

Leadership and Change Management in Higher Education

Working paper as a basis for developing the LOTUS methodology

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Appendix 1 to the LOTUS final report

Introduction

This report is certainly a quite selective take on change and change management, approaching the issue from a specific angle. The goal of this report, however, is not to provide a complete literature overview of the change management discourse in general and change management in higher education in particular, but to identify focal points that might allow trainings and workshops for higher education leaders to go beyond traditional change management recipes. The report is based on an extensive research of literature on leadership and change management in higher education, as well as of selected other sources (e.g., already existing educational programmes or courses on leadership in higher education). After an introduction on two different approaches to change in higher education, the report presents a brief account of the discourse on leadership in higher education related to those different approaches as well as selected skills and competences that are, in general, “teachable”. Implications for the LOTUS project are highlighted for each section in the report, which ends with a special section on methodological considerations.

Overall, this working paper builds on the premise that leadership is work and leading effectively can be learned, thereby emphasising knowledge, competence and skills that can be obtained and shared. Further, following Taylor and Machado’s (2006) claim that there is a dysfunctional disconnect between theory and practice regarding leadership in higher education, the working paper aims for a balance between rigor and relevance, approaching leadership from a pragmatic perspective, yet grounding the recommendations in research.

I. Dealing with change versus managing change

Change and change management are both terms that are often invoked in relation to all kinds of organisations. In general, change means not more or less than moving from one stage to another (usually lying in the future), and indeed from this perspective, higher education is constantly changing: new technologies, demographic changes, legal changes, new education providers all challenge the status quo and force institutions to rethink their strategies and operations, sometimes even their institutional identities. The disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a very good example of big changes in higher education institutions’ environment with which they need to cope. The problem very often seems to be to identify relevant environmental developments, to assess their actual impact on the institution and translate them into something meaningful for the organisation. The clearly faded hype regarding Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) serves as an example for a rather short-lived trend that has not triggered big sustainable changes but was debated extensively – yet the fact that global companies such as Alphabet are basically building on elements of MOOCs in order to create their own educational programs, which could create major ripples across global higher education, is hardly discussed. Recognising relevant environmental changes is thereby still an underrated competence and is also far less prominently featured in the professional higher education discourse, even though conventional (positivist) models of change management clearly account for them.

The conventional model of change management still seems to be the dominant one in professionalised higher education. Within this paradigm, the concept relates to deliberate and induced change, for example in the context of restructuring efforts or as a promise of new leadership teams. Induced change equals planned change with a high degree of formalisation and standardisation and is very often associated with the need to win the members of an organisation over for accepting the change(s) and supporting the change agenda. People interested in this topic will find a great bulk of literature and an entire sub-discipline in business administration/management dedicated to the question of how change processes can be incited or managed. The approach here is a linear one, with organisational goals implemented via clear action plans and leading to expected outcomes (Smith *et al.* 2014, Kotter 2012).

Far less prominent but becoming more and more relevant in the scholarly discourse and organisational development models, is change that is not deliberately instilled, yet happens anyway. Alternative models within the so-called “emergent paradigm” theorise change by regarding organisations as dynamic entities in which change often is continuous, difficult to predict and emerges from local interactions (Brady & Doyle 2018). Lueger and Froschauer (2015) see this type of change as the dominant one, challenging the assumption that organisations could ever be static. For them, the interdependence of actors and actions and the regularity of unplanned incidents are a major driver of organisational dynamics and change (*ibid.*).

Obviously, there is also a clear connection between both types of change, with change management often aiming to support the institution in adapting to environmental influences. Within this report, both paradigms will be treated equally, based on the premise that both have their merits. The rational “induced change” approach seems particularly fit for the development of new programmes or projects, where the goals are clear, and change is localisable and delimitable. The “emergent change” approach, in contrast, appears to suit broader strategic “overhauls” as well as situations and contexts where the university needs to deal with disruptions or wants to foster creativity and innovations. In addition, what both paradigms have in common is that being attentive to environmental trends and relevant context factors very often is the source or starting point of successful change management processes. The increasingly inter-relating, contradictory and unforeseeable impacts of complexity upon the world and therefore also universities

and their leaders (Barnett 2004) certainly demand a high degree of resilience. “Change-readiness” as a specific mindset to deal with different kinds of change will definitely play a big role in this regard (Drew 2010).

What this implies for LOTUS

Since higher education leaders will most likely be faced with both types of change – i.e., dynamic changes to be managed in their environment(s) or within the organisation as well as actually planned and managed changes processes, usually triggered by the first category – it seems prudent to address the issue of how to deal with emerging changes in a productive way. Identifying in a timely manner opportunities and risk factors that are going to impact the organisation is a big part of it, yet many academics treat the “opportunities and threats” part of any given SWOT exercise more like a chore than a chance. Taking into account the needs and perspectives of different stakeholders is definitely a key factor in this regard (Randall & Coakley 2009). It is thus suggested to touch upon the following topics within the LOTUS project:

- Environmental scanning techniques as well as opportunity and risk assessment on an international, national, regional and/or institutional level: What are reliable sources for identifying relevant trends in higher education? What models and techniques can be used for defining and describing environmental chances and threats for the organisation beyond the much used (and abused) SWOT template? The identification of relevant changes through the lens of an organisation’s profile and strategy is a big part of this (and also something highly suited for a good practice exchange among peers).
- Tools for a regular diagnosis of the needs of relevant stakeholders, including students, staff and external partners. A useful stakeholder management tool calls for particular instruments beyond the much-employed stakeholder surveys, which are not always fit for purpose.
- Change-readiness and accepting change as a constant in higher education leadership rather than a special occurrence.

II. The particularities of higher education contexts

There is a prominent joke about the military, the Catholic Church and universities being the only institutions that have hardly changed over the last 1.000 years. As with most jokes, the punchline relies on heavy exaggeration – but it already indicates higher education’s rather complex relationship with change.

In reality, higher education institutions (and entire systems) have experienced significant change in the last decades, most notably with regard to the globally observable transition from elite to mass institutions, which reflects various changes in the institutions’ environment as well as universities themselves (Yielder & Colding 2004). Yet this does not mean that higher education institutions are more “change-ready” or less reluctant than other types of organisations. In general, reluctance to change seems to be a predominantly experienced phenomenon, irrespective of the type of organisation (Hechanova *et al.* 2018). Even more importantly, however, it should be noted that change in higher education in most cases can be regarded as incremental rather than transformational (Taylor & Machado 2006).

Many higher education researchers keep emphasising the distinctiveness of higher education institutions, when it comes to questions of organisation and management, including leadership and change management (Drew 2010, van Ameijde *et al.* 2009, Middlehurst 2007). Hechanova *et al.* (2018) argue that leadership is very much context-dependent, emphasising the differences between effective leadership in academic organisations versus business enterprises. Sometimes, higher education institutions are even rather harshly judged, deeming them “(...) *naive in their approach to tackle challenges and problems in comparison to the profit-making industries*” (Lu & Laux 2017: 646). Rehbock *et al.* (2019) are less judgmental but found in their study that images of the typical professorial leader differ from images of the typical business leader. This mirrors Chandlers’ much-cited aphorism that the business of a university is not university business (Chandler 1999) – and requires some careful balancing of academic leadership and business efficiency (Drew 2006).

Other authors cast some doubt on the uniqueness of challenges leaders in higher education institutions have to face, finding various fields and types of organisations with similar features (e.g., Lumby 2012). The argumentation here, however, overlooks a crucial point: it may be true that other organisation types also fall into the category that Mintzberg (1979) has called “professional bureaucracies” and are

internally categorised by rather “loosely coupled entities” (Weick 1976), such as hospitals, consultancy firms or other education institutions. None of them, though, are usually known to be easy to lead or manage.

For this working paper, the takeaway from the respective discourse is almost deceptively simple: What works in some contexts, might not necessarily work in other contexts. As van Ameijde *et al.* have argued (2009), following Birnbaum (2000): “(...) *quite often the ‘solutions’ derived from the private sector which Higher Education institutions have tried to implement were based on principles and approaches derived from out-dated ideas and management fads which have already been abandoned in the sector from which they originated*” (2009: 764). Yet the premise is not only limited to the idea of importing concepts from contexts outside of higher education. Given the great diversity of legal systems, types of higher education institutions and academic traditions and cultures even within the European Higher Education Area, it is recommended not to pursue specific leadership and change management models nor to assume a common level of knowledge and experience among the participants.

What this implies for the LOTUS project

Following from the considerations on the particularities of higher education institutions above, it is safe to say that generic knowledge of higher education management and leadership has its limits. I would even argue that the differences between higher education systems and different higher education institutions might in some dimensions even outweigh the differences between higher education institutions and other types of organisations. This is not an argument for an unreflected import of ideas and concepts from more business-like contexts, more a caveat not to discard this idea from the start. Though it is likely that many LOTUS participants might originate from public universities, there are also a multitude of private and highly specialised institutions in the European Higher Education area, and requirements will differ considerably from place to place. Therefore, in addition to any generic inputs, it will be important to help participants understand the specifics of each institutional case – starting with their own.

Understanding one's own organisation and challenging this understanding are important premises for leading. Higher education managers from the academic part of the organisations might have a good overview of this part of the organisation – yet on the other hand lack insight into the structures, processes and policies originating in the administrative part. But it is not only knowledge of how universities in general are formed and run or the specifics of one's own institutions that can be regarded as indispensable for (potential) university leaders. Identifying the power players, hidden champions, secret adversaries, professional opponents and reliable supporters might be a success factor for effective change management and sustainable leadership alike.

Given that “context matters”, good practice examples should not just be described and shared within the trainings, but fully analysed: What are the actual factors that made a certain approach work? Are there elements that could also work elsewhere? This is well in line with the argument that the import of successful models can have severe drawbacks. Stripped of their immediate developmental contexts and specific institutional conditions, they create and carry different meanings than in the organisation they originally stem from (Vettori & Lueger 2011). It is suggested that this analysis be conducted in a multiperspective manner, i.e., not only by the party sharing the good practice example, but also by the audience.

Inputs that might be valuable include:

- Techniques for analysing one's own institution, beyond the omnipresent SWOT analysis. There is a broad array of approaches available for assessing an institution's change readiness, combining evaluations and change management (Fetterman 2001) or identifying stakeholders (Kettunen 2015) which are hardly known in higher education and offer valuable impulses.
- A proposed analytical grid for each good practice exchange exercise, in order to help the exercise move more in the direction of actual peer learning or qualitative benchmarking, rather than just a sharing of success stories.

III. Leadership in higher education

Leadership in higher education institution is increasingly getting attention from management and higher education researchers alike (for an overview, see Esen *et al.* 2020; also Lu & Laux 2017, Alonderiene & Majuskaite 2014, van Ameijde *et al.* 2009, Randall & Coakley 2009, Taylor & Machado 2006). Though arguments can be found for regarding leadership in close combination with the broader topic of higher education management (Taylor & Machado 2006), the focus in this working paper is decidedly on leadership, in particular in relation to organisational change.

This seems even more prudent, as the concept of leadership itself is far from being clear or easy to define. Scholars have for several decades developed different approaches to explain (and train) effective leadership, focusing on personal traits as well as different behavioural patterns and strategies, or regarding them as depending on different contextual factors (for a very concise overview, see, among others, Osseo-Asare *et al.* 2005). Different leadership principles have almost emerged once per decade, mirroring fashions in management theory as well as societal changes. In the words of Taylor and Machado: “*Leadership is a complex process consumed by the complications of timing, circumstances and individuals*” (2006: 140).

In many countries, senior managers and leaders in higher education institutions are still (s)electd from the ranks of the academia, without any formal qualifications or trainings for such positions. This holds true for administrative leaders as well as for what Rehbock *et al.* (2019) call professorial leadership and focuses on intellectual leadership and mentoring by senior academics. Countries such as the US, UK, Australia, on the other hand, have a pretty lively labour market for professional higher education managers, as well as formalised training programs and even higher education degrees for higher education management and leadership. Esen *et al.* (2020) show in their literature review of major higher education journals across 20 years (1995 – 2014) that the majority of articles stem from authors in the US, the UK and Australia, which clearly indicates a geographical imbalance with regard to reflecting leadership in higher education.

Yielder and Colding (2004) argue not only a geographical but a temporal dimension, stating that “*the collegial approach of the traditional post-war university has given way to the corporate management influences of the last twenty years.*” (316) Ultimately, they not only juxtapose both types – academic leaders and operational managers – but emphasise their “symbiotic relationship”. It is important to note, though, that the leadership concept is not limited to the most senior level of an institution: Leaders

can also emerge in middle management positions, on the level of units, departments or in working groups. They can lead projects, programmes, processes or discourse. Therefore, the developmental suggestions contained in this report hold relevance for a varied group of actors within higher education institutions.

In the literature, the approaches taken to leadership in higher education are almost as manifold as the leadership theories that are proposed. In some cases, higher education institutions are not treated (or only superficially) differently from other (even for profit) organisations, mirroring the great variety of higher education models and organisation types across the globe. In other works, the differences are clearly emphasised, suggesting that leaders in higher education have to deal with rather particular challenges – but at the same time also disregarding the heterogeneity of the sector.

Within the emergent paradigm, the focus is shifted from planning and enacting change to a more dialogue-oriented approach, trying to coordinate internal dynamics and negotiating shared goals. Leadership in this variant requires a different “mindset” and skills related to recognising opportunities arising from interactions and conversations. (Brady & Doyle 2018).

This working paper presents a couple of “leadership styles” propagated by scholars of higher education:

- Transactional leadership is based on an exchange relationship between the leader and his/her co-workers. Performance contracts between a boss and his/her employees is an example that illustrates the logic quite well: In exchange for meeting pre-defined goals, the employee gains material or immaterial rewards or advantages. Randall & Coakley (2009) argue that such transactional approaches have their merits when trying to balance university budgets with faculty needs.
- Transformational leadership, quite similar to transactional approaches, aims at inspiring people within an organisation by paying attention to their personal outcomes and achievements (Odumeru & Ogbonna 2013), which suits change management efforts rather well. The leader here entices teams to identify areas where change is needed, inspires them to develop a positive vision and motivates team members to execute the proposed changes. Encouraging trust and inspiring loyalty play a big role here. For Al Hussein & Ebeltagi, the approach is particularly suited for higher education as “*within the HE environment, TL encourages staff to participate in educational programmes, to promote and develop their skills, and to achieve exceptional performance.*” (2016: 160).

- Adaptive leadership is highly situational and also recognises that “(...) there are competing visions for the reality of the organization” (Lu & Laux 2017: 643). The concept builds on the work of Heifetz *et al.* (2009) and distinguishes two kinds of problems: technical ones, with clear solutions and adaptive ones that are not well defined and with no solutions known in advance. Adaptive leadership then aims to identify the adaptive problem in a way to gain enough stakeholder interest, to make the stakeholder aware of the necessity of change and to create conditions so the stakeholders can jointly develop a solution, including positive stress. Randall & Coakley (2009) regard the approach as particularly useful for higher education contexts, which are usually complex and require non-routine decisions.
- Implicit leadership theories approach leadership from the “opposite end”, i.e., the perspective of followers. The assumption here is that followers have an often unreflected understanding of effective leadership and that they evaluate their leaders’ effectiveness by comparing their subjective images of leaders with their actual leaders (Rehbock *et al.* 2019). The greater the followers’ schemas converge with leaders’ traits and behaviour, the more effective the leaders appear to be (Hechanova *et al.* 2018). In many ways this is not a leadership approach that suggests aspects to focus on, more an analytical lens that helps to understand what followers actually expect of their leaders.
- Distributed (or shared) leadership is an approach that challenges the notion that leadership is a primarily vertical process with singular leaders guiding the rest of the organisation. Instead, the theory regards leadership as a shared influence process to which several individual actors contribute through their interactions and dispersed expertise (van Almeijde *et al.* 2009). The same authors find the distributed leadership concept particularly suited for higher education institutions, as they are usually characterised by a number of strong actors and particular organisational complexity, and recommend applying it to project teams, where different backgrounds and expertise need to be integrated in order to reach a common goal. Overall, however, even a distributed leadership approach requires key actors that promote such an approach and have the skills to implement and accompany it, arguably requiring some vertical leadership.

This is by far not a complete list of different leadership approaches endorsed and advocated by higher education researchers. It is easily visible that the approaches do not differ that much in their basic premises, but rather in their foci and techniques. What most of them have in common is an acknowledgement that solutions for complex problems can only be resolved via the cooperation of

different actors/stakeholders – and that it is the leader’s main function to direct the stakeholders’ attention to the problem at hand – and help them tap their potential to solve the problem.

What this implies for the LOTUS project

Academics show a considerable reluctance towards formal management trainings and “corporate logics”, which is not helped by the fact that in the light of lacking leadership concepts for higher education, many institutions “import” concepts from the private sector. Maintaining a “collegial academic culture” (Drew 2010), while at the same time directing the institution where needed, requires some careful balancing. In addition, as I have tried to show, various leadership models and approaches differ greatly in their focus and scope, and selecting leadership theories that are particularly suitable for a) higher education as a field and b) a probably highly diverse group of participants appears to be a risky strategy, in particular regarding many academics’ scepticism towards management modes.

Therefore, instead of focussing on management techniques and actual leadership development from a specific leadership model perspective, it might be advisable to focus on skills which academics find useful and acceptable, but which play a crucial role for leading change processes.

In a very broad sense, the leadership skills that seem to pervade all of the approaches above are related to inspiring and motivating people, bringing them together and supporting them in tapping their creative potential – and helping them deal with conflict in a constructive manner.

Topics that could be easily adapted within the LOTUS project, include:

- Effective preparation and moderation of meetings related to a specific change process: Academic cultures are discursive and experience shows that many meetings, including project meetings endorse this habit. However, whereas multiple perspectives are helpful in the brainstorming or feedback phases of any given project, a multi-actor approach works less well for drawing up a plan or concept. How to set up a meeting, including the politics of invitation, how to prepare it to better support any change agenda and how to moderate a discussion with strong-opinioned individuals could be covered in this part of the programme.

- Negotiation techniques and the creation of win-win situations: Finding a compromise between different stakeholder interests is a key requirement for leaders and managers in professional bureaucracies or expert organisations. Following transactional theories, creating a setting where every party involved gets the feeling of gaining rather than losing something, is a plausible success factor in implementing big (change) projects or reforming policies and procedures. Again, negotiation and bargaining techniques are teachable and learnable, but hardly on the “curriculum” for academics pursuing a management career.
- Creativity and innovation approaches: Adapting to big environmental challenges often requires new solutions and out-of-the-box thinking. Leadership theories have often strained the relationship between effective leadership and the encouragement of innovations. Elrehail *et al.* (2018), for example, show how transformational leadership and knowledge sharing has contributed to the capability to innovate at institutions in their region. In their paper, Lašáková *et al.* (2017) make a couple of recommendations based on their data, arguing that connecting different stakeholders and moderating them effectively is a key premise for innovativeness. In addition, there are also research-based ideas to be found on how to support creativity, even with very concrete suggestions around brainstorming techniques in higher education contexts (Al Samarraie *et al.* 2018).
- Conflict management and conflict resolution: Academics have a rather twofold relationship with conflict, on the one hand being trained to critically reflect on each other’s work and to debate heavily, on the other hand highly averse to social conflict that cannot be resolved by a new argument. Most change processes, however, are riddled with (potential) conflict, and the readiness to deal with people’s distress or even invoke it, is an important leadership skill, for example, in adaptive or situative leadership (Lu & Laux 2017). Dealing with conflict – and helping other team members to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, rather than avoiding them and risking a climate that impedes solutions – is probably one of the most difficult aspects for higher education leaders. But again, there are well-defined conflict-resolution skills that are easily understandable and teachable (Warters & Wendy 2003).

There are a couple of other issues that authors (e.g., Drew 2010) have found to be relevant for leaders, such as fundraising, financial management or strategy development, but this seems too broad a focus within the scope of LOTUS.

IV. Communicating change as a key leadership requirement

It is a quite simple, yet effective truth: innovations in organisations are only as good as their implementation. As a colleague of mine once stated: it cannot have taken the CEOs of Austrian banks more than one afternoon to define the strategy to move into the CEE region, once the iron curtain had fallen – but it took them more than ten years to implement that plan. One of the key factors of implementing change is effective communication, not least because all change is implemented and sustained through human communication (Russ 2008).

In the daily life of organisations, communication is very often understood as a one-way model of disseminating information, where the sender aims to communicate issues as effectively as possible to a number of receivers (Shannon & Weaver 1949). Effective communication on change, however, requires a dialogue model where key stakeholders can bring their worries on the table and actively inform themselves, whereas the actors responsible for the change management process constantly update everyone and make any adaptations based on the stakeholders' feedback transparent. Following the organisation psychologist Karl Weick, any framework can be potentially successful as long as it fulfils the following functions: “1. Gets people into action; 2. Gives people a direction (through values or whatever); 3. Supplies legitimate explanations that are energizing and enable actions to be repeated” (Weick 2000: 163).

The ability to communicate well with others is a central element in most leadership theories, in particular in a higher education context. Brady & Doyle (2018) regard conversation and dialogue as key elements in the emergent change paradigm. For them, “*Strategising is less about tools and techniques and more about active engagement by all change agents in organisational conversations, surfacing differences and patterns and encouraging experimentation with emergent ideas*” (307).

It is often also necessary to communicate well with stakeholders outside of the actual project team and/or wider organisational community at hand, including tailor-making messages to individual constituencies, providing feedback on progress or ensuring the involvement of additional key actors, when needed (Almeijde *et al.* 2009).

Last but not least, academic leaders might have natural charisma and capabilities derived from their personal or professional experience. Within a “*primus inter pares*” logic, however, such qualities do not always get the opportunity to shine. Cultural aspects – including a deep distrust towards managerialism that might threaten academic freedom – make the whole notion of “academic leadership” an

ambivalent one. Being careful about the language used and adapting terminologies and approaches to higher education and their specific cultural contexts, is therefore a key requirement.

What this implies for the LOTUS project

Overall, communication seems to play a key role on various levels with regard to successful change management and leadership endeavours. Communication fulfils different functions here: promoting change and driving it forward, informing different stakeholders about the change, supporting acceptance of the change – and integrating different actors in the change management project (Schulz-Knappe *et al.* 2019). Last but not least, establishing effective communication processes within the change management team is a key factor for ensuring knowledge exchange and assisting team work.

Issues that could thus be touched upon in the LOTUS project include:

- Focusing on how to build an effective communication architecture within a higher education institution beyond traditional committee and representative structures. Representative structures are a big part of academic self-governance cultures, yet heavily rely on the representatives passing on information. When designing change projects, designing an effective communication plan (mark: not just dissemination plan) and creating fora, meeting opportunities and tailor-made communication structures and processes is something overlooked in many leadership trainings, in particular in higher education.
- Fostering awareness of the role of language and developing vocabularies for issues related to change and leadership that are easily acceptable within the specific cultural ecosystems of higher education institutions. Terms and concepts need to be carefully translated into the language of the field/institution/profession and leaders could be sensitized for the effects different framings have on the people involved (Vettori & Loukkola 2014).
- Creating effective ways of involving external and internal stakeholders. This includes a differentiated approach to identifying actual stakeholders (instead of working with generalised labels such as “students”, “teachers” or “employers” where the differences within the groups are as considerable as between the groups) as well as developing ways of engaging stakeholders beyond surveys, focus groups or sounding boards.

V. Some suggestions regarding LOTUS methodology

Whereas the previous parts of this report were all focussing on the concepts of leadership and change management in higher education and the implications for LOTUS content-wise, this final part proposes a few methodological and didactical elements for the workshops and peer learning schemes. Leadership trainings have become quite common, also in higher education: The German Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung (CHE), the British Higher Education Academy or the Austrian Danube University Krems are just some of the providers that cater specifically to the needs of (aspiring) higher education managers and even offer peer learning activities. The following suggestions are thus driven by the aim to create a “unique selling proposition” for LOTUS and also makes use of the resources the LOTUS consortium can draw upon. The basic premise here is that other providers have much more know-how and credentials in leadership education, but the LOTUS partners have arguably more experience in the field of international higher education and know better what the participants might need/could share and would perceive as adding value to alternative offers or previous learnings.

Added value could be created through the following elements:

- It seems quite likely that the participants will be tempted to restrict their “investment” in the LOTUS program to their active participation in the workshop meeting and peer learning meetings. But there is only so much content that can be discovered in such events, and the main purpose of the peer learning meetings is the exchange of views and mutual consulting. Designing self-learning modules and making use of “nudging approaches” in order to encourage participants to actively engage with the material might provide a common basis for the dialogue activities.
- By offering expert inputs beyond traditional leadership trainings, i.e., along the topics suggested above. It seems highly likely that participants will come with quite diverse backgrounds, also related to their leadership experiences and preferred approaches. Some of them might had some formal training, whereas others will have learned purely “on the job”. It is thus proposed to provide small information nuggets to the participants, e.g., in the form of short videos or online presentations provided either by experienced HE leaders, or by experts on communication, change management, conflict management, etc.

- In order to make the peer learning/consulting more effective, it appears advisable to give it some focus; otherwise, participants might be tempted to touch upon a great variety of topics, creating a meandering conversation with only few practical take-aways. Asking each participant to formulate 1-2 concrete problems or questions they want to work on during the year could help to avoid such an outcome and would also give the participants a specific objective for the programme (i.e., “solving” their problem with the help of their peers.)
- Effective peer learning groups should not be too large, allowing each participant within a group enough time to delve into their project – and creating a climate of trust, where peers can openly discuss problems and issues. Ideally, such a group would not consist of more than 4-6 peers.
- An analytical approach to good practice sharing would shape the respective stories into impulses to learn from. In many good practice exchanges, professionals tend to tell each other “success stories” but in a highly polished form, where contextual factors are blanked out and causalities simplified. By requesting participants to analyse their own stories and present the analysis, rather than provide a mere descriptive account, it is easier for the listeners to extrapolate the parts that might be useful within their own contexts. This could also be turned into a reverse exercise, with the participants themselves analysing and interpreting the case of the presenter.
- Encouraging participants to look for “ideas and practices that inspire” beyond their own institutional examples and experiences would make the learning experience even more effective, as people would be required to deliberately look for potential solutions and at the same time reflect on what makes a certain idea so compelling and how it could be adapted to their own contexts.

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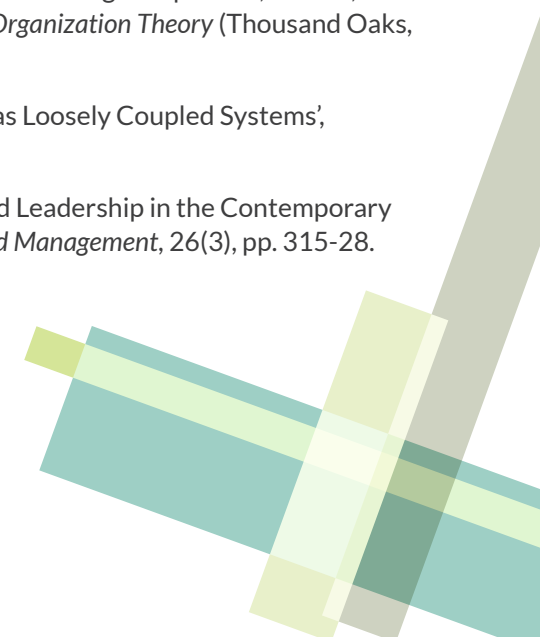
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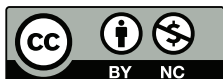
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