INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Estera Gudjonyte

THE FINAL MASTER'S THESIS

TRANSFORMACIJOS PROJEKTŲ VALDYMAS PER ADAPTYVŲJĮ PAJĖGUMĄ : KAIP TRANSFORMACIJOS PROJEKTŲ VADOVAI NAVIGUOJA POKYČIO PROCESE	MANAGING TRANSITION PROJECTS THROUGH ADAPTIVE CAPACITY: HOW TRANSITION MANAGERS NAVIGATE CHANGE

Academic supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Eglė Daunienė

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SUMMARY (EN)

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL

INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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MANAGING TRANSITION PROJECTS THROUGH ADAPTIVE CAPACITY: HOW TRANSITION MANAGERS NAVIGATE CHANGE

Thesis supervisor – Assoc. Prof. Eglė Daunienė

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Short summary of thesis:

This master's thesis examines how transition managers navigate change in organizational transition projects. It explores how transition managers adjust their approaches during transition projects and what organizational factors influence adaptive capacity. The thesis further investigates how these factors contribute to effective transition processes and support transition managers in navigating change.

The purpose of this study is to understand how transition managers navigate adaptive capacity in transition projects and to identify the organizational factors that enable or constrain adaptive capacity.

The tasks of this master's thesis are:
1) To analyze the theory of transition management, transition manager and adaptive capacity.
2) To identify organizational factors.
3) To determine positive and negative organizational factors.
4) To analyze how those factors affect project outcomes.
5) To evaluate and provide a structured list of organizational factors that can support transition managers' adaptive capacity.

A qualitative research method was employed. Eight experienced transition managers participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a personal probing technique. Eight open-ended questions, aligned with the research objectives, were designed to examine how transition managers apply adaptive capacity in practice and how organizational factors influence their ability to do so.

The results demonstrated that transition managers' ability to use adaptive capacity is influenced by leadership support, clear communication, sufficient resources, psychological safety, decision ownership, freedom to make decisions, preparation and documentation, and creative thinking. Conversely, limited resources, delayed HR and legal involvement, poor communication structures, and lack of IT support reduce adaptive capacity.

To conclude, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of transition management by showing that adaptive capacity is a system-level capability that must be actively enabled by the organization to achieve successful transition outcomes.

SANTRAUKA (LT)

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO VERSLO MOKYKLA

TARPTAUTINĖS PROJEKTŲ VADYBOS PROGRAMA

ESTERA GUDJONYTE

TRANSFORMACIJOS PROJEKTŲ VALDYMAS PER ADAPTYVŲJĮ PAJĖGUMĄ : KAIP TRANSFORMACIJOS PROJEKTŲ VADOVAI NAVIGUOJA POKYČIO PROCESE

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Trumpas darbo aprašymas:

Šiame magistro darbe nagrinėjama, kaip transformacijos vadovai naviguoja pokyčius organizaciniuose transformacijos projektuose. Darbe analizuojama, kaip transformacijos vadovai koreguoja savo veikimo būdus transformacijos projektų metu ir kokie organizaciniai veiksniai daro įtaką jų adaptyviam pajėgumui. Taip pat tiriama, kaip šie veiksniai prisideda prie efektyvių transformacijos procesų ir padeda transformacijos vadovams sėkmingai naviguoti pokyčio procese.

Šio tyrimo tikslas – suprasti, kaip transformacijos vadovai naviguoja adaptyvų pajėgumą transformacijos projektuose ir identifikuoti organizacinius veiksnius, kurie padeda arba riboja jų adaptyvų pajėgumą.

Šio magistro darbo uždaviniai yra šie:
1) Išanalizuoti transformacijos valdymo teoriją, transformacijos vadovo vaidmenį ir adaptyvų pajėgumą.
2) Identifikuoti organizacinius veiksnius.
3) Nustatyti teigiamus ir neigiamus organizacinius veiksnius.
4) Išanalizuoti, kaip šie veiksniai veikia projekto rezultatus.

5) Įvertinti ir pateikti struktūrizuotą organizacinių veiksnių sąrašą, kuris padėtų transformacijos vadovams taikyti adaptyvų pajėgumą.

Tyrimui atlikti buvo pasirinktas kokybinis tyrimo metodas. Tyrime dalyvavo aštuoni patyrę transformacijos vadovai. Duomenys buvo surinkti taikant pusiau struktūruotus interviu ir naudojant asmeninį gilinamąjį klausimų metodą. Aštuoni atviri klausimai, suderinti su tyrimo tikslais, buvo parengti siekiant ištirti, kaip transformacijos vadovai praktiškai taiko adaptyvų pajėgumą ir kaip organizaciniai veiksniai veikia jų gebėjimą tai daryti.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad transformacijos vadovų gebėjimą taikyti adaptyvų pajėgumą veikia vadovų palaikymas, aiški komunikacija, pakankami ištekliai, psichologinis saugumas, sprendimų atsakomybės aiškumas, laisvė priimti sprendimus, pasiruošimas ir dokumentacija bei kūrybiškas mąstymas. Tuo tarpu riboti ištekliai, pavėluotas personalo ir teisinės funkcijos įsitraukimas, neefektyvios komunikacijos struktūros ir IT palaikymo trūkumas mažina adaptyvų pajėgumą.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad šis tyrimas prisideda prie gilesnio transformacijos valdymo supratimo, atskleisdamas, jog adaptyvus pajėgumas yra sisteminis gebėjimas, kuriam organizacija turi aktyviai sudaryti sąlygas, siekiant sėkmingų transformacijos projektų rezultatų.

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BPO – Business Process Outsourcing

COR – Complex Outsourcing Relationship

DTP – Desktop Procedures

FA – Financial Accounting

IS – Information Systems

KS – Knowledge Sharing

KT – Knowledge Transfer

OSP – Outsource Service Provider

PM – Project Manger

SME – Subject Matter Expert

SOP – Standard Operational Procedures

SSC – Shared Service Center

TM – Transition Manager

INTRODUCTION

In today's global economy, many companies are choosing to centralize support functions. As Bellantuono, N., Nuzzi, A., Pontrandolfo, P., & Scozzi, B. (2021) highlight, the most significant challenge during transition phases is lack of management support, lack of clearly defined and achievable objectives, and poor communication. Successful transitions therefore depend on the capacity of organizations and individuals to adapt continuously to evolving conditions.

Early outsourcing arrangements in the 1980s and early 1990s were largely cost-driven and focused on routine manufacturing and IT activities. Over time, outsourcing practices evolved to encompass more complex and strategic service functions, marking the emergence of business process outsourcing (BPO) in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This shift represents a broader trend from transactional outsourcing toward service-oriented, knowledge-intensive outsourcing strategies, requiring organizations to manage more integrated processes and adapt to new operational models (Holmström & Rom, 2009; Lacity, Solomon, Yan, & Willcocks, 2011). In addition, Hätönen and Eriksson (2009) emphasize that this shift was not merely a change in cost structures but reflected a deeper strategic reorientation, in which outsourcing became a means to access external capabilities, foster organizational learning, and support long-term competitiveness rather than short-term efficiency gains.

This concept has allowed organizations to focus on their core competencies while leveraging specialized skills from external providers. Dong-Hoon Yang, Seongcheol Kim, Changi Nam and Ja-Won Min (2007) in their article write that, as information technology outsourcing has become a critical issue, business process outsourcing (BPO) an advanced form of Information Systems (IS) outsourcing is expected to be "the next big wave" in information technology services. Yadong Luo, Qinqin Zheng, Vaidyanathan Jayaraman (2010) BPO services have expanded beyond traditional back-office processes to engage in performing high-end, knowledge-intensive services in areas such as banking, finance, taxation, law, logistics, consulting, and healthcare. Gambal, Asatiani & Kotlarsky (2022) in their academic research indicates that outsourcing practices have evolved far beyond traditional IT support, accounting, and call center services towards strategic, value-creating activities that involve innovation and complex business functions. A theoretical review of outsourcing literature shows that the focus in outsourcing research has shifted from cost reduction toward enabling strategic innovation for client organizations, reflecting a broader trend in which external partners contribute to knowledge-intensive, transformative business activities rather than merely routine administrative task.

Peer-reviewed research indicates that the 21st-century global economy is increasingly defined by interconnected systemic challenges, including climate transitions, public health crises, and geopolitical disruptions which require innovation, adaptive capacity, and sustainable strategic responses rather than short-term cost-based decisions. For example, Siirilä and Salonen (2024) describe how economies are navigating a "polycrisis" in which resilience and innovation become central drivers of long-term value creation, reframing economic priorities toward sustainability and adaptive capacity over traditional metrics alone. Therefore, transition management must continuously evolve in alignment with shifting business priorities, technological advances, and global challenges, ensuring that outsourcing strategies remain relevant, value-driven, and resilient over time.

Jai Ganesh and Deependra Moitra (2004) describe that transition management is a key step before an offshore BPO project becomes fully operational. It begins with the formation of a project management team, consisting of representatives from both the outsourcing firm and the outsourcing service provider (OSP), to oversee knowledge transfer, governance, and the alignment of processes. Building on this foundation, Blair, Woodcock, and Pagano (2022) emphasize that global sourcing should be initiated through the development of a clear outsourcing strategy, which requires strong communication between principal stakeholders. At the outset, the operations to be outsourced must be identified, and collaboration should occur to create a detailed specification. This specification defines the outsourcing parameters, establishes the required service levels, and ideally becomes part of the formal outsourcing contract. Together, these perspectives highlight how effective outsourcing depends not only on contractual clarity but also on structured transition management.

The evolution of outsourcing from manufacturing to complex, knowledge-intensive and innovation-driven functions has created the need for effective transition management, where managing adaptive capacity becomes essential to ensure the success of organizational transitions. Rossokha et al. (2021) highlight that adaptive capacity is essential for managing innovation projects under uncertainty. By monitoring risks and financial outcomes at intermediate stages, firms can make timely decisions, optimize resources, and sustain long-term innovation. This underscores adaptive capacity as a strategic tool for navigating uncertainty and ensuring successful transitions.

To date, no research has been conducted to provide a deeper analysis into how transition managers navigate adaptive capacity in organizational transition projects. There is limited understanding of whether organizational factors influence transition manager's ability to adapt during transition projects and what outcomes it gives overall. This lack of knowledge creates the

problem that this study seeks to address, how transition managers **navigate adaptive capacity** in transition projects, and what are **organizational factors** that help transition managers to navigate change through organizational adaptive capacity.

The **object** of this study is to analyze how transition managers navigate change in organizational transition projects with particular focus on the organizational factors that influence adaptive capacity and their impact on project outcomes

The **purpose** of this study is to investigate how transition managers navigate change in organizational transition projects and to identify the organizational factors that enable or constrain organizational adaptive capacity.

Specifically, this research will focus on the following objectives:

- To review and analyze existing studies on transition management, transition management frameworks, the role of the transition manager, and adaptive capacity in outsourcing projects.
- To identify the organizational factors that enable or constrain transition manager's ability to adapt during these projects.
- To explore through interviews the practical strategies, behaviors and decision-making approaches that transition managers use to respond to challenges and leverage enabling organizational factors.
- To assess how the presence of positive organizational factors and the mitigation of negative factors influence project outcomes.
- To provide a structured list of organizational factors that can support the application of adaptive capacity in future transition projects.

This research is new and important because it focuses on how transition managers actually navigate change in their work. While both transition management and adaptive capacity are well described in the literature, there is limited understanding of how these concepts are applied in real projects and how organizational factors help or constrain them.

To do this, the research uses a literature review and qualitative interviews. The literature review looks at transition management principles, frameworks, adaptive capacity theories and transition manager role in transition projects, while the interviews with transition managers explore how transition managers leverage adaptive capacity in practice and how positive and negative organizational factors influence organization's adaptive capacity. The data collected are analyzed to identify common patterns, challenges, and best practices in navigating transitions under varying organizational conditions.

The work is organized to first present the literature review, then explain the research methods, including how the interviews were designed, how participants were selected, and how the data were analyzed, along with the results. The findings are then discussed, highlighting how organizational factors shape adaptive capacity and impact project outcomes. Finally, the thesis ends with a summary of the results and suggestions for future research.

Difficulties and limitations encountered during the research include the relatively small number of interview participants, which makes the findings highly context specific. As with all qualitative research, the results rely on the openness and honesty of respondents and are influenced by their personal perceptions as well as the researcher's interpretation. Confidentiality restrictions may also limit the level of detail provided about specific projects. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable empirical insights into how adaptive capacity is practiced in transition management and offers guidance for organizational transition projects.

1. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS ADAPTIVE CAPACITY IN TRANSITION PROJECT

Adaptive capacity in transition projects is the ability of organizations and their members to learn, adjust, and respond effectively to challenges and uncertainties as they arise during periods of change. According to Udo Staber and Jörg Sydow (2002), adaptation should not be seen as a fixed or optimal end state, but rather, it is a dynamic process of continuous learning and adjustment. This approach highlights the importance of navigating ambiguity and complexity, showing that adaptive capacity develops through ongoing interaction, reflection, and iterative problem-solving rather than through predetermined solutions. In the context of transition projects, especially outsourcing initiatives, adaptive capacity is closely connected to resilience, flexibility, and the ability to manage unexpected changes. Organizations with strong adaptive capacity are better able to cope with unexpected events, recover from disruptions and crises, and adapt to external environments for effective project delivery. (Zhang et al., 2023).

1.1 Transition Management

Lacity, Solomon, Yan, & Willcocks (2011) emphasize that organizations with strong internal capabilities, technical expertise, managerial experience, and knowledge absorption, combined with effective transition management practices, achieve significantly better outcomes in business process outsourcing engagements than organizations with less mature capabilities. Ume Sumayya and Ume Amen (2016) highlight that the importance of transition management has grown over time, as organizations face challenges like downsizing, outsourcing, and budget cuts, requiring strategies to maintain stability and competitiveness.

According to Loorbach, Frantzeskaki, and Huffenreuter (2015), transition management can be applied in complex societal systems where persistent problems exist and current practices are inadequate, particularly in contexts characterized by uncertainty about future developments and significant sustainability challenges. This is the reasson why transition management is most relevant during outsourcing projects. Empirical research shows that outsourcing and offshoring transitions can significantly impact employees' job security, work dynamics, and psychological well-being if not managed carefully. For example, studies have found that offshoring may increase job separation and reduce job security for domestic workers, highlighting the need for thoughtful transition strategies that consider workforce effects and organizational change processes (El-Sahli, Gullstrand & Olofsdotter, 2022).

Furthermore, XiaoYan Qiao (2025) continues that a major challenge lies in reshaping employee mindsets, as many finance professionals resist moving from traditional manual roles to

digital, data-driven practices, leading to adaptation difficulties that can slow the success of transformation initiatives. According to Arja Flinkman, Benita Gullkvist, and Henri Teittinen (2024), the most important aspect of transition management is the presence of temporally capable change agents who can adapt to shifting conditions, apply suitable interventions at the right time, and balance the pace of change to ensure a smooth and sustainable organizational transformation. J-P Muka and C. Marnewick (2018) emphasize that a successful transition is critical to the overall success of an outsourcing project, as it helps prevent negative outcomes such as disruption to business operations, increased resistance to organizational change, or harm to client–vendor relationships and points out that one of barriers to success is poor transition management.

The "Roof transition" case study (Derk Loorbach and Jan Rotmans, 2010) illustrates these principles in practice. It shows how transition management creates new business opportunities, enhances organizational reputation, and advances sustainability by reframing systems and aligning stakeholders. Similarly, organizations employ transition management to centralize financial operations "under one roof," strengthening efficiency, resilience, and long-term sustainable development. While Derk Loorbach and Jan Rotmans describes what succesful transitions provides, Ivan Mitchell and Phil James (2017) remind us of the other side of transition management, where in pre-phase employees often experience concerns about job insecurity and poor communication, which underscores that managing the human dimension of change is as important as implementing structural reforms. Ghulam Murtaza Khan, Siffat Ullah Khan, Habib Ullah Khan, Muhammad Ilyas (2022) outlines 11 key challenges (Figure 1) in Complex Outsourcing Relationships (COR) that provides cost savings and flexibility but is harder to manage due to multiple stakeholders and coordination challenges, increasing the risk of project failure.

Figure 1.

Key challenges in COR

Source: created by the author. Khan, Habib Ullah Khan, Muhammad Ilyas (2022).

Transition management takes things step by step, learning and adjusting along the way instead of following a strict plan. Christopher Williams and Susanne Durst (2019) note that the transition period is a non-linear process of knowledge transfer leading up to a crucial "ramp-up" point, where the vendor's offshore team fully assumes responsibility for core activities.

So, effective transition management establishes the foundation for a structured, transparent, and collaborative outsourcing relationship, ensuring that all stakeholders remain aligned throughout the process. Building on this foundation, the next section explores the phases of transition management, outlining the sequential steps through which planning, execution, and stabilization are achieved.

1.2 Transition management phases

Subroto Roy and K. Savakumar (2012) write that effective management of the transition stage in knowledge-based services involves the need for appropriate "management control" mechanisms developed at the transition stage. Arja Flinkman, Benita Gullkvist and Henri Teittinen (2024) describe financial accounting (FA) in four distinct stages in the transition process. Each is defined by the target and timing of specific management interventions. The first is the contact stage, which involves the initial interactions between the parties and the mutual definition of the scope of the transition. This is followed by the contract stage, where agreements are formalized through the design and signing of contracts at both corporate and operational levels,

accompanied by the development of a Go-Live roadmap to guide the implementation. Erik Beulen, Vinay Tiwari and Eric van Heck (2019) points out that transition as a project has a clear starting and end points.

As Ilan Oshri, Julia Kotlarsky, and Leslie P. Willcocks (2022) academic research shows that the transition phase in outsourcing is strategically critical and inherently complex, requiring executives and managers to be actively engaged with the intricacies of the process rather than treating it as a simple handover. Scholars note that poor management of the transition phase is a major factor in outsourcing failure, and organizations with stronger capabilities, governance practices, and managerial understanding of transition challenges tend to achieve better outcomes. Organizations typically move through four stages of transition (Figure 2): transition planning, knowledge transfer, transition governance, and retained organization.

Figure 2.

Theoretical framework of transition performance
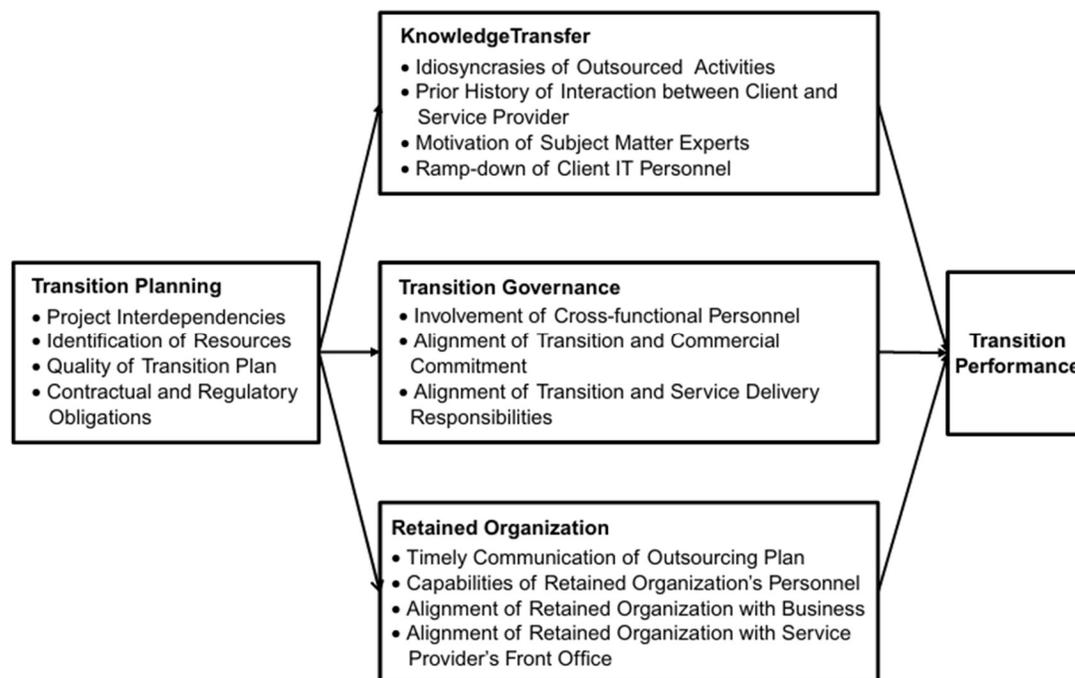
Source: Erik Beulen, Vinay Tiwari and Eric van Heck (2011). Understanding transition performance during offshore IT outsourcing P. 207

While all phases in transition management are important and should be carefully planned and executed, not all factors contribute equally to the success of the transition. Among the four

factors, Erik Beulen, Vinay Tiwari and Eric van Heck (2011) in their case study found that knowledge transfer and transition governance had a stronger positive influence on transition performance.

In transition management, a similar sequential approach can be applied, where one phase is completed before the next phase begins and it is called "Sample predictive life cycle" (Figure 3). This mirrors the predictive development approach described in the PMBOK (PMI Seventh Edition July 2021), in which each phase is performed only once and focuses on a specific set of tasks. For example, in transition management, the second phase cannot commence until the first phase is fully completed. However, unexpected changes such as adjustments in scope, new requirements, or shifts in the organizational environment may require revisiting earlier phases before proceeding.

Figure 3.

Sample predictive life cycle
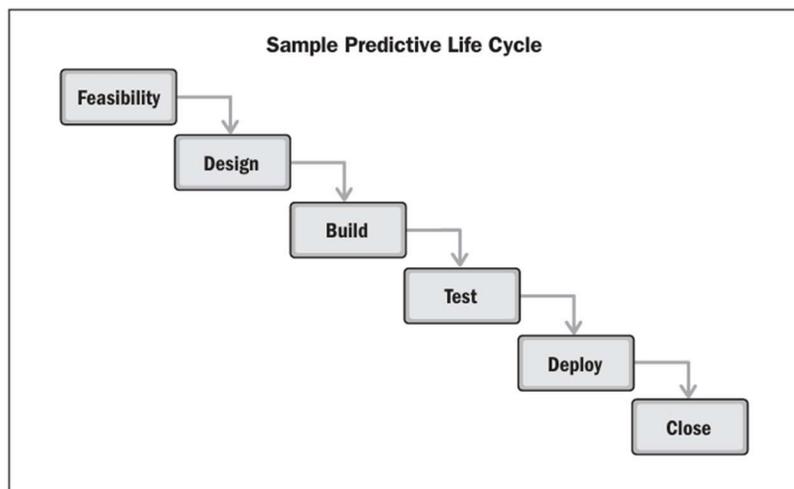
Source: PMBOK® Guide, PMI Seventh Edition July 2021.

All phases have a gate review (also known as stage gate - Figure 4) to check that the desired outcomes or exit criteria for the phase have been achieved before proceeding to the next phase. Exit criteria may be tied to acceptance criteria for deliverables, contractual obligations, meeting specific performance targets, or other tangible measures.

Therefore, every phase has different milestones, and completion of those milestones are an indicator and green light to move to the next phase. As Hakeem Omolade Sunmola (2020) writes, creation of milestones is considered an important aspect of project management, as it helps to clarify a predefined set of deliverables that should have reached a predefined state. This

enables the manager to determine review points and assess the status of project progress, which helps the project manager create a clear and attainable project plan.

Figure 4.

Meeting cascade of project phases
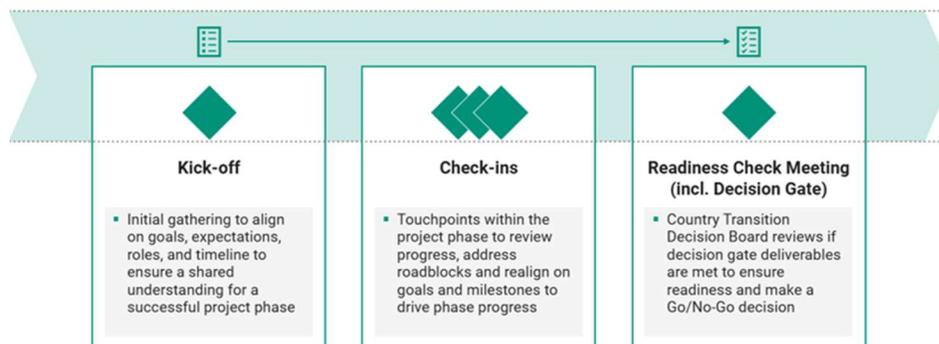
Source: created by the author

While discussing different transition management frameworks, it is important not to overlook the human dimension. As Rick L. Click and Thomas N. Duening (2005) emphasize, human and social factors cannot be ignored and must be addressed appropriately in order for a project to succeed. These factors include:

- Developing various teams to manage the BPO initiative throughout its life cycle
- Reassuring staff of their role in the company
- Training people on the new way of doing business
- Dealing with job loss and/or reassignment
- Keeping morale high throughout the change process
- Encouraging people to participate in decision making
- Understanding cultural differences between the organization and BPO partner.

Managing human and social factors is essential for project success, which highlights the critical role of the Transition Manager (TM). Literature shows that behaviours such as communication, stakeholder engagement, relationship building, and emotional intelligence are more strongly linked to project success than purely task-oriented actions (Rehan, Thorpe & Heravi, 2024). Scholars Ochoa Pacheco et al. (2023) review project manager competencies and highlight that social (conflict management, communication, leadership) and personal competences (emotional intelligence, result orientation) often outweigh technical skills in influencing project outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial for the TM to ensure clear communication, engage stakeholders,

and promote collaborative decision-making, shaping how people respond to change and affecting adaptive capacity and overall project performance. Flyvbjerg (2021) adds that in project management, both cognitive and political biases influence decision-making and outcomes, indicating that project leaders must understand and manage these behavioral influences to guide projects effectively.

1.2.1 Transition planning phase

David C. Chou and Amy Y. Chou (2009) note that many tasks must be completed during the planning and strategy-setting stages of an outsourcing initiative. These include defining goals and objectives, setting the scope and schedule, estimating costs, and deciding on the business model and processes to be used. Careful planning at this stage helps position a firm for a successful outsourcing project, while poor preparation can lead to major challenges later.

As John Effah and Ibrahim Osman Adam (2021) outlines the project is kicked off with the signing of a master service agreement (MSA) between the two parties, followed by the signing of a Statement of Work (SOW) that defined the project's scope. This formal agreement stage marks the transition from strategic intent to actionable execution, establishing a shared understanding of responsibilities, deliverables, and timelines between the client and the service provider. It serves as the foundation for building trust, setting performance expectations, and ensuring accountability throughout the transition.

At this point, both parties begin aligning resources, developing detailed transition plans, and identifying potential risks to ensure that the project moves forward in a structured and collaborative manner. Rob Babin (2017) describes transition planning as a strategic process for transferring services, personnel, or infrastructure whether to a vendor, from a vendor, or between vendors in a way that ensures continuity and minimizes operational disruption. Building on this idea, Abrahams, Farayola, Kaggwa, Uwaoma, Hassan, and Dawodu (2024) emphasize that effective transition planning also involves data migration, maintaining service continuity, and managing risks to ensure a smooth handover without compromising member services or data integrity. They further highlight that consistent communication, joint planning, and a shared understanding among all stakeholders are key to achieving a coordinated and resilient transition.

As Click and Duening (2005) emphasize, the initiation and implementation of a BPO project require close attention to technological issues during the transition planning phase. The transition manager plays a critical role in ensuring that the following factors are effectively addressed to enable the project to move successfully into the knowledge-sharing phase:

- Compatibility of systems between the BPO buyer and vendor

- Data and system security
- Backup and recovery procedures in the case of system failure
- Data interface challenges and strategies
- Software and database compatibility challenges
- Data and knowledge management

1.2.2 Knowledge transfer phase

Oliver Krancher (2020) outline that the knowledge transfer phase is a critical stage in outsourcing and offshoring transitions, focusing on identifying what knowledge must be shared, selecting effective transfer mechanisms, managing contextual factors such as the recipient's expertise, and addressing bottlenecks in individual and application knowledge, which often require active client involvement. This phase is essential because any gaps in transferred knowledge can directly affect operational efficiency and the quality of delivered services. Researchers Stefan Blumenberga, Heinz-Theo Wagnerb, Daniel Beimborn (2009) find that a higher level of shared knowledge is positively related to performance, as the integration of diverse knowledge domains provides insights that enhance both the exploitation and exploration of organizational resources. In other words, organizations that successfully facilitate knowledge transfer can leverage both existing capabilities and new opportunities, leading to improved overall outcomes during and after the transition.

Ai Ling Chua, Shan L. Pan (2008) mark that as organizations continue to take advantage of cost arbitrage between onshore and offshore locations, the importance of knowledge transfer from the onshore to the offshore staff is vital, as knowledge that is not transferred will be lost. Failure to properly transfer knowledge can result in operational delays, repeated errors, and reduced return on investment from outsourcing initiatives.

Knowledge can be categorized in multiple ways as Oliver Krancher (2020) shows in this research and each with specific implications for the transition process. Understanding these categories (Table 1) helps ensure that both individual and collective, explicit and tacit, as well as embedded and specific knowledge are effectively identified, transferred, and applied during the transition to maintain operational continuity and performance.

Table 1.

Types of knowledge

Knowledge Category	Definition (Examples)	Key Findings
Individual vs. Collective	Individual knowledge: Possessed by individuals (e.g., programming skills, an engineer's mental models about a software application) Collective knowledge: Possessed by teams or organizations (e.g., work routines, shared knowledge, transactive memory systems)	Transitions involve acquiring both individual knowledge (e.g., individuals learning to perform the outsourced task) and collective knowledge (e.g., units adjusting their routines to the new setup).
Explicit vs. Tacit	Explicit knowledge: Can be communicated without losing value (e.g., passwords) Tacit knowledge: Loses value if communicated (e.g., programming skills, mental models)	Transitions involve the transfer of both explicit and tacit knowledge.
Specific vs. Generic	Specific knowledge: Loses value when redeployed to another client (e.g., custom-built software knowledge) Generic knowledge: Can be reused across clients (e.g., programming skills)	Transferring client-specific knowledge requires substantial client involvement and can cause cost overruns; transferring generic knowledge can also be challenging.
Technical Knowledge	Knowledge about hardware and software programming	In some transitions, technical knowledge is less critical as engineers already possess it; in others, new SDUs may lack technical expertise.
Application Knowledge	Knowledge about the software application's structure, functionality, and behavior	Particularly in software maintenance projects, application knowledge is often the most difficult to transfer.

Process Knowledge	Knowledge about tools, techniques, methods, approaches, and principles used in software development	Can be critical if the new SDU lacks business software development experience; sometimes less critical, but collaboration may require new process development.

Source: Oliver Krancher (2020). Knowledge Transfer in the Transition Phase: Review of the Literature and Implications for Digital Business Strategy and Agility. P. 5-6

The most common Knowledge Transfer (KT) phase is divided into several subphases. Jihong Chen and Robert J. McQueen (2010) outlined structured knowledge transfer stages, which are primarily used to transfer embrained and encoded knowledge. According to their research, the transfer process can be described as a sequence of four stages:

- Initiation: The China-based support center searches for qualified knowledge providers at the US-based support center.
- Implementation: The knowledge recipient learns knowledge from the knowledge provider.
- Ramp-up: The knowledge recipient applies the acquired knowledge.
- Integration: The knowledge recipient integrates what has been learned, enabling them to assume full responsibility as a support agent.

These stages not only facilitate the transfer of knowledge but also enhance adaptive capacity and the ability of individuals or organizations to adjust to new circumstances and challenges. According to Hanif Ur Rahman, Khan, Raza, Afsar, and Nazir (2020), knowledge sharing is the process of passing knowledge from one person, team, or organization to another, and strong relationships and good partnerships are essential to make this transfer effective..

1.2.3 Transition governance

Beulen, Tiwari, and van Heck (2011) identified four sub-factors within transition governance, namely, involvement of cross-functional or multi-disciplinary personnel from both client and service providers, alignment of transition responsibility and commercial commitment, and alignment of transition responsibility and service delivery responsibility.

Transition Governance

- Cross-functional involvement: Engagement of multi-disciplinary teams from both client and service provider is essential for communication and coordination.

- Alignment of transition responsibility and commercial commitment: Ensuring sufficient budgeted effort during the transition period is critical despite contractual cost pressures.
- Alignment of transition responsibility and service delivery responsibility: Close cooperation between transition managers and service delivery managers ensures continuity and effective handover.

   Retained Organization

- Timely communication of the outsourcing plan: Clear messaging to client personnel about post-outsourcing roles and expectations.
- Capabilities of retained personnel: Staff must be able to handle new processes; training or additional resources may be required.
- Alignment with business objectives: Processes within the retained organization must align with overall business goals to maintain continuity.
- Alignment with service provider's front office: Clear roles and responsibilities between client and provider facilitate coordination and accountability.

As scholars Beulen, Tiwari, & van Heck (2011) outline, these sub-factors collectively determine the success of the transition by supporting knowledge transfer, coordination, and continuity of service. Poleto et al. (2022) examine how relational governance shape behaviors in IT outsourcing relationships and outlines that success of a relationship depends on the transactions' quality.

1.3 Transition manager role in the project

The person assigned by the performing organization to lead the project team that is responsible for achieving the project objectives is a Project Manager (PMI Seventh Edition, July 2021). Scholars Salimimoghadam, Ghanbaripour, Tumpa, & Watanabe (2025) indicate that emotional intelligence, communication skills, strategic thinking, adaptive capacity, and empowerment consistently contribute to project success across sectors. These competencies enhance collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making in uncertain contexts. Enablers such as supportive organizational cultures, effective communication, and empowering leadership behaviors strengthen their application, while barriers, including an overemphasis on technical skills, rigid cultures, and limited use of competency-based frameworks, can undermine their effectiveness.

In research, Ellen Mc Loughlin and Anushree Priyadarshini (2021) highlight that the identification, assessment, and development of project managers will increasingly emphasize adaptive capacity as a core competency. Research outline adaptive dimensions (Table 2) that

represent the highest frequency of experience reported by project managers, emphasizing that adaptive capacity in stress management, crisis response, interpersonal communication, and cross-cultural engagement is critical for effective leadership in complex transition and outsourcing environments.

Table 2.

Adaptive dimensions demonstrated by project managers

Adaptive Dimension	Description / Context	Key Insights
Handling emergencies or crisis situations	Responding rapidly to unexpected challenges and making quick, effective decisions under pressure.	Managing emergencies was identified as the most frequent adaptive behavior, highlighting project manager's capacity for swift, decisive action in high-pressure contexts.
Handling work stress	Remaining calm, providing direction, and guiding others during periods of high tension or uncertainty.	Stress management emerged as a constant aspect of the project manager's role, reinforcing the importance of emotional resilience and leadership stability.
Demonstrating interpersonal adaptability	Adjusting communication styles and behaviors to effectively interact with diverse team members and stakeholders.	Frequent demonstration of interpersonal adaptability suggests that relationship management and communication flexibility are central to successful project execution.
Demonstrating cultural adaptability	Collaborating effectively across different cultural and organizational environments.	Cultural adaptability was one of the highest-rated dimensions, indicating strong cross-cultural competence as a key adaptive capability.

Source: created by the author. Adaptability in the workplace: Investigating the adaptive performance job requirements for a project manager. P.5

A transition manager is directly in charge of every stage of a transition project, overseeing the process from start to finish to ensure everything runs smoothly.
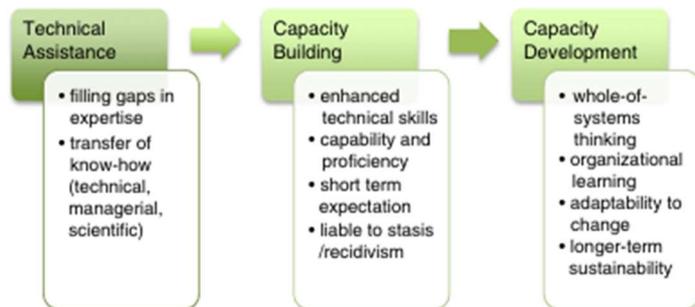
1.4 Adaptive capacity

Udo Staber, Jörg Sydow (2002) highlights that adaptive capacity refers to the ability to cope with unknown future circumstances. Organizations with adaptive capacity can reconfigure

themselves quickly in changing environments rather than merely identify existing demands and then exploit the available resources. Bert de Groot, Wim Leendertse, and Jos Arts (2020) highlight that transport infrastructure networks face rapidly changing contexts, including climate change, new mobility technologies, aging infrastructure, demographic shifts, and increasing stakeholder involvement. These challenges require organizations to enhance both physical flexibility and organizational adaptive capacity, with learning as a central component. Capacity development (Figure 5) may refer to both process and outcomes– i.e. the efforts to improve individual capabilities and organizational performance and/or the results of those efforts in terms of capacities developed.

Figure 5.

Capacity progression

Source: Peter McEvoy, Malcolm Brady and Ronaldo Munck (2016). Capacity development through international projects: a complex adaptive systems perspective. P.531

The idea of *adaptive capacity* for an organization's ability to learn, adjust, and reorganize in response to change has developed alongside the evolution of outsourcing and global services management. Earlier studies in outsourcing mainly emphasized cost savings and process optimization, but this perspective has shifted toward recognizing the importance of flexibility, learning, and responsiveness. Recent research shows that the ability to adapt has become central to sustaining performance in global sourcing environments. Seyed Mohammad Amin Javid (2024) outline that in the contemporary landscape of industrial development, outsourcing has emerged as a pivotal strategic tool for firms aiming to enhance competitiveness, operational efficiency, and flexibility in project execution. Particularly in large-scale industrial projects, where complexity, uncertainty, and resource constraints dominate, outsourcing decisions significantly influence project outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, and organizational agility.

The case study by Marius Goldberg, Axel Kieninger, Gerhard Satzger, and Hansjörg Fromm (2014) highlights that the most significant challenge during the transition phase is the shift in mindsets (Figure 6). In fact, many of the other challenges identified in the study are closely linked to this need for a change in perspective. Similarly, John W. Reich, Alex J. Zautra, and John Stuart Hall (2010) emphasize that responding to challenges whether severe or minor enables organizations to build adaptive capacity. As Udo Staber, Jörg Sydow (2002) writes organizations have adaptive capacity when learning takes place at a rate faster than the rate of change in the conditions that require dismantling old routines and creating new ones.

Figure 6.

The five major challenges of the transition phase
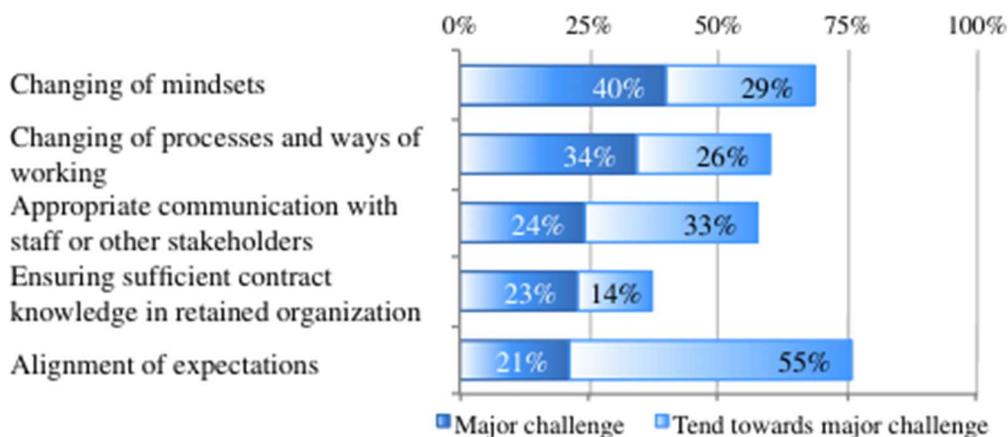
Source: Transition and Delivery Challenges of Retained Organizations in IT Outsourcing. Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Karlsruhe Service Research Institute. 2014 p.63

According to Stephanie Duchek (2019), adaptive capacity is a crucial element of managing resilience, which also involves adapting to challenges and turning change into an opportunity. Adaptive capacity can be understood at different levels of analysis and should be clearly distinguished as either an organizational capability or a personal capability.

Staber and Sydow (2002) explain that **organizational adaptive capacity** is not about how individual employees behave, but about how the organization works as a whole. It is built into system-level elements such as organizational learning, how resources are rearranged, and how decisions are made, which together allow the organization to change its strategies and operations over time.

In contrast, **adaptive capacity at the individual level**, as described by Pulakos et al. (2000), refers to a person's ability to adjust their behavior, learn new skills, and perform well in new or changing situations. This type of adaptive capacity is often called *adaptive performance* and includes skills such as flexibility in thinking, problem-solving, learning quickly, and managing emotions. While individual adaptive capacity affects how people deal with change, it does not on its own represent the adaptive capacity of the organization. Distinguishing between these two levels is important, as organizations may employ highly adaptable individuals while still lacking the structures and processes required for collective adaptation (Staber & Sydow, 2002).

Seyed Mohammad Amin Javid (2024) highlights that strong communication, both formal and informal, is essential for the success of outsourcing and transition projects also clear structures for reporting, escalation, and regular updates help teams solve problems more efficiently. The study also shows that being adaptable through flexible contracts, crisis plans, and room for renegotiation helps organizations stay responsive and maintain stability when project conditions change. As Ian Burton, Elizabeth Malone, and Saleemul Huq (2005) explain, adaptive capacity is the property of a system to adjust its characteristics or behavior to expand its coping range. They highlight three major tasks to assess and enhance it:

- assessing current adaptive capacity;

- identifying the constraints of adaptive capacity and developing actions to enhance adaptive capacity.

According to the authors to assess current adaptive capacity, relevant indicators should be developed to reflect how well a system can respond to change. Although these indicators are often more difficult to define than risk indicators, they can be established through targeted questions posed to stakeholders. This approach helps identify the existing strengths and weaknesses of the system, providing a foundation for the next steps in improving adaptive capacity. Research by Albert Plugge, Harry Bouwman, and Francisco-Jose Molina-Castillo (2013) highlights that adaptive capacity is crucial for maintaining competitiveness in outsourcing relationships. Their findings show that providers must continuously monitor and respond to changing client circumstances to remain agile and deliver high-quality performance. The study emphasizes that a provider's ability to adapt should be a key factor in clients' outsourcing decisions, as it determines how well the partnership can cope with environmental uncertainty and sustain long-term success.

1.4.1 Organizational adaptive capacity framework

Henrik Hassel and Alexander Cedergren (2025) presented several methods for assessing organizational adaptive capacity such as retrospective when organizations aim to understand the situations when things go wrong and opposite, when things go right or proactive assessment. The benefit of retrospective assessment is that there is concrete evidence of event occurrences that can be scrutinized in the search for indicators of adaptive capacity. The same authors, Henrik Hassel and Alexander Cedergren (2024), demonstrate through their case analysis that multiple interrelated factors support the development of adaptive capacity, including strong trust relationships across hierarchical levels, a polycentric structure that enables autonomous departmental decision-making while preserving necessary central coordination, clearly defined strategic objectives, systematic learning from both minor and major disruptions, and a high degree of asset literacy among staff. As Charlotte Gorley (2016) describes in her research that adaptive capacity relies on several key components (Figure 7): an entrepreneurial mindset, future orientation, creativity and innovation, effective systems, communication, a learning-oriented culture, and leadership. All of which together support an organization's ability to adapt, innovate, and maintain resilience in dynamic environments.

Figure 7.

*Key components of adaptive capacity as identified in the literature review*
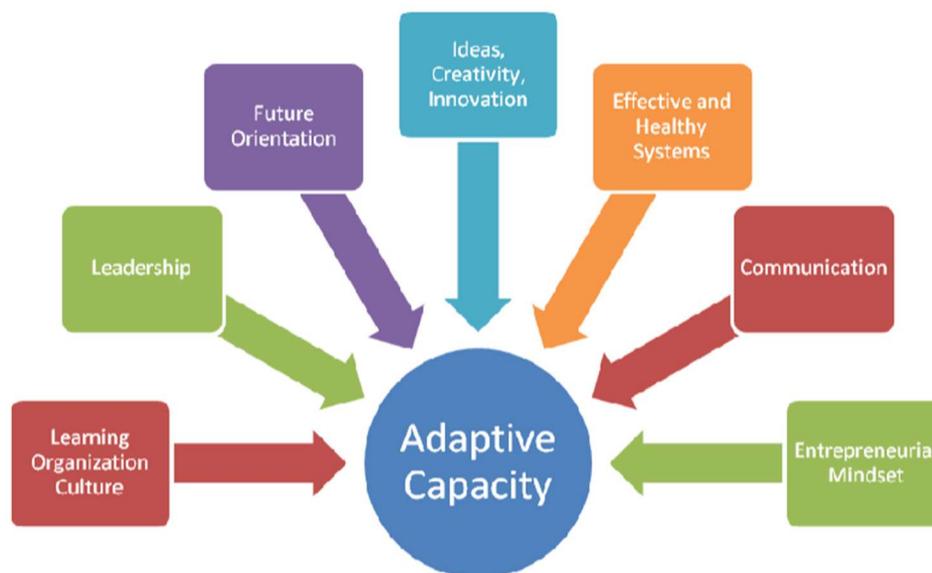
Source: Charlotte Gorley (2016). Adaptive Capacity as a Proactive Approach p.49

1.4.2 Leadership and adaptive capacity

Miguel González-Mohíno, Mario J. Donate, Fátima Guadamilla and L. Javier Cabeza-Ramírez (2024) in their research highlights that effective leadership is crucial for integrating human, technological, and organizational resources to enhance innovation capabilities. Knowledge-Oriented Leadership (KOL) combines transformational and transactional approaches to support knowledge creation, sharing, and integration. By facilitating learning, communication, coordination, and team cohesion, KOL strengthens the organization's adaptive capacity and ability to respond to change. Hongsheng Kan, Yujuan Li, and Xue Li (2025) in their research implicates that organizational structure shapes knowledge flow and decision-making through authority distribution, communication mechanisms and integration capabilities, thereby influencing innovation outcomes. Highly formalized structures offer control and coordination but can create bottlenecks and limit knowledge sharing, reducing innovation performance. Jonas Hermann Schulze and Felix Pinkow (2020) illustrates (Figure 8) four types of adaptive spaces created by leaders to support innovation:

- *Head Space* — dedicated time away from client work to explore ideas and strengthen competencies;

- *Meetings* — both formal and informal interactions that connect employees across teams and promote collaborative problem-solving;

- *Virtual Space* — digital platforms that enable idea sharing, feedback, and community formation across organizational boundaries;

- *Physical Space* — shared work environments designed to encourage spontaneous communication and creativity.

The study by Pornthip Chaithanapat, Prattana Punnakitikashem, Nay Chi Khin Khin Oo, and Sirisuhk Rakthin (2022) confirms that organizations adopting knowledge-oriented leadership can enhance customer knowledge management (CKM). Under knowledge-oriented leadership, a positive cultural orientation toward CKM emerges, fostering an environment that encourages open innovation and experimentation. This approach enables organizations to effectively acquire, assimilate, and apply knowledge to better serve their customers.

Figure 8.

Adaptive spaces
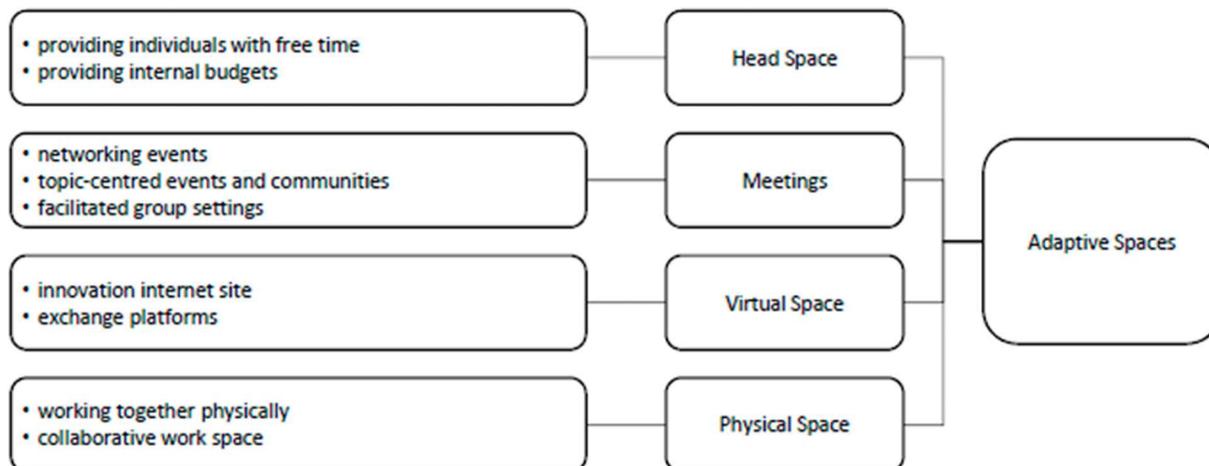
Source: Jonas Hermann Schulze Felix Pinkow (2020). Leadership for Organizational Adaptability: How Enabling Leaders Create Adaptive Space p.21-22

1.5 Summary

To summarize literature, adaptive capacity is an organization's ability to learn, adjust, and respond effectively to change and uncertainty during transition projects (Staber & Sydow, 2002; Zhang et al., 2023). It develops through continuous learning, reflection, and problem-solving, helping organizations manage disruptions and deliver projects successfully.

Transition management is essential, particularly in outsourcing projects. Effective transitions combine planning, structured knowledge transfer, governance, and attention to human factors, while poor management can cause inefficiency, resistance, and failure (Beulen, Tiwari & van Heck, 2011; Krancher, 2020).

Areas that are important for organizational adaptive capacity:

- **Leadership support** – enables confident decision-making (González-Mohíno et al., 2024).
- **Clear communication** – aligns teams and prevents misunderstandings (Javid, 2024).
- **Knowledge transfer and governance** – ensures learning and continuity (Krancher, 2020; Beulen et al., 2011).
- **Psychological safety and collaboration** – foster engagement, innovation, and flexibility (Salimimoghadam et al., 2025).

While these factors are well established conceptually, existing literature largely addresses them at a theoretical or organizational level. There is limited empirical evidence on how transition

managers experience and navigate adaptive capacity in practice, and how organizational factors enable or constrain their ability to use it during transition projects.

This gap highlights the need for research that examines how transition managers apply organizational factors to navigate change effectively, offering a deeper understanding of organizational adaptive capacity as a practical capability.

2. REASERCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research process overview

A **qualitative research approach** was selected to explore how transition managers understand and navigate organizational adaptive capacity when managing transition projects. A qualitative approach is best suitable because as Weng Marc Lim (2025) points out, qualitative research stands out for its unique ability to capture the richness of social phenomena involving human experiences and perspectives.

As Bhangu, Provost, and Caduff (2023) outline that if you want the findings of any research study to be reliable, you must employ appropriate research techniques that are uniquely tailored to the phenomena under investigation. Scholars add that researchers must choose techniques based on their specific research questions and understand the strengths and limitations of the different tools available to them. In line with this perspective, this study aims to analyze how transition managers apply adaptive capacity in practice and how organizational factors influence their ability to do so.

For this purpose, **a personal probing technique** was selected where participants have to recount and reflect on their own experiences and share their perceptions and perspectives related to the topic. This technique enables participants to reflect on their own experiences and allows this research to have rich, detailed, and context-specific insight-based data. By encouraging participants to share their perceptions and perspectives, the method enabled a deeper understanding of how transition managers navigate challenges, respond to uncertainty, and apply adaptive capacity in real-life transition projects, while also revealing how different organizational factors facilitate or constrain their actions. As Lim (2025) explains, this type of method helps to understand how people's experience shapes their views and actions. Majority of the questions are based on sharing experience, as an example questions:

- Can you share an example of a situation where you had to adapt your approach in response to unforeseen challenges or changes?
- What specific practices or behaviors help you remain flexible and responsive when managing collaboration between teams?

It gives an open space for recipients to share situations where he/she had to navigate adaptive capacity in challenging situations during transition projects.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and understand how transition managers navigate change and use adaptive capacity during challenges and unexpected situations. This interview method was chosen because it allows participants to freely share their

experiences while still guiding the conversation with prepared questions. For that case, eight **open-ended interview questions** were developed and based on existing theory were directly linked to the research objectives of this study.

These questions were designed to investigate how transition managers understand and apply adaptive capacity in practice, to identify organizational factors that enable or constrain its use, to examine behaviors employed in response to challenges, and to assess the impact of adaptive capacity on project outcomes. By aligning the interview questions with the study's objectives, the research ensures that the collected data provide relevant insights to address the research problem, achieve the study's purpose, and fulfill its specific objectives.

To investigate how transition managers navigate organizational adaptive capacity in practice, participants were asked to share specific examples of situations where they adjusted their transition strategies in response to unexpected challenges or changes. In line with the study objectives, the research aimed to identify organizational factors that influence adaptive capacity, distinguish between positive and negative organizational factors, and assess how these factors affect project outcomes. Finally, the study explored how these factors could inform a structured list of organizational elements to support the effective application of adaptive capacity in future transition projects, including impacts on knowledge transfer speed, information accuracy, and team preparedness post-transition.

2.2 Data gathering process

As Sirwan Khalid Ahmed (2024) explains, purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on the researcher's judgment to meet specific study criteria and it is normally used in research requiring certain people with some specific characteristics or expertise. In this case, the focus is on professionals who manage organizational transition projects that includes transferring knowledge between teams. To identify suitable candidates, a targeted search was carried out on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). I directly contacted individuals whose profiles included the job title *Transition Manager*. Over a period of several weeks, I have reached 16 potential participants. Out of these, eight (Table 3) agreed to take part in the study and were available for a 30-minute online interview conducted via Microsoft Teams. The remaining individuals either did not respond or explained that although their profiles listed the title *Transition Manager*, they did not have relevant experience in the specific area under investigation.

Table 3.

Participant overview

Respondent	Nationality	Current Title	Experience in years
A	Lithuanian	Transition Manager	1.5
B	Lithuanian	Transition Manager	10
C	Bulgarian	Transition Manager	1
D	Polish	Transition Manager	2.5
E	Polish	Senior Transition Manager	5
F	Polish	Senior Transition Manager	7
G	German	Project Manager	10
H	German	Head of Transition Office	10

Source: created by the author.

As the participants were selected based purely on professional roles and experience, it occurred naturally that they represented different nationalities. This added diversity of perspectives to the study and enriched the analysis by reflecting transition management practices across different national and organizational contexts.

All interviews were conducted online and were scheduled for 30-minute sessions. Saarijärvi and Bratt (2021) highlight that qualitative interviews conducted via video, telephone, or online platforms are valid and trustworthy alternatives to traditional face-to-face interviews. Additionally, digital interviewing allows the inclusion of participants who might otherwise be excluded due to geographical distance. Each interview was carried out with the participant's informed consent, including permission to audio-record and fully transcribe the sessions for analysis. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, ensuring that participants were aware of the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all responses and securely storing data to protect participants' identities.

2.3 Qualitative data analysis

Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis approach**, which according to researchers Ahmed *et al.* (2025) is one of the most widely utilized methods for analyzing qualitative data, offering a structured yet flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within datasets. I followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework (Table 4).

Table 4.

Six phases in thematic analysis

Thematic Analysis Steps	Practical Application for Researchers
1. Familiarization with the data	Researchers immerse themselves in the raw data (e.g., transcripts, notes) by reading and rereading. They actively engage with the material, noting initial ideas and potential patterns. Transcription by the researcher can enhance familiarity, and reflective memos can support early insights.
2. Generating initial codes	Researchers systematically work through data to identify meaningful features. Codes summarize data segments and can be semantic or latent. Qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo) or manual coding methods may be used. The aim is comprehensive and inclusive coding across the dataset.
3. Searching for themes	Codes are grouped into broader patterns or themes that capture meaningful aspects of the data related to the research question. Tools such as mind maps or thematic maps can support organization. This phase involves active interpretation and analytical thinking.
4. Reviewing themes	Candidate themes are reviewed for internal coherence and clear distinction between themes. Researchers return to the original data to verify accurate representation. This recursive process may involve merging, refining, or discarding themes.
5. Defining and naming themes	Researchers refine the core meaning of each theme and clarify how it relates to the research question. Theme names should be concise, descriptive, and reflective of their content. Supporting quotations and detailed theme descriptions are developed to enhance clarity.
6. Writing the report	Findings are presented in a coherent analytical narrative. The report includes detailed descriptions of themes, illustrative data extracts, and interpretive commentary. Results are linked to existing literature, and methodological transparency is maintained throughout the write-up.

Source: Ahmed *et al.* (2025) Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. Using thematic analysis in qualitative research - ScienceDirect

I began by familiarizing myself with the data, which included six interviews in English and two in Lithuanian that I manually translated and transcribed. All transcripts were read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the content and identify initial patterns. I then generated initial codes by highlighting significant statements and ideas relevant to the research question. These codes were grouped into broader themes that captured recurring patterns across the interviews. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data, and each was clearly defined and named to reflect key organizational factors influencing adaptive capacity. Finally, the findings were organized into a coherent report, supported with illustrative quotes from the participants, providing a structured understanding of the factors shaping adaptive capacity in transition projects.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1. Organizational factors influencing adaptive capacity

As W. Kucharska and T. Rebelo (2025) highlight in their research, change is a defining characteristic of today's economy, placing companies in a constant state of learning and development as they adjust to maintain competitiveness, gain market advantage, and create value through continuous innovation. This ongoing need for adaptation is particularly visible in transition projects, where complexity and uncertainty are high.

In this study, eleven organizational factors Ttable 5) were identified as "game changers" for transition project success and its outcomes. These findings are reflected in the interview data, where participants described organizational factors (e.g., communication channels, leadership support, resource availability) that influence their ability to navigate adaptive capacity during transition project.

Table 5.

Organizational factors influencing adaptive capacity

Organizational factor	Description	Impact on adaptive capacity
Leadership support	Sandwich position, alignment and visible backing, give freedom, clear decisions	Positive
Clear communication	Transparency, Close cooperation, open dialogue, prevents misunderstandings	Positive
Clarity of decision ownership	Acting as a 'change agent', Structured yet adaptable methodology	Positive
Decision-making freedom	Milestone flexibility, adjust methodology and approach	Positive
Preparation & documentation	Preventing information loss, proper identification	Positive
Resource availability & flexibility	Access to time, budget, expertise, backup resources, change plans	Negative
HR & Legal involvement	Contracts, terminations, confidentiality	Negative
Psychological safety	safe to raise risks, open communication, building relationships, calmness, people	Positive
Communication structure	Number meetings, channels	Negative

| IT support | System access, tools before execution starts | Negative |
| Creative thinking | Unconventional solutions, 'good cop,', flexibility | Positive |

Source: created by the author.

To understand the organizational factors that influence transition managers' adaptive capacity, interviewees were asked targeted questions, including:

- *What organizational factors influence your ability to be adaptive?*
- *How does adaptive capacity affect outcomes like speed, accuracy, and readiness?*

All those factors have different impact on the project and transition manager ability to navigate change:

- **Positive** supports the manager and contributes to better project outcomes.
- **Negative** creates obstacles, limits adaptive capacity, and can negatively affect project outcomes.

3.1.1 Positive impact on adaptive capacity

To support adaptive capacity within organizations, eight participants shared their expertise and experiences in transition management, highlighting seven organizational factors (Table 6) that help them effectively navigate change across various transition projects.

Leadership support

Across all interviewees, leadership support was consistently identified as the most influential organizational factor in enabling adaptive capacity during transition management. Research by Burton, Malone, and Huq (2005) highlights that stakeholders at different levels and stages play a critical role in the success of adaptation projects. When leaders are engaged, transparent, and empowered to make decisions, teams can respond quickly to change, escalate issues effectively, and secure additional resources when needed.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that **the presence of supportive leadership** creates both practical and psychological advantages. Participant E noted: "The most important is support from senior leaders. If we face obstacles, we need a steering committee or senior decision makers who can approve overtime, allocate extra resources, or push things through. If those leaders aren't engaged or committed, everything becomes much harder." Similarly, participant D highlighted the importance of safety in decision-making: "Leadership support is crucial. I must feel safe raising risks without being punished, because risks are usually not my fault."

Freedom to act within clear boundaries was another key theme. Participant C described: "The most important is management. I currently have two managers: local and the transition lead: one is hands-off ("I don't care - do it your way"). The other looks like micromanaging, but it's actually over-caring and supportive. Both give me freedom, which is essential. I've experienced toxic management before, where they control every step. Freedom is key." This sentiment reflects how hands-on, controlling leadership can severely restrict adaptive capacity, whereas empowered managers can make decisions efficiently and adjust approaches as needed. Participant A added, "Leadership support, when leaders understand and back transition goals, decisions can be made quickly, and resistance is reduced," reinforcing the link between supportive leadership and smoother project execution.

Participants also pointed to the importance of **alignment and transparency**. Participant A explained, "Securing top management support to ensure alignment and visible backing of the transition strategy," while participant H emphasized, "Good communication channels, strong leadership support, clear reporting lines, these make adaptation easier." Similarly, participant G stated simply: "Leadership support is the most important factor. Without it, adapting the approach is almost impossible."

The interviews illustrate that leadership support not only facilitates practical problem solving such as allocating resources, approving overtime, or resolving conflicts but also provides the **psychological safety and trust** needed for teams to navigate complex transitions. Participant H described the challenge: "You're always in a sandwich position. The sending team, the receiving team, leadership above, operational levels below, and everyone has expectations, and you have to manage them all. In contrast, disengaged or toxic leadership characterized by excessive control or lack of commitment severely restricts adaptive capacity and slows progress. Of course, when leadership support and resources exist, you should use them. It makes life easier. But challenges can also be motivating."

Clear communication

Clear, transparent, and well-planned communication was consistently highlighted by all participants as a crucial factor for enabling adaptive capacity in transition management. Effective communication ensures that expectations are understood, roles are clear, and teams can respond quickly to changes or unexpected challenges.

Participant F emphasized the **importance of timing and clarity**: "In my recent project, announcing the change at the right moment was crucial so we didn't lose critical resources." Similarly, participant D added, "Clear communication and clear expectations is not only for the project but also for my role" highlighting that communication must be precise at both the project

and individual levels. Participant H reinforced this idea with a practical approach: "One key rule is: never assume people understood something just because you didn't hear questions. No feedback doesn't mean understanding. So I always do pulse checks and make sure knowledge is actually applied, not just 'heard.'"

Other participants pointed to the **structural and procedural aspect**s **of communication**. Participant G explained, "Clear communication channels and escalation paths enable fast decisions," emphasizing the need for formal structures to support adaptive decision-making. Participant D added, "Close cooperation with trainers and managers. We hold daily meetings to recap progress and adjust plans," demonstrating the role of routine check-ins in keeping everyone aligned.

Participant F also stressed thorough planning: "Clear decisions and agreements with steering committees, project owners, executives. **Proper communication planning** who is informed, when, and how," illustrating that proactive planning prevents misunderstandings and ensures smooth knowledge transfer. Finally, participant H summarized the behavioral aspect: "Strong communication explaining what's happening and why…documenting agreements so expectations don't drift," showing that communication is not just about sharing information, but also about maintaining accountability.

Clarity of decision ownership.

Clearly defined roles and accountability are essential for enabling adaptive capacity in transition management. When everyone understands who is responsible for decisions, delays and confusion are minimized, allowing teams to respond more effectively to changes or unexpected challenges.

Participant D highlighted the practical **approach of assigning clear ownership**: "I always have someone acting as a change agent on both sides, one among trainers and one among trainees, someone aware of the overall goals and able to moderate expectations and communication." This ensures that there is a dedicated point of contact for decision-making and coordination, keeping the transition process aligned and smooth.

Participant H emphasized the **importance of role boundaries**: "You must understand the boundaries of your role by knowing where you can act gives you the freedom to navigate complex situations." Understanding decision ownership allows individuals to act confidently and take initiative without overstepping, which is critical when dealing with complex or fast-changing scenarios.

Participant A further stressed the value of combining structure with flexibility: "**Structured yet adaptable methodology** and a clear framework help maintain control while allowing room to

pivot when circumstances change." A clear framework for decision ownership provides stability, while still allowing the team to adjust processes as required, balancing control with adaptive capacity.

Decision-making freedom

Healthy organizations tend to foster autonomy, trust, and respect, avoiding micromanagement. Such an environment allows employees and specifically transition managers to exercise judgment and respond effectively to unforeseen challenges.

Participant C shared a personal reflection: "I've experienced toxic management before, where they control every step. **Freedom is key**." This highlights that excessive control can stifle adaptive capacity, while decision-making freedom empowers managers to navigate complex transitions. Similarly, participant H notes, "**Flexibility is essential** because things rarely go exactly as planned. You always need a backup plan and you must know where you have flexibility." Freedom in decision-making allows managers to leverage their expertise and adjust approaches to fit the specific context of a project, a team, or even a country. Participant C further summarizes: "Adaptive capacity means being able to use your knowledge and ways of working while adapting to the specific project, person, or country."

Finally, participant A highlights the direct impact on outcomes: "Flexibility during KT ensures a smoother handover and a shorter path to operational independence."

Preparation and documentation

Thorough preparation and proper documentation emerged as key enablers of adaptive capacity during knowledge transfer. When transition managers plan carefully, structure activities, and maintain clear records, teams can respond more effectively to changes and unexpected challenges.

Participant G emphasizes the **importance of realistic planning**: "And of course, realistic timelines. Aggressive deadlines reduce adaptive capacity dramatically." Having sufficient time and a structured plan allows managers to adapt without creating undue stress or compromising quality.

Participant F highlights the role of **early preparation**: "Before even talking about knowledge transfer plans, we prepare communications, training planning, all materials. I always schedule workshops for both receiving and sending teams together." This proactive approach ensures all participants understand the process, expectations, and objectives from the start.

The proper **identification of key personnel** is also critical. Participant D explains: "Proper identification of trainers at the beginning is crucial…Training progress always falls on me. Also, I set very clear expectations before the project and during the knowledge transfer."

Documentation itself is central to sustaining adaptive capacity. Participant G notes: "Never assume documentation is accurate or complete. **Validate documentation early**. Maintain transparency at all levels. Honest communication helps detect problems early. Simplify before transferring don't transfer unnecessary complexity." Participant F adds, "Never give up on process documentation. **SOPs, DTPs, work instructions**…People don't want to create them, they're tired, but without documentation, you lose knowledge when people leave."

Psychological safety

Psychological safety and open communication play a critical role in enabling adaptive capacity during transition projects. When team members feel safe to raise concerns, ask questions, and share knowledge without fear of blame, they engage more fully and contribute to smoother, more effective transitions.

Participant D emphasizes this point: "I must feel safe raising risks without being punished, because risks are usually not my fault." Similarly, participant C highlights the importance of **transparency from leaders**: "When leaders, like <…>, share openly, it helps build trust and supports adaptive capacity."

Creating a trusting and **supportive environment** fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing. Participant E explains: "Listen. Listen. Listen. Forget the tracker for a moment and focus on what the people on the other side really need…We are not just transferring process steps, we are helping people adapt. Build strong relationships. They will help you in critical moments."

Participant H adds: "You need to create a foundation of trust. **Personal connection** helps sometimes…When teams see something working early on, it builds trust and shows that collaboration is possible." H further notes, "It's important to create a light and supportive atmosphere even when things are tough…Your attitude as a transition manager influences their ability to adapt." Participant F adds, that "Technology issues are manageable, Teams, Skype, documents. Language barriers, use translators. The hardest part is people."

Creative thinking

Creative thinking plays an important role in adaptive capacity during transition projects, especially when things do not go according to plan. Several transition managers explained that real-life transitions are rarely linear, and strict methods alone are often not enough. Being able to think creatively helps them adjust their approach and keep the transition moving forward.

Participant H points out that plans often need to change, saying that "**Flexibility is essential** because things rarely go exactly as planned." This highlights the need to look for alternative ways of working when timelines, resources, or scope suddenly shift.

Participant C also connects adaptive capacity with the **ability to adjust one's own working style** depending on the situation. As he explains, "Adaptive capacity means being able to use your knowledge and ways of working while adapting to the specific project, person, or country." This shows that creative thinking is about applying experience differently, not just following the same template every time.

Participant G adds another perspective by stressing the **value of simplifying work** before transferring it. His advice to "Simplify before transferring — don't transfer unnecessary complexity" reflects a practical form of creative problem-solving, where reducing complexity helps teams adapt faster and avoid overload.

In addition, participant H mentions that sometimes creativity means **finding "unconventional solutions"** when standard approaches no longer work. This kind of thinking helps transition managers deal with constraints such as cultural differences, limited resources, or unexpected changes.

3.1.2 Summary

Positive organizational factors clearly identify the conditions that enable adaptive capacity during transition projects. Rather than viewing adaptive capacity as an abstract concept, the findings show that it is strongly shaped by concrete organizational factors, including leadership support, clear communication, clarity of decision ownership, decision-making freedom, structured preparation and documentation, psychological safety, and creative thinking. Collectively, these factors allow transition managers to navigate change successfully, highlighting the practical relevance of adaptive capacity as an organization-level capability.

The structure of themes and sub-themes (Table 6) demonstrates that adaptive capacity is a system-level outcome enabled by organizational factors that support transition managers during transition projects.

Table 6.

List of themes with positive impact

Themes	Sub-themes
Leadership support	• presence of supportive leadership • freedom to act within clear boundaries • alignment and transparency • psychological Safety and trust
Clear Communication	• importance of timing and clarity • structural and procedural aspects • proper communication planning
Clarity of decision ownership	• approach of assigning clear ownership • importance of role boundaries • structured yet adaptable methodology
Decision-Making Freedom	• flexibility is essential • freedom is key
Preparation and Documentation	• importance of realistic planning • early preparation • identification of key personnel • validate documentation early • SOPs, DTPs, work instructions
Psychological Safety	• feel safe raising risks • transparency from leaders • supportive environment • personal connection
Creative Thinking	• ability to adjust one's own working style • value of simplifying work • finding "unconventional solutions"

Source: created by the author

3.1.3 Negative impact on adaptive capacity

In contrast to the enabling factors discussed above, the same eight participants reflected on factors that constrain their ability to adapt during transition projects. Based on their practical experiences, **four organizational factors** were identified as making a negative impact during transition projects.

The negative impact of these factors is observed as increased obstacles, reduced flexibility, and slower decision-making, causing transition managers to spend time resolving organizational shortcomings instead of focusing on project milestones.

HR & Legal involvement

Insufficient or **delayed involvement of HR and legal** functions was identified as a barrier to adaptive capacity during transition projects. Participants emphasized that when HR and legal aspects are not addressed early, transition managers face constraints that limit flexibility, slow decision-making, and increase operational risk.

Participant F stresses the importance of early engagement by noting: "Involving HR and legal early…contracts, terminations, confidentiality." Participant G shares experience adding "HR support matters for incentives, training, and addressing employee concerns." When these functions are not aligned from the start, transition managers are forced to work around unresolved issues, reducing their ability to adapt plans effectively. Legal constraints were also described as limiting flexibility in how transitions are executed. Participant F explains that formal requirements can restrict adaptive responses: "Clear decisions and agreements with steering committees, project owners, executives." Without **clear legal frameworks and approved agreements**, even necessary adjustments may be delayed or blocked.

Resource availability & flexibility.

Limited resource availability and lack of flexibility were consistently described by participants as major constraints on adaptive capacity during transition. Insufficient time, staffing, budget, or access to key people reduced the ability of transition managers to respond effectively to unexpected changes and increased pressure on both sending and receiving teams.

Several participants highlighted tha**t aggressive timelines and cost-driven decisions** significantly reduce adaptive capacity. Participant G explicitly notes: "And of course, realistic timelines, aggressive deadlines reduce adaptive capacity dramatically." When transitions are driven primarily by cost efficiency, there is little room to adjust plans or absorb disruptions without negatively affecting outcomes. **Resource shortages related to people's availability** were also frequently mentioned. Participant D describes: "We often lack time, resources, and money, so we must cross out anything that is not critical to the project's success." This forces transition managers to focus only on minimum requirements, reducing opportunities for deeper learning, repetition, or contingency planning. Participant B highlighted the importance of early agreement of resource availability by stating, "It is really important to agree from the beginning that the sending team will have time for KS" Participant A points out that: "It often relates to human resource management, balancing business-as-usual operations while allocating sufficient time for

both knowledge senders and receivers." When teams are overloaded or **key employees are unavailable** due to vacations, peak periods, or early departures, adaptive capacity is significantly weakened. Participant A adds "Another example is resource unavailability, where either a **sender or receiver vacated their role** earlier than planned." Participant C also highlights the pressure caused by limited availability on the sending side: "They (employees) are already under a lot of pressure (people being fired, organizational changes). No need for me to pressure more." In these contexts, the lack of spare capacity limits scheduling flexibility and forces transition managers to adapt passively rather than proactively. As participant H emphasizes that without sufficient organizational support structures, the burden falls heavily on the transition manager: "The transition manager plays a vital role. If you can't manage the situation, nobody else will pick up the slack in the same way." Limited resources increase the risk of burnout and missed issues.

Communication structure

Ineffective or poorly structured communication was also identified as a factor that negatively impacts adaptive capatity during transition projects. When communication channels, escalation paths, or information flows are unclear, transition managers face delays, misunderstandings, and they have reduced ability to respond to change. At the same time, communication that is excessive or poorly balanced can also limits adaptive capacity.

Participant A emphasizes the **importance of cross functional alignment**, stating that "All parties (transition, operations, HR, IT, etc.) aligned prevents misunderstandings and helps react faster to changes." When communication structures do not integrate all relevant stakeholders, adaptations become fragmented and inconsistent.

Participant C highlights that **communication must be purposeful and not overloaded** "There are too many meetings. Sometimes I'm lost in endless calls. Reducing them would help me be more organized."

IT support

When technical readiness is overlooked, transition managers face delays that cannot be compensated for through planning or communication alone. Access to systems, tools, and data is a prerequisite for effective knowledge transfer, and without it, adaptive capacity is significantly reduced. Participant D clearly highlights the importance of technical preparedness, stating: "Technical aspects matter too and especially **ensuring system access before KT** starts. Without access, everything is delayed." This illustrates that even well-prepared transition plans lose effectiveness if IT dependencies are not resolved in advance. The **absence of strong IT support** forces transition managers to spend time resolving technical issues instead of focusing on knowledge sharing, stakeholder coordination, or risk management.

3.1.4 Summary

Negative organizational factors show the conditions in organizations that make it harder for transition managers to adapt during projects. Instead of seeing these challenges as abstract problems, the findings show that things like late HR and legal involvement, limited resources, poor communication, and lack of IT support can directly reduce flexibility and slow decision-making. As a result, transition managers are required to spend significant time addressing organizational obstacles that should have been resolved in advance or on time, such as unclear responsibilities, missing approvals, or unavailable systems. This shifts their focus away from managing key project milestones and strategic transition activities toward resolving preventable issues, ultimately weakening the organization's ability to navigate change effectively and negatively affecting transition outcomes.

Each negative organizational factor is expressed through distinct sub-themes, highlighting how organizational structures and practices constrain adaptive responses during transition projects (Table 7).

Table 7.

List of themes with negative impact

Themes	Sub-themes
HR & legal involvement	• delayed involvement of HR and legal • not clear legal frameworks • not approved agreements
Resource availability & flexibility	• aggressive timelines and cost-driven decisions • resource shortages related to people's availability • key employees are unavailable • sender or receiver vacated their role
Communication structure	• importance of cross functional alignment, • Communication purposeful and not overloaded
IT support	• not ensured system access before KT • absence of strong IT

Source: created by the author

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate several critical insights into how transition managers navigate adaptive capacity in organizational transition projects, which are summarized in the following key conclusions:

1) Transition managers' ability to navigate adaptive capacity in transition projects is strongly influenced by organizational factors.

2) Leadership support and clear communication are the most significant enablers of adaptive capacity.

3) Positive and negative organizational factors have differing impacts on transition managers' ability to use adaptive capacity.

4) Practical strategies, behaviors, and decision-making approaches are shaped by organizational context.

5) A structured list of organizational factors can guide future application of adaptive capacity.

The results are strongly supported by the theoretical view of adaptive capacity as a dynamic, learning-based process rather than a fixed capability (Staber & Sydow, 2002). Transition managers' ability to navigate transition projects was consistently enabled when organizational factors allowed learning, flexibility, and timely decision-making. This aligns with Duchek (2019), who argues that adaptive capacity emerges from organizational processes that support anticipation, coping, and learning rather than from individual effort alone.

Leadership support emerged as the most influential enabler of adaptive capacity. Interviewees emphasized visible backing, psychological safety, and decision autonomy as essential for navigating transition projects. These findings are consistent with peer-reviewed studies showing that supportive and knowledge-oriented leadership enhances learning, coordination, and adaptive capacity in complex projects (González-Mohíno et al., 2024; Schulze & Pinkow, 2020). The results further confirm that leadership does not need to be controlling to be effective. Instead, freedom within clear boundaries enables faster and more context-appropriate adaptation.

Clear communication and well-defined decision ownership were also found to be critical enablers of adaptive capacity. These results align with Beulen, Tiwari, and van Heck (2011), who identify transition governance and communication alignment as key drivers of transition performance. The findings reinforce existing literature showing that structured communication, escalation paths, and shared understanding reduce uncertainty and allow transition managers to react effectively to change (Oshri, Kotlarsky & Willcocks, 2022).

The importance of preparation and documentation supports prior research on knowledge transfer, which highlights that both explicit and tacit knowledge must be systematically identified, validated, and transferred to avoid operational disruption (Krancher, 2020; Chen & McQueen, 2010). Participants' emphasis on early preparation, realistic timelines, and validated documentation confirms that adaptive capacity during transitions depends on the quality of planning and learning mechanisms established before execution.

At the same time, the findings reveal organizational constraints that limit organizational adaptive capacity. Delayed HR and legal involvement, limited resource flexibility, weak IT readiness, and ineffective communication structures were identified as key barriers. These results are consistent with outsourcing literature that links poor transition management to increased resistance, delays, and performance risks (Muka & Marnewick, 2018; El-Sahli et al., 2022). Resource shortage and aggressive timelines were shown to reduce flexibility, supporting earlier studies that highlight the negative impact of cost-driven outsourcing decisions on adaptive capacity and resilience (Lacity et al., 2011).

These findings highlight that adaptive capacity is a system-level capability that must be actively enabled by organizations. By addressing constraints and fostering enabling factors, organizations can enhance project outcomes, reduce delays, and support successful navigation of change in transition projects.

This research offers several practical recommendations based on the findings to support transition managers in navigating adaptive capacity during projects. By following these recommendations, organizations can actively create conditions that support transition managers in navigating adaptive capacity during transition projects. Leadership support, clear communication, timely involvement of HR, legal, and IT, as well as sufficient resources and structured preparation, all contribute to enabling adaptive responses and reducing delays. Implementing these measures can improve project outcomes, foster flexibility, and strengthen organizational learning. At the same time, the study highlights the importance of understanding adaptive capacity as a system-level capability, emphasizing that its effectiveness depends on organizational structures and practices. This reinforces the need for organizations to continuously assess and refine the factors that enable adaptive capacity, ensuring that transition managers can respond effectively to change while minimizing risks and enhancing overall project performance.

Future research could expand this study by examining adaptive capacity in different types of transition projects and organizational contexts, such as across various industries or levels of project complexity. Comparing multiple cases could provide deeper insight into how

organizational factors shape adaptive capacity and how the role of transition managers varies in practice, further strengthening transition management theory.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

The list of themes and subthemes that have positive impact, evidence from the interviews.

Themes	Sub-themes	Evidence from interviews
Leadership support	• presence of supportive leadership • freedom to act within clear boundaries • alignment and transparency • psychological safety and trust	A: "Leadership support, when leaders understand and back transition goals, decisions can be made quickly, and resistance is reduced. <...> Securing top management support to ensure alignment and visible backing of the transition strategy." B: "Most important is that highest management (from both sending and receiving sides) supports transition. It prevents from manipulation" C: "The most important is management…Both give me freedom, which is essential. I've experienced toxic management before, where they control every step. Freedom is key." D: "Leadership support is crucial. I must feel safe raising risks without being punished, because risks are usually not my fault." E: "The most important is support from senior leaders. If we face obstacles, we need a steering committee or senior decision makers who can approve overtime, allocate extra resources, or push things through. If those leaders aren't engaged or committed, everything becomes much harder." G: "Leadership support is the most important factor. Without it, adapting the approach is almost impossible." H: "Good communication channels, strong leadership support, clear reporting lines,

		these make adaptation easier." <...> You're always in a sandwich position. The sending team, the receiving team, leadership above, operational levels below, and everyone has expectations, and you have to manage them all."
Clear communication	• importance of timing and clarity • structural and procedural aspects • proper communication planning	D: "Clear communication and clear expectations is not only for the project but also for my role. <...> Close cooperation with trainers and managers. We hold daily meetings to recap progress and adjust plans." F: "In my recent project, announcing the change at the right moment was crucial so we didn't lose critical resources. <...> Clear decisions and agreements with steering committees, project owners, executives. Proper communication planning who is informed, when, and how." G: "Clear communication channels and escalation paths enable fast decisions." H: "One key rule is: never assume people understood something just because you didn't hear questions. No feedback doesn't mean understanding. So I always do pulse checks and make sure knowledge is actually applied, not just 'heard. <...> Strong communication explaining what's happening and why…documenting agreements so expectations don't drift."
Psychological safety	• feel safe raising risks • supportive environment • personal connection	C: "When leaders, like <…>, share openly, it helps build trust and supports adaptability."

		D: "I must feel safe raising risks without being punished, because risks are usually not my fault."
		E: "Listen. Listen. Listen. Forget the tracker for a moment and focus on what the people on the other side really need…We are not just transferring process steps, we are helping people adapt. Build strong relationships. They will help you in critical moments."
		F: "Technology issues are manageable, Teams, Skype, documents. Language barriers, use translators. The hardest part is people."
		H: "You need to create a foundation of trust. Personal connection helps sometimes…When teams see something working early on, it builds trust and shows that collaboration is possible. <...> It's important to create a light and supportive atmosphere even when things are tough…Your attitude as a transition manager influences their ability to adapt."
Preparation and documentation	• realistic planning • early preparation • identification of key personnel • validate documentation early • SOPs, DTPs, work instructions	D: "Proper identification of trainers at the beginning is crucial…Training progress always falls on me. Also, I set very clear expectations before the project and during the knowledge transfer." F: "Before even talking about knowledge transfer plans, we prepare communications, training planning, all materials. I always schedule workshops for both receiving and sending teams together. <...> Never give up on process documentation. SOPs, DTPs, work instructions…People don't want to create them, they're tired, but without

		documentation, you lose knowledge when people leave."
		G: "And of course, realistic timelines. Aggressive deadlines reduce adaptive capacity dramatically. <...> Never assume documentation is accurate or complete. Validate documentation early. Maintain transparency at all levels. Honest communication helps detect problems early. Simplify before transferring don't transfer unnecessary complexity."
Creative thinking	• flexibility is essential • ability to adjust one's own working style • value of simplifying work • finding "unconventional solutions"	C: "Adaptive capacity means being able to use your knowledge and ways of working while adapting to the specific project, person, or country." G: "Simplify before transferring — don't transfer unnecessary complexity." H: "Flexibility is essential because things rarely go exactly as planned. <...> Sometimes creativity means finding 'unconventional solutions' when standard approaches no longer work."
Decision-making freedom	• flexibility is essential • freedom is key	A: "Flexibility during KT ensures a smoother handover and a shorter path to operational independence." C: "I've experienced toxic management before, where they control every step. Freedom is key. <...> Adaptive capacity means being able to use your knowledge and ways of working while adapting to the specific project, person, or country." H: "Flexibility is essential because things rarely go exactly as planned. You always need a backup plan and you must know where you have flexibility."
Clarity of decision ownership	• clear ownership • role boundaries	A: "Structured yet adaptable methodology and a clear framework help maintain

	• structured yet adaptable methodology	control while allowing room to pivot when circumstances change." D: "I always have someone acting as a change agent on both sides, one among trainers and one among trainees, someone aware of the overall goals and able to moderate expectations and communication." H: "You must understand the boundaries of your role by knowing where you can act gives you the freedom to navigate complex situations."

Appendix 2.

The list of themes and subthemes that has negative impact, evidence from the interviews.

Themes	Sub-themes	Evidence from interviews
HR & legal involvement	• addressing employee concerns • clear legal frameworks • approved agreements	**F:** "Involving HR and legal early…Contracts, terminations, confidentiality. <…> "Clear decisions and agreements with steering committees, project owners, executives." **G:** "HR support matters for incentives, training, and addressing employee concerns."
Resource availability & flexibility	• aggressive timelines and cost-driven decisions • resource shortages related to people's availability • key employees are unavailable • sender or receiver vacated their role	**G:** "And of course, realistic timelines, aggressive deadlines reduce adaptive capacity dramatically." **D:** We often lack time, resources, and money, so we must cross out anything that is not critical to the project's success." **B:** "It is really important to agree from the beginning that the sending team will have time for KS" **A:** "It often relates to human resource management, balancing business-as-usual operations while allocating sufficient

		time for both knowledge senders and receivers. <…> Another example is resource unavailability, where either a sender or receiver vacated their role earlier than planned." **C:** "They are already under a lot of pressure (people being fired, organizational changes). No need for me to pressure more."
Communication structure	• importance of cross functional alignment, • Communication purposeful and not overloaded	**A**: "All parties (transition, operations, HR, IT, etc.) aligned prevents misunderstandings and helps react faster to changes." **C**: "There are too many meetings. Sometimes I'm lost in endless calls. Reducing them would help me be more organized."
IT support	• not ensured system access before KT • absence of strong IT	**D**: "Technical aspects matter too and especially ensuring system access before KT starts. Without access, everything is delayed."