



MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY



INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
ANALYSIS ON MANAGERIAL GROWTH  
DURING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Aušra Kolbergytė, PhD, [auskol@mrni.eu](mailto:auskol@mrni.eu)

Researcher in the Lifelong Learning Laboratory

2022 01 19-21

TQR 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference



MYKOLAS ROMERIS  
UNIVERSITY

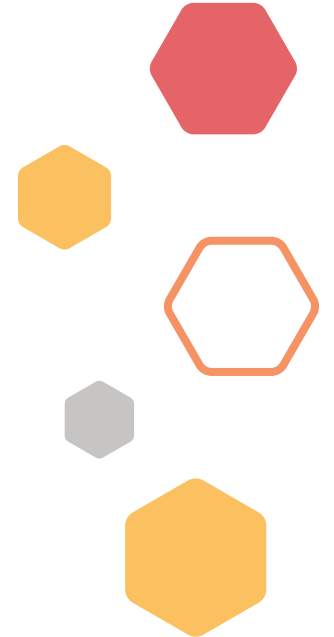


# Introduction

Who am I?



- Graduated from Mykolas Romeris University and work there
- Formal & Informal background: social work, education, psychology
- Scientific interests: self-development, consciousness-raising, emotional intellect, addictions, life-long learning, adult education
- Defended doctoral thesis on: “Conscious Self-Development of Adults as Transformative Learning”
- Presently engaged in post-doc research, titled: “Self-Development of Managers in the Context of Organizational Changes: Transformative Learning Experiences, Conscious Personal and Professional Growth”
- AIM: to reveal the phenomenon of managers’ self-development as transformative learning during organizational changes.
- I am grateful that this research is funded by the European Social Fund under the No 09.3.3-LMT-K-712 “Development of Competences of Scientists, other Researchers and Students through Practical Research Activities” measure.
- I also sincerely thank my research participants and supervisor prof. dr. Valdonė Indrašienė.



Vilnius, Lithuania, Baltic region of Europe



# Research Topic

## What and Why Important?

The concept of “**manager**” in this study encompasses middle management not top leaders that usually initiate change and have an executive power.

The concept of “**growth**” in this study is understood as a self-development process and analyzed from theoretical lens of:

- 1) **Transformational Learning Theory:** occurs through mental conflict requiring new meanings of perception (Daloz, 1999; Mezirow, 1999; Dirkx *et al.*, 2006).
- 2) **Self-Directed Learning Theory:** leads to a holistic and harmonious self-development. Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) stresses the importance of personal responsibility for growth stating that optimal situation for SDL is most effective when the person, process, and context are in balance.

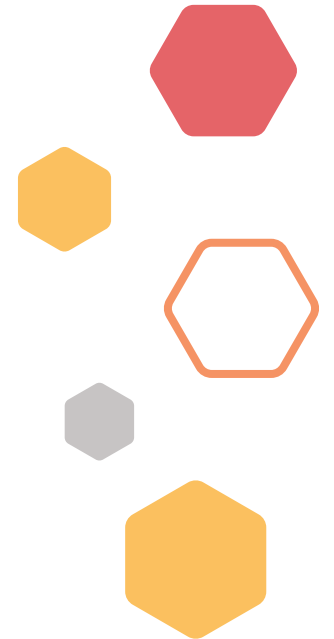
**Research problem:** middle managers play an important role in navigating organizational change, facilitating support to new work routines and catalysing subordinates’ emerging emotions. Because of work overload they are at high risk of burnout and need understanding about how to support themselves.

**Research gap:** studies on executive leadership in change management and growth are relevant (Abernethy *et al.*, 2020; Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2021), though there is a lack of research about middle managers experiences, who are not key decision makers (Hiatt, 2006), but mediators coordinating strategic initiatives and navigating employee activities to transformations (De Klerk, 2019).

**Research question:** How do middle managers experience growth in the context of organizational change?

### Additional questions:

- What are main concerns reflected in the experiences of middle managers during organizational change?
- What kind of transformative experiences do they face that develop them personally and professionally?
- What meanings do managers make to alleviate discomfort, stay resilient / strong, and productive in organizational change?





## Background / Literature Review

What do we know so far? What helps to Understand the Topic?

### Management:

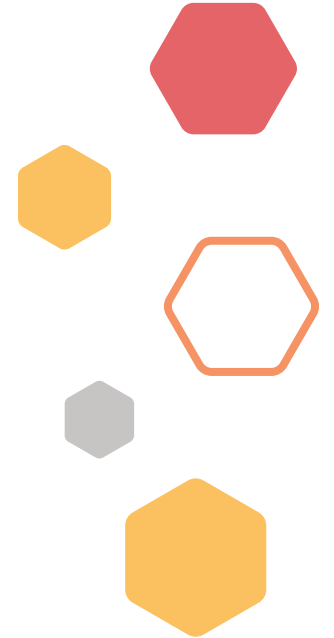
- Organizational change overlaps restructuring, merger and acquisitions, cultural change, digital or sustainable business transformations, project or programme lead change or management in uncertain times (Cameron and Green, 2020).
- Top management frequently faces strong resistance to change when implementing service-growth strategies (Ulaga and Loveland, 2014).
- “When changes occur in an organization, supervisor or manager is an employee first and manager second” (Hiatt, 2006, p. 89).

### Education:

- Organizational change embodies a context of discomfort which is necessary for growth (Janick, 2005).
- Adult learning is lifelong process, but the deepest experiences and discoveries about oneself, environment and life are formed at critical moments when significant changes in professional or personal life happen (Taylor, 1998; Mezirow, 1999; Bulajeva, 2007).
- Work conditions that require stress, high responsibility, emotional and mental strain, managerial self-education becomes an essential tool for helping oneself and others (Gerwing, 2016; Jalagat, 2017).

### Psychology:

- Transformations are emotionally charged inner experiences leading to misunderstandings, conflict, hurt feelings including spiritual pain (Marcia, 2010; Gaspar and Hayden, 2017; Mattar, 2020).
- Uncertainty, joy, and resignation correlate throughout the process (Giæver and Smollan, 2015).





# *Methodology*

What, with Whom, and Where?





# Methodology

## What, with Whom, and Where?

- Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is applied:
  - IPA helps to understand how a person perceives, interprets, gives meaning to his or her world and creates meanings in the context of an experienced phenomenon through self-reflection (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).
  - IPA put emphasis on a specific context and complexity of particularities revealing depth of the experience; also identifying things and relationships that matter most to the research participant (Larkin, 2021).
- Theoretical assumptions of IPA include:
  - 1) Phenomenology: analysis of the essence of experience.
  - 2) Hermeneutics: double dynamic systematization of meanings interpretations made by researcher and participants.
  - 3) Ideography: separation of particular meanings and in detail.

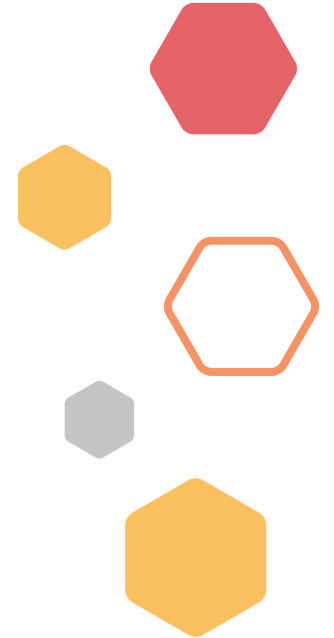




## Methodology

### What, with Whom, and Where?

- Purposeful Sampling with criteria for research participants, who:
  1. are mid-chain managers;
  2. had 5 or more directly accountable subordinates;
  3. organization size is over 250 employees;
  4. had experience in organizational change;
  5. confirmed that such experience had contributed to personal and professional growth.
- Data Collection:
  - Empirical data is collected using semi-structured interviews with middle-chain managers (n = 10)
  - Interviews were conducted directly or remotely, using Skype or Teams chat programs
  - Duration: in June-July 2021
  - Location / Nationality: Lithuania(-ns)

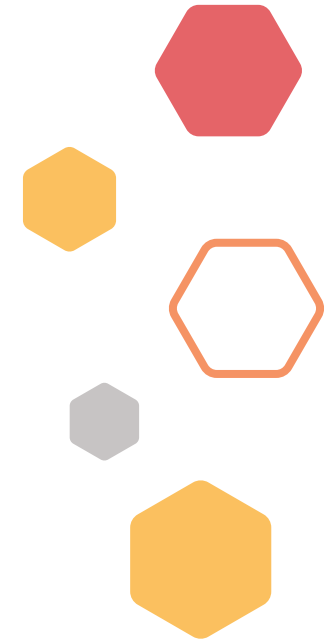




# Methodology

## What, with Whom, and Where?

Research participants (n = 10)	Gender	Age	Organization sector	Organizational size	Number of subordinates	Nature of organizational change
Gintas	Male	35-40	Private	250-500	10	Structural, strategic, technological
Tauras	Male	50-55	Public	1000-1250	5-15	Structural
Nojus	Male	35-40	Public	1250-1500	20	Structural, technological
Julius	Male	45-50	Mixed	1500 <	200-500	Structural
Regina	Female	40-45	Private	250-500	20	Mergers, strategic, technological
Simonas	Male	40-45	Public	1000-1250	25-45	Structural
Donata	Female	35-40	Private	750-1000	5-15	Strategic, technological, cultural
Brigita	Female	40-45	Private	250-500	15-20	Mergers, cultural
Milda	Female	35-40	Private	1500 <	8-250	Structural, strategic, cultural
Agneta	Female	35-40	Private	250-500	130	Structural, technological



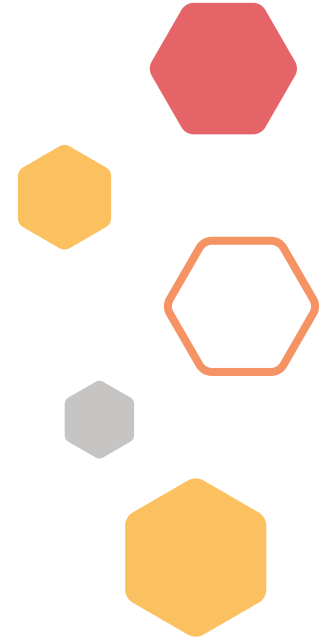




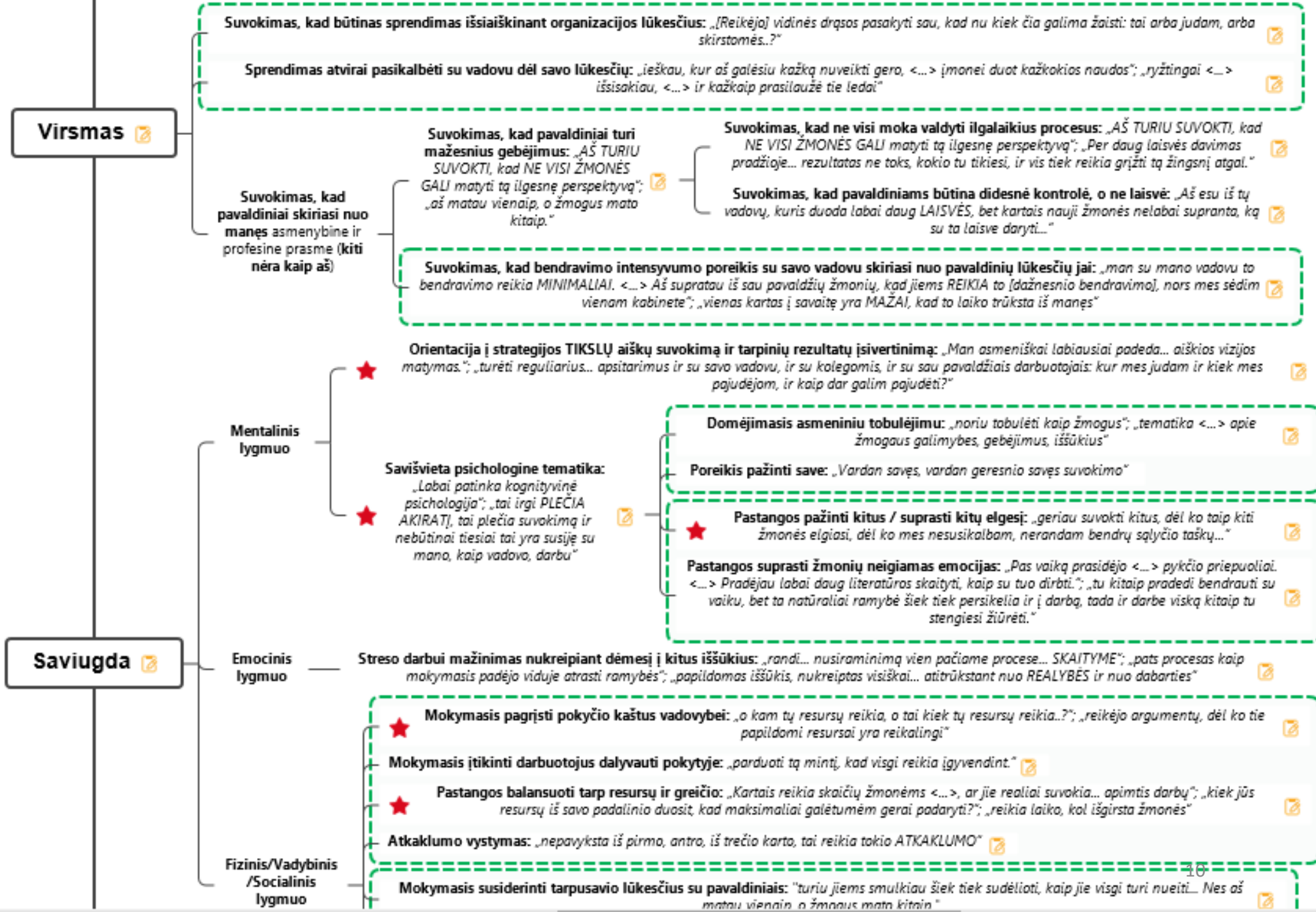
## Methodology

### What, with Whom, and Where?

- The study data were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using IPA guidelines (Smith, *et al.*, 2009: 79-107):
  1. Reading and re-reading.
  2. Initial noting.
  3. Developing emergent themes
  4. Searching for connections across emergent themes.
  5. Moving to the next case.
  6. Looking for patterns across cases.
- Connections among themes were formed using: abstraction, polarization, contextualization, numeration and function.
- The data were processed using the digital application of “Wondershare MindMaster (Pro)”.
- The study was guided by ethical principles of research, including a humanistic approach to the participant, volunteering, anonymity, transparency, and other parameters of qualitative research to ensure reliability (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2009).



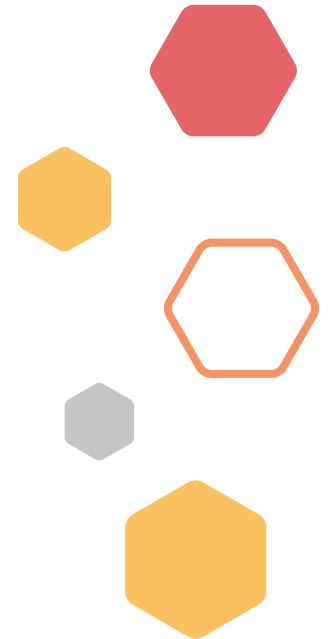
Extract from Case Profile [Donata]

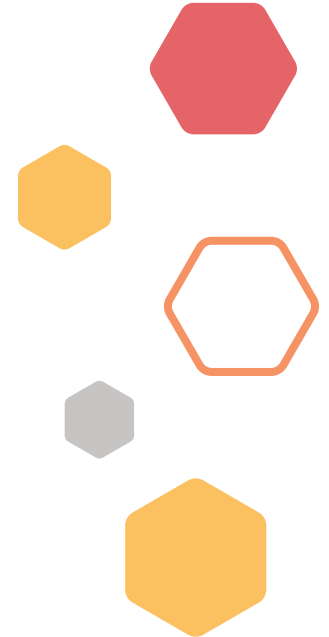
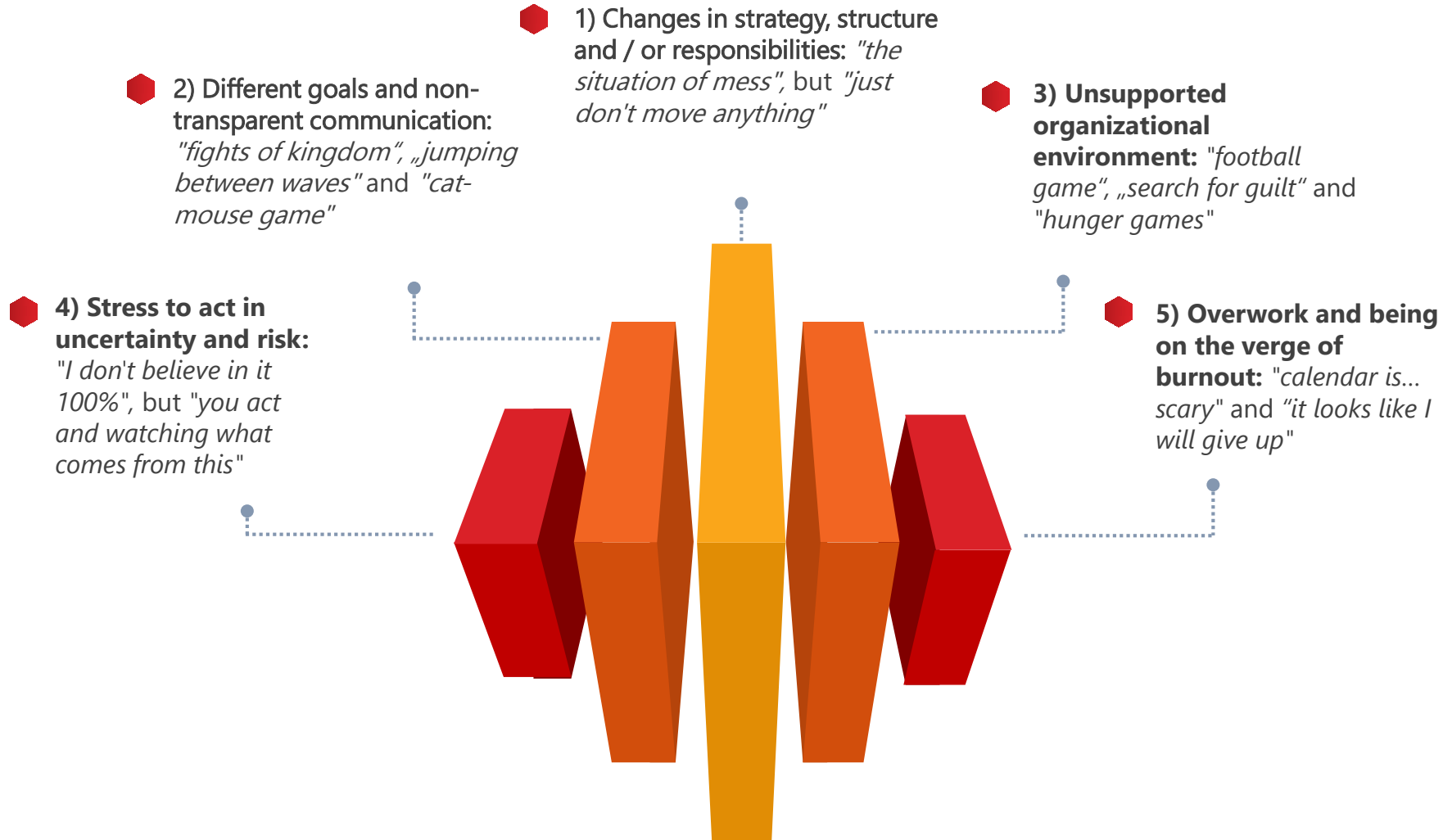




# *Findings*

What did I learn?





## Findings

What did I learn?

## Experiential Context:


What are the Challenges?





# Findings

What did I learn?



**(1) Formation of Professional Identity And Self-Realization**

Sub-themes:

1. *"it's all yours"*
2. *"everyone says everything to me"*
3. *"we must also be specialists"*
4. *"proving that I know"*
5. *"I can compete"*
6. *"I feel needed"*



**(2) Recognition and Acceptance of Social Diversity**

Sub-themes:

1. *"there are bad people"*
2. *„why don't we agree?"*
3. *„approach individually"*
4. *"exploiting strengths"*
5. *"you won't be good to everyone"*



**(3) Finding Inner Strengths to Stay Productive**

Sub-themes:

1. *"both this and that can't have"*
2. *„what can I do?"*
3. *"this is business"*
4. *"I took breaks"*
5. *"I have hands and feet"*
6. *"get out of that mode"*





# Findings

## What did I learn?



Sub-themes:

1. "it's all yours"
2. "everyone says everything to me"
3. "we must also be specialists"
4. "proving that I know"
5. "I can compete"
6. "I feel needed"

### 1. Awareness of greater responsibility: "it's all yours".

"I realized that [now] it will take a lot of thinking now... <...> Now it's your responsibility and that's it: you can't point a finger at anyone. It's all yours. {laughs} <...> That amount of work... threatening, you know. How much will you have to give yourself?" [Nojus]

### 2. Constructing leadership standards: "everyone says everything to me".

"The team has changed and all people are new and... I'm maybe one of those leaders who gives a lot of FREEDOM, but sometimes new people don't really understand what to do with that freedom... <...> Too much freedom given at the beginning... the result is not what you expect, and you still need to go back that step back and after a while put together the smaller critical points you need to check what [they] know, what don't know..." [Donata]

### 3. Improving professional knowledge: "we must also be specialists".

"As a leader... I personally like to touch, to know what they're talking about, <...> to be in the process... and... what that leadership is about. <...> Dive into that swamp, [and] then instruct others. <...> You get a new product, you start to deepen: taste, aftertaste, enough shades..." [Tauras]

### 4. Questioning competence: "proving that I know".

"Maybe we just don't talk, and I'm not good for this company?" <...> There was perhaps such distrust in myself <...>: maybe I don't understand something here, [or] I don't know [smth]?" [Donata]

### 5. Enhancing professional practice: "I can compete".

"I have the opportunity ... to influence xxx changes in the company. That opportunity allows me to learn a great deal in my professional field, to develop my competence." [Gintas]  
"When I looked back at how much I got out of it: that communication with managers, representation of my situation, composition of the rules, that sense... that experience of how things are done... <...> That feeling of how it should be ok I got it..." [Regina]

### 6. Personal meaningfulness of the activity: "I feel needed".

"We checked what drives us. <...> Here we have such a moment of identity that if we see meaning especially in Lithuania, VALUE, some... change in well-being, change in progress... for ourselves" [Milda]



MYKOLAS ROMERIS  
UNIVERSITY





# Findings

## What did I learn?



Sub-themes:

1. "there are bad people"
2. „why don't we agree?"
3. „approach individually"
4. "exploiting strengths"
5. "you won't be good to everyone"

### 1. Perception of different nature of people: "there are bad people".

"About 40% were women. <...> I didn't know how to behave at all, it was a challenge for me because they react completely differently... Because a man gets angry and leaves. And that's it. The woman, for some reason, starts crying. Why is she crying? Do not understand..." [Simonas]

"I met incredibly BAD people. And maybe I didn't have the environment to meet them before. <...> I lived in such a fairytale world... <...> They began to push you very hard into the wheels. And at first I didn't realize it. After you start it very clearly, just like on the palm of your hand, you know, very very very... <...> Sometimes I don't even understand why people behave like that, it's very hard for me. {annoyed}<...> And I thought: WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE, WHY, HOW? {silence}<...> It was unbelievable to me. My way is this... I couldn't believe people were bad. I thought, they're all good! Well, there are worse, but they're all good there... Well, no. {laughs}" [Nojus]

### 2. Efforts to understand others: "why don't we agree?".

"I was interested in the evenings... <...> I had bought psychological books: so how do you really communicate with those people? <...> How to communicate with those who want to argue with you, hurt. <...> You want to know not only the people who wish you ill, but also your employees." [Gintas]

### 3. Accepting employee diversity: "approach individually".

"It was necessary to <...> accept each person, evaluate them individually, not put that... cliché that we are all the same. <...> One is a closed person (although he is a good specialist), but you ask him - he running into the bushes, he may cry. But if you want a result, you have to know how to get to it. <...> It was necessary to learn that approach even more, <...> that communication with people, so much more... let's say, more personal." [Brigita]

### 4. Focusing on employees' skills: "exploiting strengths".

"I talked to everyone because I wanted to know where those qualities are. <...> I chose people who could do a certain task. <...> One of them was able to make really good graphs from that big data, but he doesn't [succeed] with that conclusion in any way... and that's it: they work in a couple." [Simonas]

### 5. Balancing in a destructive relationship: "you won't be good to everyone".

"It is my saying, to put [colleague]... in its place, <...> straightforwardly... boldly, that such a person... in such a position, at such a mature age, does not even have the right to treat anyone in this way. Including me and against everyone. It may have been a shock to those people that I endured and I was not afraid to answer that I feel offended by such behavior." [Brigita]



### **1. Transformation of expectations and values: "both this and that can't have".**

"One of those discoveries was that <...> maybe the organization will both evolve and grow, and in the finals it will go in that... direction, but it won't be as fast as it wants to be (what you see here... in visions). {knock on the table} And... then, <...> you really have to <...> beautifully put up choice for yourself: are you running a sprint or are you running a marathon? Because if you still want to achieve something in a more long-term sense, you will have to run in stages. So those ... [must] skip, LET GO... such a bunch of perfectionism... NOT TODAY, maybe next year. <...> NOT AT THAT PACE IN THIS ORGANIZATION. {knocking fingers} Not so fast. <...> You have to learn... to wait. Because otherwise you will scatter everything, evaporate, drop... and done." [Milda]

### **2. Realizing the limits of power: "what can I do?".**

"When you are not responsible for making decisions, you cannot guarantee something. <...> Can I change something? Well, if I can't, it can get nervous — not nervous, [it's] not up to me. <...> Not within my competence. <...> I don't go too deep, I just look at how to get better <...>, {laughs} what I can actually do, not what I want to do." [Tauras]

### **3. Separation of work and personality: "this is business".**

"You knew it was disgusting here [bureaucratic dismissal procedure], unpleasant, but you realized it was a job, I have to do it and I go and do it. <...> I went like, I would say... like a tank. I had to do it, we do it ... we fill it up, we sit down, we talk and then we go." [Brigita]

### **4. Emotional self-knowledge and self-regulation: "I took breaks".**

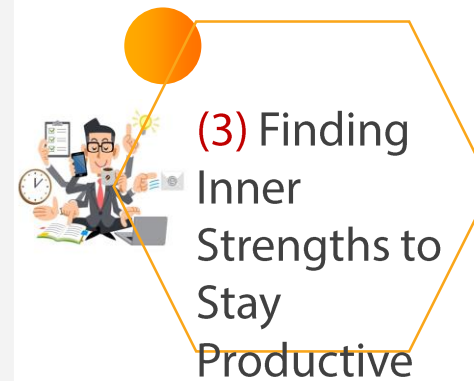
"I'm choleric: <...> the reaction is too strong. <...> When you catch fire, sit down - rethink... And when you put your mind together, and somehow it passes. <...> I realized I didn't need to react here and now. <...> Sometimes those things need a day or another to lie down. <...> The world will not fall apart if I just go out and have a coffee." [Nojus]

### **5. Adoption of the worst case scenario: "I have hands and feet".**

"Maybe what helped me is such an internal determination... {thinks} that either I stay in this company and try to make that change, or I go out and look for where I can do something good and where I can give the company some benefits. {energy rises} When I decided inside and spoke out with enough determination (because we had a conversation [with the management]) and somehow that ice began to melt." [Donata]

### **6. Conscious rest planning: "get out of that mode".**

"Over time, I began to feel [tired] sooner than [health] broke. <...> [When] I feel the signs, then get concerned. <...> Now I have started to protect myself more. <...> I book massages, take a break, go out, lie down in the Spa." [Regina]



Sub-themes:

1. "both this and that can't have"
2. „what can I do?"
3. "this is business"
4. "I took breaks"
5. "I have hands and feet"
6. "get out of that mode"







# Discussion

## Usability and Applicability

### For Heads of Organizations

- Provide more financial resources to support middle managers during org. changes
- Ensure transparent communication on change strategy
- Promote more respectful organizational culture formation

### For HR Professionals

- Organize staff training on mental health care, social diversity, change management, etc.
- Guidelines for middle managers' recruitment participating in future change
- Form an emotionally favorable organizational culture and traditions fostering cooperative work environment

### For Middle Managers

- Adapt the guidelines for self-development methods and practices taking care of mental health and maintaining motivation during org. change
- Anticipate potential challenges for organizational change and assess capabilities / resources before committing to them

### For Higher Education Institutions

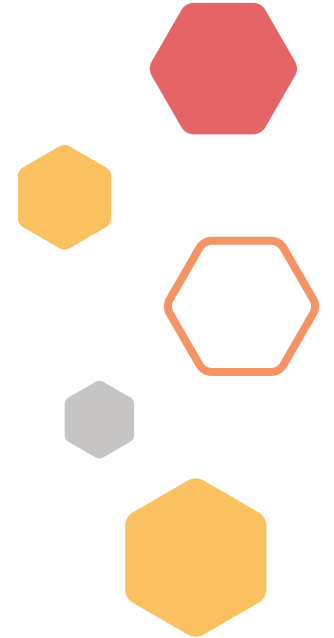
- For study program developers and lecturers:
- to supplement management, psychology and other disciplinary study programs that respond to the topics and problems of org. change, addressing the necessary knowledge and skills for change managers.

### For Researches

- Relevant qualitative research analyzing the experience of organizational change and the nature of self-development practices of senior management and other employees
- In-depth studies on adult education are needed to adapt to social diversion

### To the Public

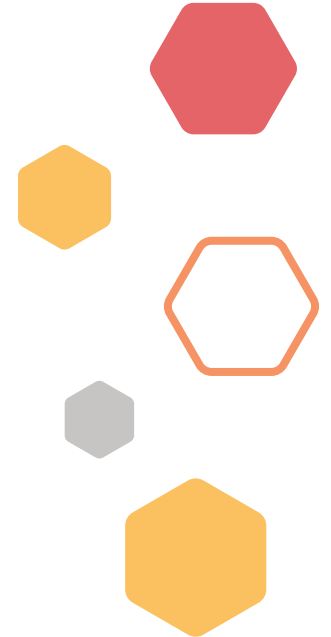
- Provide knowledge for adult self-education in a broad sense
- Helps to change narratives related to the pursuit of ideal perfectionism and unconditional goodness in a relationship





# References

- Abernethy, M. A., Anderson, S.W., Nair, S. and Jiang, Y. (2021), "Manager 'growth mindset' and resource management practices", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 91.
- Bhardwaj, A., Mishra, S. and Jain, T. K. (2021), "Analysis of strategic leadership for organizational transformation and employee engagement", *Materials Today: Proceedings*, [Vol. 37, No. 2](#), pp. 161-165.
- Bulajeva, T. (2007), "Suaugusiųjų ugdymas: kritinio sąmoningumo link", *Logos*, Vol. 50, pp. 167-175.
- [Cameron, E.](#) and [Green, M.](#) (2020), *Making Sense of Change Management: A Complete Guide to the Models, Tools and Techniques of Organizational Change*. NY: Kogan Page.
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Daloz, L. A. (1999), *Mentor. Guiding the journey of adult learners*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- [De Klerk, J.J.](#) (2019), "Leading transitions in traumatically experienced change – a question of doing or being?", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 340-355.
- Dirkx, J. M., Mezirow, J. and Cranton, P. (2006), "Musings and Reflections on the Meaning, Context and Process of Transformative Learning: A dialogue Between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow", *Journal of transformative education*, Vol. 4, pp. 123-139.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. (4th ed.). Sage publications.
- [Gaspar, D.](#) and [Hayden, K.](#) (2017), "Legacy Practices: Implications for Leadership", *Emotion in the Library Workplace (Advances in Library Administration and Organization)*, Vol. 37, pp. 147-166.
- Gerwing, C. (2016), "Meaning of Change Agents within Organizational Change, *Journal of Applied Leadership and Management*", Vol. 4, pp. 21-40, <http://www.journal-alm.org/article/view/17107>
- [Gjæver, F.](#) and [Smollan, R.K.](#) (2015), "Evolving emotional experiences following organizational change: a longitudinal qualitative study", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 105-133.
- Hiatt, J.M. (2006), *ADKAR: a model for change in business, government and our community*. Prosci Learning Center Publications.
- Hiemstra, R. and Brockett, R. G. (2012). "Reframing the Meaning of Self-Directed Learning: An Updated Modelt", *Adult Education Research Conference*.
- Jalagat, R. (2017). Leading and Managing People and Organizational Change: Individual and Organizational Benefits and Its Value on Staff Development. *Business, Management and Economics Research*, 3(8), pp: 146-150.
- Janik, D. S. (2005), *Unlock the Genius within – Neurobiological Trauma, Teaching, and Transformational Learning*, Rowman & Littlefield Education Lanham, Maryland.
- Larkin, M. (2021). What's the difference in Qualitative Analysis, Workshop, 2021.12.09.
- Marcia, J. E. (2010), "Life transitions and stress in the context of psychosocial development", Miller, T. W. (Ed.), *Handbook of Stressful Transitions across the Lifespan*, Springer, New York, pp. 19-34.
- [Mattar, D.M.](#) (2020), "The culmination stage of leadership succession", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 33 No. 7, pp. 1355-1373.
- Mezirow, J. (2000), *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, J. A, Flower, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Theory, Method and Research*. Sage.
- Taylor, E. (1998), *The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning: A Critical Review*, The Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Ulaga, W., & Loveland, J.M. (2014). Transitioning from product to service-led growth in manufacturing firms: Emergent challenges in selecting and managing the industrial sales force. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 43, 113-125.



*Thanks for your attention!*

Aušra Kolbergytė, PhD, [auskol@mruni.eu](mailto:auskol@mruni.eu)  
Researcher in the Lifelong Learning Laboratory

Mykolas Romeris University  
Ateities st. 20, Vilnius, LT-08303 Lithuania



[www.mruni.eu](http://www.mruni.eu)

[Mykolas Romeris University](http://www.mruni.eu)



[Mykolas Romeris University](http://www.mruni.eu)

