages-1.3862292

Veldsman, T. H. (2002). *Into the people effectiveness arena: Navigating between chaos and order*. Knowledge Resources.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher mental process.

Wakeman, D. (2014). Principles of constructive communication. [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.freepmstudy.com/PDFFiles/PrinciplesofConstructiveCommunication.pdf

Weeks, W. A., Roberts, J., Chonko, L. B., & Jones, E. (2004). Organizational readiness for change, individual fear of change, and sales manager performance: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *24*(1), 7-17.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization science*, *16*(4), 409-421

Appendices

Appendix A – Recruitment Letter

Study Title: Making Sense of Communication about Change Management: How do peers constructively communicate with one another?

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor:**
Name	Name
Institution	Institution
Address	Address
Email	Email
Phone Number	Phone Number

Background

- You are being asked to be in this study because you were an employee of St. John Ambulance when the Microsoft Dynamics Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software was implemented.
- I gathered potential participate contact information from a participant list provided by the Director of Human Resources.
- The results of this study will be used for the final capstone project of the Masters of Arts in Communication and Technology degree for Rachelle Fischer.

Purpose

- The purpose of this research is to explore how employees use communication with their peers to make sense of communication delivered to them from a top-down (management-employee) approach during workplace change.
- Benefits of this research can include developing tools to implement when organizations are going through organizational change.
- This research may inform the development of a 'tool kit' resource which will be shared with management.

Study Procedures

- Semi-structured interviews will be conducted. The interview questions were informed by the completed literature review and reviewed by the researchers academic supervisor and the Director of Human Resources at St. John Ambulance.
- Participants will have a choice to be interviewed at their place of work (a private office at the St. John Ambulance office in Edmonton, AB) or a mutually agreed upon location.
- Interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.
- Data to be collected:
    - Semi-structured interviews/ 30-minute time commitment/ results will be transcribed concurrently with interviews.

Benefits

- Participation in this study may lead to created tools for change management implementation.
- We hope that the information we get from doing this study will help us better understand how employees make sense of workplace change with their peers.
- There are no costs involved in this research.
- Participants will not receive any compensation (or reimbursements) for their participation.

Risk
- There is potential that your participation in this study maybe identified by the Director of Human Resources given the recruitment method.
- There may be risks to being in this study that are not known. If we learn of anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in this study, we will inform you right away.

Voluntary Participation
- You are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study.
- You have the right to not participate.
- You also have the right to opt out without penalty and to have any collected data withdrawn and not included in the study up until the completion date of the study, August 1, 2017. In the event of opting out, please notify the research investigator, Rachelle Fischer.
- There are no known risks or personal benefits from participation in this study.

Confidentiality & Anonymity
- The intended use of this research is for completion of the Masters of Arts in Communication and Technology degree for Rachelle Fischer. It may be used in research presentations, teaching and web postings. Participants will not be identified in any part of these.
- Data will be kept confidential. The research investigator and supervisor will have access to it.
- The anonymity of participants will be protected with the dissemination of the research.
- Data will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of 5 years following completion of the research project. Electronic data will be login protected and will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.
- Participants can request a copy of the report of the research findings by checking off the request box on the consent form.

Further Information
- If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact
  ________________, Research Investigator, phone/email
  ________________, Supervisor, phone/ email
- The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix B – Consent Form

Study Title: Making Sense of Communication about Change Management: How do peers constructively communicate with one another?

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor:**
Name	Name
Institution	Institution
Address	Address
Email	Email
Phone Number	Phone Number

Researcher will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants
http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/gfcpolicymanual/policymanualsection66.cfm

Background
- Invitation to participate in this research project, as you were an employee of St. John Ambulance during the implementation of Microsoft Dynamic Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software.
- The researcher received your contact information from a participant list provided by the Director of Human Resources.

Purpose
- To explore how employees use communication with their peers to make sense of communication delivered to them from a top-down (management- employee) approach during workplace change.
- The study is in completion of the Masters of Arts in Communication and Technology degree for Rachelle Fischer.

Study Procedures
- A semi-structured interview will be conducted. Participants will have a choice to be interviewed in either a private office at the St. John Ambulance office (12304 118 Ave, Edmonton, AB, T5L 5G8) or a mutually agreed upon location.
- The semi-structured interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The interview questions were informed by the completed literature review and reviewed by the researchers academic supervisor and Director of Human Resources at St. John Ambulance.
- The interview will be recorded, documented and used for analysis.
- Completion of the interview is completely voluntary.

Benefits
- We hope that the information we get from doing this study will help us better understand how employees make sense of workplace change with their peers.
- Information from this study will be used to develop a 'tool kit' resource for change management implementation and will be shared with managers.

- There are no costs involved in this research.
- Participants will not receive any compensation (or reimbursements) for their participation.

Risk

- There is potential that your participation in this study may be identified by the Director of Human Resources given the recruitment method.
- There may be risks to being in this study that are not known. If we learn of anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study, we will inform you right away.

Voluntary Participation

- You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary.
- You are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in this study.
- You also have the right to opt out without penalty and to have any collected data withdrawn and not included in the study up until the completion date of August 1, 2017. In the event of opting out, please notify the research investigator, Rachelle Fischer.
- There are no known risks or personal benefits from participation in this study.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

- There is potential that participants may be identifiable by the Director of Human Resources. To protect confidentiality, the Director of Human Resources has signed a confidentiality agreement.
- All information collected will be coded to protect the participant's privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Before releasing aggregated data to the University of Alberta, any identifying indicators will be removed.
- Data will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years following the completion of the research project, and when appropriate, will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. No information will be released until after the completion of the Masters of Arts in Communication and Technology degree for Rachelle Fischer.

Other Uses

- Resulting research may be used in published journal articles and for professional presentation (teaching and/or conferences).

Further Information

- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints please contact:
  Researcher: _______________, email or phone
  Supervisor: _______________, email, or phone

Consent Statement

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form after I have signed it.

____ _______________

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature Date

____ _______________

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

Please indicate if you would like a copy of the research report after final grades have been assigned:

□YES □NO

Appendix C – Confidentiality Agreement

This form may be used for individuals that have participated in any part of the recruitment method.

Project title – Making Sense of Communication about Change Management: How do peers constructively communicate with one another?

I, ______________________________, the ____________________________________ (specific job title) have provided a list of potential participants.

I agree to -

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g. participants names) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.

2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., participant list) secure while it is in my possession.

3. after consulting with the *Researcher(s),* erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

______________________________	______________________________	______________________
(Print Name)	(Signature)	(Date)

Researcher

______________________________	______________________________	______________________
(Print Name)	(Signature)	(Date)

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Interview Questions

1) Can you describe how you received information about the implementation of the CRM software from management?

What if anything did you find unclear?

Did you feel this information was adequate?

What information was most useful?

What information was least useful?

Were you missing any information regarding the CRM software?

2) Can you describe how you received information about the implementation of the CRM software from your peers?

What if anything did you find unclear?

Did you feel this information was adequate?

What information was most useful?

What information was least useful?

Were you missing any information regarding the CRM software?

3) What did you do to gain a better understanding of the CRM software?

Who did you talk with to get support or answers to your questions?

What kind of information did you ask about?

What benefits did you gain from these conversations?

4) What are your top 2 or 3 concerns with how you received information about CRM software changes/ updates?

How have your peers supported you with these concerns?

5) Think of a peer relationship you have at your workplace. Can you describe it to me?

What kind of information do you share?

6) Consider a typical day at work, how often do you interact with your peers about the CRM software?

What topics are frequently mentioned? (i.e. Usability, job change)

7) How often do you ask your peers questions about the CRM software?

8) How often do you help your peers with the CRM software?

9) How do your peers influence your understanding of the CRM software as changes and updates are announced?

10) What barriers do you have to communicating with your peers about CRM software?

11) What supports do you use to communicate with your peers about the CRM software?

Do you have a preference for any one of these?