

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Chaired by Jane Creaton

Wed 11 Dec 2019

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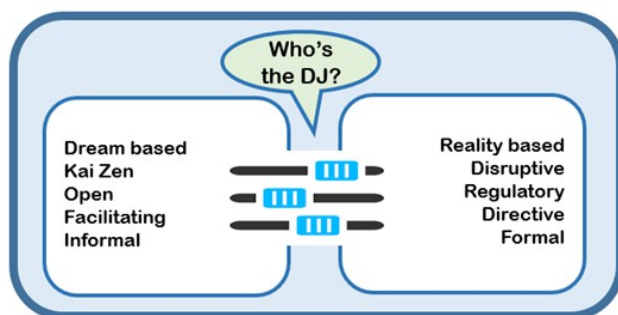
Sliders in educational change

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Research Domain: Academic practice ,work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract: Is the metaphor of a DJ panel with sliders useful to create a language for educational change? This paper is a first conceptual report of the findings of similarities and differences in change approaches between four universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands. Despite apparent homogeneity in mission, we found large differences in the approaches to implement change at a strategic level. We distinguished five sliders to play with. By making the sliders explicit, we try to create an orientation and a language to visualize strategy choices and to develop a story about change approaches and possible consequences.



In our presentation we will focus on the sliders and question whether they are conclusive. Our final question will be who is the DJ and does that make a difference?

Paper:

Sliders in educational change

Change towards a professional and collaborative university

In 2018 four universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands initiated a learning and research community for innovation leaders (Argyris & Schon, 1974). The community started with two main

goals: (1) to improve the quality of the individual participant and (2) to study overall context-free factors of how innovation processes work in Dutch universities for applied sciences. Therefore, four 48 hours pressure cooker sessions were arranged within the context of each university. This paper is a first conceptual report of the findings of similarities and differences in change approaches between universities. The research question was: which context independent factors are important in educational innovation?

The universities and their context

All four universities had similar goals visible in their central policy: (1) prepare students for earning a living in a society with new tasks, insecure jobs, and globalisation (Mannion, Biesta, Priestley, & Ross, 2011), (2) use research to raise the abilities of students and institution (Terlouw, van der Pool, & Griffioen, 2013), (3) respond to wicked problems (Ramaley, 2014) and (4) engage students to take control over their learning process (Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010).

The responses were different in each university. University A used a particular educational scheme (design based education). This innovation was top down initiated and program leaders carried out monitoring activities. University B had all innovations led and initiated by program teams. A project team with innovation leaders and researchers was installed and trained to support the programs. University C had a visionary leader whose image of necessary adjustments in higher education were transferred into innovation goals by lower management and staff. Staff and board prescribed little rules and regulations and the innovation process was described as adaptive to programs and iterative as a whole. University D worked iterative as well, providing teams with learning communities and supportive interventions.

In summary, despite the apparent homogeneity in mission, we found large differences in the approaches to implement change at a strategic level. Especially universities B, C and D used broadly described innovation goals, concepts and ideas. The question now is what we can learn from the different approaches, which choices are made and what are the possible consequences?

Mixed methods

This research employed a broad approach to fieldwork, data collection and data analysis. Differences between universities in innovation strategies and experiences by actors emerged through the visit. By visiting different university settings the participants were able to make the familiar strange again. The intention was to create a deeper understanding of the own context and provided the participants with a broader view of innovation in a university of applied sciences. Data was collected through observations, safaris, gossiping sessions, interviews and the drawing of rich pictures.

Sliders and mixing variations

In a brainstorming session we found the metaphor of sliders on a control panel useful. We found five sliders:

1. *What is the origin of the goals: dream based or reality based?* One university used a conceptual pedagogic framework as base for change. The concept was thoroughly thought through in theory

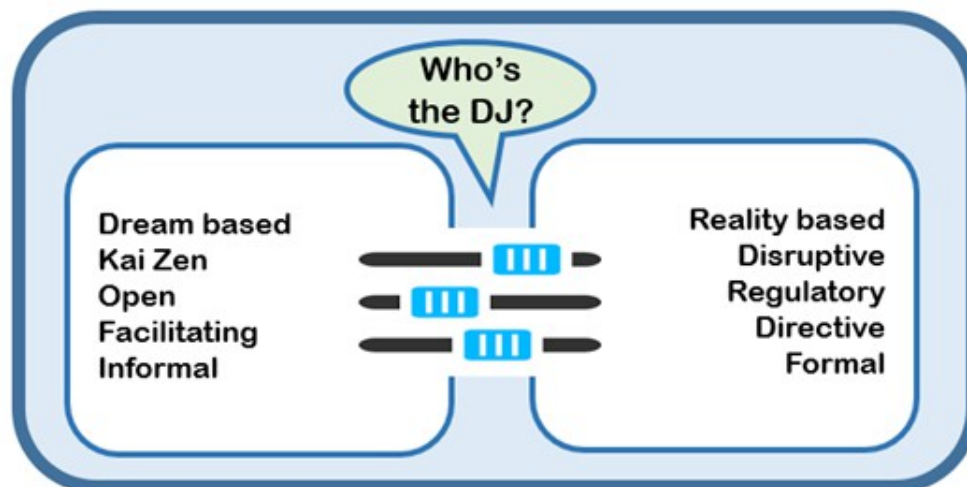
before handed over to the programs. Whilst another university started with the practice within the program teams and tried to expand these practices to more future proof.

2. *What is the categorisation of the change strategy: Kai zen or disruptive?* One university spoke of the change as disruptive and a paradigm shift; but we also encountered a continuous quality improvement approach (Kai Zen) (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2012). We found the university's culture as cause of the different approach but also the innovation purpose. For instance blended learning proved to be a concept where a technical-rational approach was common. While a change in pedagogics was more often designed in a Kai Zen strategy.

3. *In which way are the goals of the change described: open or regulatory?* The universities varied in open goals to tight described goals. One university used figures and quantitative goals others used broad concepts such as 'flexibility' as set of directions. Which gave programs much more room for navigation.

4. *How is the purpose of the staff described or experienced: facilitating or directive?* We found staff as centre of the change program who were setting directions and monitoring activities. We found more facilitating staff as well, setting up learning communities and doing supportive activities.

5. *How does organisational learning take place: Informal or formal?* Some universities used the hierarchy to learn, other universities put lots of efforts into learning communities. One university created a team of innovation leaders who 'spread the word' of possibilities.



Discussion; Who's the DJ?

In the analysis of the differences, the metaphor of a control panel with five sliders was useful to clarify which explicit and implicit choices have been made. One slide addresses the issue of the innovation dream based or reality based is. Another slide is situated between a Kai Zen or a disruptive strategy. The way the change is described was between open and regulatory. The staff is in a continuum between facilitating or directive. The organization as a whole will learn in formal groups through hierarchical lines or in informal communities or networks.

Finally, the main question we have not addressed to this point: who is the DJ? Is power in a central position or do program teams themselves set directions? We found widespread poles. The visibility of

higher management and knowledge of mission and vision was surprisingly. Some sliders were apparently in control of higher management but never in every setting. We also found program teams setting directions and choosing how to achieve them. The DJ-position is a prominent difference between universities.

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