

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Cutting knots and riding hobby horses: alignment in educational innovation

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**Research Domain:** Management, leadership, governance and quality (MLGQ)

**Abstract:**

Educational innovations rarely lead to intended outcomes due to poor alignment. Themes of alignment between actors influencing the process of an education innovation is investigated. Exemplary moments have been reconstructed using the learning history method. The input for the learning history came from a survey, interviews and contemplative dialogue. Themes in which alignment is released: (1) working together and (2) directionally stable and supportive leadership. Themes were alignment fails: (1) lack of clarity in decision-making, (2) separation between actors with dominant archetypes, (3) disagreement on the task between performers and directors, (4) disagreement due to content discussions and (5) communication clumsiness. Preliminary findings suggest four underlying mechanisms influencing the alignment in innovation. This case study emphasizes the importance of understanding underlying actor perspectives formed by cognitive frames for a better understanding of alignment in complex educational innovation.

**Paper: Introduction:** Educational innovations rarely lead to intended outcomes as a result of poor alignment between actors (Fullan, 2007). Alignment of actors on the core idea of innovation and the intended outcomes, and alignment between actors on the way of working influence the release of development energy and thus the progress of innovation (Coppoolse, 2018; Silane, 2002). Nevertheless, most studies investigate alignment from a single actor perspective. Our starting point is that the release of development energy as a result of alignment between closely involved actor groups, such as clients, directors and teachers, is important for the progress of the innovation. In this study, alignment is investigated from a multi-actor perspective, focusing on what happens when different actors groups stand together in the innovation. The research question is: Which themes in alignment between actorgroups influence the process of educational innovation?

*Methods:* Exemplary moments have been reconstructed in an educational innovation - in a context of a merger of three study programs in the social domain in a university of applied science in The Netherlands - using the learning history method (Roth & Kleiner, 1996, 2000). The input for the learning history came from a survey (n = 32), interviews (n = 8) using the rich picture method and a contemplative dialogue with involved actors (n = 20). The data from the survey were analyzed on alignment themes en further explored in the interviews. *Results:* Themes in which alignment is released are: working together on new products increases mutual trust and directionally stable and supportive leadership leads to developmental space among teachers. Themes where alignment fails were lack of clarity in decision-making caused by actors with dominant frames who do not accept the decision, separation between actors caused by dominant archetypes, disagreement on the task due to lack of trust of performers in directors, disagreement due to content discussions disturb the process and communication clumsiness leads to a decrease in mutual trust. Further, we find indications that the emergence of themes where development energy is released or, on the contrary, has to do with an underlying interpersonal mechanism, as a result of deep-rooted images about each other and about innovation.

Upon further preliminary analysis of the found themes, we discovered four mechanisms that could be traced back to an important foundation. The first two mechanisms increase the alignment between actors and the release of development energy. The first mechanism is that of the great initiatives. A subgroup made itself the owner of one of the subjects to be worked out in the new curriculum. They selected a number of like-minded people, both in terms of views and people who are also open to new ideas. Together they shaped a new piece of education, presented it to colleagues, became proud and received new energy. The second mechanism that is linked to this is the mechanism of growing enthusiasm. Developers who saw enthusiasm among those involved in the first mechanism joined in, mutual trust was increased and, as it were, a movement of like-minded people was optimistic about educational innovation and new impulses from, for example, the directors of innovation or a steady director who repeatedly recalled the original idea of innovation also framed as helping in their process. With the other two mechanisms that prevented alignment or made the differences bigger, a decrease in development energy on the present innovation arose. The first mechanism is that they don't listen. Actors who agreed that this innovation is not on the right track were no longer heard by directional directors, and subsequently escalated via an institute council. They raised issues with the management, not in a constructive dialogue, but as one of the interviewees described, as the pull on a chain. This resulted in solutions that developers confirmed in the frame that the intended innovation was wrong, so that the groove actually deepened instead of people coming together. As a result, the development energy with regard to the present innovation decreased and the resistance grew. The fourth mechanism is that of undermining decision-making. A common method is that an issue that needed to be worked out was assigned to a subgroup who came up with a result, but that result was consistently challenged by others. One of the interviewees described that compliments are never even given, but that there is always criticism of each other's products. The criticism is explained in the interviews as the lack of confidence in each other's expertise.

The foundation of these four mechanisms is the trust or mistrust in each other's expertise and the way of working. Developers who believe in the underlying ideas of this innovation and find like-minded people on working methods organize for themselves a mechanism in which they get stuck in

their groove of alignment and development energy. Developers who do not trust each other's expertise, but also developers who believe that the views of the directors are not good, organize chaos in decision-making, stopping progress and reinforcing their views that the ideas of this innovation and the way of working are wrong.

These preliminary findings will be further analyzed on underlying patterns and discussed in the contemplative dialogue.

*Discussion:* Key themes through which alignment arises or fails to occur in this case can be traced to an underlying mechanism in which opinions guide the response to innovation. The results of this study show that teachers look for like-minded people who fit into their dominant frame, while Siciliano et al (2017) indicate that teachers fall back on existing networks earlier. We also see that in the multi-actor context, people are constantly appealing to adjust frames, but that the dominant cognitive frame colors the reaction. This case study emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the underlying actor perspective formed by cognitive frames. A better understanding of themes and underlying mechanisms in complex educational innovation increases the possibilities for understanding and possibly influencing the success rate of educational innovation.

Survey	n	Interviews	n
<b>Alignment</b>			
Working together on new products	10	Working together on new products increases mutual trust	6
Commitments from the management	7	Directionally stable and supportive management leads to development space among teachers	6
<b>Lack of alignment</b>			
Cutting knots and riding hobby horses	21	Unclear decision-making influenced by actors with dominant frames as a result of deep-rooted beliefs	17
No communication about images between actors groups and sticking to ideas and images	27	Separation between developers by dominant archetypes	42
Uncoordinated educational innovation	30	Disagreement on the task due to lack of trust of performers in directors	12
Troubled process	14	Lack of clarity in agreements due to content above process	21
Communication issues	26	Communication clumsiness decreases mutual trust between groups of actors	7

Table 1. Themes in alignment in educational innovation form survey and interviews with number of fragments mentioned in the survey and the interview data (n).

## List of references

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