Microfoundations of Management Innovation:
The Dual Role of the Management Innovation Actor

Abstract

The strategic importance of management innovation has become a central theme in the organization and management literature over the past decades. Yet, the microfoundations of this particular type of innovation remain understudied. Although management innovations are inherently connected with changes for managers, extant research considers managers as change agents who drive innovation rather than the recipients of change. The fact that managers themselves are subjected to change is largely overlooked. Anecdotal evidence suggests that managers may be both agent and recipient in the context of management innovation. We conducted a qualitative study of managers' roles and considered agile as the specific management innovation. We found that managers have dual roles of change agent and recipient. In the case of agile, managers are confronted with a double dual role as they have to act as "managers" and "coaches" depending on the condition. These dual roles respectively are connected with tensions that impact the management innovation as a whole.

Keywords: Microfoundations, management innovation, role theory, manager, agile

1. Introduction

Individual actors are a crucial component in organization studies (Abdelnour et al., 2017). Inarguably, individuals of utmost importance inside an organization are managers (Felin et al., 2015). The field of management and organization theory underlines managers' relevance (Neely et al., 2020). Especially upper echelons theory suggests that individuals located at the top have significant implications for organizations (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Frequently, managers are – implicitly or explicitly – presented as the most influential people for the introduction of innovation and change in organizations (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006).

Despite individuals' significance, extant management research and innovation literature places primary focus on the organizational level and more often than not neglects the micro level (Crossan

& Apaydin, 2010; Lay et al., 2022). Insights into individuals' role in innovation, therefore, remain limited (Lay et al., 2022). Moreover, empirical research concentrating on the role of managers is scarce (Bojesson & Fundin, 2021). Correspondingly, studies increasingly call for scholars' focus on managers. Aguinis et al. (2022) for instance point to the urgent need to place the manager at the center of scholarly attention. Similarly, studies increasingly emphasize tapping into microfoundations as doing so allows to open up "explanatory black boxes" and to develop new and to improve existing theory (Felin et al., 2015, p. 589).

A concept whose microfoundations are largely neglected is management innovation (Palmié et al., 2023). Management innovation pertains to the introduction of novel management practices, processes, and organizational structures (Volberda et al., 2014). Such management innovations are essential in today's world for manifold reasons such as competitiveness and performance (Millar et al., 2018). Accordingly, many companies engage in efforts to introduce management innovations. The success of such efforts often depends on actors who promote and manage innovations inside the organization (Randhawa et al., 2021). This agentic view aligns with the claim raised by Mantere (2008) that it is not organizations that create or implement novelty, it is the people.

Management innovation literature indicates that managers are essential in two ways. On the one hand, do management innovations change the way managers work (Hamel, 2006). On the other hand, are managers typically depicted as important change agents that drive the innovation inside the organization (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Combined, these aspects suggest that managers may occupy a double role in management innovation: managers may have to change and navigate the innovation through the organization. In the literature, however, the change agent and recipient roles are mostly considered as distinct "either-or" rather than "both-and" options (Huy et al., 2014). That being said, managers are typically depicted as agents of change rather than recipients (Oreg & Berson, 2019). The fact that managers themselves can be agents and recipients requires scholarly attention as it is largely overlooked in theoretical accounts and empirical research (Walk, 2022). It is particularly not clear what happens when managers have such dual roles. Role theory underlines the importance of addressing this question as potential issues such as role conflicts and ambiguities may occur.

A study conducted by the authors revealed that in introducing agile managers were both agents and recipients (working paper; not referenced here to maintain authors' anonymity). Based on our empirical observation, which stands in contrast to most studies' accounts, we pursue a question-driven, phenomenon-based inquiry that allows us to elaborate theory (Graebner et al., 2022). We adopt a microfundational research approach and probe into managers' roles in the context of management innovation. Thereby, we ask the following research question:

RQ: *What are managers' roles in management innovation and what are the implications of the roles?*

To answer the research question, we conducted (and currently continue to conduct) interviews with different managers from two companies. The paper is currently work-in-progress with data collection and analysis being ongoing. We focus on the specific management innovation of "agile"e. We decided to study agile as the management innovation for two reasons. First, agile qualifies as a management innovation that is only sparsely considered as such. Second, the introduction of agile typically comes about with changes for managers while they are at the same time in charge of supporting the implementation inside the firm such that agile is a suitable context to explore managers' dual roles.

Our findings are expected to contribute to microfoundations research and management innovation studies. By developing the notion of management innovation actors, we contribute to research on actors and change agents in general and innovation actors in particular. Moreover, in that we explore managers' roles, our findings expectedly add to role theory (Biddle, 2013). By framing managers' dual roles as paradoxical, we further aim to contribute to paradox theory (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Moreover, our findings add to research dealing with role dualities (Balogun et al., 2015; Nigam et al., 2022).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Microfoundations

Organizations can be conceived of as an accumulation of the individuals they encompass, and microfoundational research addresses this micro-level (Felin et al., 2012; Foss & Pedersen, 2019).

Apart from individuals, microfoundations comprise processes and structures (Felin et al., 2012). Research into microfoundations aims to shed light on the micro-level aspects underlying higher-level concepts (Barney & Felin, 2013; Felin et al., 2015). The underlying assumption thereby is that higher-level phenomena comprise lower-level aspects such as actors as a direct cause or at least influential factor (Felin et al., 2015). As a whole, microfoundational research allows "to explore the 'black boxes' within macro-level models" (Zilber, 2020, p. 2). This makes microfoundations instrumental to theoretical and empirical progress (Foss & Pedersen, 2019).

A growing body of research taps into diverse microfoundations for manifold macro-constructs in management theory (Foss & Pedersen, 2019). Correspondingly, several topics have been discussed (Felin et al., 2015). For instance, previous research has probed into the microfoundations of strategy (Kouamé & Langley, 2018), institutions (Powell & Rerup, 2017), capabilities in general (Felin et al., 2012; Gavetti, 2005), as well as capabilities for business model innovation (Loon et al., 2020) or design thinking (Magistretti et al., 2021). In the area of innovation, topics such as open innovation (Bertello et al., 2022) or knowledge aggregation (Davis & Aggarwal, 2020) have attracted attention.

Despite its numerous contributions, to date, microfoundational research is still underrepresented (Foss & Pedersen, 2019). Crossan & Apaydin (2010) for instance found that the individual level is barely considered in innovation research. Similarly, Garud & Turunen (2021) stated that studies have neglected the microfoundations of innovation as a process. Mol et al. (2019) underlined the importance of microfundations in the study of management innovation. Recently, Palmié et al. (2023) pointed to the neglect of the micro-level in research on management innovation. Aguinis et al. (2022) stressed the need to place specific focus on managers, which "allows the researcher to consider managerial actions and hence the practical side of management" so as to better understand underlying mechanisms. Addressing the presented shortcomings in extant research, this study aims to shed light on the microfoundations of management innovation by focusing on individuals because they are central to management innovation as the rational perspective on management innovation suggests (Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Volberda et al., 2014)

## 2.2 Empirical Context of Management Innovation: Agile Ways of Working

Management innovation refers to the introduction of new management practices, processes, techniques, and organizational structures that are intended to further organizational goals (Volberda et al., 2014). Consequently, management innovation represents an organizational change (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). On a more individual level, according to Hamel (2006), management innovations change "how managers do what they do". This implies that management innovations bring about new ways in which managers perform work. Volberda et al. (2013) maintain that management innovations also change "what managers do as part of their job". Consequently, management innovations change the "how" and "what" of managers' work.

In this study, we considered "agile" as the specific management innovation. We deemed agile as a suitable example for three main reasons. First, introduced within non-agile-born companies, agile brings about fundamental changes to organizations and their workforce. The introduction of agile therefore qualifies as a management innovation. Second, although a few studies have pointed to the fact that agile represents a management innovation, there remains a dearth of research appreciating agile as a management innovation (Denning, 2013). Third, anecdotal evidence as well as our pre-study's findings suggest that managers are crucial components concerning agile and deserve in-depth scholarly attention.

Agile originates from software development and is widely discussed in the Information Systems field (Baham & Hirschheim, 2022). Having spread beyond its origin, agile is now used in different areas (de Borba et al., 2019). To date, however, research has made only limited progress in theorizing agile. Recently, Baham and Hirschheim (2022) attempted to clarify the theoretical core of agile software development by capturing its central aspects. The identified constituents are (1) incremental design and iterative development, (2) inspect and adapt cycles, (3) continuous customer involvement, and (4) working cooperatively/collaboratively/in close communication. We advocate that these aspects relate to the agile work approach more generally.

A further fundamental component of agile is the execution of work in cross-functional teams (Grass et al., 2020; Khanagha et al., 2022). These teams use agile work practices that encompass the reliance on short term-goal cycles (i.e., Sprints), an iterative work approach, and meetings focused on goal monitoring (i.e., stand-up meetings) and reflection (i.e., retrospective meetings) (Junker et al., 2022). Agile coaches support agile teams with the agile way of working (Rigby et

al., 2018). Agile teams that operate in related areas are frequently combined into tribes which have a tribe lead who is responsible for the work environment. Chapter leads are responsible for a so-called chapter which is a group of individuals with similar competencies. Tribe leads can be considered top managers and product owners as middle managers. Chapter leads can be considered line managers.
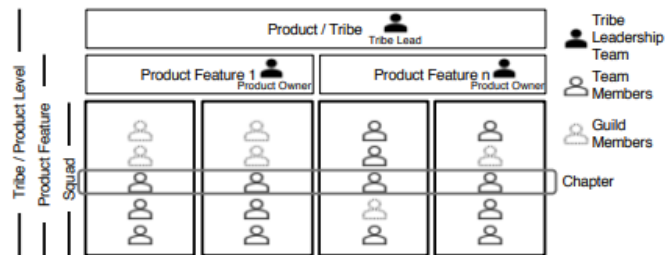
Figure 1. Typical Agile Setup

2.3 Innovation and Change Actors

Abdelnour et al. (2017) pointed to the importance to clarify actors versus individuals. That is because actors are not necessarily individuals (Felin et al., 2015). In this study, we conceive of actors as individuals. Moreover, we adopt the perspective of individuals as being modular (Abdelnour et al., 2017). In this view, individuals are can take on multiple roles simultaneously and enact associated role behaviors. Role behavior relates to "the recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome" (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 189). According to role theory, role behaviors evolve from the social positions that individuals hold in their organizations with roles being based on expectations of actors' own and others' behavior (Biddle, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

The literature provides numerous concepts of actors related to innovation and change in organizations as described hereinafter:

Change agents are "those who are responsible for identifying the need for change, creating a vision and specifying a desired outcome, and then making it happen" (Ford et al., 2008, p. 362). These actors are sometimes also referred to as change leaders. "Anyone involved in initiating, implementing, and supporting a change" can be regarded as a change agent (Armenakis et al., 2000, p.

104). Birkinshaw et al. (2008) distinguish between internal and external change agents. Ottaway (1983) provides a taxonomy of change agents that delineates three types: (1) change generators, (2) change implementors, and (3) change adopters. In line with Lewin's three-stage model of change, generators unfreeze, implementors move, and adopters refreeze the change.

Against the backdrop of change agents, it is essential to introduce *change recipients* (Oreg et al., 2018). Change recipients are those people who are predominantly affected by the change as they have to adopt it (Ford et al., 2008). They are the ones who have to change and deal with a changed context (Berson et al., 2021). Change agents have an impact on recipients' responses to change (Oreg & Berson, 2019) which are a main determinant for the success or failure of organizational change (Oreg et al., 2011). Therefore, dealing with recipients' responses such as resistance to change is a core of change agents' work.

DiMaggio (1988) introduced the notion of *institutional entrepreneurs* who are actors that initiate and implement changes that break with institutions (Battilana et al., 2009). Beckert (1999) identifies the institutional entrepreneur as an "analytically distinguished social type who has the capability to take a reflective position towards institutionalized practices and can envision alternative modes of getting things done" (p. 786). They intentionally and purposefully work to change existing or to create new institutions (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008). To do so, they leverage resources (Maguire et al., 2004). What is more, these actors "create a whole new system of meaning that ties the functioning of disparate sets of institutions together" (Garud et al., 2007, p. 957). Consequently, institutional entrepreneurs are instrumental in bringing about institutional change (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). Institutional entrepreneurs are change agents but not every change agent is an institutional entrepreneur. An actor qualifies as an institutional entrepreneur when (s)he initiates divergent change and actively participates in the change implementation (Battilana et al., 2009).

Coining the term *innovation champion*, Schon (1963) describes the champion as "a man willing to put himself on the line for an idea of doubtful success" who "is willing to fail" and may "display persistence and courage of heroic quality" (p. 84-85). Innovation champions are individuals that take action toward strategically important aspects (Mantere, 2005). Walter et al. (2011) identify

four key innovation champion activities: pursuing innovative ideas, building network, taking responsibility, and persisting under adversity. Tushman and Nadler (1986) mention that championing actors "take creative ideas (which they may or may not have generated) and bring the ideas to life" (p. 89). To do so, they engage in bricolage activity (Molloy et al., 2020). Scholars stress such championing activities as fundamental for innovation (Burgelman, 1983; Shane & Venkataraman, 1996). Walter et al. (2011) provide empirical support for a positive link between championing behavior and innovation success.

The knowledge-based view suggests that knowledge is central to innovation (Grant, 1996) and *knowledge brokers* contribute to innovation by moving knowledge to where it is needed (Hargadon & Sutton, 1997). Knowledge brokers represent "intermediaries (…) between otherwise disconnected pools of ideas. They use their in-between vantage points to spot old ideas that can be used in new places, new ways, and new combinations" (Hargadon & Sutton, 2000, p. 158). Through the mobilization of knowledge, knowledge brokers link, recombine, and move to new contexts otherwise disconnected information (Currie & White, 2012). Brokering occurs in a cycle of network access, knowledge absorption, knowledge integration, and implementation (Verona et al., 2006). This ensures that "the right knowledge is in the right hands at the right time" (Currie & White, 2012, p. 1333). Such flows of knowledge are fundamental for innovation (Grant, 1996).

Boundary spanners identify, translate, and circulate important information, both inside and outside the organization and often take managerial authority (Fleming & Waguespack, 2007). The literature on boundary spanning has identified two central activities of boundary spanners, namely information processing and external representation (connecting the company with external factors) (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Based on these activities, do boundary spanners execute important mechanisms in the innovation process (Tushman, 1977). These actors are essential also in interfirm relationships (Dekker et al., 2019). Although empirically correlated, brokers and boundary spanners are conceptually distinct concepts as brokers can be boundary spanners but not all boundary spanners broker (Fleming & Waguespack, 2007). Related to the concept of boundary spanners, Grigoriou & Rothaermel (2014) introduced relational stars which are actors particularly crucial for innovation as they "exhibit patterns of collaborative behavior that make them potentially valuable as sources of organizational capabilities" to innovate (p. 607).

2.4   Managers' Role in Innovation

According to Kanter et al. (1992), managing change has become managers' ultimate responsibility. Both top and middle managers are important change agents (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Mantere, 2008). Conceptual research into management innovation emphasizes managers as important change agents who drive the innovation (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Studies of related topics such as the implementation of strategy (Vaz et al., 2022) or culture change (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003) present a similar view of managers being the agents of such initiatives. Also in the area of innovation implementation, studies typically depict managers as agents (Klein & Knight, 2005). Nutt (1986) highlights managers as the ones who direct and guide the implementation of innovation following different tactics. Similarly, Scott (2008) positions managers as central figures in innovation by stating that managerial professionals are typically active in the "creative core".

Innovation champions are among the most important actors for innovation (Walter et al., 2011). Frequently, however, innovation champions are not managers but other people whose position in the organizational chain of command is ill-defined (Kelley & Lee, 2010). Managers are influential in the sense that they must provide appropriate support to let champions and thus innovation thrive (Kelley & Lee, 2010). Considering the other concepts of innovation actors we presented, research emphasizes that managers often act as boundary spanners (Alexander et al., 2016) and knowledge brokers frequently have managerial authority (Fleming & Waguespack, 2007).

Studies increasingly point to the need to reconsider managers' role in change and innovation (Heyden et al., 2017; Samimi et al., 2022). Research typically maintains a distinction between change agents and recipients, and depicts managers as the change agents and organization members as the recipients (McDermott et al., 2013). In this common view, the two roles are considered distinct (Huy et al., 2014). In many cases, however, managers may be both agent and recipient of change (Balogun et al., 2015; Oreg et al., 2018). Yet, research largely neglects that managers themselves may be change recipients (Walk, 2022). Relatedly, the idea that change agents are also change recipients "has yet to receive much research attention" (Oreg & Berson, 2019, p. 299). The importance of addressing managers' double roles is underlined by role theory which suggests that role conflicts and ambiguities may occur (Biddle, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

he fact that managers themselves can be agents and recipients requires scholarly attention as it is largely overlooked in theoretical accounts and empirical research (Walk, 2022).

Overall, as the above discussion indicates, there is a lack of research on managers' change roles. This study responds to Walk (2022) who stresses the need for research into the fact that managers can be change agents and recipients simultaneously as theoretical accounts as well as empirical research have largely overlooked this question thus far.

3. Research Method

This study is built upon a exploratory study conducted by the authors of this study on the topic of agile transformations in different companies (reference not provided to keep authors anonymous). The preceding, inductive study gave us the impetus to engage in a dedicated, in-depth exploration of managers against the backdrop of management innovation in general and agile in particular. That is, in the previous study, we recurrently observed that managers played a critical role in the companies' agile initiatives in many different ways. Most strikingly, managers appeared to have a double role as change agent and recipient. We further noticed that managers frequently struggled with the new practices, structures, and behaviors expected from them.

Based on our previous insights, we figured that probing into managers in the context of agile is a promising and practically relevant research avenue. As our empirical observation is not sufficiently theorized and suffers from a lack of research, we pursued a question-driven phenomenon-based approach (Graebner et al., 2022). We used our exploratory study's insights to inform the present study. Similar to a pilot study though more extensive, the prior research allowed us to purposefully set up the present research design (Goffin et al., 2019).

3.1   Research Design and Data Collection

This study followed a qualitative approach. In line with our aim to study the microfoundations of management innovation, this study was designed to explore managers. We adopted the methodological approach of Mantere (2008) that "is based on hearing the point of (…) managers" (p. 298). Interviews with elite informants such as managers provide the unique opportunity to study

microfoundations (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). Therefore, data were (and continue to be) gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with people holding managerial positions.

Our informants came from two different companies that we selected purposefully through theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 2021; Patton, 2002). Most importantly, we sought to include companies with a similar agile setup and similar agile roles. We selected two Dutch companies, "The Bank" and "The Rail" with which the authors stood in an outsider relationship. Both companies underwent an agile transformation and introduced a similar agile model. That is to say, both companies introduced a matrix organization with agile teams, coaches, and managerial roles such as product owners, tribe leads, and chapter leads. The companies further shifted comparable organization areas to agile. Given that the companies involved the same consulting firm, we could conjecture that the firms took a similar agile approach and relied on the same external knowledge sources. Moreover, to ensure the same national context, the companies were based in the same geographical area in the Netherlands. The Dutch state had ownership shares of both companies so we involved similar types of organizations. To allow for variance, we selected companies of different industries and ages. Overall, we opted to study diverse managers from two companies in favor of depth of understanding as opposed to breadth. We follow an embedded design (Yin, 2014) with managers being our unit of analysis.

Company ID	Industry	Headquarter	Departments Examined	Interviewees
The Bank	Financial services, banking	The Nether-lands	IT, HR	Executive board member (IT) (1); COO/program manager (1); HR director IT (1); HR manager IT (1); 2 agile consultants (2); senior audit manager (1)
The Rail	Transporta-tion	The Nether-lands	IT, Business	Head of IT Department (1); Business Transformation manager (1); Head of Data and Operations (1); DIA Lead (1); Lead of Data Analytics (1); Lead of Data Platform (1)

Table 1. Sample Overview

As of March 2023, we interviewed 13 managers. Interviews varied in length from a minimum of one to over three hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Notes were taken during interviews and all available documentation got organized in a database to enhance reliability and minimize investigator bias. We purposefully sampled the interviewees and engaged in a snowball approach to identify suitable informants. Managers ranged from director level to front-line managers. Our interview protocol is shown in Appendix A.

3.2   Data Analysis

The data analysis is currently ongoing and we engage in a first round of coding of interviews (Gioia et al., 2013). The first step in the analysis was to carefully read the transcripts and identify main themes. In the further analysis of the data, we will group managers' roles and develop higher-order codes and integrate them into aggregate dimensions.

4.   Preliminary Findings

We found that managers mostly moved into those new positions that should come close to their previous "status" as expressed in their hierarchical positioning in the upper echelons. Throughout the agile transformations, managers became so-called owners and leads. We didn't observe managers "downgrade" to team member positions for instance. Rather, as our informants reported, managers that weren't shifted to managerial-like positions and managers that didn't want to change, left the companies.

Managers as Recipients of Change

In terms of our objective to explore managers' roles against the backdrop of the introduction of agile, we found that agile required managers to change such that they were change recipients. Managers across levels had to face different changes.

The introduction of agile had implications for most managers in terms of what they did on a day-to-day basis. Managerial behaviors that were increasingly required were facilitating, coaching, sponsoring, and empowering people. These activities formed a fundamental requirement of managers' new roles. Instead of being involved in the daily work of employees, managers were requested to let teams work independently. Moreover, managers had to provide the right conditions

for the teams and individuals to flourish. For many managers, these activities were new. On the level of directors, agile required managers to act differently as well. For instance, directors were (expected) to embrace agile principles such as increased transparency, customer focus, and collaboration.

The more traditional managerial tasks of supervising and monitoring were not fully replaced but were less required in the agile context. As such "managing" needed to remain part of managers' skill set. In some situations such as critical events, managers needed to make decisions and tell people what to do, thereby acting as supervisors or commanders rather than coaches. Yet, given that the teams worked largely autonomously, compared to before, managers had increased leeway to engage in strategic work like goal setting.

Managers across levels also changed their way of working by using agile practices. In "The Bank" also the director and board level started using agile in their daily activities.

Overall, the "how" and "what" of managers' work underwent changes as a consequence of the introduction of agile, making managers recipients of change. In the agile context, it appeared crucial for managers to be able to engage in both coaching and more traditional managerial aspects, depending on the condition. Yet, we observed that managers throughout different levels, from the top to frontline managers, frequently had difficulties in taking on the new behavior and letting go of the old aspects.

Managers as Agents of Change

The agile transformations required managers to be change agents. In both companies, most managers were actively involved in the companies' agile transformation. Both companies had a roadmap of the agile transformation that described the future model. Managers were expected to take care of introducing the envisioned aspects inside the organization. The execution of the roadmap and rollout of agile, therefore, laid to a significant extent on the managers. The different managers had to ensure that the units or areas they were responsible for were set up according to agile and that people relied on agile practices and principles. Managers had to ensure that a team-based structure was in place. During the agile transformations, throughout the different levels, many managers initiated and contributed to the execution of the agile model. They communicated

about agile and provided employees with important information. Managers encouraged the usage of novel work practices and introduced new structures. For instance, different managers pushed for the implementation of agile and supported the organization in enacting novel practices.

However, we also noticed that in both companies existed managers that were skeptical towards agile and didn't push for its implementation in the organization. Although the management in both companies was expected to support the agile transformation as change agents, several managers were not (able or willing) to do so. Managers that were not in favor of or even opposing agile represented a threat to the companies' agile transformation. At times the transformations were negatively affected by those managers that lacked commitment which in turn impeded the progress.

Implications of Dual Roles

As described, the agile transformations posed managers with the challenge of being recipient and agent of change. Consequently, managers were typically confronted with role expectations of both roles – as the agent and the recipient. As presented, many managers however struggled in both respects: they had difficulties with the changes they themselves were expected to embrace, and they didn't appropriately support the transformation as agents.

Most managers that didn't act as change agents did so because they had difficulties with their change recipient role. This finding indicates that the dual roles of managers as agents and recipients are a source of tensions that are yet to be explored in-depth. In other words, managers were expected to engage in two roles, and the role expectations involved or evoked tensions.

So far, we, on the one hand, observed tensions between the change agent and recipient roles. On the other hand, we found tensions within the change recipient role (facilitating versus managing). What is more, as the findings suggest there were nested role expectations due to double dual roles: agent – recipient; coach – manager. First evidence indicates that the role expectations involved tensions that can fall into behavioral and political categories.

We aim to deepen our analysis into the direction of the tensions associated with the (nested) dual roles of managers.

5. Preliminary Discussion

In a nutshell, our study supports that managers (are expected) to fulfill specific roles and responsibilities (Mintzberg, 1973). In particular, our study demonstrates that managers have a dual role in management innovation: they are agent and recipient of change. As change agents, managers initiate, support, or execute the change in the organization. As change recipients, managers themselves change what they do and how. We thus present the manager as a central figure. Institutional theorists have long pointed to the relevance of individuals as they stand in an interdependent relationship with organizations (Scott, 2001). Huising (2019) noted that the implementation of innovation and change depends on actors who have the necessary authority and resources. Overall, this study reinforces the importance of managers (Aguinis et al., 2022).

Based on our findings, we develop the notion of the "management innovation actor": an individual that typically assumes managerial authority and has a dual role of change agent and recipient. These actors can be considered to occupy dual social positions (Bourdieu, 1977). Management innovation actors are recipient and agent of change and engage in diverse activities that contribute to the success of management innovation. Given that actors who combine agent and recipient roles are not specific to agile but apply to other cases of organizational change as well (Balogun et al., 2015), we advocate that the concept of management innovation actor speaks to a wider research domain than management innovation studies and is applicable to the broader area of organizational change. As such, adjacent research streams such as strategic change would benefit from considering management innovation actors.

The management innovation actor role can be framed as paradoxical. Paradoxes indicate "contradictions between interdependent elements" (Schad et al., 2016). Contradiction and interdependence are the two core characteristics of paradox. To qualify as a paradox, they need to exist for a longer period (Putnam et al., 2016). Lüscher and Lewis (2008) suggest that "paradox lens and paradoxical inquiry may offer means for new and more enabling understandings of contradictory managerial demands and ubiquitous tensions". We posit that contradicting, interdependent elements are inherent to the role of management innovation actors. The literature offers different categories of paradox. Lewis (2000) distinguishes paradoxes of learning, organizing, and belonging. Lüscher and Lewis (2008) identify that managers are confronted with a paradox of organizing,

paradox of belonging, and paradox of performing. In the realm of management innovation, managers can be considered to experience all three types of paradoxes.

Being focused on managers, our study portrays management innovation actors mainly as people from inside the organization. Research suggests that people from outside the organization such as management consultants play an important role in management innovation and organizational change (Mosonyi et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2012). Consultants who are involved in a firm's organizational change efforts are undoubtedly change agents but they may also be recipients of the change in some way. Recently, Nigam et al. (2022) stress that people who combine insider- and outsiderness are particularly crucial change agents. Dual insider-outsiderness not only pertains to the physical or contractual affiliation with a company but can be any distinguishing features such as experience, ethnicity, age – just to mention a few. Individuals having a dual insider-outsider role may be management innovation actors when they are agent and also recipient of change. Hence, the notion of management innovation actor should consider also the duality outsider- and insiderness.

Our findings further resonate with scholars who have pointed to the need that managers are required to move beyond 'either/or' contingencies and have to instead engage in 'both/and' approaches (Lewis & Smith, 2014). Managers, therefore, require a 'paradoxical mindset' that enables working through paradoxes rather than attempting to resolve them (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Schad et al., 2016). In the paradox literature, contradictions between aspects like exploitation versus exploration or control versus openness have been described as "interrelated aspects of a greater whole" (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p. 134) or "two sides of the same coin" (Lewis, 2000, p. 761). The management innovation actor can be linked to such a paradoxical view as having a double role of agent and recipients can have opposing elements (Balogun et al., 2015). We argue that a major constituent of the management innovation actor is the actor's ability to manage paradox and thrive on it.

Our findings are in contrast to the movement in the practitioner domain and studies alike that praises the leader and associated behaviors and demonizes the manager. As we show, in the case of agile, managers are required to act as coach/facilitator as well as being more directive. The "agile manager" is thus an individual acting as both a leader and manager. The two roles should

thus be considered as the ends of a continuum on which managers have to move. Wu and Calic's (2022) discussion about how Elon Musk can successfully address the challenge of transforming Twitter highlights that the ability to engage in both transformational leadership aspects and more traditional managerial tasks is axiomatic, applying beyond the agile manager. Similarly, Kelley & Lee (2010) point to the dual role of managers as sponsors and supervisors for the development and commercialization of innovations. The authors claim that scholars need to acknowledge both sponsor and supervisor roles of managers. They further argue that managers need to find the right type and the right balance of empowering and monitoring to support innovation. The leader-manager duality may therefore not only relate to the agile manager but to individuals in hierarchical positions in general. In this view, the individuals are required to recognize when to enact which behavior.

The majority of research points to middle managers as the ones who impede change. For instance, (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008) found that middle managers were paralyzed and struggled to understand the change and its impact on their roles, relationships, and organization. Our study goes beyond by finding that also higher-level managers can impede transformations. This finding is important as opposed to the common view of higher managers as being the ones initiating and driving change.

6.   Expected Contributions

With this study, we respond to different calls for research. First and foremost, we answer the call for research by (Palmié et al., 2023) on the microfoundations of management innovation. We further respond to Aguinis et al. (2022) who pointed to the need to consider the micro-level of managers. More generally, we address the request by Foss & Pedersen (2019) for research on the microfoundations of strategy and international business. We present research on the behavioral foundations of organizations as called for by Felin et al. (2015). Moreover, we respond to calls for research on the dual role of change agent and recipient (Oreg & Berson, 2019; Walk, 2022). Thereby, we contribute to a growing body of research dealing with dual roles (Balogun et al., 2015; Nigam et al., 2022) and role theory more broadly (Biddle, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

We contribute to extant research by identifying and providing empirical evidence that in management innovation, the change agent is also change recipient. Previous research has mainly focused

on agents such that recipients have received relatively little attention (Vos & Rupert, 2018). By presenting the management innovation actor as an agent who navigates change throughout the organization and receives change, we contribute to both management innovation and microfoundations literature Through our microfoundational approach, we provide a more nuanced and richer explanation of management innovation. Our findings are especially expected to contribute to a refined understanding of the role of human agency in management innovation. While prior management innovation literature has mainly emphasized change agents (Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Vaccaro et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2012), our theorizing involves change recipients.

Proposing that the management innovation actor role is paradoxical, our study is expected to add to paradox theory. Paradoxes become increasingly crucial in the literature because "paradoxical dynamics become more salient in contemporary organizations" (Schad et al., 2016, p. 3). We believe there is particular value in drawing on paradox theory to inform the microfoundations of management innovation. By applying paradox to the study of organizational change and managers, we blend organization-level (macro) and individual-level (micro) paradoxes.

This study is expected to have practical implications as well. First, management innovation actors need to be aware of their double role as change agents and recipients. Relatedly, in an agile context, managers should possess a diverse skill base in terms of leader-manager competencies. Managers need to recognize when to act as a sponsor or facilitator and when to act as a supervisor. As part of introducing an agile operating model, companies are advised to support and strengthen managers' diverse role behaviors. Managers who see themselves as traditional managers may be in role conflict by the additional requirement to coach and facilitate people. On the other way around, individuals that are inherently more on the coaching side could face ambiguities by having to supervise. Such role conflicts can be adverse and need to be taken care of.

7. Limitations and Future Research

First, the study is currently based on a moderate number of interviews due to the practical challenge of maintaining access to companies and finding different managers willing to partake in our study. Yet, each interview was conducted in-depth. To improve the replicability and transparency of research based on interviews with elite informants such as managers, we followed Aguinis and

Solarino (2019) and provided information about our research method along the following dimensions: kind of qualitative method, research setting, relationship of researchers to the companies, documentation, sampling procedure, and data analysis. Our data originates from the Netherlands and involves mostly Dutch individuals. Therefore, the findings might have some limitations in terms of generalizability to other cultural contexts. Future studies could examine managers' roles concerning management innovation in other countries and contexts.

Second, the study is focused on a specific management innovation, namely agile. Studying agile and managers places boundary conditions on our findings. We invite future studies to corroborate our findings by using additional forms of management innovation. Studies should seek to understand whether the double role of agent and recipient is specific to agile or whether it holds for other forms of management innovations. Further light needs to be shed on the management innovation actor. Especially efforts in its conceptualization and theoretical substantiation are required. In particular, we advocate multilevel theorizing to advance management innovation research. Using a paradox lens thereby may be helpful in developing more creative and potentially insightful theorizing (Poole & van de Ven, 1989). What is more, in that we focused on managers only our insights are restricted to this set of organization members. Hence, the notion of management innovation actor is currently based on managers. However, individuals such as employees or even consultants hired by the companies may qualify as management innovation actors. Future studies should thus expand the view beyond managers.

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Appendix A. Interview guide

Opening	• Introduction of interviewer(s) and objective of the interview • Confidentiality and anonymity • Agreement to record the interview

Introduction	• Introduction of interviewee
	    ○ tenure
	    ○ function
	    ○ role/position
	    ○ leadership

Background information agile initiative	• When • Why • Who
Managers' changing role	• Please describe your role (a) before, (b) during and, (c) after the change. • How has agile changed managers' role? • What were managers main activities, work, competences, responsibilities before agile? What are managers (supposed) main activities, work, competences, responsibilities now? • Discrepancy between what managers should do and actually do? Describe and give examples
Managers' role in the change	• What has been your role in the agile transformation?

	• What activities did you engage in?
Managers' responses to agile	• What do you think about agile? Why? • What do your colleagues (managers) think about agile? Why? • What are the major doubts/issues/problems with agile? Please describe them • Who is having difficulties/struggles with agile or impedes agile? Specify the groups and describe the difficulty • How do/did your colleagues (managers) react to agile? Why? Please give examples
Last comments	• Have we missed an important aspect in our discussion? • Do you have additional comments on what we have talked about?
Closure	• Thank you • Follow up (further people to talk to)