Discourses of Participation within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg

Ongoing Tensions between Verksamhetschefer and Personliga Assistenter

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Since I came to Sweden in 2014, I started working within the field of health and social care services. As a personal assistant, the job gave me among other things the required flexibility to study this master programme while taking care of a wonderful person. Although it was not easy at the beginning, I have always enjoyed my work during these years. In my view, it is an extraordinary emotional work through which links between the client and the employee are inevitably created. From a personal level, I must recognize that this work has changed my life. Sharing day to day with the clients and realize how the disease is gradually taking their life away is extremely hard and disheartening. I sometimes have a sense that every worker (including me) is immunized against client’s suffering. But, in fact, one must be a professional. That is the only way to avoid being affected by the personal clients’ health situation. Thus, the working environment as well as the predisposition of employees are essential to improve the client’s quality of life.

Studying participation within organizations requires knowledge, data, and hard work. The combination between this master as well as my role as an employee within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg set the stage for this research. A big thank you to all the managers and employees for your willingness during the process, interest, and support. Without your help, this study would not have been possible to complete. Special thanks to my supervisor Cecilia Strand, lecturer at the Department of Informatics and Media at Uppsala University for constructive feedbacks. Following her metaphors, your help has been essential to “give birth” to this research. Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents and friends for supporting me through these months of study.

Carlos Losa Valencia

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Abstract

Introduction (Purpose) - The main purpose of this study is to investigate how participation is differently understood and its effects in the relationship between managers and employees. By answering the research question has the potential to improve more effective participation practices.

Theoretical framework – Discourses are considered as sites of power which involve an act of resistance itself. Both concepts co-emerge together in a dialectical relationship. The co-existence of different participation discourses inevitably provides tensions which are understood as a normal condition of the organizational life.

Design/methodology/approach - The research setting took place in Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg where the data was collected during 14 weeks. Due to my position as an employee within the organization, an inductive approach was considered as the most suitable reasoning in this research. By taking a qualitative design, interviews and observations were carried out to both managers and employees in three different groups.

Findings - The organizational context as well as the different understandings of authority between managers and employees involves tensions which are used to articulate contrasting expectations and participation discourses. Significantly, the employees’ silence at the meetings is not only used by the managers and the group leaders to reinforce their own identities. Furthermore, the absence of a group leader does not eliminate this figure as such. This shows the inefficiency regarding the organizational debate about the appropriateness and maintenance of group leaders (i.e. “samordnares”) within personal assistants’ groups.

Conclusions – Contrasting participation discourses reflect how power is differently exercised between managers and employees. Moreover, the intentionality of power and, hence, resistance behaviors is often misunderstood between managers and employees. To improve more effective participatory practices, some of the following examples were found; the requirement of clarify employees and group leaders’ competences within the decisions making processes, the correct organization in advance of the items for discussion, decentralization of responsibilities among the employees as well as conducting group meetings at the clients’ residence, at least once a year.

Keywords – Participation discourses, power, resistance behaviors
Discourses of Participation within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg

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1. Introduction

Promoting employees’ participation within the organizational life has gradually become mainstream in both public and private organizations, a tendency which does not seem to be under discussion. Through the development of participatory practices, organizations aim at improving productivity and economic efficiency while reducing potential employees’ resistance behaviors (Pardo-del-Val et al., 2012). Hence, participation emerges as an organizational instrument which entails positive benefits not only for the employees but also for the entire organization (Kim, 2002). However, this optimistic view of participation through which productivity, efficiency and even empowerment are principally boosted by encouraging employees’ participation will be refused in this research. I am not suggesting that enhancing participation necessarily leads to negative outcomes per se. Instead, the enormous complexity of the organizational life requires that the focus should be shifted towards two interrelated variables, which determine the effectiveness of participation. On the one hand, organizational structural factors such as the organizational context, the work environment, and the organizational size play a critical role in this process. Thereby, the introduction of participatory mechanisms without considering the organizational context often leads to undesirable results which show inefficiencies within organizations. On the other hand, as hierarchical structures, organizations are constituted by different power relations which inevitably produces the co-existence of contrasting participation discourses. It is expected that, within the relationship between managers and employees, different understandings of participation emerge. However, as Saku Mantere and Eero Vara highlight, there is a lack of knowledge about the implications produced by the co-existence of different participation discourses in the organizations (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Thus, in order to give an appropriate answer, the study of these two interrelated variables is required.

Focusing on the case study, promoting patients and employees’ participation is now part of the managerial repertoire in places such as hospitals, nursing homes and diverse institutional care organizations (Sahlsten et al., 2007). Influenced by the user-centered organizational design, Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg aims at providing health and social care services to those residences who need attendance. The key focus is to understand the specific needs and requirements of the clients, hereafter referred to as “brukare”. Participation instruments such as “medarbetarsamtal” (conversations between managers and clients) are used to encourage clients’ involvement within the different
service planning processes. By giving voice to the clients, managers, hereafter referred to as “verksamhetschefer” identify the clients’ specific necessities as well as the health and social care services that need to be implemented.

Due to the organizational context, these services are generally carried out at the client’s private residence. Thus, employees, hereafter referred to as “personliga assistenter” work outside and without a direct supervision of the managers. At this point, my position as an employee becomes salient in this research. After working three years as a personal assistant within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg, I can personally say that the absence of a daily control provides an increased employees’ perception of autonomy. In contrast, the lack of supervision is widely understood by the managers as a limiting factor regarding the effective control over the employees. This particular context may reflect tensions as well as contrasting expectations of what is understood as participation.

Despite the large number of studies within health and social care sectors through which participation is analyzed, especially in hospitals and nursing homes (Sahlsten et al., 2007), these studies are mainly focused on patients’ involvement within decision-making processes or service planning processes rather than focusing on how participation practices are differently understood by managers and employees. Within a user-centered organizational design where the role played by the employees is often neglected, a deeper understanding about the relationship between both organizational members is needed. This fact represents the main motivation in my research which has the potential to improve more effective participatory practices. By considering the organizational context and the role played by the different power relations, this empirical-oriented study aims at providing a better understanding of how three different personal assistants’ groups and their managers within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg experience and make-sense of participation and the effects that different participation discourses play within the everyday organizational process.

It becomes clear that the co-existence of different understandings of participation inevitably involve tensions within organizations (Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004). Hence, this research acknowledges tensions as a common attribute of organizing rather than anomalies or barriers to productivity and efficiency (Trethewey and Ashcraft, 2004). Instead of being suppressed or eliminated, both managers and employees need tensions in the ongoing construction of participation discourses. A process which is intrinsically related to the identity formation. This productive contribution of tensions leads me to take
a tension-centered approach in order to analyze how managers and employees struggle over the different meaning systems of participation. The tension-centered approach defines organizations as conflicted sites of human activity (Ashcraft and Trethewey, 2004). Accordingly, tensions are not exclusively subjected to a particular context but rather they are understood as a normal condition of the organizational life (Ashcraft and Trethewey, 2004). Furthermore, the co-existence of different participation discourses not only reflects tensions but also involves organizational members’ resistance behaviors. This entails the need to go beyond the widespread theoretical assertion through which improving participation employees’ resistance is reduced (Mumby, 2005). Although can be mitigated, participation does not eliminate resistance (Mumby, 2005). As with tensions, they are understood as endemic features of the organizations which are embedded into the different participation discourses within the existing power relations.

In this research, participation, power, and resistance are the three main axles through which the overlapping and contrasting discourses as well as the organizational frictions created by fluid, and at times contradictory, understandings of participation between managers and employees will be analyzed. The nature of Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg being that their employees work remotely at the clients’ location will give an interesting insight into the different participation discourses, tensions, and resistance behaviors within the existing power relations.

1.1. Research Question

This empirical-oriented study aims to contribute to the field of organizational communication by providing insight into: How do managers and employees experience and make-sense of the different understandings of participation? The main research question is then complemented by one sub-question which aims to identify the impacts on the co-existence of diverse participation discourses with the question: What impact does contrasting participation discourses have on the relationship between managers and employees?

I am fully conscious of the challenge to materialize this empirical-oriented study into practical measures. Nonetheless, I truly believe in the necessity of this research in order to identify how the contrasting understandings of participation affect the relationship
between these two different organizational levels, ultimately having an impact on the quality of the provided service.

1.2. Outline of the Thesis

Throughout this research, five different sections are clearly distinguished. Firstly, the previous research section introduces a description of the main studies within the organizational communication field. Dominated by the positive/negative dichotomy of participation, approaches to employees’ involvement and participation (the managerial and the human resource perspectives) present a detailed set of arguments of the appropriateness as well as the limitations of enhancing employees’ participation within decision-making processes. Secondly, the theoretical framework presents the theories which will be used when analyzing the empirical material. Regarding this, concepts such as discourse, power, and resistance will be defined. Due to little agreement within the field regarding what is understood as participation, the introduction of a participation framework is appropriate. By doing this, I intend to contextualize and visualize the relationship between managers and employees as well as the extension of participation. Focusing on participation discourses, three different understandings of participation “participation as an opportunity”, “participation as a threat”, and “participation as something irrelevant” will be developed and subsequently connected with the participation framework. Through the study of these discourses, two different resistance behaviors “resistance through silence” and “resistance through absence” emerge. As previously mentioned, I will also introduce the contribution of the tension-centered approach in this section. Thirdly, the methodology used in this research will be described. By conducting interviews and observations to both managers and employees, this research takes a qualitative approach in order to understand how participation is differently understood and its effects in the relationship between managers and employees. Fourthly, the findings section shows the empirical data which will be analyzed by using the theories previously presented. Finally, conclusions and how the research questions have been answered during this research will be also presented.
2. Previous Research

Throughout the organizational communication field, the study of employees’ participation has recently been dominated by the managerial and the human resource perspectives (Van der Westhuizen et al., 2012). Approaches to employee involvement and participation (EIP) are often dichotomized into a means/ends classification (Wright and Kim, 2004). From the managerial perspective, participation is mainly considered as a mean to accomplish organizational goals such as economic efficiency and productivity. In contrast, the human resource perspective approach discusses participation as an end which aims to enhance and empower the labour force. However, these two different understandings of participation are not mutually exclusive but intertwined which each other. As Soonhee Kim writes, promoting employees’ involvement within decision-making processes has potential benefits not only for the employees but also for the organization (Kim, 2002).

Accordingly, there is a broad consensus about the overwhelming positive outcomes that participation entails among the scholars (Grissom, 2012). Encouraging employees’ participation is intimately correlated with feelings of empowerment and job satisfaction (Kim, 2002), lower turnover rate (Heller, 2003), readiness to change (Mumby, 2005) and commitment (Grissom, 2012). Organizations often recognize that employees know the requirements and implementations needs of their job better than managers (Collins, 1997). Under this premise, managers have the task of improving productivity while enhancing flows of communication with their employees (Miller and Monge, 1986). This optimistic view of participation is highly influenced by the functionalist perspective which takes for granted that productivity and efficiency are exclusively boosted through promoting employees’ participation. Importantly, however, the functionalist approach is thoroughly criticized for neglecting the role played by the different power relations within the organizations (Jo and Park, 2016).

In agreement with this critique, several voices have recently questioned the limitations and the benefits of participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Accordingly, Mick Marchington claims that the relationship between employees’ participation and productivity has not been proven (Marchington et al., 1991). Thus, giving employees a voice by fostering participation does not necessarily brings about positive consequences per se. Similarly, Sharon Conley emphasizes that managers often carry out organizational strategies with the objective of increasing employees’ involvement such as “delegation”,
which creates uncertainty about responsibilities (Conley, 1991). The problem behind these strategies is the different expectations between managers and employees regarding how participation should be implemented. Meanwhile, Ian Cunningham and Jeff Hyman highlight the potential organizational risks, which arise when employees exceed their own competences. This fact may produce ambiguity and confusion, leading to dissatisfaction (Cunningham and Hyman, 1999). Moreover, employees may not perceive having influence over the decision-making processes which involve certain disengagement (Somech, 2010). In line with this, employees often believe that managers promote participation with the aim of increasing efficiency by encouraging them to work harder (Cunningham and Hyman, 1999).

Participation is, therefore an extraordinary contested term. Promoting employees’ involvement can generate both positive and negative consequences within organizations. Influenced by the functionalistic perspective, participation has historically been understood as objective fact, something than can be measured and transferred, rather than a social construction (Jo and Park, 2016). Furthermore, from the functionalistic perspective, the role played by the different power relation in the ongoing construction of participation discourses is neglected. Accordingly, the social constructionist approach emerges as the most suitable perspective to better understand this messy, fragmented, and enormous complexity of the organizational life. Therefore, the focus should not be whether participation is good or not but rather how managers and employees experience and make-sense of the different meaning systems of participation and the effects that entails within the everyday organizational practices.

However, we cannot disregard the theoretical contribution of both managerial and human resource perspectives in the study of participation within the organizational communication field. Despite being under the umbrella of the functionalistic perspective, these two approaches to employee involvement and participation will be used as a basis for understanding how managers and employees within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg reflect contrasting understandings of participation. This is highly relevant for the purpose of this research when analyzing organizational members responses.
3. Literature Review/Theory

This chapter starts with a presentation of the two main participative perspectives in organizational studies. By doing this, I will introduce a tension-centered approach in order to show how tensions are intrinsically related to the different understandings of participation between managers and employees. Related to this, three different participation discourses “participation as an opportunity”, “participation as a threat”, and “participation as something irrelevant” emerge. Furthermore, through the study of these discourses, two different resistance behaviors “resistance through silence” and “resistance through absence” will be also included in this research. Influenced by the social constructionist perspective, discourse, power, and resistance co-emerge in a dialectical relationship. Finally, the Harder’s participation framework will be used to visualize the relationship between managers and employees as well as the extension of participation within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg.

3.1. What is Participation?

The term participation has extensively been researched by many different disciplines including political science, anthropology, economy, law, sociology, and management, among others (Kumar and Sia, 2012). Hence, as a multidisciplinary concept, the study of participation has gradually introduced a broad range of concepts such as voice, involvement, empowerment or even democracy. However, although the managerial and human resource approaches has recently dominated the organizational communication field, the study of employees’ participation through having a voice was originally influenced by liberal economic scholars since the 40s and 50s (Dundon and Gollan, 2007). The emergence of Taylorism entailed collective and individual resistance behaviors (i.e. strikes, absenteeism and high turnover rates) which threatened the productivity and the managerial control. As an economic concern, promoting employees’ participation through unions was largely considered as a practical organizational solution among the scholars (Dundon and Gollan, 2007). Accordingly, Richard B. Freeman and James Medoff emphasized in their study “What Do Unions Do?” the potential benefits in both employees and organizations that trade unions involved (Goldberg, 1986). These two Harvard University labour economics underlined that allowing employees to have a voice
provides a means for the early detentions of problems that could have a potentially positive impact on productivity and quality (Dundon and Gollan, 2007).

### 3.1.1. The Managerial Perspective

From the managerial approach and influenced by Richard B. Freeman and James Medoff’s contribution, Mick Marchington and Adrian Wilkinson distinguish three different forms of participation “direct communication”, “upward problem-solving”, and “representative participation” (Marchigton and Wilkinson, 2005). While the first two are interrelated, the representative participation refers to the trade unions’ role. By promoting different participation strategies (i.e. group meetings) “so-called APTs within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg”, managers not only improve communication but also “test” the employees’ workplace environment. Understanding participation as a problem-solving instrument, the managerial perspective emphasizes that employees may identify problems (i.e. failures in health and social care services’ implementation or labor conflict) while generating potential solutions (Marchigton and Wilkinson, 2005). This inclusionary nature of participation increases the employees’ involvement and commitment which has positive impacts on the organizational efficiency and productivity. Furthermore, the “upward problem-solving” is highly recognized among the managers by its facilitating role regarding changes (Pardo-del-Val et al., 2012). Under this premise, any organizational adjustment (i.e. routines or work schedules’ changes) is expected to provide certain resistance behaviors which are mitigated by encouraging participation. Within a control/resistance dichotomy, the managerial perspective associates resistance with a lack of commitment (Budd et al., 2010). Thus, improving employees’ participation leads to feelings of commitment which avoids resistance. However, two different types of commitment “work commitment” and “organizational commitment” should be distinguished (Budd et al., 2010). An employee may be committed to her work while perceiving the organization far from her necessities, personal demands, or expectations. Hence, these two different categories are not always interrelated with each other.

The latest form of participation refers to the role played by the unions. Originally, employees joined a trade union to voice their demands which were subsequently transmitted to the organizations, prompting collective bargaining. In Sweden, alike many countries in Europe, most of the employees still pay a monthly union fee. Despite this,
trade unions “i.e. Fackförbundet Unionen” are generally understood by the employees as consulting mechanisms where they are informed about their labour rights rather than a form of participation within organizations. Additionally, under severe labour conflicts, unions are often used as instruments of coercion through which the employees exercise pressure over the managers with the goal of reaching its demands. However, the decline of unions has renewed the interest in the fundamental importance of participation while also promoting reflections into what forms of voice employees want (Dundon and Gollan, 2007). Accordingly, A. Bryson defines voice in terms of two-ways of communication flow between manages and employees, giving employees the capacity to voice their concerns (Bryson, 2004). Related to the upward problem-solving conception of participation, this definition of voice is criticized by G. Strauss who argues that, by having a voice does not mean that employees can influence over the decision-making processes (Strauss, 2006). This lack of influence may involve tensions which affects how participation is differently understood between managers and employees.

### 3.1.2. The Human Resource Perspective

By doing research from the human resource approach, two core elements “information” and “consultation” are introduced within the participation process (Gollan et al., 2006). This theoretical assumption is reflected by the European Directive 2002/14/EC which established minimum requirements for the right to information and consultation of employees. Information is generally understood as the provision of data concerning the daily employees’ activities. Within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg managers, for instance, provide information regarding the patients’ diseases as well as employees’ labour rights and obligations. In contrast, consultation is considered as the exchanges of views between managers and employees which are linked to Bryson’s voice definition (Bryson, 2004). Similarly, I. Li and J. Qian highlight that organizations have increasingly implemented different methods of sharing information and consulting employees within decision-making processes by soliciting feedbacks (Li and Qian, 2016). Influenced by the Psychological Ownership Theory (Pierce et al., 2001), the human resource perspective aims to empower employees. Thus, when employees perceive ownership of their job is the fundamental motivation that could drive feedback-seeking behaviors. However, promoting feedback-seeking behaviors should be considered as a double-side sword. On the one hand, employees have the potential to provide inputs and exercise control and
influence over the decision-making processes (Li and Qian, 2016). By increasing employees’ self-awareness, they may be more committed to their job which is translated into positive impacts on both the employees and the organization. Nevertheless, managers often reject feedback-seeking behaviors by arguing that employees’ knowledge is insufficient to exercise control over decisions. Among the “personliga assistenter” in Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg the average profile is an individual without higher education and in many cases immigrants with a lack of knowledge of the language “Swedish”. This low profile of the employees is often understood by the managers as a limiting factor and therefore, promoting feedback-seeking behaviours are dismissed. Thus, depending on the organizational context, consultation may not be understood as an exchange of views but rather a way that complement the information process (Gollan et al., 2006). By refusing employees’ knowledge may provide tensions which determine the emergence of different understandings of participation as well as resistance behaviours (Jo and Park, 2016).

### 3.2. Tension-centered Approach

Influenced by the functionalist perspective, both managerial and human resource approaches have widely considered participation as a universal and objective fact rather than a social construction that may reflect existing power relations (Jo and Park, 2016). However, within organizations, different understandings of participation co-exist in a particular time and space (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). This co-existence inevitably involves tensions in the ongoing construction of participation discourses. As previously mentioned, the employees’ lack of influence over decision-making processes as well as the managers’ consideration of their knowledge as insufficient involve tensions between these two organizational members. This may reflect the underlying idea that managers and employees recognize authority differently. Thus, Stephen R. Barley establishes a division between authority of position (i.e. managers) and authority of expertise (i.e. employees) which represent the main source of tensions between them (Barley, 1996). Tension that are used as a catalyst in the co-emergence of contrasting participation discourses in the relationship between managers and employees.

It is worth stressing that the functionalistic and the tension-centered approaches have different ontological and epistemological conceptions of tensions. From a functionalistic
In a continuous organizational changing environment, learning to live with tensions is an imperative step that should be seriously reconsidered. To that end, the focus should be shifted towards the cognitive processes through which both managers and employees experience and make sense of the different understandings of participation. Within contrasting sense-making processes and influenced by the past discursive dimension, organizational members frame and respond to tensions (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Therefore, the importance of the organizational context represents a key variable for the tension-minded scholars (Grissom, 2012).

### 3.3. Participation Discourses

Throughout the organizational communication field, two core elements, the “sense-making process” (Weick et al., 2005) and the “struggle over interpretation” (Mumby, 2005) respond to the different dynamics through which managers and employees frame meanings of participation while constructing different discourses and social realities. Influenced by the social constructionist perspective, participation discourses are constantly negotiated and renegotiated within the everyday cognitive processes. However, G. Musson and J. Duberley highlights that discourses not only define a meaning but also define a role (Musson and Duberley, 2007). Thus, although it is not the focus of this research, the “sense-making” and the “struggle over meaning” are intrinsically interrelated with the identity formation processes (Weick et al., 2005)
At this point, two interconnected dimensions “the individual” and “the environment” should be considered. Based on his/her own working experience, the individual creates meaning systems over participation. In other words, the sense-making process includes a historical perspective which connects what has happened in the past to make-sense of the present (Rydgren, 2007). Thus, the self-identification as manager or employee determines the emergence of a participation discourse. Additionally, the individual needs a group who share the same values and beliefs which are used not only to reinforce his/her own identity but also to justify that his/her understanding of participation is the correct one. However, due to the asymmetrical power relations, different understandings of participation co-exist and co-emerge together. This fact entails an ongoing “struggle” over contrasting meanings of participation where the us/them dichotomy emerged (Weick et al., 2005). Through a continuous “struggle over interpretation”, these overlapping dimensions shape and reshape different discourses of participation between managers and employees. Furthermore, it is expected that multiplicity of sense-making processes as well as the existing power relations provide tensions where certain participation discourses are privileged while others are refused or neglected (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Thus, tensions co-emerge within an ongoing discursive construction of meaning systems being an inevitable feature of this process (Mumby, 2005). In this research, three different discourses “participation as an opportunity”, “participation as a threat”, and “participation as irrelevant” (Musson and Duberley, 2007) summarize the contrasting understandings of participation presented in the relationship between managers and employees within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg.

- Participation as an Opportunity

Influenced by the managerial perspective, participation is generally understood as a problem-solving instrument which aims to reduce employees’ resistance behaviors while enhancing productivity and efficiency (Marchighton and Wilkinson, 2005). Thus, “participation as an opportunity” is a discourse regularly shared among the managers. By encouraging employees’ participation (i.e. group meetings), managers expect to take better decisions. Through maintaining a direct communication flow with the employees, managers receive relevant information regarding the work environment. As a taken-for-granted managerial discourse, participation is broadly understood as a useful tool which entails potential benefits both for the employees and for the managers. In this connection,
any negative outcome of participation (i.e. frustration, dissatisfaction, and feelings of powerlessness) is identified.

However, this participation discourse can be also presented between the employees who recognize that participation practices allows them to have an impact over the decision-making processes. Hence, participation as an opportunity is intrinsically related to the empowerment of employees. Therefore, the act of participation entails an act of power through which the employee exercises control over the decisions. In the absence of influence, participation as an opportunity is a discourse which is gradually called into question.

- **Participation as a Threat**

This participation discourse is highly associated with the lack of knowledge to engage within a decision (Musson and Duberley, 2007). Alike “participation as an opportunity”, “participation as a threat” is a discourse shared by both managers and employees. Although it seems contradictory, promoting employees’ participation may affect the effective managerial control over the decision-making processes. Thus, the lack of employees’ knowledge is often used by the managers as an argument to justify their limited impact within the planning processes. Influenced by the functionalist perspective, managers are the organizational actors with the enough and valid knowledge to be able to take a decision. Despite being understood the employees’ views, in a certain way, a potential source of data, managers often decide which information should or should not be considered as relevant.

In contrast, employees generally emphasize that their lack of participation or involvement does not mean that they do not feel committed to work but recognize their own skills limitations within the decision-making processes. However, even when employees consider that they have the necessary knowledge or skills, the nature of participation practices (i.e. group meetings) are generally questioned. Besides that, understanding participation as a threat is also intrinsically related to the lack of trust between the employees. Through an active involvement within the meetings, employees express their concerns and opinions regarding the work environment which may uncover personal or labour conflicts among the co-workers. Thus, the act of participating is understood as a
threat in organizational contexts when the lack of confidence or trust between the employees is clear.

- **Participation as something Irrelevant**

Finally, “participation as something irrelevant” is a discourse entirely presented among the employees who perceive that their views or feedbacks are often rejected within the decision-making processes. In this context, meetings are exclusively understood as managerial instruments rather than spaces of “authentic” participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Accordingly, the us/them dichotomy becomes prevalent through which certain employees’ resistance behaviors are justified. The lack of employees’ impact and influence over decision involves that participation may be understood as irrelevant. For employees, there is not any practical consequences of being involve at the meetings and therefore, the act of participating is generally rejected.

It is worth mentioning that these three contrasting participation discourses are not mutually exclusive but rather they may be intertwined with each other depending on the context and the topic which is discussed. Influenced by the functionalist perspective, participation discourses reflect a conception of power and resistance which are refused in this research study. From the functionalist approach, power is mainly understood as a managerial capacity and therefore, resistance behaviours are an outcome of control. In contrast, by introducing a social constructionist perspective, the power/resistance dichotomy is disrupted (Mumby, 2005). Thus, participation discourses are considered as sites of power which involve an act of resistance itself (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Both concepts co-exist and co-emerge together through the ongoing construction of discourses. Therefore, the study of this dialectical relationship between discourses, power and resistance is required.

**3.4. What is Power? The Foucauldian Perspective**

Power as a theoretical concept is extremely complex and as well as the organization communication field, this term has gradually evolved through the time and it has been reframed into different perspectives as Marxist, post-Marxist and post-colonialist (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). In the same way as participation, there are many different
definitions of power. From a classical perspective, power is understood as an instrument which can be acquired and transmitted (Jo and Park, 2016). This feature is broadly shared by the functionalistic perspective through which managers often “delegate” power to the employees. By giving voice to employees through participation may involve a certain employees’ empowerment and therefore, power is something measurable and tangible (Jo and Park, 2016). However, influenced by the social constructionist perspective, M. Foucault analyzed power not as something that is acquired or transferred but as a product of relationship within the everyday practices (Gallagher, 2008). Power is understood as a way of social action, both as a means of control and resistance (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Accordingly, Foucault encouraged us to think of powers rather than power (Jo and Park, 2016). As an example, the power that the managers exercise over the employees is different from the power that employees exercise to resist managers’ control. Thus, employees and managers’ behaviors, actions and understandings of participation are all shaped by the everyday exercise of power.

Following the Foucauldian perspective, the main question is not to understand who has the power but rather how power is exercised in a specific context and with what effects (Gallagher, 2008). In this way, the power/powerless (managers/employees) dichotomy is rejected. Foucault also recognized the intentionality nature of power which is exercised with the aim to satisfy certain objectives, purposes, expectations. Nonetheless, the co-existence of different participation discourses involve that the particular intention of an action may provide unexpected outcomes and tensions between managers and employees (Gallagher, 2008). Thus, certain resistance behaviors’ can be differently understood between managers and employees.

3.4.1. Discourses, Power, and Resistance: A dialectical relationship

Influenced by the Foucauldian perspective, post-modernist scholars have gradually been interested in the relationship between power and discourse (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Both concepts are studied in a dialectical relationship which co-emerge together. From a post-modernist perspective, discourses are not exclusively understood as a way of action but also as sites of power (Mumby and Stohl, 1991).

However, any action of power is subjected to resistance (Mumby, 2005). Thus, any participation discourse brings about an exercise of power which inevitably involves
tensions and resistance behaviors which constitute both managers and employees. Thus, postmodernist approaches to organizational studies have gradually analyzed resistance as a discursive feature (Hodson, 1995).

Through the organizational communication field, different resistance behaviors (i.e. irony, humor, or sarcasm) have been broadly studied (Mumby, 2005). In contrast, two ways of employees’ resistance “resistance through silence” and “resistance through absence” will be studied in this research. The reasons behind this selection rest upon the idea that silence and absence are the most visible resistance behaviors among the employees within the decision-making processes.

- **Resistance through Silence**

Employees’ silence is associated with the lack of involvement within a group discussion or meeting. The employee physically attends the meetings but he/she does not take an active role during the process. This choice of not getting involved within a decision-making process may represent an individual act of power through its silence. However, due to the low-profile of the employees in Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg, the employees’ silence may be justified by the managers, among other reasons, because of their insufficient knowledge of the language. It is also associated with different aspects of personality (i.e. shyness and fear of public speaking). In this research, “resistance through silence” is understood as a way of “passive resistance” which should not be considered as the opposite of participation. Despite not taking an active involvement at the meetings, the employees’ silence represents a deliberate act of power while potentially reflecting different understanding of participation such as “participation as a threat” and “participation as something irrelevant”. It is evident that the widely shared managerial discourse of participation as an opportunity is not present behind the employees’ silence.

- **Resistance through Absence**

Conversely, “resistance through absence” is obviously related to the employees’ absenteeism at the meeting. Thus, the physical absence is understood as an “active resistance” where employees decline to participate while challenging the existing power relations (Gallagher, 2008). Nonetheless, this resistance behavior does not eliminate a
participation discourse itself through which the employee exercises power through its absence. Among the different participation discourses presented in this research study, “participation as something irrelevant” is the most dominant one within this category. Alike silence, the employee absence is a deliberate act of power which reflects an intention. However, this resistance behavior may be differently understood between managers and employees. From the managerial perspective, employees’ absence is often associated with a lack of respect, disloyalty, and commitment. In contrast, employees often justify the employees’ absence by questioning the nature of meetings.

It is worth mentioning that “resistance through silence” and “resistance through absence” should not be considered as a lack of individual commitment. This would be a simplistic understanding of employees’ resistance behaviors within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. As previously mentioned, two different types of commitment are presented within an organization “work commitment” and “organizational commitment”. An employee may be committed to his/her work while refusing the organizational participation practices. By integrating a social constructionist perspective and a tension-centered approach, resistance is constituted in a dynamic, reflexive interconnection between the ongoing construction of participation discourses as the result of different sense-making processes. Therefore, different understandings of participation inevitably involve tensions between managers and employees which are used to shape and reshape contrasting participation discourses as well as resistance behaviors.

### 3.5. Participation framework

Throughout the organizational communication field, there is little agreement on what is understood as participation (Budd et al., 2010). From the managerial and the human resource perspectives, concepts such as voice and involvement are often used interchangeably, providing a conceptual confusion of the term (Budd et al., 2010). Instead, scholars have gradually focused on the different levels as well as the extension of participation within organizations by implementing different participation frameworks (Harder et al., 2013). Following this tendency, the present investigation takes the Harder’s participation framework to contextualize the relationship between managers and employees within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. Previously developed by (Daigneault and Jacob, 2009), this participation framework is constituted by three
different categories “depth, breadth, and scope”. By “depth” is understood as the employees’ extension of control over the decision-making processes. Within the other two categories, “breadth” represents the diversity of organizational members invited to participation while “scope” represents the different stages of decision-making (initiation, reflection, design, and communication). However, “breadth” and “scope” categories are not under discussion in this investigation. Although other stakeholders (i.e. nurses “sjuksköterskor”) are occasionally presented within the group meetings, this study exclusively analyzes the relationship between managers and employees regarding participation. Likewise, due to the organizational context which will be explained in the following section, the “scope” category is reduced to the communication stage within the monthly group meetings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level (-1) Non-participation</th>
<th>Level (0) Informing</th>
<th>Level (1) Acknowledgement</th>
<th>Level (2) Engagement</th>
<th>Level (3) Interaction</th>
<th>Level (4) Full partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical Processes</td>
<td>Managers make decisions without employees’ involvement</td>
<td>Managers make decisions without employees’ involvement: dismissive employees’ interest</td>
<td>Managers ask employees’ opinions but do not feel obligated to take them into account. Managers make the final decision</td>
<td>Managers ask employees’ opinions and consider employees’ contribution seriously. Managers still make the final decision</td>
<td>Major issues are negotiated through discussion between managers and employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical Attitudes</td>
<td>Managers denigrate employees’ ways of thinking, knowing and/or acting</td>
<td>Employees’ ways of thinking, knowing, and acting are considered</td>
<td>Managers acknowledges that employees have different ways of thinking, knowing, and acting</td>
<td>Managers recognize that there may be some value in Employees’ ways of thinking, knowing, and acting</td>
<td>Managers recognize value in employees’ ways of thinking, knowing, and acting, and in the added value of working with employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typical Assumptions by managers

| Employees’ ways are inferior and possibly a threat | Employees’ ways are inferior and of no real consequence or use | Employees’ ways are inferior but worth noting | Employees’ ways may be inferior but seem potentially useful | Managers’ ways employees are equal in status but probably operate in different domains | Superior ways are those that solve the problems (often co-created) |

Typical Actions taken by managers

| Attempt to minimize or eradicate employees’ ways | Ignore employees’ ways; teach employees to adopt managers’ ways | Learn about employees’ ways, without changing own ways | Learn from Employees’ ways and consider making limited changes to own ways | Take into account strengths and weaknesses of both approaches. Co-creation | Work closely with employees to co-create new ways of thinking, knowing, and acting |

Figure 1. Harder’s participation framework. A typology of relationship between different categories of managers and employees

Focusing now on the “depth” category, from level (-1) to level (4), six different levels of participation are developed. The level (-1) represents the entire “denigration” of employees’ participation within the decision-making processes, being this stage reframed as non-participation. The level (0) introduces the unidirectional flow of “information” where the managers are considered as the only legitimized actors to provide data. Within this level, employees’ voices regarding the decision-making processes are rejected. The level (1) represents the “acknowledgement” stage. At this level, managers encourage employees’ participation via consultation which is used to complement the information process. Influenced by the managerial perspective, participation is merely understood as a problem-solving instrument. Thus, employees’ opinions have a limited impact or influence over the decision-making. The level (2) indicated the “engagement” stage. Through an active collaboration between both organizational members, employees’ feedbacks are considered as a valued source of information. However, most of the final decisions are still unilaterally taken by the managers. On this stage, the influence of both the managerial and the human resource perspectives is clear. Although participation may be also understood as a problem-solving instrument, employees’ opinions significantly affect the decision-making processes. In contrast, the level (3) is dominated by “interaction”. Promoting exchanges of information between these two organizational members, the manager/employee dichotomy is gradually reduced. Both influence and share responsibilities concerning the different processes (i.e. discussion, planning and
implementation). Participation is here understood as an authentic employees’ instrument rather than a mainly problem-solving practice. Finally, the level (4) introduces an organizational environment where the manager/employee dichotomy disappear. Dominated by consensus, any decision is established with a “full partnership” between managers and employees in a co-created process where the focus lies on the ideas rather than the source of these ideas.

By introducing the social constructivist perspective, the “depth” category not only define the power relations but also entail the co-existence of different understandings of participation through which contrasting participation discourses are constantly articulated and rearticulated within an ongoing process. Accordingly, with the objective of providing a better knowledge of the relationship between managers and employees, the three main discourses “participation as an opportunity”, “participation as a threat” and “participation as something irrelevant” presented in this research will be introduced within the Harder’s participation framework. Consequently, influenced by the dialectical relationship between discourse and power, resistance is not exclusively considered as an outcome of control but rather as an act of power itself. Embedded into discourses, “resistance through silence” and “resistance through absence” will be also analyzed within this typology of participation between managers and employees. Thus, it is only through the study of participation discourses that the power dynamics at work in participation practices can be fully understood (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). It should be noted that, these six levels of participation show a fixed picture which does not reflect the enormous complexity of the organizational life. Thus, depending on the decision, this separation between levels may be blurred and intertwined with each other.
4. Method

In this chapter, the methods used to operationalize the aim of this research will be presented and described. However, I will start by introducing the research setting and a brief description about the case study with the objective of providing a broad knowledge regarding the working dynamics and the organizational context within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. Following this, the research approach, methods, and the data collection will be further developed. Lastly, ethical considerations and research limitations will be also presented.

4.1. Research Setting

This research aims to study the different discourses created by the co-existence of contradictory understandings of participation and its effects in the relationship between managers and employees within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. To this end, three personal assistants’ groups will be analyzed. Every group is always comprised by one manager, hereafter referred to as “verksamhetschef” and an undetermined number of employees, hereafter referred to as “personliga assistenter” depending on the clients, hereafter referred to as “brukare” needs. While the managers assume the role of controlling the employees’ performances as well as the effective implementation of the health and social care services, the employees take care of the client at his/her own home. However, the figure of a group leader, hereafter referred to as “samordnare” is often presented within a group. Although is considered as a regular personlig assistent, managers often delegate certain responsibilities to the group leaders for the effective control of the daily activities at the work place (i.e. bureaucratic matters).

As previously mentioned, this research was carried out in three different personal assistants’ groups at Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. Focusing on managers, I conducted two rounds of in-depth interviews for deepening their understandings regarding participation. In total, three managers were interviewed. Altogether sex in-depth interviews were carried out. Among the group leaders, this figure is presented within two different groups. In this respect, two in-depth interviews were consequently conducted. Lastly, four employees for each group were also interviewed. Altogether, twelve semi-structured interviews were carried out.
Apart from interviews, data were collected by conducting observations at the group meetings “hereafter referred to as APTs”. Each group (group manager and employees) has one meeting per month and therefore, during the period of this research (14 weeks), data from ten monthly meetings were collected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verksamhetschef (1)</td>
<td>Verksamhetschef (1)</td>
<td>Verksamhetschef (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samordnare (1)</td>
<td>Samordnare (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personliga assistenter (8)</td>
<td>Personliga assistenter(7)</td>
<td>Personliga assistenter (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Personal assistant groups within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg*

As can be note from the table, there is one group without samordnare. This selection, in fact aims at providing a better knowledge regarding the potential effects of group leaders on employees’ participation which is related to the sub-question in this research.

### 4.1.1. Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg

Uppsala Kommun is the Sweden’s fourth most populous municipality with 215,762 inhabitants (Statistiska centralbyrån., 2017). This municipality is located in the central part of the Uppland province “Uppsala län”.

Due to the increasingly complex society, the citizenry continuously demands different services which involves that public administration decentralize their structures to answer these needs while enhancing efficiency and productivity. Thus, Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg competences aim at providing health and social care services to those residents who need attendance. As an autonomous organization with an independent budget, Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg “Omsorgsförvaltningen” reflects an extraordinary user-centered organizational design. Accordingly, the key focus is to understand the specific needs and requirement of the clients. The organization continuously evaluates the health and social care services that should be implemented with the objective to improve the clients’ quality of life. From children to elderly people with functional, mental or additions problems represent the broad variety of clients who
demand Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg services. Among these services, human capital such as nurses “hereafter referred as sjuksköterskor”, personal assistants, and specialist personnel as physiotherapist, dieticians (if the situation requires it) are also placed at the service of the client. It should be noted that, in all cases, a nurse regularly supervises the client’s health situation.

Additionally, different participatory instruments are carried out both for clients and employees. Influenced by this user-centered organizational design, managers and clients maintain an ongoing contact (by phone or email) which is widely considered essential for the proper functioning of the organization. The so-called “medarbetarsamtal”, is very useful both for the client and for the manager. Firstly, the client transmits relevant information regarding the everyday situation as well as potential deficiencies and conflicts that should be addressed. Furthermore, through this mediavertaresamtal, managers give a voice to the clients to listen their needs and demands. Apart from the client, Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg provides different channels or strategies (i.e. monthly group meetings, email, phone calls, and face-to-face individual meetings) that aim to enhance communication with the employees. However, within these tools, the group meetings emerge as the most important organizational strategy which aims at promoting employees’ participation by discussing certain issues concerning the client as well as the working environment.

By giving voice to the clients and the employees, managers receive a broad image about how health and social care services are being implemented. However, some brukare are no longer able to speak or barely can communicate (i.e. clients with dementia). Thus, the relationship between manager and client is practically void. In this context, the employees became, to a certain extent, the client’s voice and therefore, the role played by them acquire greater relevance. Once this connection between the client and the manager has practically dismissed, the monthly group meetings are widely considered as the most important participation instrument to understand what is going on at the client’s home.

Focusing now on the internal group structure (at the client’s home), a brief description about the different employees’ roles and responsibilities is required. Firstly, the group leaders are the employees who have more authority within the group. Their responsibilities include keeping a permanent contact with the manager regarding the client's health situation as well as the working environment. Samordnares often supervise that all the necessary documents (i.e. tidsrapport “document that contains the hours
worked by the employees” and hälspärm “a folder that contains a collection of client-related information) has been correctly filled out by the employees. As previously mentioned, group leaders have, in a certain way, a bureaucratic role. Nevertheless, this figure is not always presented in every group. The decision depends on managers who determine whether a samordnare is needed or not within a group. In most cases, group leaders are understood by the managers as an extra instrument for employees control. Secondly, the permanent staff who have a fixed schedule within the group represents the highest proportion of the employees. As a common characteristic, these employees have been working with the same client for a long time. Finally, extra staff “hereafter referred as vikarier” (employees who are eventually called when someone is sick or unable to work) should be also considered. It is worth mentioning that each group has a list of additional staff who has previously worked with the client and they are maintained by the rest of the group as an important source of working replacement. In this research study, group leaders, permanent, and extra employees (all of them personliga assistenter) are included within the data collection.

4.2. Research Approach

Throughout the methodological literature, three different approaches (inductive, deductive, and abductive) are distinguished. The inductive perspective involves that the research study starts by conducting observations and then theories are gradually introduced to support the studied phenomenon. In contrast, the deductive approach goes in the opposite direction. Thus, the research begins with previous theories and studies which are used to confirm or refute different hypothesis. Finally, the abductive perspective bridges the gap between the inductive and deductive approaches (Saunders et al., 2012). However, rather than be understood as a combination between both reasonings, the abductive approach aims to discover “new things” and develop existing theoretical models by generating new concepts (Saunders et al., 2012).

Based on my own working experience as an Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg employee over the last three years, an inductive approach is considered as the most suitable reasoning in this research. My period as personal assistant has significantly given to me a deep knowledge about the different work dynamics as well as the main problems that managers and employees are constantly dealing with within. However, the inductive
perspective is often criticized by scholars who claim that the empirical data does not enable to develop theories (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, with the goal of facilitating the theoretical development, the inductive approach is here complemented by selecting an action-oriented design. As previously mentioned, the main research question and the sub-question has the potential to improve more effective participation practices within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. Thus, Small emphasizes that action-oriented design not only aims at addressing a specific situation but also aims at developing theories (Small, 1995). Moreover, I cannot forget that being part as an employee within one studied group, the influence of an autoethnographic work becomes clear (Angrosino and Flick, 2007). My view as an insider is used to guide the reader through this messy and complex organizational environment within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg.

4.2.1. Qualitative Method

The qualitative methodology is widely considered by scholars in social studies as the most suitable tool for understanding how individuals perceive and interact with the environment (Angrosino and Flick, 2007). Furthermore, it is a very useful method to analyze peoples’ experiences and conflicts. By using qualitative methods, researchers should be sensitive to the context which determine people’s interpretations (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). Thus, the role played by the organizational context and the environment is crucial to provide a better knowledge about the contrasting participation discourses between managers and employees within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg.

In this research study, two different qualitative approaches (in-depth interviews and observations) are applied. However, certain differences concerning the observations processes should be considered. While in the “group 1” (the group which I work as a personal assistant) the observations were conducted by taking an active role (participant observation) within the “group 2” and “group 3”, I took a passive role at the group meetings. Due to ethical considerations which will be further developed, it was impossible either work or participate actively in these two groups.
4.3. Selection of data

At this point, a profound description about the selection of data and data collection is required. Between managers, I collected data from in-depth interviews in two different rounds. The decision to conduct two rounds was to provide the broadest possible input of information. Alike employees, I have little contact with the managers and therefore two interviews rounds were aimed at reducing this lack of knowledge regarding how participation is understood. In total, three managers were interviewed. Altogether, six in-depth interviews were carried out within this organizational level. Finally, all in-depth interviews were transcribed and recorded.

Focusing on the employees, data from semi-structural interviews was collected. Within each group, four employees among the regular and extra staff were interviewed. In total twelve interviews were recorded and transcribed. It should be noted that two samordnare are presented in two different groups (group 1 and group 2). Due to the broad recognition as a certain power dimension between the employees, two in-depth interviews were conducted to the group leaders. It is obvious that, both interviews were also transcribed and recorded.

Finally, data from observations at the group meetings was also collected. During the next section, I will further develop the different observation processes which I conducted during this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Gathering</th>
<th>Analytical (Phase 1)</th>
<th>Analytical (Phase 2)</th>
<th>Analytical (Phase 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verksamhetschefer</strong></td>
<td>First-round interview (2)</td>
<td>First-round interview (1) Second-round interviews (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samordnare</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Samordnare in-depth interview (1)</td>
<td>Samordnare in-depth interview (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personliga Assistenter</strong></td>
<td>Employees interviews (6)</td>
<td>Employees interviews (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APTs “group meetings”</strong></td>
<td>Observations (Group 1) Participant observation</td>
<td>Observations (Group 1 and 3) Participant and non-Participant observations</td>
<td>Observations (Group, 1,2 and 3) Participant and non-Participant observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Phases of data collection in this study.*
4.3.1. Observations

As previously developed, observations were conducted by taking different roles. However, this matter is not considered as a limiting factor regarding the collection of data and the strict compliance with the objectives of this study. Accordingly, the choice of this qualitative approach was mainly underpinned to give an answer to the sub-research question: *What effects does it have contrasting participation discourses in the relationship between managers and employees?*

Due to my position as an “insider”, allowed me to accomplish in-depth analysis about employees and managers’ behaviors at the group meetings. Moreover, by combining data from both interviews and observations, the enormous complexity of this participation practice was addressed. Another crucial aspect to observe is how these two organizational members respond to an employee’s absence as well as the employees’ silence at the meetings. Given that observations were conducted along the entire process of this research, every relevant data for this investigation was included. Finally, the observations were systematically documented by writing field notes. Nevertheless, depending on the nature of the research, Geoffrey Walford distinguishes two different ways of field notes *descriptions* and *dialogue* (Walford, 2009). By descriptions are understood as the field notes which focuses on the environment and people’s actions while dialogue is the written representation of what was said in a particular context. Therefore, not being part of this research, any related data from discussed topics and personal issues at the group meeting were collected.

4.3.2. In-depth interviews, Managers

Two different rounds of in-depth interviews with the managers were carried out in this research. The main reason for conducting two rounds lied on the necessity to deeply analyze managers’ participation discourses as well as provide a broad knowledge about their role within the group.

In the first round of questions, a brief approach to managers’ understandings of participation was established. Questions such as how they understood employees’ participation, their opinions about the monthly meetings and if they considered any difference between communication and participation were conducted. In this round, the
interviews lasted between 26 and 49 minutes. This first approach provided useful information which was used to develop and prepare the second round with more detail.

The second round of questions was conducted for deepening how managers understood employees’ voice and participation within the decision-making processes. Moreover, managers were asked about the importance of samordnares’ role, its utility in a group and if they considered that this role improved or constrained the rest of employees’ participation. By asking about the work dynamics at the monthly group meetings, the main purpose was to understand managers’ understanding regarding the different employees’ resistance behaviors. This purpose lies on the necessity to identify the different challenges and barriers between managers and employees which take place within the everyday organizational life. It should be noted that I compared and contrasted managers’ answers in both rounds with the main purpose to identify if they fell into contradictions. During this second round, interviews lasted between 22 and 38 minutes. Both first and second round are semi-structured interviews.

4.3.3. In-depth interviews, Group leaders

At this point, one round of in-depth interviews to group leaders were conducted. The main reason which I refused to carry out a second-round interview lied on the fact that, although they are broadly considered as a certain power dimension, group leaders are personliga assistenter who work at the client’s home. In my view, the only difference regarding the interviews processes was the election of conducting in-depth interviews rather than semi-structural interviews as with the rest of the employees.

Group leaders were asked about the importance of their role in the group and if they considered that they had more voice or influence over decisions-making. Analyzing this intermediate level between managers and employees represents an important element in this research. Group leaders are understood as an informal boss among the employees and as a trusted person by the managers. Therefore, this role within a group might be seen both positively and negatively regarding how the rest of the employees understand participation as well as may determine certain employees’ resistance behavior through their absence at the group meetings or a lack of involvement within the meetings. Therefore, questions concerning the different employees’ responses to the meetings were also conducted. The purpose was to understand the group leaders’ opinions about the
reasons behind these employees’ behaviors and how employees’ participation and voice can be improved. Finally, these two in-depth interviews lasted between 27 and 35 minutes respectively, being both recorded and transcribed.

4.3.4. Interviews, Personal assistants

The employees’ interviews (twelve in total) involved the largest amount of data in this research. They were asked about their understandings of participation and if they considered that they had a voice in their groups as well as at the meetings. In addition, questions regarding how they understood manager and group leaders’ role were conducted. It becomes clear that any question about samordnares were carried out between the employees in the “group 3” (there is not such a role). Instead, I asked these four employees if there was any personlig assistant who was considered as an informal group leader. Furthermore, questions about the two different employees’ resistance behaviors at the group meetings were discussed. These last questions were related to employees’ understanding about the nature and the necessity of this participation practice. The semi-structured interviews with the employees lasted between 18 and 47 minutes, being all of them both recorded and transcribed.

4.4. Data analysis process

Focusing on the data collected during the first-round interviews with the managers, I searched for keywords and phrases that provided a deeper knowledge about how participation was understood as well as the managers’ behaviors at the group meetings. By comparing managers’ responses, this analytical process aimed at establishing different categories which were then used for the development of the second-round (Johnson, 2014). At this point, categories such as collaboration, meetings, lack of knowledge, communication, and language emerged.

The same analytical structure was performed both in employees and in group leaders’ interviews. Although any second-round interview was conducted here, different categories as the lack of trust, influence, samordnares, silence, and communication appeared. Through a continuous analytical process, keywords and categories reflect a
pattern which is translated into different understandings and responses of participation (Johnson, 2014).

4.5. Operationalization of theory

By embracing the Harder’ participation framework (Harder et al., 2013) and the post-modernist dialectical relationship between power and discourse (Mumby and Stohl, 1991) the three main axles in this research (participation discourses, resistance, and power) were operationalized. Influenced by the social constructionist perspective and the tension-centered approach (Ashcraft and Trethewey, 2004), managers, and employees articulate and rearticulate contrasting participation discourses which co-emerge together in a particular time and space (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). This co-existence involves tensions and resistance behaviors which are used to reinforce managers and employees’ identities. Discourses which not only define a topic but also define a role (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Thus, by focusing on the different participation discourses “participation as an opportunity”, “participation as a threat”, and “participation as something irrelevant” different power relations emerged (Musson and Duberley, 2007). Moreover, discourses are sites of power and resistance and alike participating, employees’ resistance behaviours “through silence” and “through absence” are understood as an act of power itself. In line with this, power is operationalized through actions.

Considering the ontological and epistemological conceptions of power, resistance, and discourses developed in the theoretical section, the Harder’ participation framework is a very useful instrument to visualize how the different understandings of participation as its consequences are presented at Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. By doing this, the main research question and the sub-question in this study were successfully answered.

4.6. Limitations and criticism

This research focuses on a specific organizational context and therefore, the conclusions should be considered as such. This is because the data were collected in three different personlig assistant’s groups within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg.

Among the limitations on this research, the time represents a key variable. Although fourteen weeks is apparently considered as sufficient time, a more extensive long-term
study would have been better to further deepen the impacts on the co-existence of
different participation discourses in this organization. Furthermore, due to the group
meetings between managers and employees are performed once a month, data from
observations are far from being enough. Secondly, the language used in the interviews
varied from Swedish, English, and Spanish. I was always conscious that the translation
process from the Swedish to English could imply that certain expression and connotations
could be misunderstood or incorrectly translated. With the objective of overcoming this
limiting factor, every expression or work in Swedish which potentially involved a
problem in the translation process was heard by a native speaker in both languages.
Finally, my position as a worker within the “group 1” might determine employees and
managers’ responses. Thus, by taking a role of interviewer both organizational members
might be felt insecure or even constrained.

4.7. Ethical considerations

The ethical dimension in this research is crucial. Due to my role as an employee within
Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg, it is worth mentioning that I have previously
maintained a close relationship with managers and employees. This required a special
attention to the ethical considerations concerning the correct development of the study.
Although the ethical issues should always be considered between researchers, I had to
adjust this study both to the very strict organizational ethical code and to the theoretical
procedures laid down in ethnographic studies (Kozinets, 2009). Uppsala Kommun Vård
och Omsorg aims at providing health and social care services where the employees’
working environment is at the client’s private residence. Being aware of this particular
organizational context, I only conducted three interviews (one to the group leader and two
to employees) at the work place. They were not only previously informed about my study
but also, I asked for permission to the responsible manager of the group. Although my
proposal was initially accepted, underlying doubts about the viability and the
appropriateness were then discussed with the manager. Thus, I decided to stop collecting
data at the work place, being the location of the organization (Bäverns Gränd 10) the site
where the data was mainly collected. Furthermore, at the beginning of this research, I
asked for permission from managers for taking part as a worker within the other two
studied groups. In this case, however, my proposal was refused because of ethical
considerations. This implies that both managers and employees were interviewed within
the organization. Regarding the data collected through observations, every group meeting was conducted in the space reserved at the organization.

According to Robert V. Kozinets, during an ethnographic study, four general procedures should be considered: identifying and informing, asking permission, gaining consent and citing and crediting (Kozinets, 2009). Throughout the whole research process, I regularly informed both managers and employees about the steps to be followed. Moreover, the ethical considerations are not exclusively related to the data collection but also to the way that findings are presented and analyzed. In order to guarantee as much as possible the anonymity and confidentiality of the managers and employees, any name or specific references to the three different groups studied were excluded in the empirical findings analysis. Confidentiality is essential for avoiding future conflicts between employees and their relationship with the managers.

4.8. Reliability and Validity

For those researchers who use qualitative methods in their studies, reliability and validity involve problems regarding the replicability and credibility of scientific findings, specially by ethnographers (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

On the one hand, reliability is widely understood as the possibility that other researchers would discover the same phenomena in the same or similar setting (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). However, due to the studied phenomena are impossible to be reconstructed under the same circumstances, the replicability of the findings in this research cannot be reproduced. On the other hand, validity refers to the accuracy of findings and conclusions, reflecting the empirical reality. It is worth mentioning that this study is based on particular organizational context and working environments and therefore, conclusions must be considered as such. Thus, no generalization or translatability to other personal assistant’s groups within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg can be established.

It should be recalled, however, that this research can serve as the basis to extent the sample in future studies within the organization. From the huge variety of personal assistants’ groups and clients, this research focused exclusively on three different groups. Therefore, the assertion that the findings presented in this study can be extrapolated to the entire organization would not reflect its enormous complexity and reality.
5. Findings

This section will present the empirical findings from the managers and employees’ interviews and observations. The chapter consists of three different parts. The first one presents the empirical findings and the analysis of managers’ definitions of participation, their understandings about the monthly group meetings, the samordnares and employees’ resistance behaviours. The second part presents the empirical findings and the analysis of participation at the group meetings “hereafter referred to as APTs” as well as the employees’ silence and absence from the group leaders’ perspective. Finally, the third part presents the empirical findings regarding employees’ definitions of participation and the analysis of resistance behaviors at the group meetings.

Throughout the different participation tools presented within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg such as group meetings, medarbetarsamtal (communication between the manager and the client), and the individual meetings (between the employee and the manager), the first participatory instrument “group meetings” is exclusively under consideration in this research.

5.1. Participation, managers’ definitions

The first-round interviews with the managers aims at providing as broad picture as possible about how participation is understood. In this respect, the empirical data show an extensive consensus regarding the importance of maintaining different participation strategies for the proper functioning of the organization. One of the managers highlights the need of promoting “collaboration” with the employees as the cornerstone for achieving a good working environment. Another manager emphasizes that, through participation, the distance between them and the employees may be gradually reduced. However, this first encounter with the managers reflects a great ambiguity concerning participation as a concept. Although all of them recognize that employees’ participation is essential within the organization, they provide unclear definitions of what is understood as such. This is not surprising given the variety of definitions of participation presented in both the managerial and human resource perspectives. Similarly, instead of defining participation, one manager describes the organizational structure from top to bottom while pointing out their own competences and limitations as verksamhetschefer within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. By asking the differences between communication
and participation, both concepts are generally considered synonyms by the managers. Thus, the empirical data demonstrate without any shadow of a doubt that managers’ understandings of participation are difficult to define. As a starting point, this first-round interviews were conducted to prepare a second-round with questions (i.e. participation within group meetings, the employees’ resistance behaviors and the group leaders’ role) were discussed.

5.1.1. Group meetings

Throughout the different participation strategies presented within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg, the monthly group meetings are the only ones through which both employees and managers meet each other. During the year, ten group meetings (except for July and August) are performed. Managers generally decide the date of the meeting with only a few very specific exceptions (i.e. when many employees notify in advance that are unable to attend). At the beginning, managers were asked about the nature of the monthly group meetings, being this participation practice widely considered as essential for the smooth functioning of the organization. Accordingly, one manager recognizes that, without this instrument it would be impossible to accomplish the job. This characteristic (meetings as a necessary condition) is shared by the other two managers who stress its significant relevance within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. Following this argument, one verksamhetschef defines meetings as a great opportunity both for them and for the employees. Similarly, another manager highlights that through group meetings, employees have a space outside the working place (client’s home) where they can freely voice their demands and concerns about the daily routines. This managerial statement rests upon the assumption that employees are considered as a value source of information which should not be squandered. Hence, all the managers emphasize that their responsibility is to listen to employees, reflecting a common understanding of the meetings as democratic instruments. Influenced by the human resource perspective, one manager adds that employees have the right to participate within the decision-making processes and therefore, group meetings are the perfect opportunity to express themselves.

“The meetings should be democratized” - Verksamhetschef
"We provide information from the top to bottom but it is also time to listen" - Verksamhetschef

When asked how they perform these meetings, the empirical data show a broad consensus regarding the necessity to prove information. Thus, one manager affirms that employees need to receive information. Based on the employees’ lack of knowledge on issues such as regulatory environment and laws “LSS-lagen om stöd och service till vissa funktionshindrade”, group meetings are generally understood as information tools by the managers.

"The employees want to receive information" - Verksamhetschef

It is obvious that for the proper functioning of the meetings, the information provided by the managers should be clearly understood. However, due to the average profile of the employees “immigrants or Swedish citizens without higher education”, the lack of knowledge of the language is generally considered as a limiting factor for the effective implementation of the group meetings. Thus, one manager claims that sometimes the employees do not understand the information and therefore, group meetings “hereafter referred to as APTs” need to be complemented by performing individual meetings. As a managerial concern, a project which aims at improving the language among the employees will be carried out in the coming months. The so-called “språkprojekt” tries to reduce the deficiencies related to the poor knowledge of the Swedish language. Additionally, managers often justify certain employees’ behaviors at the meetings (i.e. silence) because of the limitation use of the language, arguing that employees may not feel comfortable speaking in Swedish.

5.1.2. Analysis of Participation and Group meetings

Influenced by the managerial and the human resource perspectives, participation is not only considered as a mean to accomplish more effective organizational goals but also as an end which aims to empower employees. As Kim highlights, promoting employees’ involvement has the potential benefits not only for the employees but also for the entire organization (Kim, 2002). By analyzing managers’ responses, the empirical data show that participation is widely understood as an opportunity to seize within Uppsala
Kommun Vård och Omsorg. One manager asserts that group meetings facilitates the employees’ capacity to have a voice within the decision-making processes.

“The meetings play a social function” – Verksamhetschef

This association of participation as a voice recalls the Bryson’s definition as two-way communication flows between managers and employees (Bryson, 2004). However, it becomes clear that participation is acknowledged as a managerial instrument, which offers the possibility of employees’ involvement for a particular purpose. By promoting participation practices such as group meetings, managers not only provide information but also test the working environment. Thus, one manager recognizes the need for knowing how the health care services are being implemented at the client’s home as well as existing conflicts among the employees. Therefore, participation as an opportunity is a discourse which entails that meetings are considered both as information and as problem-solving instruments (Marchigton and Wilkinson, 2005). Moreover, a common trait presented in all the managers’ interviews is the assumption that employees’ participation should be complemented by the client’s views regarding his/her demands and necessities. These responses reflect an organization user-centered design within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. Managers emphasize that the client is the focus and therefore, employees’ participation aims at improving the working environment by detecting ineffective implementations and potential conflicts among them. At this point, managers were asked whether they perceive differences concerning the importance of employees’ participation within a group where the client is unable to talk or suffers from a mental illness. Any of them recognize substantial distinctions, being the employees’ participation equally important regardless the case.

“Although this situation (a client with incapacity to speak) can happen, the client always has other ways to communicate” – Verksamhetschef

This lack of criticism regarding the influence of employees’ views at the meetings under specific clients’ health situations (i.e. mental illness) reinforce the managers’ understandings of participation both as information and problem-solving instruments. In this context, APTs follow the organizational necessity to overcome tensions at the workplace while exercising control over the employees. However, managers emphasize that sometimes the monthly group meetings are not enough to resolve problems. Thus, the individual meetings emerge as practical solutions through which managers deal with
employees’ tensions by listening one by one all the workers involved. Understanding tensions as problems to be solved, managers also find informal meetings as necessary instruments to ensure productivity (Budd et al., 2010). Furthermore, within this positive view of participation, managers do not recognize any negative outcomes or effect between the employees. Feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction or powerlessness are not considered by the managers who claim that employees are fairly satisfied with the meetings. These managerial statements are highly influenced by the functionalist approach where the role played by the different power relations are generally neglected (Jo and Park, 2016). Thus, managers legitimize the participation discourse as an opportunity while other views of participation are not even considered or refused. As a managerial taken-for-granted discourse, promoting employees’ participation as a “good thing” is not in question.

Focusing now on the data collected through observations, participation as a problem-solving instrument perfectly summarizes the very nature of the APTs. During the group meetings, managers start by asking employees if everything (i.e. work environment and client’s health situation) is fine. By doing this, managers attempt to identify potential problems which may be further discussed. For its part, employees often refer to the health situation of the client as well as the general condition of the equipment (i.e. lifting devices, electric and shower chairs). Moreover, these group meetings may be used to lay issues as gossip or spreading rumors which often emerge at the workplace. This fact supports the managers’ view of participation as an opportunity through which employees express certain conflicts with the co-workers. Despite this, during the APTs there is a relaxed and friendly atmosphere where both managers and employees converse about the working routines while enjoying “fika” (coffee and biscuits). Furthermore, managers provide general information regarding organizational initiatives, bureaucratic digitalization “e-avvikelserapport” (internal document whereby employees notify deficiencies, problems, complaints, and irregularities at the workplace) and ethical codes, schedule changes as well as information from the nurse.

To sum up, by combining the empirical findings with Harder’s participation framework, two well differentiated sides within the managers’ understandings of participation should be considered. On the one hand, influenced by the human resource perspective, group meetings are considered organizational instruments where employees exercise their right to participate and be informed (Gollan et al., 2006). Within this perspective, information and consultation are the very means through which participation should be developed.
While information means the provision of data, consultation is understood as the exchanges of views between managers and employees. However, based on the managers' consideration that employees' knowledge is insufficient, verksamhetschefer do not promote employees' feedback seeking behaviors, being consultation mainly understood as a complement of the information process (Li and Qian, 2016). Despite this, employees' participation is widely recognized as crucial for the proper functioning of the organization. This taken-for-granted managerial discourse of participation reflects the employees' involvement as prerequisites to “collaborate” within the decision-making processes. On the other hand, influenced by the managerial perspective, the group meetings are understood both as information and as problem-solving instruments. By promoting employees’ participation, managers not only provide information but also receive a better knowledge about what is going on at the workplace. As a managerial instrument, employees’ participation is enhanced with the objective to identify conflicts while improving communication.

Considering the Harder’s participation framework, the empirical data show that the managers’ understandings of participation represents the connection between the level (1) acknowledgement and the level (2) engagement (Harder et al., 2013). As previously mentioned in the theoretical part, due to the very different types of decisions, the limits between levels of participation are diffused.

![Table](attachment:image.png)

**Figure 4. Harder’s participation framework (1)**
Finally, influenced by the functionalist perceptive, any power dimension (i.e. group leaders) which might constraint employees’ participation is considered. This serves to reinforce managers’ identity and their participation discourse as an opportunity. Through the group meetings, managers exercise their power by legitimizing their participation discourse while neglecting or refusing others. The fact that managers emphasize the obligation of attending the meetings represents the most obvious proof of power. In contrast, the managers’ resistance is underpinned by the assumption that employees’ knowledge is insufficient for taking control over the decision-making processes. Thus, the information is mainly understood by the managers from a clear top-down perspective.

As will be further analyzed, the co-existence of different participation discourses between managers and employees involve tensions which inevitably determine the effectiveness in the implementation of these participation practices.

### 5.1.3. Analysis of Resistance behaviors

Following the managers’ statement that all the employees are fairly satisfied with the implementation of the group meetings, questions regarding the lack of employees’ involvement (silence) and even the absenteeism within this participation practice were conducted.

Starting with the employees’ silence or those who do not take an active role within the monthly group meetings, the empirical data show a certain consensus between the managers. While one manager highlights that the opportunity to participation is given to everybody, another manager emphasizes that the act of participating represents an employee’ right rather than an obligation. Thus, the lack of involvement is considered neither as a disruptive behavior or as the opposite to participate itself. Employees physically attend a meeting where the information that must be given by the managers is successfully provided.

“If the employee receives and understand the information, their silence is not a problem” – Verksamhetschef

Thus, while one manager points out that employees’ silence may be related to shyness or a lack of confidence in speaking in public, the other manager recognizes that some employees do not feel comfortable speaking Swedish. In this context, employees’ silence
is associated with the lack of language skills and therefore, all the managers highlight that APTs should be complemented by carrying out individual meeting.

“We need to identify when the employee’s silence hides a problem with the language”- Verksamhetschef

However, the empirical data show that the employees’ absence at the APTs is broadly acknowledged as an important managerial concern. One manager recognizes that this behavior represents a limiting factor through which group meetings cannot successfully be implemented. In line with this, other manager emphasizes that many absences make the objective of the APTs unproductive. Despite this, one manager partially justifies employees’ absence by pointing out certain personal reasons behind (i.e. familiar issues). Here, the private sphere arises as an explanation to the absence. By combining the interviews with the data collected through the observations, managers often ask about the employees who have not showed up at the meetings with the objective of knowing their reasons. As an example, the employees’ absence is justified because of the employee has been working the night before. However, this behavior is widely associated with a lack of commitment, engagement, and even dissatisfaction.

“Employees know that they must come to the group meetings, it is mandatory”- Verksamhetschef

Moreover, within the APTs, managers generally remind the mandatory nature of the meetings. It is worth mentioning that there are only 10 APTs a year with an average length of 2 hours per meeting therefore, 20 hours over the year. Thus, if the employee’s absence is repeated over time, managers assume that something goes wrong. Furthermore, by understanding participation as both information and problem-solving instruments, the employees’ absence involves inefficiencies and tensions between both organizational members. At this point, alike to the lack of involvement “silence”, managers call the employee to request an individual meeting with two goals: detect problems and provide information. Thus, managers exercise power through legitimizing the need to attend meetings (Gallagher, 2008). The employees’ absence constraint the reinforcement of managers’ identities as well as the effective control over them. Therefore, it is not surprising that all the managers understand employees’ absence as something negative. However, none of the managers openly acknowledge that these employees’ behaviors are frequent at the group meetings. This fact is very significant, since employees vehemently
reject this assertion. It is quite clear that employees’ absence at the meetings represent a source of tensions between the managers.

5.1.4. Analysis of Group leaders

As previously mentioned, group leaders “hereafter referred to as samordnares” are presented within two groups studied. The empirical data show a wide range of opinions regarding the appropriateness of maintaining samordnares among the managers. Thus, one manager refuses the samordnares by emphasizing the natural tendency towards informal leaders and the undemocratic nature of this feature. In this view, the very existence of samordnare within a group works against the democratization at the workplace. Based on his working experience, this manager criticizes that group leaders have largely misunderstood their responsibilities and therefore, is considered as a negative element within the organization. In contrast, another manager points out the usefulness of the group leaders. Accordingly, this manager highlights that samordnare facilitates her work by checking out that every employee sings on the list as well as finding extra personal who work when some employees are sick. Although group leaders are considered as a normal employee within the group, managers recognize that samordnares may be understood as a certain power dimension among the rest of the employees. However, this description is undervalued by those managers who defend the maintenance of the group leaders while considering them as useful managerial instruments.

Influenced by the functionalist perspective, power is understood as a managerial capacity, something that is acquired and transmitted and therefore, managers delegate (i.e. deligering) certain responsibilities to the group leaders (Jo and Park, 2016). Hence, managers open a direct communication flow with the group leaders which is used to detect conflicts at the workplace. Nevertheless, managers who have samordnares in their groups do not recognize the potential negative outcomes regarding the employees’ participation. The argument in favor of maintaining the group leaders is based on the large employee experience for being samordnares who are considered as trusted persons with whom the managers have a special relation with. The empirical data shows that this point is the most controversial one, reflecting internal tensions between managers. They recognize that there is an ongoing debate within the organization regarding the
appropriateness of the group leaders. The main argument is associated with the lack of training which involves that many samordnares misunderstand their own competences as well as how effectively they can manage a group within the everyday practices (Kim, 2002). At this point, there seems to be a certain managerial resistance to consider group leaders as a power dimension. Influenced by the functionalist perspective, it is understandable that managers expect to concentrate all the power in their hands. From a classical view of power, if group leaders are considered as a power dimension, that means the managerial power is reduced. Obviously, I refuse this classical conception of power as something that can be transferred or measurable. Instead, power is a product of social relations which is exercised rather than possessed (Gallagher, 2008).

5.2. Participation: Group leaders’ definitions

Asked about how the group leaders understand participation, the empirical data show inconsistencies, and ambiguities regarding a clear definition of the term. However, unlike managers, the group leaders associate participation with communication between and within employees. Despite being treated as synonymous, communication is generally considered as means to an end. As an example, one samordnare emphasizes the need to work together for improving the quality of client’s life. Although group leaders recognize the diversity of opinions within the group, they highlight that the focus must be on the client. In the same way as managers, these responses reflect the user-centered organizational design. Nevertheless, the empirical data show differences between samordnares concerning how communication is understood. While one group leader highlights that she tries to listen all the employees’ points of views, the other group leader refuses to take them into account. Notwithstanding communication between employees is broadly considered as an essential prerequisite for the proper functioning of the group in order to give the best service as possible to the client.

“We need to improve communication” – Samordnare

“We work for the client, that is the most important thing” - Samordnare

Focusing on employees’ participation at the group meetings, the empirical data show a wide consensus concerning the suitability of this participation practice between the group leaders. While one samordnare asserts that she is looking forward to the meetings, the
other group leader emphasizes that meetings are the only opportunity between managers and employees to discuss the current client’s health condition. As organizational instruments, samordnares often use the monthly meetings for updating information from both the client and the group. Through this participation practice, group leaders summarize what has happened during the last month at the workplace.

5.2.1. Analysis of participation, Group meetings

On this point, questions about how participation is understood at the group meetings were conducted. As previously mentioned, samordnares generally describe communication and participation from an internal point of view (at client’s home). This was not surprising given the samordnares’ nature as employees who have certain responsibilities within a group. Thereby, based on their own working experience, communication between employees is widely acknowledged by the samordnares as the most important feature which determine the effectiveness on the client’s care services.

However, when analyzing the participation at the APTs, both group leaders underline the necessity to provide information to the managers regarding the client’s health situation as well as the working environment. Alike managers, samordnares consider themselves as providers of information which reflect the understanding of participation as two-ways communication flow between them and their managers (Bryson, 2004).

“We provide information about the client” – Samordnare

The argument behind, is the assumption that group leaders know perfectly well the client’s needs and therefore, their information should be seriously considered by the managers. In this respect, the identity dimension is used to legitimize their views while delegitimizing others (Rydgren, 2007). As group leaders, they are employees with a considerable experience with the client and the self-identification as samordnares is viewed as a reinforcement of their own identities. Thus, other employees’ views are rejected while considering that they do not know enough the client. Group leaders are generally considered a bridge between the manager and the client. Thus, following the identity dimension, both samordnares point out the importance of their activities for the proper functioning of the working environment. Hence, potential problems or conflicts
among the employees as well as with the client are identified and subsequently transmitted to the manager.

Accordingly, participation at the APTs is broadly understood not only as a direct-communication between employees and managers but also as a problem-solving instrument, reflecting the Marchington and Wilkinson definition of the term (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). Nevertheless, the empirical data show a certain feeling of frustration between group leaders. Although they consider themselves as providers of information, samordnares criticize the slowness in decision-making processes. Thus, one group leader emphasizes that, although conflicts or problems (with the client or between the employees) are regularly communicated to the manager, any real solution is rapidly implemented. Another group leader also criticizes the sluggishness in decision-making processes which involve that problems may get bigger over time or even forgotten. Furthermore, both samordnares stress the urgency of ensuring the best possible service to the client and therefore, the cost of managers’ inaction may be very harmful. The lack of an effective action or implementation involves a sense of powerless, leading to frustration (Grissom, 2012). As Strauss highlights by having voice at the group meetings does not necessary imply that group leaders can influence management decisions (Strauss, 2006). Regarding this, the empirical data show a need which is mainly directed to the managers. Despite the acknowledgement of the close relationship, both samordnares demand more empathy from the managers. At this point, the us/them dichotomy arise. Samordnares emphasize that managers do not know the client. Hence, this lack of knowledge provides inefficiencies regarding the implementations of the health and social care services. Group leaders need an explicit recognition of their role to reinforce their identities. Therefore, criticisms of managers are extremely common. By underestimating managers’ knowledge, group leaders emerge as the most skilled person to provide relevant information about the client. As Barley points out, two different understandings of authority “authority through position” and “authority through expertise” are presented in the relationship between managers and employees (Barley, 1996).

“Without knowing the client is impossible to understand how the health situation can be improved” - Samordnare

“We know the client, they (managers) do not” - Samordnare
Moreover, both samordnare also emphasize that they feel powerless because of the difficulty of explaining what is going on at the workplace. Thus, tensions between group leaders and managers are evident. To remedy this situation, both samordnare suggest that managers must visit the client. Similarly, while one group leader emphasizes that her manager has never showed up at the client house, the other samordnare suggests the idea of performing the monthly group meetings at the client’s home. Despite the feeling of frustration in the exercise of its duties, the empirical data show a consensus about understanding participation as an opportunity where employees have a voice within the decision-making processes (Gollan et al., 2006). Alike managers, participation is a taken-for-granted discourse between group leaders. Although the information is mainly understood from a bottom-up perspective (group leaders provide the most useful information), this conception reflects certain similarities regarding the managers’ answers. Focusing on Harder’s participation framework, group leaders’ responses refers to the level (1) acknowledgement (Harder et al., 2013).

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<th>Level (1) Acknowledgement</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Typical Processes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Typical Attitudes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Typical Assumptions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Typical Actions taken by Managers</strong></td>
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*Figure 5. Harder’s participation framework (2)*

Therefore, by taking this participation discourse, the empirical data both from interviews and observations is analyzed to determine how the group leaders’ power is exercised within the group meetings. Firstly, they always sit next to the manager demonstrating their closeness. Another important feature is that the rest of the employees take other seats, thus showing a certain recognition of this person as a power role. Moreover, before the meeting starts, the group leaders often put on the table sheets and other documents (i.e. hälsopärm “a folder that contains a collection of client-related information). It is noteworthy that except for managers and group leaders, any employee show documentation during the meetings and therefore, their power is exercised through
information. Secondly, due to this collection of data, group leaders establish in cooperation with the manager the agenda of the meetings. At the outset of the APTs, managers always ask general short-answer questions (i.e. how is everything going? or how is the client?). By doing this, managers break the ice by encouraging employees’ involvement. However, group leaders generally begin to describe the matters that they perceive as important. During this process, the rest of the employees as well as the managers kept silence. Furthermore, group leaders maintain eye contact with the managers, seeming that the information is exclusively directed to the managers without encouraging a constructive debate between all members present at the meeting. Finally, when the information has been forwarded, group leaders give an opinion. After this, some employees begin to discuss while others stay silent. However, during the whole discussion the group leaders play an active role by replying most of the employees’ comments. Their sign and body language (i.e. arms resting on the table or finger-pointing) reflects how group leaders try to control the overall development of the meeting. It should be emphasized that in the absence of such role (samordnare), the empirical data show that the employee who sits beside the manager often shares the majority of the group leaders’ characteristics. In other words, in the personliga assistent group without samordnare “group 3”, the employee who have documents takes the most active role at the meetings. Thus, the lack of a group leader does not eliminate this power dimension. It is clear that the very act of participating involves an act of power through which the group leaders’ identities are reinforced.

Apart from that, none of the samordnares acknowledge that the existence of their role within the group may be understood as a constraining factor for the employees’ participation. Asked about the likelihood of being considered as a certain power dimension, both group leaders claim that they are “normal” employees, except for maintaining a certain trusted relationship with the managers. This fact reflects the classical conception of power (Jo and Park, 2016). Avoiding being considered as a power dimension, group leaders refuse a direct confrontation with the managerial control. However, the empirical data support the Foucauldian perspective of power where samordnares exercise power through participation at the group meetings by taking the most active role among the employees (Gallagher, 2008). The act of participation not only reflect an act of power but also an act of resistance itself. By taking the most active role...
during the meetings, samordnares constraint employees’ participation. Based on a greater working experience, they consider themselves as the most value source of information.

“Without trust, nothing could be improved” - Samordnare

Moreover, the trust or better said, the lack of trust emerges as a keyword which is continuously repeated during the interviews. Hence, the lack of involvement, participation or even communication between employees is extremely related to the lack of trust. Because of this, group leaders comprehend both employees’ resistance behaviors (silence and absence). The slowness in the decision-making processes as well as the lack of a real impact on the everyday practices is mainly used by samordnares to justify, in a way, the employees’ demotivation feelings regarding the APTs

Asked about the reasons behind the lack of trust between employees, any of them provide a plausible explanation. However, group leaders recognize that participation may be understood as a threat between the employees.

“They (employees) do not want to create unnecessary conflicts”- Samordnare

While one group leader points out the importance of trust between the group, the other samordnare recognizes that rumors and envies among personliga assistenter are mainstream at the workplace. Once again, the us/them dichotomy is always presented in group leaders’ responses. Thus, one samordnare complains about the little recognition regarding the complexity of being group leader from the managers. Samordnares often emphasize that they work with the client to justify the importance of their role. Being aware of the user-centered organizational design, every complaint towards the managers are sustained in the necessity to be considered as important source of information.

“We take care of the client” but “they (managers) do not understand us (personliga assistenter)” – Samordnare

Going back to the trust, this factor is widely considered as a key condition for the proper functioning of the group. However, none of them provide an answer about how to resolve the lack of trust and communication that they detect within their groups. One samordnare merely acknowledges that without trust, there is no participation and without participation the affected person is the client. Samordnares consider that overcoming the lack of trust and communication are beyond their competences. Thus, improving trust is understood as a managerial responsibility. For them, the most important issue is make sure that the
client receives the best possible service. While one group leader summarizes her role as a guarantor of providing confidence and security to the client, the other one recognizes that if the employees’ personal conflicts do not affect the brukare, all the efforts should be focus on the client.

“There is always one meeting per month, it is insufficient” – Samordnare

According to group leaders’ experience, APTs as problem-solving instruments are ineffective. Focusing on their sense-making processes (Weick et al., 2005), samordnares acknowledge that there are moments where extra meetings are needed or even months where any meeting is required. Following the problem-solving instrument as a managerial responsibility, group leaders emphasizes that labour conflicts or problems between the employees should be resolved by performing individual meetings with the manager.

5.2.2. Resistance behaviors

Although, samordnares share managers’ participation discourse as an opportunity, the empirical data show certain differences about the reasons behind employees’ resistance behaviors.

Focusing on employees’ silence, unlike managers who generally associate this behavior with the lack of Swedish language or related to personality traits (i.e. shyness), group leaders identify the lack of trust as the main element to constraint employees’ involvement. In this respect, one samordnare highlights that many personliga assistenter may feel insecure to speak in front of the rest of the group. To avoid misunderstandings or conflicts within the group, samordnares often recognize that employees prefer to be silent, reflecting the possibility of understanding “participation as a threat”. However, one group leader does not understand why employees are afraid to even talk, being the APTs the opportunity to be heard. This estrangement with the rest of the employees and the proximity to managers’ participation discourse is understood as a self-identification of samordnares as a power dimension.

Employees’ silence is not understood as a sign of any lack of commitment but rather as a significant preventative aspect. It is worth mentioning that employees’ commitment is not measurable in terms of involvement at the group meetings but in everyday activities. Nonetheless, the empirical data show differences regarding how the commitment is
particularly assessed between the group leaders. While one samordnare focuses on employees’ contribution in the *hälsopärm* (reports on the ongoing status of the client), the other group leader evaluates the commitment through the employees’ attitude towards the client. Apart from the lack of trust, both samordnares complaint about the repetitive nature of the meetings. Thus, based on their own working experience, group leaders recognize that employees may understand “participation as something irrelevant”. This repetitiveness of the issues discussed is broadly considered by the group leaders as another reason through which employees do not feel the need to take an active role during conversations.

“*Sometimes we have to remind managers about issues which had not been resolved*” - Samordnare

However, when asked about the employees’ absence, the empirical data show similarities with the managers’ responses. Although it is acknowledged that employees may understand participation as a threat or as something irrelevant, group leaders broadly recognize meetings as the opportunity to make their voices heard. Thus, the employees’ absence is considered as pointless and meaninglessness. In this situation, both samordnares remind that they (personal assistants) work on improving client’s life. Following this argument, attending the meetings is understood as a matter of respect. One group leader highlights that the employees’ absence limits the capacity both to solve, discuss, and receive information of the client. Therefore, failure to attend meetings makes impossible to know the necessary changes as well as the information provided by the manager. As previously mentioned in the methodological section, the nurse responsible for the client occasionally attend the meetings where relevant information (i.e. changes in medication and use of new medical/health devices) is transmitted to both managers and employees. This fact is used by one group leaders who points out that in these meetings (when the nurse attend), the employees’ absence is a major problem. It should be noted that there are some meetings which are considered more important than others between the group leaders. Those meetings where the nurse attends are broadly understood more relevant and those exclusively between the employees the manager.
5.2.3. Analysis of Silence and Absence

During the observations, the empirical data show that employees’ silence is an overarching feature at the group meetings. Contrary to what one group leader suggests, managers often ask employees with the objective of encouraging participation. Nevertheless, the great majority of the questions receive a quick reply from the employees. The feeling that all the information is been understood inevitably provides that employees’ silence as the normal response. Within APTs, group leaders regularly exchange views with the managers regarding the client’s health situation without barely mentioning specific questions related to the employees. All the problems, conflicts, and complaints among co-workers (i.e. false and hostile accusations and concerns about an employee professional incompetence) are briefly discussed during the meetings. It seems apparent that a certain level of self-constraint among the group leaders emerged. In a certain sense, participation as a threat is also presented here. The choice for not bringing conflicts at the meetings shows an expression of distrust which discussions about labor and personal conflicts between the employees are suppressed. Typically, these matters are transmitted via phone calls, individual meetings and avvikelserapports (internal document whereby employees notify deficiencies, problems, complaints, and irregularities at the workplace).

From a group leaders’ perspective, the employees’ silence does not create any conflict for the recognition of their authority. This particular behavior allows samordnares to exercise power through the act of participation at the group meetings (Gallagher, 2008). By taking an active role, group leaders reinforce their identities in front of the manager and the rest of the employees. Thus, although samordnares recognize the co-existence of different understandings of participation between the employees, their silence is exclusively considered as a result of the lack of trust rather than a rejection of their role as group leaders.

In contrast, the employees’ absence at the APTs challenges the exercise of the group leaders’ power and control over the employees. While at the beginning of the meetings managers search for an explanation, group leaders often clarify the reasons for the employees’ absence which are always associated within personal and familiar matters. The emergence of the private sphere seems to be a valid justification within this context. However, when employees who attend the meetings represent a small part of the group (a meeting with 3 or 4 employees in a 9-people group), the samordnares’ authority is
constrained. Thus, unlike silence, the employees’ absence creates tensions which not only limit group leaders’ capacity to exercise power through participation but also the reinforcement of their identities. In this way, the absenteeism is broadly considered as the most harmful behavior by the group leaders. They do not feel supported by the rest of the employees and therefore, samordnares aim exclusively to maintain a close relationship with the managers rather than encouraging employees’ involvement. Furthermore, the employees’ absence not only reflect that participation may be understood as something irrelevant but also as an act of employees’ power which aims to delegitimize group leaders and managers’ authority. Based on the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982), the identity is continuously articulated and rearticulated through social interactions. Thus, without employees’ presence at the meetings, managers and group leaders’ identities are not reinforced. Therefore, the employees’ non-participation challenge the structures of control within the organization (Hodge, 2005).

It is worth mentioning that samordnares do not recognize these employees’ resistance behaviors as deliberate acts against them but as a response to the ineffective nature of APTs as information and problem-solving instruments. This fact is very significant, since group leaders do not consider themselves as barriers to the employees’ participation. However, as will be further developed, the empirical data show a broad consensus between the employees who point to the group leaders as the responsible for their lack of participation at the meetings.

5.3. Participation, Employees’ definitions

In the same way as managers and group leaders, the employees provide unclear definitions of how participation is understood. However, the empirical data show a consolidated tendency between the employees who generally associate participation with communication and trust. As samordnares, confidence is considered as the driven force to improve participation by the employees.

“Participation is having people around you, where the person can freely speak without fear”- Personlig assistent

It should be noted that the definitions of participation are, in the first instance, related to how participation is generally understood rather than describing participation within
Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. This distinction reflects the differences between employees’ expectations and how participation is really understood at this particular context. Initially, the great majority of the employees share the view of participation as a “positive thing” (Kumar and Sia, 2012). Terms such as “collaboration, voice, and empowerment” repeat the managerial discourse which assumes that, by promoting employees’ participation involves positive outcomes both for the employees and for the organizational productivity (Kim, 2002). Thus, employees broadly considered participation (in general terms) as an opportunity which allows them to have a voice within decision-making processes (Bryson, 2004). Following this argument, several employees recognize that participation leads to feelings of commitment and engagement. However, when focusing on how they understand participation within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg, all the employees (to greater or lesser extent) emphasize the small weight of their contributions in practice. Taken to the extreme, one employee highlights that “in this work” participation does not exist. Even through this statement cannot be extrapolated to other employees’ answers, a common link is clearly identified. The lack of influence involves feelings of disengagement and dissatisfaction. One employee defines APTs as meaningless while emphasizing that managers are not interested in their points of view.

“They (managers) do not care about us (personliga assistenter)” – Personlig assistent

“We (employees) are cheap labour and easily replaceable” – Personlig assistent

These answers also reflect feelings of resignation and demotivation which imply that some employees question the nature of the meetings by arguing that nothing important is discussed. Similarly, one employee asserts that she exclusively attends the meetings because of its mandatory nature and because she gets paid for it. However, other employees defend the existence of the monthly group meetings as a question of professionalism and respect towards both the client and the rest of the group. Even through employees recognize that some co-workers may understand meetings as something pointless or irrelevant, they emphasize that everyone must attend. In line with this, another employee admits that although APTs may be considered trivial, the personal should raise awareness about how important is to make their voices heard.
“We need to talk about rumors, criticisms, and problems among us, we cannot be afraid” – Personlig assistent

“If we do not talk, the situation (a conflict) is not going to change” - Personlig assistent

By considering the lack of trust between the employees and the lack of influence at the group meetings, two main understandings of participation “participation as a threat” and “participation as something irrelevant” emerged. As will be further analyzed, this fact not only determine the relationship between managers and employees but also involves employees’ resistance behaviors through their silence or absence.

5.3.1. Analysis of employees’ participation and Group meetings

On this point, questions about how the group meetings are understood between the employees were conducted. The empirical data show contrasting interpretations regarding the reasons behind this participation practice. However, due to the large amount of data, employees’ answers are divided into two main blocks.

Firstly, APTs are considered as managerial instruments which are mainly used to provide information. Thus, one employee highlights that through these meetings, they receive important information on the client as well as organizational changes (i.e. work schedules and routines) which should be implemented at the workplace. This understanding of the information as exclusively one-way communication flow is highly shared by the employees within this block. Similarly, another employee emphasizes that managers often neglect their views or feedbacks. Following with this employee, she stands out for having innovative ideas which may improve the working environment. However, as she recognizes, managers are not interested in listening to employees. As previously mentioned in the theoretical section, managers often refuse to promote feedback-seeking behaviors, arguing that employees’ knowledge is insufficient for taking control over decisions. Thus, consultation is considered a way that complements the information process (Gollan et al., 2006). One personlig assistent affirms that her manager rarely asks the employees about their opinions which inevitably provide disaffection to the following meetings. This resignation makes that another employee recognizes that her role as personlig assistent is listen to managers.
“Managers want us (employees) to attend meetings because they want to be heard, this is what we do” - Personlig assistent

By focusing on the Harder’s participation framework, these employees’ responses refer to the level (0) informing (Harder et al., 2013).

Secondly, other employees describe the group meetings as basically problem-solving instruments. Here, the information provided by the managers is no longer as relevant as before. I must say that this understanding is the most widely shared between the employees. They admit that the main reason for conducting the meetings is intrinsically related to the necessity to resolve problems or conflicts among the personal. All the employees recognize that there are many rumors, dishonesty, mistrust, and jealousies with their groups. Working environments which do not facilitate the needed tranquility to the clients. However, the employees highlight that many problems or conflicts are not successfully resolved at the group meetings. One employee points out that managers may be aware of a problem but they do nothing about it. Alike samordnares, the inefficiencies of the group meetings, the inaction of the managers and their lack of influence within the decision-making processes are mostly addresses by the employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Processes</th>
<th>Level (0) Informing</th>
<th>Level (1) Acknowledgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers make decisions without employees’ involvement: dismissive employees’ interest</td>
<td>Managers ask employees’ opinions but do not feel obligated to take then into account. Managers make the final decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Attitudes</th>
<th>Typical Assumptions</th>
<th>Typical Actions taken by Managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees’ ways of thinking, knowing, and acting are not considered</td>
<td>Employees’ ways are inferior and of no real consequence or use</td>
<td>Ignore employees’ ways; teach employees to adopt managers’ own ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers acknowledge that employees have different ways of thinking, knowing, and acting</td>
<td>Employees’ ways are inferior, but worth noting</td>
<td>Learn about employees’ ways, without changing own ways</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Harder’s participation framework (3)

It is worth mentioning that these two different understandings “informing and problem-solving” of the group meetings are not mutually exclusive but intertwined with each other. Although considering APTs as mainly informative or problem-solving instruments,
employees broadly acknowledge the interconnections of this duality (Marchigton and Wilkinson, 2005).

Going back to the Harder’s participation framework, employees’ answers reflect, in this respect, the level (1) acknowledgement.

By embracing these two different understandings of the group meetings “information” and “problem-solving”, the empirical data show similarities regarding the Marchington and Wilkinson definition of participation (Marchigton and Wilkinson, 2005). Influenced by the managerial perspective, APTs aim to exercise control over the employees while detecting tensions that must be overcome in order to enhance productivity. Managerial instruments which provide useful information to the managers regarding how to deal with the group.

It should be noted that the common trait between the employees is the reference to their working experience through which different understandings of participation are justified. This fact reflects the contrasting sense-making processes where personliga assistenter respond to participation (Weick et al., 2005). Thus, based on her experience, one employee describes the monthly meetings as 70% positive and 30% negative. Following her answer, APTs are mainly understood as problem-solving instruments where decisions are jointly taken between managers and employees. This cohesion is positive not only for the employees but also for the client. Through meetings, managers seek to achieve consensus regarding the most significant issues. However, one employee recognizes that the meetings’ structure is completely disorganized. There is not a table which establishes a certain order about how the different issues should be discussed. During the observations, this description is widely sustained. Neither managers nor employees organize the meetings with the goal of optimizing the time (generally two hours). Another employee underlines the repetitive character of meetings where issues presented at previous months continuously appear. Employees are barely interested on the issues discussed at the group meetings but rather on the consequences that these matters may involve. Accordingly, one employee identifies the trust among the employees as the cornerstone to demonstrate the usefulness of the APTs. Alike samordnanes, trust is broadly understood as the prerequisite both for a good communication and participation between the employees. Thus, the lack of trust constraints employees’ involvement who
are afraid to be subjected to reprisals. As an example, one employee claims that, although he has a voice within the meetings, he expects that others started talking to join in the discussion. This aspect is widely shared by the great majority of the employees. None of them want to be pointed as the “bad guy” by the rest of the co-workers.

Therefore, the lack of trust represents the most limiting factor to resolve problems, reflecting the understanding of “participation as a threat”. All of them recognize that there are problems within the group but nobody seems to be the first one to speak. This responsibility is mainly related to the group leader and managers. For the employees, the samordnare should transmit confidence, trust, and good communication to enhance participation. The empirical data show a broad consensus regarding the recognition of the group leader as a power dimension. Even in the group without samordnare, employees identify one personlig assistant who has the closest relationship with the manager and in a certain way is considered as an informal leader within the group. As we saw previously, the data collected through observations show that the absence of a group leader does not involve that this role is suppressed. However, despite criticism, some employees demand more meetings, considering that one APT per month is insufficient. Those who are alienated with this request understand the objective of the group meetings as problem-solving instruments. Thus, a plausible answer to improve communication between managers and employees as well as resolve problems or conflicts among the co-workers more meetings should be implemented. Furthermore, employees argue that the need to have more meetings is because some APTs are more informative than others. By way of example, one employee reminds one meeting which was entirely dominated by the information provided by the nurse. Accordingly, the lack of an effective structure limits the possibility of talking about other issues. Therefore, matters which are considered important between the employees must wait until at least next month. This fact makes that participation may be considered as something irrelevant between the employees.

5.3.2. Analysis of Resistance behaviors

Throughout employees’ interviews, the empirical data show that the employees’ silence at the meetings is an extensively accepted behavior. This fact reflects the understanding of both participation as a threat or something irrelevant. Hence, these two participation discourses determine the employees’ action of keeping silence during the meetings. As I
mentioned earlier, personliga assistenter identify certain reasons through which the participation is constraint (i.e. the lack of trust and influence). However, none of them recognize to be afraid at the group meetings. This means that APTs are principally understood as managerial instruments which aim at providing information while resolving problems (Grissom, 2012).

The lack of influence regarding the different decision-making processes where the employees’ views are often refused or neglected involves that silence may be understood as the best attitude at the meetings. Employees’ silence not only avoids potential conflicts but also allows managers’ capacity to provide information and exercise control over them. As “passive resistance” behavior, the employees’ silence does not challenge the power relations but is used by the group leaders and managers to reinforce their own identities. In this context, the act of taking an active role during the meetings involves an exercise of power. However, employees’ silence is also considered as an act of power itself as well as a practical solution for their own interest. Furthermore, the silence is understood as a way of recognition of power figures (both verksamhetschefer and samordnnares). This aspect is broadly sustained during the observations. Employees’ silence is prevalent when the group leaders describe the general situation of the working environment. However, when an employee takes an active role in the conversation facilitates others involvement. As an empirical example, during a group meeting, two employees were given their opinions about certain aspects of the routine. This fact involved at the first time the group leader and the manager silence while the rest of the employees were joining to the conversation, reinforcing the analysis of the active participation as an act of power. During these conversations, the group leader often participates while looking at the manager which indicates certain seek of recognition of his/her opinion over the rest of the employees. This legitimation is intrinsically related to the identity dimension.

However, the employees’ absence, the non-participation is understood as an “active resistance” behavior. Materialized in the form of absence at the meetings, the participation is broadly understood as something irrelevant. Based on their working experiences, employees who recognize that they do not regularly attend at the meetings emphasize that is not worth showing up at the meetings,

“It is pointless, it is never said the important things, they (managers and employees) talk rubbish” – Personlig assistant
Employees criticize that the discussed topics are never translated into real consequences. This statement refuses the manager’s information as something important or to be considered by the employees.

“I do not know which kind of information they (managers) are going to give us if we (employees) are who work with the client” – Personlig assistent

Once again, the us/them dichotomy emerges within this participation discourse. For those employees who recognize that they do not attend at the meetings, they claim that there is no difference between attending and keep quiet or not attending. Despite does not being shared buy the rest of the employees, this behavior is in a certain way accepted under certain circumstances. Thus, one employee points out that one absence does not involve a problem and may be associated with personal and familiar matters. However, repetitive absences of the same employee are considered as a lack of respect and disloyalty with the client. One example is the response of one of the employees

“Why are we (employees) going to attend, only for listening things that nobody cares” – Personlig assistent

This demonstrates a lack of consensus regarding the issues which are considered important within the group. One employee suggests that before the meetings, the group leaders should be gather with the rest of the employees for preparing the meeting.

“This (organizing meetings) would facilitate employees’ participation by giving voice to everybody” – Personlig assistent

Following the employees’ absence, all the employees recognize the mandatory nature of the meetings. However, they are aware of that there is not any punishment to those employees who do not attend at the meetings. In this respect, one employee admits that he feels impotent due to the lack of control of the managers over the employees’ absences.

“There are sometimes that we finish earlier because we were not enough and it is a pity”- Personlig assistent

The employees’ absence not only involves tensions between the employees (those who attend and those who do not) but also constraint the proper functioning of the meetings as information and problem-solving instruments. One employee argues that he works for the client and he is entirely committed to the work but the meetings do not help the client. At this point, within the participation framework, the level of participation represents the
level (-1) non-participation. Here, the employees do not recognize the meetings as instruments where participation has a utility, being the absence as the normal employee resistance behavior within this context.

Therefore, employees’ resistance behaviors reflect different understandings of participation but intertwined with each other. Discourses that imply contrasting acts of power and resistance which are used to negotiate their identities through a continuous struggle over the meaning (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). At this organizational level, managers and group leaders’ participation discourse as an opportunity is widely criticized between the employees.
6. Conclusion

The study of Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg requires, in the first instance, a broad knowledge of the organizational structural factors such as context, environment, and the regulatory framework (Kumar and Sia, 2012). However, we cannot forget that every organization is a product of social relations (Weick et al., 2005). Within a hierarchical structure, different organizational members (managers and employees) reflect contrasting understandings of participation. While managers and group leaders broadly acknowledge participation as an opportunity, the vast majority of the employees criticize the group meetings as tools for the enhancement and promotion of involvement within the decision-making processes. Thus, the co-existence of different participation discourses shows a clear distinction between the power relations with the groups. As Mumby highlights, discourses are sites of power and resistance (Mumby, 2005). However, the effects are not always as desired or intended which inevitably involve tensions in the relationship between managers and employees.

Firstly, the managerial discourse is clear. The participation is a necessary element in the drive to reduce conflicts while improving communication. Despite the managers’ statement of group meeting as a collaborative or democratic space, this participatory instrument is widely understood as a problem-solving instrument. Due to the organizational context, managers feel the need to exercise control over the employees. Thus, group meetings emerge as an opportunity for the managers. Attendance at the APTs is mandatory of all the employees. Thus, the managerial power is exercised by refusing employees’ absence. Influenced by the functionalist perspective, managers are believed to have the best knowledge for making well-reasoned decisions. By considering employees’ knowledge as insufficient, a certain resistance behavior between the managers is presented. The proof is that feedbacks-seeking or employees’ involvement is encourage by the managers. Hence, the silence is not considered as a negative aspect at the meetings. Managers exercise their power by providing information and evaluation the working environment.

Secondly, group leaders also share the view of participation as an opportunity. Ironically, this discourse needs the employees’ silence for the reinforcement of their identities. Although the lack of trust is broadly understood as the main reason behind the employees’ silence, group leaders do not consider among their competences an attempt to reduce this situation. This is not surprising given that employees’ silence is an enabler of
participation. By taking the most active role within the group meetings, samordnares exercise power over the employees. The silence shows a recognition of their authority and therefore, any conversation with the rest of the employees is promoted. Significantly, group leaders’ resistance rest upon the same argument as managers. Their major experience and knowledge is generally used to justify their role. However, as Barley emphasizes managers and group leaders reflect different understandings of authority. An authority through position “managers” and authority through expertise “group leaders” (Barley, 1996). For this reason, the us/them dichotomy arise within their interviews. As a user-centered-organizational design, group leaders often refer to APTs as instruments which aim at improving client’s health situation.

Thirdly, employees broadly criticize the nature of the group meetings which are considered as something irrelevant. Within the organizational level, my analysis shows many contradictions regarding the employees’ answers. Despite not sharing the view of participation as an opportunity, many employees recognize that group meetings are positive both for the group and for the client. This means that employees accept the top-down control which is exercised by the managers. Accordingly, the choice of not getting involved may be understood as a symbolic level of resistance. Employees are aware that, by attending the meetings is the minimum requirement demanded. By doing this, any conflict between them and their managers is created and therefore, this passive resistance behavior does not constraint managers’ control. Alike to remain salient at the meetings, the act of participation is an act of power itself. I do not say that employees’ silence is understood as the opposite to participate. Indeed, they participate through their silence. However, by taking an active involvement, employees exercise their power with the objective to reduce group leaders’ role. Following this argument, the participation may be understood as a threat through which employee mistrust of future retaliation from group leaders. Moreover, the lack of influence is often shared to justify their silence. This promotes inter-group solidarity between the employees through which a collective silence represents a source of power against managers’ control. In line with this, the employees’ absence challenge both group leaders and managers’ power. As an active resistance behavior, this situation involves the most notable tensions between managers and employees. At this point, participation as something irrelevant is the dominant discourse.

Therefore, three main participation discourses co-exist in the relationship between managers and employees. My analysis not only demonstrate how different participation
is understood but also the reasons behind employees’ resistance behaviors. Focusing on Harder’s participation framework, four levels of participation are displayed in this research. From level (1) *non-participation* to level (2) *engagement* existing power relations are continuously negotiated and renegotiated between managers and employees. Based on their working experience, organizational members respond to different sense-making processes within an ongoing struggle over meaning (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Thus, the tension-centered approach is a very useful instrument in understanding how competing meanings of participation are constructed. Meanings that, in turn, provide actions of power and resistance (Mumby, 2005). Likewise, resistance behaviors which are considered as reactions to the ongoing tensions within the organizational life.

Finally, this empirical oriented study shows how participation discourses are extremely linked with the meetings. Therefore, I would like to end my research by stimulating an in-depth reflection about the necessity to rethink the monthly group meetings as merely problem-solving instruments within Uppsala Kommun Vård och Omsorg. The analysis demonstrates the inefficiency of this organizational mechanism which is part of the taken-for-granted managerial repertoire. However, the large among of employees’ criticism against APTs should be seriously considered. To paraphrase Coombs, when employees believe that an organization has a problem, a problem does exist (Coombs, 2012).

### 6.1. Summary

This study aimed at answering two research questions. The main research question was: *How do managers and employees experience and make-sense of the different understandings of participation?* This main question is then complemented by one sub-question which aims to identify the impacts on the co-existence of diverse participation discourses with the question: *What impact does contrasting participation discourses have on the relationship between managers and employees?*

By focusing on the cognitive processes, managers and employees frame meanings of participation while constructing different discourses. Based on their own working experience, both organizational members make-sense over what is understood as participation. These processes are intrinsically related with the identity formation (Weick et al., 2005). Thus, discourses not only define a topic but also a role (Musson and Duberley, 2007). Influenced by the managerial and human resource perspectives,
participation is broadly considered as an opportunity by the managers. As a managerial instrument, promoting employees’ involvement aims at resolving potential conflicts while reinforcing managers’ understandings of participation as something positive and fundamental for the proper functioning of the organization. It becomes clear how managers legitimate their participation discourse as an opportunity while neglecting or refusing others. The empirical data shows the lack of criticism among the managers regarding the co-existence of different understandings of participation. This entails an act of power and resistance itself. Focusing on the employees, group leaders generally share the managerial understanding of participation. However, as with the rest of the employees, they recognize the co-existence of contrasting understandings of participation. Alike managers, group leaders’ understandings of participation are influenced by their own working experience. The difference from the managers is the contrasting understanding of authority. As Stephen R. Barley highlights, group leaders recognize their gained knowledge through the working experience with the client as a source of legitimacy, which are frequently used to undervalue managers’ decisions (Barley, 1996). Consequently, even though participation is broadly understood by the group leaders as an opportunity the lack of impact as well as the slowness over the decision-making processes shows a certain critique about how participation is implemented. Lastly, employees’ understandings of participation range from participation as an opportunity to participation as a threat and participation as something irrelevant, being the latter the most dominant one. Alike group leaders, employees recognize the co-existence of different participation discourses. By considering participation as something irrelevant, employees justify resistance behaviours through silence and even absence at the group meetings. This implies an act of power and resistance itself. However, the effects diverge depending on the chosen resistance behavior. Through their silence at the group meetings, employees reflect their disagreement regarding how this participatory practice is implemented. However, the employees’ silence is used by the group leaders and managers to reinforce their identity as power dimensions. In contrast, the employees’ absence reflects the same disconformity while challenging the structures of power and domination. That is why employees’ absence are widely understood between managers and group leaders as negative behavior, which should be mitigated and even punished.
6. References


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Appendix 1. Questions for in-depth interviews round one (managers)

1. Background info
   Name:
   Working at:
2. How do you define participation?
3. Do you think there is a difference between participation and communication?
4. Do you think employees’ participation is more important when the client is unable to talk or communicate?
5. How do you define the monthly group meetings?
6. How important is the employees’ participation at the group meetings?
7. How do you promote employees’ participation?
Appendix 2. Questions for in-depth interviews round two (managers)

1. What impact do employees have at the group meetings?
2. What is the role of group leaders?
3. What is your opinion about group leaders?
4. What is your relationship with group leaders and employees?
5. Do you think that group leaders constrain or improve employees’ participation?
6. What is the purpose of the group meetings?
7. What do you think about employees’ silence during the group meetings?
8. How do you encourage employees’ involvement?
9. What do you think about employees’ absence at the group meetings?
10. What do you used to do when this situation occurs?
11. What do you think is the reason behind employees’ absence?
12. How would you improve employees’ participation?
Appendix 3. Questions for in-depth interviews (group leaders)

1. Background info
   Name
2. How do you define participation?
3. Do you think there is a difference between participation and communication?
4. How do you define your role?
5. What do you consider is important?
6. What is your opinion about group meetings?
7. Do you consider yourself as a certain leader within the group?
8. Do you think that your co-workers could see you as a certain boss?
9. What is your relationship with the manager?
10. What do you think are the responsibilities of the managers?
11. What is the purpose of the group meetings?
12. What do you think about employees’ silence during the group meetings?
13. What do you think about employees’ absence at the group meetings?
14. What do you think is the reason behind employees’ absence?
15. How would you improve participation?
Appendix 4. Semi-structured interviews (employees)

1. Background info
   Name
2. How do you define participation?
3. Do you think there is a difference between participation and communication?
4. How do you define your role?
5. What do you consider is important?
6. What is your opinion about group meetings?
7. Do you consider yourself as a certain leader within the group?
8. Do you think that your co-workers could see you as a certain boss?
9. What is your relationship with the manager?
10. What do you think are the responsibilities of the managers?
11. What is the purpose of the group meetings?
12. What do you think about employees’ silence during the group meetings?
13. What do you think about employees’ absence at the group meetings?
14. What do you think is the reason behind employees’ absence?
15. How would you improve participation?