



SCHOOL OF  
BUSINESS AND  
ECONOMICS

# Executive Team Dynamics In Times of Change

*Research Overview*

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**Higher Purpose**  
Consulting

# Executive Team Dynamics In Times of Change

As a team coach and leadership & change consultant, I noticed the influence of the executive team's willingness – in times of navigating organizational challenges – to consider and address the **impact of their own paradigms and behavioral patterns**.

Teams that struggled most to effectively lead their organization through a season of transition were also **reluctant** to consider and address **the way they themselves were impacted by the change agenda** – and got in their own way.

At the start of my PhD journey, the **personal experience** of a tragic loss further deepened my interest in understanding the impact of 'difficult' change on a personal and team level.



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## Research Question

How are executive teams impacted by adaptive change, and what are the effects of responses to these impacts?



## Research Project

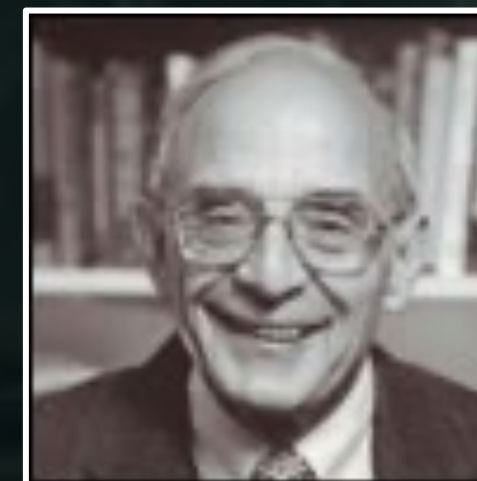
Overall objectives:

- assisting executive teams with understanding and effectively navigating impacts of change on themselves at personal and team level; build and test a theoretical model with practical applications and tools for executive teams in times of change
- academic contribution to fields of management studies in organizational change, corporate governance, organizational learning and top management teams (TMT).

“ Management scholars should .. produce knowledge that they aren't producing at the moment, that is, how to deal with the 'underground'..

It's very important that ..we.. help scientists see that the knowledge they are producing stops when it hits the underground ”

Argyris



# Executive Team Dynamics In Times of Change



## Background

- The executive team plays a critical role in navigating times of organizational change, especially when shifts in culture, behavior, identity and/or purpose are required ['adaptive change']
- The role of emotions, beliefs, and subconscious processes in executives is known from psychology and psychodynamics (the "inner theater", Kets de Vries) at mostly the individual level, but team dynamics at the executive team in times of change are hardly researched or considered in the change management and top management literature. Most studies and theorizing in management studies focus on executive team composition and strategies to effectively lead their organizations through times of change, not the actual dynamics as the executive team's 'lived experience'
- Executive teams remain notoriously difficult for researchers to access, and most team dynamics at that level remain a 'black box', with limited theorizing and models to guide practitioners and executives
- This research project seeks to explore these dynamics and map the cognitive, emotional and relational processes at individual and team level during periods of substantive organizational change that touches organizational culture, behavior, identity and/or purpose

# *Discovery*

"detecting or uncovering something.. which is already there in the world, but was previously not recognized as something relevant.. coming upon something, which is not yet acknowledged"



# Research structure & design



## Dissertation

Table of content and status

Ch.1 – Literature research [finalizing for journal submission]

- What do we know about executive teams and change? Key findings: impacts of change on executive teams is not theorized or studied as a recursive relationship. However, these impacts are reported, especially in adaptive challenges.
- Focus for research: impact of adaptive change on executive teams, and the effects of their responses to these changes

Ch.2 – Interviews [in progress]

- How are executive teams impacted by adaptive change? Using grounded theory to gain insights through interviews into impacts of adaptive change at individual and group level, responses to these impacts and the effects of these responses

Ch.3 – Case studies [to start after interviews]

- How are executive teams impacted by adaptive change? Using Eisenhardt method, with a participative and intersubjectivistic approach at individual and group level

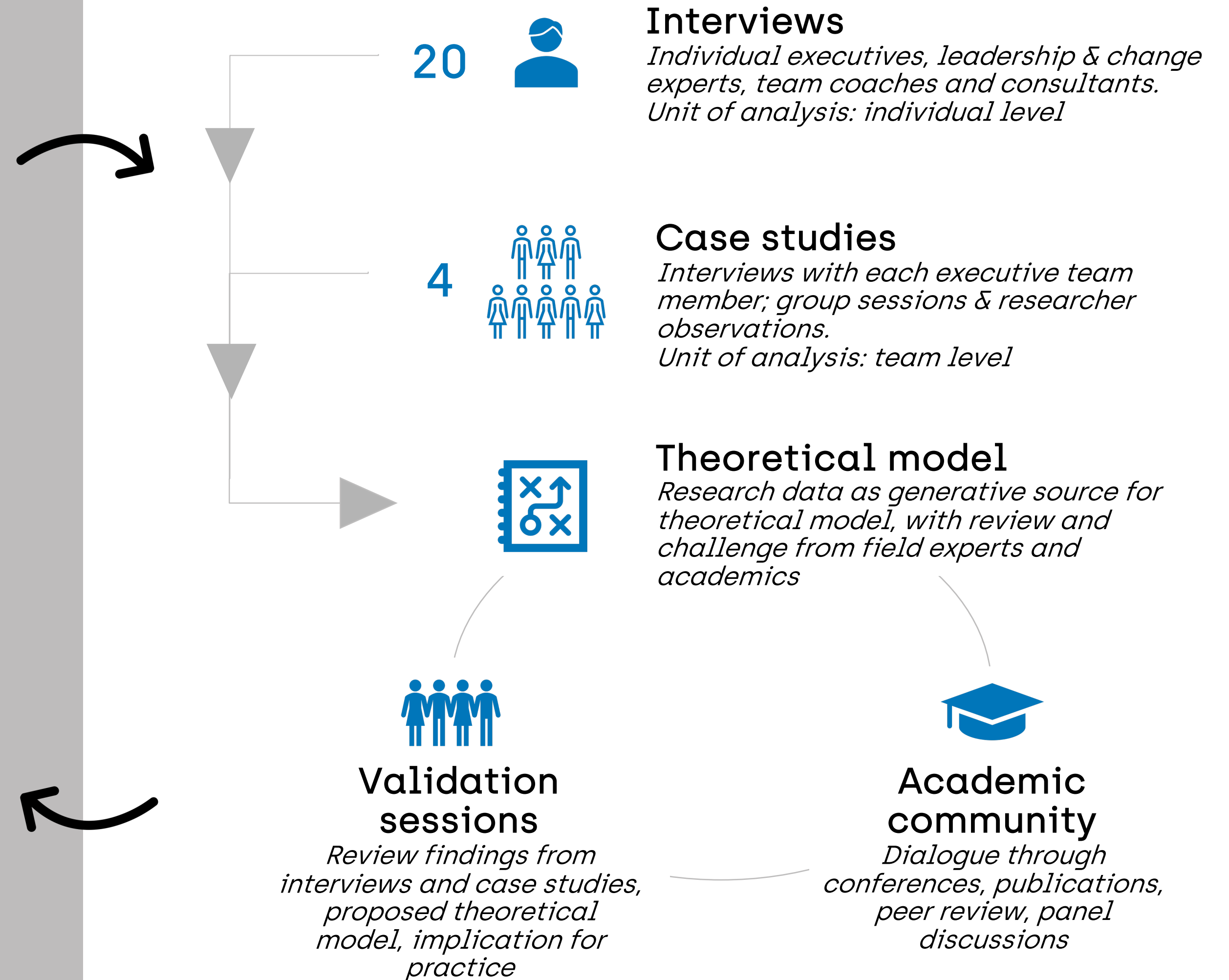
Ch.4 – Theoretical model [to start after field research]

- Build and describe theoretical model based on 4 sources: literature review, interviews, case studies and validation/exchange with team coaches and academic community

Ch.5 – Contribution [to start when finalizing the research]

- Integration of literature research, findings of empirical study and theorizing. Outlining theoretical contributions, relevance for application, limitations and agenda for future research

## Research design: empirical study & theorizing



*".. leaders have to learn to challenge their habits and limitations [as] the only way to not repeat the past..*

*To change responses and behaviors in their external world, they need first to change what's happening in their internal world.*

*When they see how hard it is to change themselves, they'll be more aware of the challenges that lie ahead in changing others."*

**“ organizational change  
is predicated on  
personal change ”**

*Kets de Vries*





" One of the most  
difficult things  
is not to change  
society  
—  
but to change  
**yourself** "

Nelson Mandela  
1918 - 2013





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