Influencing teaching and learning microcultures. Academic development in a research-intensive university.

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Influencing teaching and learning microcultures

Academic development in a research-intensive university

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Influencing teaching and learning microcultures – Academic development in a research-intensive university

The focus in this thesis is to explore theoretical perspectives and strategies for academic development, particularly in a research-intensive university. The purpose is to investigate academic development that aims to support and influence individual academic teachers and groups of teachers, in the different social collegial contexts that they work in, here called microcultures. Building on literature focused on organizational learning these microcultures are defined as constituting the meso-level within the university. Previous research shows that effects from teacher training programmes largely depend on how such programmes are valued in the teacher's professional environment. Furthermore, previous research has shown that local teaching and learning cultures, including norms developed over time, largely influence teachers' ways of thinking and practising.

In this thesis academic development is explored with a research-intensive Scandinavian university as a case study. The theoretical framework originates from sociocultural and network theory, as well as from organizational and leadership research. The research is presented here in five articles and shows that academic teachers rely on trusting and inspirational conversations about teaching with a few others that constitute the teacher's *significant network*. The more the professional context or microculture supports such conversations, the higher the number of significant relations within the workplace. By researching microcultures as a starting point for systematic academic development at the organizational meso-level, the research further suggests that an effective strategy for academic development is to increase the number of significant relations within microcultures, as well as between them. One such strategy that is used and investigated in the case is the *scholarship of teaching and learning* (SoTL). SoTL can be a quality regulator for the character of the conversations within and between networks and the artefacts produced through SoTL can be used as transferrable objects of locally produced knowledge both within and between microcultures. Finally, *local-level leadership* is shown to have an impact on the development of microcultures, with results indicating that above all, an internal mandate needs to be established.

By focusing on how academic teachers and leaders are mutually influenced by, and influence, their collegial context, this thesis shows that academic development, taking this into account, has the potential to contribute to organizational learning.

Key words: Academic development, higher education, leadership, microculture, organizational learning, scholarship of teaching and learning

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Academic development in a research-intensive university

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Cover: The image symbolizes the many layers of perspectives that has inspired this thesis, looking forward at the endeavour of academic development, and finding new interesting aspects from the sides along the way. Photo taken by Katarina Mårtensson in Sauveterre-de-Béarn, France.

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Foreword

"How do you change a university?" This was the initial question I was asked when I was interviewed in 1999 for the position of academic developer. I was stunned. I had never really thought about it. I had – throughout my entire life so far – been interested in learning and developmental processes but this was a totally new thought. The question implicitly was asking how to make the status of teaching and learning a priority within a research-intensive, old and traditional university. I remember hesitantly saying something about the importance of listening to students' opinions, and about the importance of engaging the academics, but that was basically it. Looking back now, I still think those are crucial dimensions for "changing a university". However, I have come to realise through my research and practice that there are so many more dimensions, such as the university as a system, an organization, and a culture (as we shall see - many cultures); leadership and management; quality processes; changes in the surrounding world; political and global influence, and technical developments. The question however – how do you change a university – still remains fascinating. In my own academic development practice and research I have had this question in the back of my mind over the last fifteen years. This thesis contributes to the growing knowledge of how to change a university. As you may have guessed, I got the job. The person who posed me the question was my significant colleague Torgny Roxå, who has also been my companion and co-author on this scholarly journey.

I am myself a part of the phenomenon and the context under study in this thesis: I have researched my own and my colleagues' practice in the university where I work. As an academic developer my role for more than a decade has been to support the academic teachers and leaders at Lund University, in reflecting upon their teaching and learning, and in improving conditions for their teaching and their students' learning. From that perspective the teachers are absolutely pivotal and the most central element to educational development. Without their engagement no development will occur. Academic developers can facilitate and contribute to development but not on our own. Some issues are too complex for any individual to tackle singlehandedly; and some teachers express a lack of interest or appreciation from their colleagues and/or leaders for teaching-related matters. It is therefore my conviction that as academic developers we need to think systemically when aiming to support the development of teaching and learning and the conditions in which

teaching and learning are embedded in our institutions. Out of this comes my research interest in improving our understanding of how we can facilitate development of teaching and learning cultures. I am convinced that such development should not – and probably could not – be enforced or imposed only externally, but rather needs to be characterized by engagement also from within. Alongside this there is a need for some basic academic values within the academic culture in which learning and teaching take place. As a researcher I have collected data through various methods. I have used my knowledge about the organization, my activities as an academic developer, and my network of colleagues, teachers and leaders within the organization to get access to material for the studies presented in this thesis. Along the way my colleagues have adopted a very open attitude to let me investigate the issues I am interested in. Teachers and leaders have more than willingly taken part. I have interpreted this as a sign of a general interest in teaching and learning cultures under exploration, documentation and analysis, for the benefit of the individual as well as for the organization. It is therefore my ambition that the results presented in this thesis will contribute both to an understanding of and to future opportunities to develop teaching and learning cultures in academia.

Acknowledgements

Producing this thesis was similar to running. It feels like what I imagine running a marathon, although I have never run more than a half-marathon, 21 km.

The similarities are several:

- It takes time!
- I work in intervals: when I run, sometimes my speed is really good, and sometimes I can barely jog. In periods I have had a really nice flow in my writing, and I could go on for hours and hours. Other times I could just sit for hours and yet only produce one small section at the most.
- Steps forward and steps back: In periods of time I go running two, three or even four times per week. Other periods in time I mostly sit in the sofa eating chocolate and snacks. Persuading myself to get going involves taking long walks and then gradually start running again. In my writing David Green helped immensely by introducing me to the concept of ”shitty first draft”, just to get the writing going.
- Finally, I cannot run in silence. I need music in my ears, which provides company and emotional support; just as being surrounded by 50.000 other runners in Gothenburgh half-marathon helps me challenge myself. And I certainly couldn't have done all this writing and scholarly work on my own.

So many people have joined me in this academic marathon, and I wouldn't have made it without you:

My mother, Eva Falk-Nilsson, who inspired me with the passion for educational development, and for always encouraging me to “ask the questions”. My father, Per Nilsson, for always believing in me and inspiring me to challenge myself.

Torgny Roxå, for posing me that question many years ago, “How do you change a university?”. Our joint scholarly journey has been a professional adventure, and it continues.

My supervisors, Per Odenrick, Kristina Eneroth, and Thomas Olsson, for continuous and sensitive support, critique and encouragement. Much needed and much appreciated!

Gunnar Handal for invaluable formative feedback as a critical friend at my final seminar. You gave me tools, literally, to sharpen my thinking and my arguments.

To readers and commentators of this thesis at different stages of its drafts: Jonas Borell, Catherine Bovill, LaVonne Cornell Swanson, Eva Falk-Nilsson, Mona Fjellström, David Green, Maria Larsson, Åsa Lindberg-Sand, Susanne Pelger, Sara Santesson, and Gun Wellbo. Your input has definitely improved the final product.

Andreas Josefson, CED, for professionalising the figures in the thesis and Maria Hedberg, CED, for assisting with the cover.

Colleagues at CED, Genombrottet and MedCUL, and my significant network locally, nationally and internationally. You know who you are. I so enjoy my work thanks to you.

LTH, Department of Design Sciences, and CED, Malin Irhammar and Åsa Lindberg-Sand, for the opportunity to pull this research together in a PhD-thesis.

And most importantly my beloved husband Mats and the gems of our lives: Viktor, Edvin and Alva. Thank you for supporting me in this endeavour, and also for helping me develop in other aspects of life: as a wife, a mother, a travel companion, a runner, a snowboarder and a freediver. I love you with all my heart. Now and forever. Time after time.

Abstract

The focus in this thesis is to explore theoretical perspectives and strategies for academic development, particularly in a research-intensive university. The purpose is to investigate academic development that aims to support and influence individual academic teachers and groups of teachers, in the different social collegial contexts that they work in, here called microcultures. Building on literature focused on organizational learning these microcultures are defined as constituting the meso-level within the university. Previous research shows that effects from teacher training programmes largely depend on how such programmes are valued in the teacher's professional environment. Furthermore, previous research has shown that local teaching and learning cultures, including norms developed over time, largely influence teachers' ways of thinking and practising.

In this thesis academic development is explored with a research-intensive Scandinavian university as a case study. The theoretical framework originates from sociocultural and network theory, as well as from organizational and leadership research. The research is presented here in five articles and shows that academic teachers rely on trusting and inspirational conversations about teaching with a few others that constitute the teacher's *significant network*. The more the professional context or microculture supports such conversations, the higher the number of significant relations within the workplace. By researching microcultures as a starting point for systematic academic development at the organizational meso-level, the research further suggests that an effective strategy for academic development is to increase the number of significant relations within microcultures, as well as between them. One such strategy that is used and investigated in the case is the *scholarship of teaching and learning* (SoTL). SoTL can be a quality regulator for the character of the conversations within and between networks and the artefacts produced through SoTL can be used as transferrable objects of locally produced knowledge both within and between microcultures. Finally, *local-level leadership* is shown to have an impact on the development of microcultures, with results indicating that above all, an internal mandate needs to be established.

By focusing on how academic teachers and leaders are mutually influenced by, and influence, their collegial context, this thesis shows that academic development, taking this into account, has the potential to contribute to organizational learning.

Sammanfattning

Alltsedan expansionen av den högre utbildningen tog fart i Sverige, i slutet av 60-talet, har universitet och högskolor arbetat för att utveckla utbildningskvaliteten. Detta har bland annat gjorts genom satsningar på policys som reglerar exempelvis arbete med kursvärderingar, mångfald, och kurs- och utbildningsplaner. Satsningar har också gjorts på pedagogisk utbildning av universitetslärare och forskare, och på pedagogiska utvecklingsprojekt som ofta drivits av eldsjälar. Många universitet och högskolor har anställt pedagogiska utvecklare och skapat särskilda enheter för att underlätta och driva på utvecklingsarbetet. Den sammantagna effekten av dessa olika satsningar är dock oklar. Många av dem är antingen alltför toppstyrda, eller i alltför hög grad individfokuserade.

Denna avhandling fokuserar pedagogiskt utvecklingsarbete i högre utbildning, i gränssnittet mellan övergripande policynivå och individnivå, den organisatoriska så kallade meso-nivån. Närmare bestämt studeras med kvalitativa metoder hur universitetslärare i en forskningsintensiv miljö (Lunds universitet) påverkas av sina närmaste kollegor och ledare i sitt sätt att tänka om och bedriva undervisning och utbildningsutveckling.

I avhandlingen undersöks vem lärare vänder sig till för att prova nya idéer i undervisningen och för att bearbeta och hitta lösningar på pedagogiska utmaningar. Det framkommer att lärarna förlitar sig på ett litet antal betrodda personer, ett så kallat *signifikant nätverk*, som både kan utgöras av kollegor och av personer helt utanför den egna lokala organisationen. Med hjälp av teorier om sociala nätverk, organisationsutveckling och ledarskap visas också i avhandlingen att pedagogiskt utvecklingsarbete har stor potential att bidra till organisationsutveckling. Detta förutsätter ett fokus på de enskilda lärarna, inte bara som individer utan också som en del av ett kollegialt socialt sammanhang, så kallade *mikrokulturer,* på den organisatoriska meso-nivån.

För att pedagogiskt utvecklingsarbete ska vara hållbart och kunna bidra till organisatorisk utveckling behöver interaktioner gällande lärande och undervisning *inom* mikrokulturerna vara starka, liksom interaktioner *mellan* olika mikrokulturer. Detta kan ske exempelvis genom mötesplatser och forum för diskussion och erfarenhetsutbyte, men också med hjälp av dokumenterade, underbyggda reflektioner kring undervisningsfrågor. Det sistnämnda bygger på ett synsätt på akademisk

kompetens som internationellt kommit att kallas *scholarship of teaching and learning*, vilket innebär ett vetenskapligt förhållningssätt till undervisning och lärande. Förutom att bidra till lokalt skapad kunskap så kan sådana dokumenterade underbyggda reflektioner om undervisning spridas i organisationen, och synliggöras genom seminarier, konferenser och nyhetsbrev. De blir också möjliga underlag att använda i samband med tjänstetillsättningar, belöningar och karriärmöjligheter. För att ovanstående ska komma till stånd krävs en mängd sammanhängande, integrerade aktiviteter i en komplex och dynamisk verksamhet, vilket också ställer krav på ledarskap. Avhandlingen visar därför slutligen att lokalt *ledarskap* i mikrokulturerna kan bidra till att understödja pedagogisk utveckling under förutsättning att det finns eller skapas interna mandat att leda.

Appended papers

Paper I

Roxå, T. & Mårtensson, K. (2009) Significant conversations and significant networks – exploring the backstage of the teaching arena. *Studies in Higher Education 34*(5), 547–559.

Both authors designed the study, collected and analysed the material, and wrote the paper together.

Paper II

Roxå, T., Mårtensson, K. & Alveteg, M. (2010) Understanding and influencing teaching and learning cultures at university – a network approach. *Higher Education* 62,99–111; Online First, 25 September 2010.

Torgny Roxå introduced the literature from network theory and its application to organizational culture in higher education, and wrote the first iteration of the paper. All three authors together developed a number of subsequent iterations along with reading the literature. Mattias Alveteg designed and wrote the narrative. I wrote the final iterations of the manuscript and responded to revisions suggested by the journal.

Paper III

Mårtensson, K., Roxå, T. & Olsson, T. (2011) Developing a quality culture through the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Higher Education Research and Development 30*(1), 51–62.

All authors developed the perspective used in the article, in theory as well as in practice. I, together with Torgny Roxå, wrote the first draft of the article. The authors together developed a number of subsequent iterations. I wrote the final iterations and responded to revisions suggested by the journal.

Paper IV

Mårtensson, K., Roxå, T. & Stensaker, B. (2012) From quality assurance to quality practices – an investigation of strong micro-cultures in teaching and learning. *Studies in Higher Education,* 1–12, iFirst Article.

I together with Torgny Roxå designed, conducted and reported the underlying case-study. Bjørn Stensaker drafted the introduction of the paper. I, together with Torgny Roxå, wrote the first draft for the main body of the paper. I finalised the paper into a publication.

Paper V

Mårtensson, K. & Roxå, T. (accepted for publication in *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*) Leadership at a local level – enhancing educational development.

Both authors developed and ran the leadership-programme in which data was collected. Both authors analysed the material. I was the main author of the manuscript.

1. Introduction

> "There has been an increasing recognition of the limits on the extent to which individual teachers can change or improve in effective ways if their colleagues and other courses do not, and on the difficulty of innovation and permanent change where the local culture and values are hostile to such change, or even hostile to taking teaching seriously. Studies of why some departments are much more educationally effective than others have tended to identify the role of leadership of teaching, and the health and vigour of the community of teaching practice, rather than seeing the whole as being no more than the sum of the [individual teacher] parts."
>
> (Gibbs, 2013: 4)

The quote above from Gibbs (2013) captures the essence of what this thesis will address. The thesis as a whole focuses on the development of teaching and learning in relation to the social, collegial context in which university teachers live their professional lives, here called teaching and learning cultures. In particular I explore perspectives that might be relevant for academic development as a field of practice and research. In this thesis the term "academic development" is used synonymously with the terms "educational" or "faculty" development although I am aware that in some contexts these terms connote somewhat different foci and scope. Here it mainly refers to various activities aiming for the development of teaching (including supervision), curricula, and leadership of teaching, in turn with the aim of supporting high quality student learning. "Academic developers" are employed with a main responsibility for promoting and supporting such activities. After working as an academic developer for 15 years in a research-intensive university, one crucial starting-point and underpinning value of my research is that successful changes need to occur in accordance with core values within each unique academic context. The main reason for exploring perspectives on academic development that might contribute to what Gibbs above calls "health and vigour of the community of teaching practice" is to enhance our understanding of what might influence and contribute to such characteristics in teaching and learning cultures. I therefore aim to explore academic development mainly from within my own university context (further described in section 2.2), with a gentle respect for the soul of academia. University teachers (henceforth for simplicity called teacher/s) are pivotal actors if teaching and learning is to develop. But they do not do this or should not do this in isolation – they are part

of local, collegial contexts in which their teaching takes place; and where norms and traditions guide what is considered good or bad ways to teach, to assess student learning, to design curricula, how leadership influences teaching and teachers etc. The focus in this thesis is therefore to explore theoretical perspectives and consequent strategies for academic development that move beyond the individual and into the meso-level of the organization – here defined as the different social, collegial contexts in which teachers work. In other words, the main purpose is to explore and understand more about how various perspectives on academic development can influence such collegial contexts from within academia itself. Results from this thesis could potentially support the work of academic developers in similar research-intensive universities. It can hopefully also aid academics and leaders themselves in their efforts to preserve core values, direct their efforts and achieve a collegial culture with high quality teaching and correspondingly high quality student learning.

The expansion of the higher education sector in Sweden over the past five decades has brought with it an increased attention to phenomena like internationalization, 'massification', and various quality assurance procedures (Stensaker et al 2012). Politicians, students, and society place high expectations on higher education in terms of student employability and societal growth. In addition, higher education has the potential to make use of new technologies in order to provide lifelong learning opportunities to students that no longer need to be on campus to take part in the education that is offered. These developments seem to be quite similar across the educational systems of the Western world; Sweden generally being not very different from other Scandinavian, European and Anglo-Saxon countries. A lot of these briefly described overarching changes fall into the laps of the individual academic who meets the students in teaching. The increasing pressures that academics face to deal with many new challenges, along with students' demands for high quality education (The Swedish National Union of Students, 2013) suggest it is important to explore in what ways academic teachers' professional development can be effectively supported.

There should be no doubt that university teachers of today face numerous challenges in relation to teaching and learning, certainly if they have ambitions of doing a good job (HSV, 2008). In my experience most of them want to and also do so. Over approximately the last fifty years universities have adopted various strategies to meet the challenges that have come along with the changes. In Sweden, as well as in other Scandinavian countries, academic developers (some were called educational consultants) were employed to facilitate these changes (Lauvås & Handal, 2012; Åkesson & Falk-Nilsson, 2010). The support was provided primarily through consultation with departments and individual teachers, or workshops and seminars with a focus on teaching and learning. Eventually special educational development units (EDUs) were formed with the specific task to support development of teaching and learning within institutions. In Sweden these units were initially organised as centres providing support and service for all academic staff sometimes all staff, across

the university. The same development occurred in UK (Gosling, 2009), Australia (Holt et al., 2011), and USA (Sorcinelli et al., 2006), as well as in Norway and Denmark (Havnes & Stensaker, 2006; Lauvås & Handal, 2012). Over time, various forms of organizing such support have occurred, sometimes with EDUs within schools or faculties rather than centrally; or a mix between a central EDU and locally engaged educational developers (within schools and faculties). It is not the focus of this thesis to elaborate on how to best organize and structure such support, although this is a topic of continuous challenge and change within the field of academic development (see Lindström & Maurits, 2014; Riis & Ögren, 2012 and Stigmar & Edgren, 2014, for recent Swedish examples).

Alongside the above, and to some extent integrated with it, research on teaching and learning in higher education expanded. Research initiated by a Swedish research group in Gothenburg, headed by Ference Marton, is considered to have been a spark that lit a fire. Marton and colleagues (1976a; 1976b; 1977; 1997) investigated how students went about their learning and came up with two very powerful concepts: deep and surface approaches to learning. This research, referred to as the learning paradigm (Barr & Tagg, 1995), resonated with research internationally (Marton et al., 1984) and became very influential. There is now a large body of research and literature that also links students' approaches to learning with teachers' approaches to teaching (for instance the seminal work of Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) as well as research focusing on teaching, assessment, course- and programme-design that will increase the likelihood of students taking a deep rather than surface approach to learning. Ramsden (1999) and Biggs (1999) are perhaps the most widely known advocates for this.

Academic developers have used this growing body of research in an endeavour to support teachers to re-think their teaching roles, their teaching and assessment practices, as well as their course and programme designs. Academic developers were involved in activities such as individual consultancy and workshops, as well as with pedagogical courses (sometimes also called teacher training and in Anglo-Saxon countries often referred to as postgraduate certificates in higher education) with a focus on teaching and learning in higher education (Åkesson & Falk-Nilsson, 2010). These activities were commonly underpinned by the rapidly growing body of research on teaching and learning in higher education. The design and effects of pedagogical courses have been evaluated extensively, in numerous ways (see for instance Chalmers et al (2012) for a comprehensive account of this). A general conclusion is that pedagogical courses are quite effective in getting teachers to reconceptualise their teaching (Ho et al., 2001), and to take on a more student-centred approach that also affects their teaching practice (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Weurlander & Stenfors-Hayes, 2008). However, Trowler and Bamber (2005:79) highlights that "if policy□makers at all levels are serious about the enhancements to teaching and learning that compulsory training is designed to achieve the policy must be prioritized, properly

resourced, and measures taken to develop a hospitable environment for it both structurally and culturally." Furthermore, it has been pointed out that pedagogical courses might be more effective for the individual teacher than in the local contexts where the teachers are professionally active (Gran, 2006; Ginns et al., 2010; Prosser et al., 2006; Stes et al., 2007). In other words, when a teacher attends a pedagogic course s/he might be inspired to try new things in teaching, but when returning to the department s/he will sooner or later go back to business-as-usual. Some colleagues might actively criticize new ideas and new practices that course participants bring back to their department, as suggested in the initial quote from Gibbs (2013). In Sweden this has been called the "coming-home problem". Trigwell (2012) points out that evaluations of the organizational impact of pedagogical courses are largely lacking, although there are some evaluations available (Larsson & Mårtensson (unpublished); Roxå & Mårtensson, 2012). This thesis aims to highlight some perspectives on academic development that have the potential to counteract the coming-home-problem.

So, as stated initially, this thesis will explore various perspectives on academic development activities and how they might contribute to development of local teaching culture/s. The context is a Swedish research-intensive university in which pedagogical courses have been offered and positively evaluated for several decades (Åkesson & Falk-Nilsson, 2010). The scope of this thesis is to also explore ways to counteract the coming-home-problem by systematically and consciously considering the collegial context and its importance in teachers' professional development. Explicit critique has been formulated against pedagogical courses, highlighting instead the importance of day-to-day-practice as a more important space for professional development (Knight, 2006). Since day-to-day-practice is part of the local disciplinary teaching and learning culture, or what Hounsell and Anderson (2009) call "ways of thinking and practicing", this is where change and development primarily should take place. This is where ideas about teaching and student learning should grow, and should be tried out and evaluated – in the collegial context of teaching, not only in the "private" minds or classrooms of individual teachers. No doubt this could be facilitated by academic development activities, initiated centrally or more locally, but there is a need to investigate how this can become a constructive reality.

Gibbs (2013:2) highlights the necessity to "identify the wide range of activities that can be engaged in to develop a university's teaching and learning". He has observed across countries and institutions, trends in educational development with shifts in several dimensions that involve "increased sophistication and understanding of the way change comes about and how it becomes embedded and secure within organizations" (ibid:2). These include some shifts: a) from a focus on the classroom to a focus on the learning environment; b) from a focus on individual teachers to a focus on course teams, departments and leadership of teaching; c) from a focus on teaching

to a focus on learning; d) from small, single, separate tactics to large, complex, integrated, aligned, multiple tactics; e) from change tactics to change strategies; f) from a focus on quality assurance to quality enhancement; and g) from a focus on fine-tuning of current practice to transforming practice in new directions. This is of course not a recipe of how to do it, but rather highlights the complexity and wide scope that academic development has to deal with. This thesis is an effort to explore some theoretical perspectives (further elaborated in the Theoretical framework section) in order to extend existing knowledge of some of Gibbs' (2013) dimensions mentioned, mainly a), b), and d).

Much literature points to the complexity of using top-down policy-making as a vehicle for organizational change and development of teaching practices (Bauer et al., 1999; Newton, 2002, 2003; Trowler, 1998). Taking a sociocultural point of view, Trowler (2008, 2009) argues for work groups, disciplines or departments as a more important focus for development. This indicates that academic development should neither focus only on individual academic teachers, nor only on the institutional policy level. Academic development strategies need more elaborated knowledge about the level in between, the local *meso-level*, and how teaching related activities are perceived, valued, and accomplished here. In doing so, academic development has the potential to contribute to organizational learning and development "from within" the university. But what might such knowledge look like, and what strategies might follow? In this thesis academic development in my own research-intensive university context is presented as a case study with the aim of exploring development strategies based on a focus at the meso-level. Such exploration contributes to understanding what happens at the meso-level and how academic development initiatives can grow from within and at the same time be sustainable in an academic organizational environment.

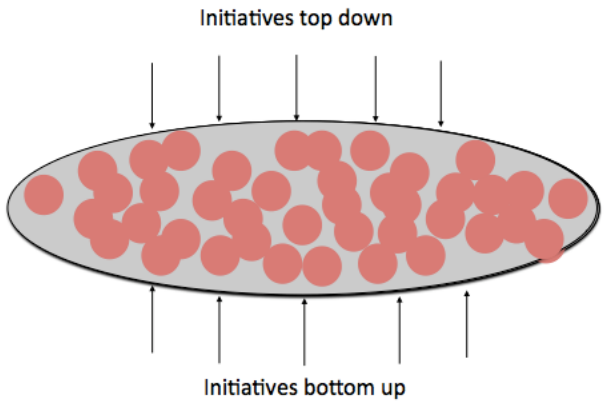

Figure 1: Illustrating how top-down and bottom-up initiatives meet at the meso-level in an organization, with a multitude of local teaching and learning *microcultures*. Adapted from Roxå & Mårtensson (2011). Perspective elaborated in Roxå (2014).

As briefly described and illustrated above and further developed later on in this thesis, attempts to influence teaching practice in Sweden have come in various ways: through national policies and development of various quality assurance systems as well as through support for individual teachers in the form of teacher training, consultancy, workshops, and project funding. As shown in previous research, the effects of these various initiatives are somewhat unclear. Two perspectives, illustrated in Figure 1 as top-down-initiatives and bottom-up-initiatives, meet at the meso-level. But, as will be shown later, even the meso-level consists of many groups of people: working groups, teaching teams, academic programmes, units, departments, and informal networks. Since the fundamental perspective taken in this thesis is a sociocultural one, I will use the concept from Roxå and Mårtensson (2011) who have called these social collegial contexts *microcultures* (further elaborated in Roxå, 2014). These academic microcultures constitute the focus of the academic development explored in this thesis and research into these microcultures contributes new insights into the enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education.

2. Research aims

The general aim of this thesis is to explore some selected theoretical perspectives for academic development practice: In particular perspectives that relate to an ambition to influence both individual academic teachers *and* their local teaching and learning microcultures in a research-intensive higher education institution.

2.1 Research questions

Following from the aims above come several questions that are addressed in the papers appended in this thesis. The papers and perspectives explored follow in some ways from one another, and mirror my own research process and academic development practice since the mid-2000s. It starts at the level of the individual teacher, exploring what social interactions are important when teachers think and talk about teaching. Thereafter perspectives from organizational learning focusing on the meso-level and a general socio-cultural perspective on academic development are explored. Finally I use perspectives from quality assurance and leadership and investigate how they can inform academic development. I have thereby chosen to widen the scope of academic development to reach individual teachers and beyond, into their social collegial contexts. I have also chosen to limit my perspectives to the meso-level and will therefore not investigate the macro-level, in other words how national and institutional policies and political reforms might influence academic development.

In the thesis the following questions are addressed:

1. How – and to whom – do university teachers talk in order to develop their own thinking and practice related to teaching and learning? (Paper I)
2. How can a sociocultural perspective on academic development and network theory add to our understanding of the development of teaching and learning microcultures? (Paper II)
3. How can the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) be used as a strategy to develop teaching and learning microcultures in a research-intensive university? (Paper III)
4. How are teaching and learning quality practices in strong microcultures related to quality assurance policies? (Paper IV)
5. How can local-level leadership influence local teaching and learning microcultures? (Paper V)

2.2 Research context – the case

Since I have chosen to research my own academic development practice in my work context, I will now describe that context. This forms the basis for the present case-study and for later result discussion, conclusions, and potential generalization.

In 2003 Sweden uniquely initiated a nationally legislated requirement for academics to complete pedagogical courses in order to get tenure positions within universities (see Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson (2008) for a detailed account and analysis of this development). The Association of Swedish Higher Education, SUHF, formulated supportive recommendations (SUHF, 2005) that established a framework for the structure, scope and learning outcomes for such courses. The requirement was taken out of the legislation in 2011 but a majority of Swedish universities still keep it, encompassing between five and ten compulsory weeks of pedagogical courses for tenure positions and/or for promotion. The past decade in Sweden has also brought with it increased attention to pedagogical merits and pedagogical competence when recruiting and promoting academics at universities (Ryegård, 2013; Ryegård et al., 2010).

Lund University (LU), located in the southern part of Sweden, was founded in 1666, and is one of the oldest in Scandinavia. It is a comprehensive university that currently has eight rather autonomous faculties: Economics and Management, Engineering, Fine and Performing Arts, Humanities and Theology, Law, Medicine, Science, and Social Sciences. The university also comprises various institutes and research centres, and overall it is a research-intensive university, regularly ranked among the top 100 in the world. There are (2014) 47,700 undergraduate students, 3,200 postgraduate

students, and 7,500 staff, of whom 5,100 are academics (Lund University website, 2014-03-21).

Academic development at Lund University has its roots and traditions as far back as to 1969 (Åkesson & Falk-Nilsson, 2010), when the first 'educational consultant' was employed. The historical development described in the introduction to this thesis largely mirrors what has happened at Lund University. There is now a university-wide Centre for Educational Development (CED), as well as units for academic development in the Faculty of Engineering, LTH (Genombrottet), and the Faculty of Medicine (MedCUL). This side-by-side existence of academic development units and activities centrally and locally in some faculties is a significant trait for this university (Lindström & Maurits, 2014). Pedagogical courses offered to academic teachers, supervisors, and leaders are at the heart of the academic development activities at LU. Many pedagogical courses are arranged within the different faculties, often in collaboration with CED. CED also offers courses that are university-wide, complementary to the faculties' courses and it is thereby possible to attend a course with participants from across the university on a specific topic (such as research supervision, assessment, or educational leadership). Most pedagogical courses are provided as modules comprising between two and five weeks of participants time (80–200 hours). All courses have a long tradition in striving to support reflective practice, collegial exchange of experiences as well as knowledge-input from research on teaching and learning (Åkesson & Falk-Nilsson, 2010). Most of the courses include participants writing reflective papers related to their own teaching, underpinned by educational literature, and peer-reviewed within the course. The preparatory work for the national legislated compulsory teacher training was awarded as a pilot-project to Lund University, proposing learning outcomes, structure and underpinning ideas that became national recommendations (Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson, 2008; Lörstad et al., 2005; SUHF, 2005). Lund University was also responsible for a national project between 2004–2006 to support the professional development of academic developers nation-wide, an initiative called "Strategic Educational Development" (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2008).

Every other year there is a university-wide campus conference on teaching and learning; and the alternating years some faculties arrange their own teaching and learning conferences. Since 2003 all pedagogical courses and other academic development activities in the university, such as reward schemes, campus conferences and so on, are underpinned by the idea of *scholarship of teaching and learning* (more on this in the Theoretical framework, section 3.5). The Faculty of Engineering (LTH) has pioneered this, although the strategies and activities have migrated into other faculties as well (Roxå et al., 2008). The main purpose has been to support and develop not only individuals but also teaching and learning cultures within the organization, by creating incentives for teaching at the local level to become more collegial, peer-reviewed, and documented. This has been regarded by the Faculty of

Engineering as a competitive strategy in comparison with other technical schools. One significant feature of the academic development strategy in this faculty is its reward system, the Pedagogical Academy, initiated in 2001, which aims to reward scholarly teachers who also contribute to the development of the faculty. This reward scheme has been developed and thoroughly researched over time (Larsson, Anderberg & Olsson, 2014; Mårtensson, 2010; Olsson & Roxå, 2013) and has gained positive attention nationally and internationally.

The papers appended in this thesis use a case study approach in order to describe and analyse various perspectives on this academic development at Lund University, with material collected from this research-intensive context. The thesis thereby contributes to a deepened understanding of my five main research questions by exploring perspectives for academic development of relevance to other research-intensive academic contexts.

3. Theoretical framework

In this section I will present the selected theoretical perspectives that constitute the cornerstones of the research aims and questions formulated above. I start off with a multi-level model for exploring organizational development in knowledge-intensive organizations, which helps define micro-, meso- and macro-levels. First I focus on the individual academic teachers (micro-level) since they are absolutely pivotal to any activity aiming at developing teaching and student learning. I therefore start my theoretical perspectives with what might influence teachers' ways of thinking about and practising teaching. This does not take place in isolation, but rather in a collegial context. Therefore, following the individual perspective I will display some perspectives from network theory, organizational culture and teaching and learning cultures (meso-level). These are chosen because of their potential to inform the underpinnings of academic development with the ambition to influence and develop collegial contexts. Finally I turn to some perspectives that can contribute to an understanding of potential academic development strategies to actively *influence* the collegial contexts: scholarship of teaching and learning, and local-level leadership.

3.1 Social networks and informal learning

One basic assumption in this thesis originates from social psychology, and the idea that every human being is influenced by *significant others* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) in his/her ways of understanding the world. Significant others, they state, "occupy a central position in the economy of reality-maintenance. They are particularly important for the on-going confirmation of that crucial element of reality we call identity" (p. 170). Individuals do not only act as cognitive beings but also highly social creatures.

Using a multilevel model (micro, meso, and macro) Hannah and Lester (2009) describe and illustrate a perspective on organizational development in knowledge-intensive organizations (Figure 2). Their conceptual model highlights how leadership can contribute to development at all three levels with the aim of organizational learning. At the *micro-level* the individual is in focus, and conditions for what they call developmental readiness. The *meso-level* in their model consists of several so-

called semi-autonomous knowledge network clusters, and finally the *macro-level* is the organizational overarching systems of networks. Hannah and Lester argue that a number of interrelated activities at all levels are necessary, as is the need to create the possibility for a number of tight interactions within and between clusters (they use the terminology 'homophilic' (with those who are alike) and 'heterophilic' (with those who are different) interactions) in order to develop a learning organization. This resembles what Granovetter (1973) has labelled *strong* and *weak ties*. Strong ties are interactions *within a cluster* that are more common, intense, and frequent, than interactions *between clusters*, which are therefore called weak ties. I will return to this in Paper II, and in the final discussion.

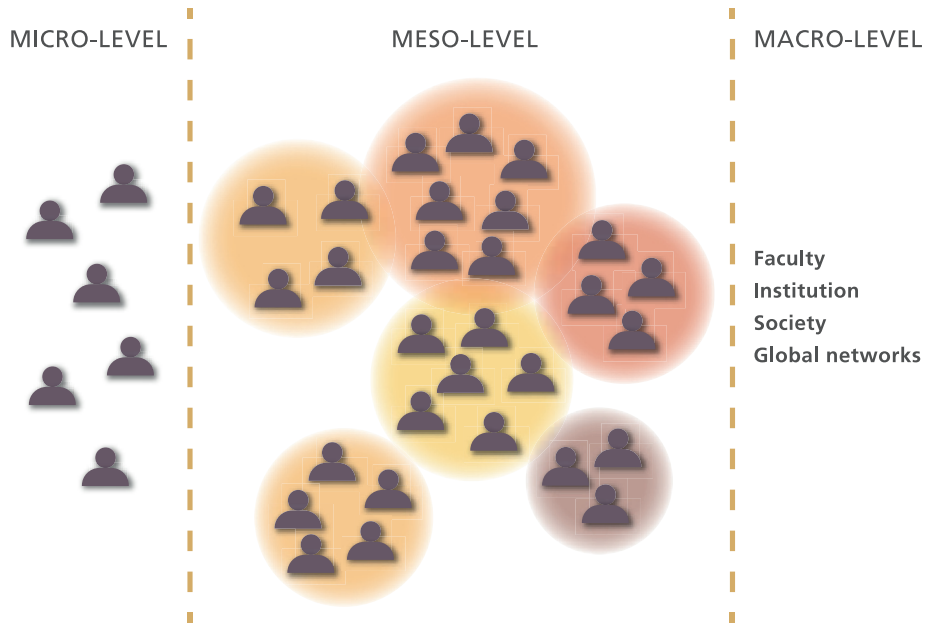

Figure. 2: Adapted from Hannah & Lester (2009): a view on knowledge-intensive organizations illustrating the micro-, meso- and macro-levels relevant in organizational development. The organizational meso-level consists of a number of "semi-autonomous knowledge networks".

The content of this thesis and the integrated articles relate to Hannah and Lester's model, with a main focus on the meso-level. My use of the model does not have the same emphasis on leadership as Hannah & Lester, although one part of the thesis (Paper V) does address leadership. The model is used here as an illustration and informative theoretical framework for looking at individuals and clusters of individuals in a knowledge-intensive organization. Furthermore this model highlights different levels and crucial interactional elements in relation to development in an

organization. The thesis explores academic development in one particular university context starting at the individual micro-level, focusing on the meso-level and only lightly touching upon the macro-level. The overall aim is to contribute to understanding of how academic development, with a focus on the meso-level, can also facilitate organizational development. The meso-level is particularly interesting since this is where top-down and bottom-up initiatives meet (Figure 1).

As mentioned in the introduction, Knight (2006) critiques pedagogical courses as a means of professional development. He claims that "learning to teach is not, mainly, a formal process: non-formal, practice-based learning is more significant" and that "enhancing the quality of teaching implies the creation of working environments that favour certain kinds of professional formation" (Knight, 2006:29). He therefore argues that quality enhancement of teaching and educational professional development should have as its main focus the non-formal, daily practice of the academic teachers and their working environments rather than focusing on formal educational training programmes and quality assurance procedures. He connects this point of view to intrinsic motivation, in stating that "if people are to be enthusiastic about the continuing professional learning on which quality enhancement depends, then they need workplaces, departments and teams that give plenty of opportunities or affordances for self-actualization" (Knight, 2006:35). Knight's argument suggests a particular direction for academic development work, especially when taken together with recurrent results evaluating the effects of pedagogical courses, which indicate that effects largely depend on how such courses are designed and valued in the individual teachers' collegial contexts. It must be acknowledged that pedagogical courses can be designed in numerous ways, and many of them are, as mentioned previously, evaluated with highly positive outcomes (Chalmers et al., 2012; Trigwell, 2012). Still, there is a need to know more about how academic workplaces can develop so that they give plenty of opportunities for self-actualization and quality enhancement, as argued by Knight (2006). I argue that, as academic developers, we need to widen our scope beyond supporting individuals, and expand our activities and perspectives to the professional working environments in which the teachers live their daily lives.

In a recent thesis, Thomson (2013) confirms the importance of informal learning as an academic teacher. She interviewed thirty academic staff in different disciplines in a research-intensive Australian university. The results also highlight the potential of informal conversation to support academics in learning about teaching. Her findings define five categories where the respondents claim such conversations to be useful: "to Vent about teaching-related issues, to Reassure themselves about their teaching, to Manage their teaching context, to Improve their teaching and student learning and to Evolve their teaching, thinking and practice" (Thomson, 2013:201, capitals in original). Furthermore, four specific areas of the context are described by the interviewees as influencing their informal conversation about teaching: Colleagues

with whom they work; Processes for reward and recognition; Time and place; and Formal management of communication (Thomson, 2013: 202). This confirms that the individual teacher does not act in isolation; rather the local collegial context is an important locus when it comes to developing ways to think about and practise teaching. But how can we understand that local context? What does it consist of? I will first turn to some theoretical perspectives that shed light on organizational culture generally, and then on teaching and learning cultures (the meso-level) specifically. These are used in order to view academic teachers within their social context, where meanings are interpreted and negotiated, and norms and traditions that guide thinking and actions, what Hounsell and Anderson (2009) call 'ways of thinking and practising', are developed over time.

3.2 Organizational culture

Someone at a conference I once attended described universities as "an archipelago of different interests". This indicates how difficult it is to talk about a university as one culture, or one organization. Therefore, in order to focus on the meso-level we need to understand more about higher education institutions as organizations. Van Maanen describes three different lenses for analysing or understanding an organization (Van Maanen, 2007, further elaborated in Ancona et al., 2009): 1) the *strategic design* lens, in which the organization is described as it is supposed to work (the boxes and arrows and flow-charts that can be found on any organization's web-page), 2) the *political* lens, which highlights various interest groups within the organization, allies, opponents and the like, and 3) the *cultural* lens, which foregrounds the values, habits and norms in the organization. Van Maanen points out that all three perspectives are partly overlapping, and equally important in order to fully understand the organization at hand. Analytically they are perhaps separable but in reality they are blurred and mixed. In this thesis the third perspective, the cultural lens, will dominate. However, the political and strategic design lens must also be borne in mind, since they shed light on structural issues such as resources, budget flows, line management, policies, and so on. I will return to this in the final discussion section.

Culture in an organizational setting can be defined as "the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed" (Geertz, 1973, quoted in Kunda, 2006:8). Following Alvesson (2002), culture is what constitutes a group and makes it visible in relation to its background; usually group-specific norms are developed over long periods of time. The group can vary in size, but as in all groups, the members share something: certain ways of communicating, certain ways to act in specific situations

or common ways to react to people outside the group. Schein (1985) analytically defines organizational culture by its *artefacts, values*, and *basic assumptions*. These are according to Schein embedded in cultural layers, with the artefacts at the most superficial layer, underpinned by values, which in turn are underpinned by basic assumptions. A university might have a certain organizational culture, such as being very research-intensive, in other words, placing a high value upon research. But how high quality research is conducted and verified differs even within one university, and relates more to disciplinary traditions and norms, as shown by Becher & Trowler (2001) and defined as different "academic tribes and territories".

Institutional culture has been shown to influence educational changes. Merton et al. (2009) studied the development of two engineering programmes and concluded: "the failure of one effort (measured by inability to sustain the curriculum over time) and the success of the other (the curriculum continues to be offered by the institution) were directly linked to how well the change strategies aligned with the culture of the institution" (Merton et al., 2009: 219–220). Furthermore, Kezar and Eckel (2002), investigated six diverse higher education institutions engaged in systematic efforts to change teaching and learning and found that for those efforts to succeed strategies must be "culturally coherent or aligned with the culture" (p. 457). But even within one organization, following the culture perspectives outlined above, there are various cultures, distinguishing groups that are more or less subtly different from each other. As a consequence any organization – including a university or a faculty – most likely consists of many different cultures. A group of teachers and their local *microculture* (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011) can therefore be distinguished from other groups of teachers because they have an inclination to favour particular teaching and assessment methods, to explain students' mistakes in similar ways and to base their practice on commonly shared assumptions about teaching and learning. I will now turn to some of the relevant theories and concepts related to this.

3.3 Teaching and learning cultures

It has long been assumed that university teachers are individualistic in relation to their teaching; that teaching is a "private" business between the teacher and the students, and colleagues and leaders do not have much insight into what really goes on in teaching. Academic identity is tightly linked to the discipline and to academic freedom (Henkel, 2005). Academic freedom might be interpreted as every academic's right to do whatever they want in their academic practice without external interference, as shown in a study by Åkerlind and Kayrooz (2003). However, the same authors also show that academic freedom might be interpreted and understood as strong loyalty towards the discipline and the institution of which the academic is a

part. This interpretation of academic freedom is much more scarcely appreciated and attended to. Both interpretations of academic freedom are relevant here because of the potential tension between the two poles. Is it possible to create a collegial local working environment, which appeals to academic freedom as the loyalty to the discipline and the institution, and that strongly supports the individual to develop teaching and learning, like the working environments that Knight (2006) seeks? If so, how? These are underpinning issues when exploring academic development in this specific research-intensive university where there is an ambition to reach beyond the individual teacher and influence the collegial contexts for the benefit of the organization as a whole (and for the benefit of student learning). Then academic freedom should be interpreted as an individual's opportunities to engage in teaching and learning inquiries and practices that are deemed relevant to that individual *and* his/her collegial context.

The social context in which academics work has been described in terms of so-called teaching and learning regimes – TLRs (Trowler & Cooper, 2002; Trowler, 2008, 2009). These are social traditions and norms, developed over time in any disciplinary context, that guide what academics say and do in relation to teaching and student learning. Various taken-for-granted tacit assumptions about best teaching methods, about students, assessment practices and so forth are examples of the different aspects that are expressed through teaching and learning regimes. The implicit theories of teaching and learning, the manifestations of power, as well as the conventions of appropriateness, become most visible when entering a new academic work place, as described by Fanghanel (2009). Academics' opportunities to develop teaching and learning are, according to Trowler (2009), linked to a certain TLR in two ways: the TLR can both influence learning and teaching, but the TLR can also change as a result of new perspectives introduced. However, Trowler does not write much about how this might come about, so this thesis seeks to fill that gap.

Trowler (2008, 2009) identifies the department or the working group as the most important when considering development initiatives (rather than focusing only on the individual, or on the institutional policy level). Furthermore, Jawitz (2009) confirms the importance of the influence of colleagues in his studies of how the practice of assessing student learning is influenced by *collective habitus*: habits, norms and traditions that vary between disciplines, within the same university context. In my own work as an academic developer, this has become quite clear. Some academic teachers seem to be part of a collegial context in which teaching, student learning, and educational development is considered a collegial concern of great importance. Other teachers talk about the lack of interest from their colleagues (including leaders) in relation to teaching and learning issues and educational development (see also the initial quote from Gibbs, 2013). Trowler, however, uses TLR mainly as an analytical tool, in order to highlight differences between groups within the same institution, or within the same discipline at different institutions. That is very informative and

helpful. However, Trowler does not deal with how such teaching and learning regimes develop or change over time, and little other research addresses this question either. This thesis contributes to some of that understanding by analysing systematic strategies used for more than a decade with the aim of influencing local teaching and learning cultures.

Also relevant in this context is a more general, yet very influential, sociocultural theory about learning: Wenger's *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998). A community of practice consists of people who share an interest in a common practice, be that baking bread (as exemplified in Wenger's book), nano-physics research, or teaching sociology. One person can be a member of many communities of practice (and here "member" is not used in any formal sense). Over time, a community of practice develops a shared history of learning, a shared repertoire of words, concepts, and models relevant to their practice. Members engage constantly in a process of negotiation and participation in order to develop the practice at hand. In Wenger´s terminology the future development of the practice is the enterprise. Accordingly, people's identities are strongly influenced by the community of practice. Wenger also describes how *reification* is an important part of a community of practice, meaning that there are documents or other artefacts that at different points in time make visible the activities, values and meaning-making within the group.

Although Wenger's framework is not developed for, or specific to, higher education (unlike Trowler's), the community of practice model might work as an ideal model for how collegial academic contexts could deal with the development of teaching and student learning. Roxå and Mårtensson (2011) explored strong academic microcultures which were found largely to resemble what Wenger (1998) describes as communities of practice, fulfilling the significant traits described above. The study by Roxå and Mårtensson (2011), however, explored only microcultures that were strong both on teaching and research, and does not explain how such high quality microcultures develop.

I will now turn to some previous research and theoretical perspectives that examine academic development and influence at the meso-level generally (section 3.4), and then more specifically the scholarship of teaching and learning (section 3.5) and leadership at the meso-level (section 3.6) as specific ways to influence the meso-level. These perspectives are all chosen and presented here because of their potential to influence academic development in relation to the aim of influencing individual teachers and their microcultures.

3.4 Development at the meso-level

Graham (2012) recently studied what signified successful and sustainable educational reforms in engineering education globally. In total 70 international experts – researchers in the field, leaders of educational change, people with a policy view of engineering education, and observers of educational reforms – were interviewed, with a focus on the "current climate for educational change at a national level, key barriers to establishing and implementing reform efforts and the critical ingredients for successful and sustainable reform" (Graham, 2012:6). Additionally the study included six case-study investigations from Australia, Hong Kong, the UK, and the USA. The results are surprisingly similar and general, independent of geographic or institutional context, and the study identifies four common features of successful widespread change: Firstly, successful systemic change is often initiated in response to a common set of circumstances, usually triggered by significant threats to the market position of the department or faculty. Such threats can be related, for instance, to recruitment, retention and/or employability. Secondly, success appears to be associated with the extent to which the change is embedded into a coherent and interconnected curriculum structure. In other words, rather than a few enthusiastic champions developing their teaching in their own courses (modules), for sustainable success it takes an ambition to work at the programme level, with a lot of opportunities to engage teachers across the curriculum. Thirdly, the department is highlighted as the engine of change, with the sustained commitment of the head of department identified as a critical factor for success. Finally, the study highlights "significant challenges associated with sustaining change, with the majority of reform endeavours reverting to the *status quo ante* in the years following implementation" (ibid. p. 2). Graham's study concludes with a list of recommendations to engineering schools and departments who want to embark on widespread sustainable educational change: collect evidence; engage the head of department; consult senior university management; communicate need for reform to teachers across the department; ensure faculty-wide curriculum-design; consult external perspectives; appoint a management team and release their time; establish impact evaluation; select implementers of reform; loosen the direct link between individual teachers and individual courses; maintain momentum; closely monitor impact data; make new teachers aware of the reform; establish an on-going focus on education; and be aware of potential issues.

Such a substantial list of recommendations is of course helpful, but it may also be easier said than done. Teaching and learning cultures might not necessarily be under external pressure – at least not perceived as threats – and therefore other levers for creating incremental, on-going, scholarly and sustainable educational development might be necessary. Edström (2011) introduces the concept of *organizational gravity*, somewhat similar to what Graham calls status quo ante. This concept refers to certain traits and basic values in an organization that tend to "pull back" attempts at

improving educational programmes. She suggests two possible strategies to counteract this gravity: either what she calls the *force strategy*: to constantly "add energy" into the system, for instance supporting driving spirits, leaders, and adding money; or secondly, what she labels the *system strategy*: to change the organization, the system as a whole, through for instance changes in recruitment and promotion structures, resource allocation systems, rewards and the like.

This thesis explores perspectives on how teaching and learning cultures (and structures) can be influenced though academic development. It is assumed that such understanding can contribute to long-lasting and sustainable development that counteracts the tendencies of returning to the status quo ante or negative effects by the organizational gravity.

I will now turn to a concept that has grown in importance in academic development internationally, and that might help us tie these different strategies described above together: the scholarship of teaching and learning.

3.5 Scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)

Since Boyer published the book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* in 1990, there has been a lot of attention to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL; originally by Boyer called only scholarship of teaching but in later literature developed to include learning). The basic idea is that teaching and learning should be treated with the same academic approach and seriousness as other academic practices, for instance research. In short, SoTL includes systematic and underpinned inquiry into teaching and learning. Some call it researching the classroom: making observations and collecting data that are then analysed, systematised, documented, related to formerly published knowledge and somehow made public (Kreber, 2002; Trigwell & Shale, 2004). Internationally there are now institutes, conferences, societies, and peer-reviewed journals that support SoTL (for instance the Carnegie Foundation in the USA; the International Society for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; and the International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning).

As described previously, pedagogical courses for academic teachers became compulsory in Sweden in 2003. The preparatory work resulted in a national common framework and learning outcomes for such courses (Lörstad et al., 2005). It put forward the idea of scholarship of teaching and learning as a fundamental competence that was desirable to develop (Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson, 2008). With this view on academic teachers' professional competence, pedagogical courses at Lund University have been designed as a way to encourage and support the scholarship of teaching and

learning. However, there are some issues that need consideration if SoTL is to contribute to influencing the collegial context, and also to counteracting the status quo ante that Graham (2012, above) warns us about. One important issue is the amount and character of theory – educational or other relevant theory – that needs to underpin the scholarly work. After all, it is less frequently educational researchers, but rather it is academic teachers from all disciplines, (who are often active researchers in their main discipline) who engage in SoTL. In fact, there was a special issue in the journal 'Arts and Humanities in Higher Education', devoted to this discussion in 2008. In this special issue, Roxå et al. (2008) argue, building on a matrix model from Ashwin and Trigwell (2004), that the most important level for investigation and dissemination of SoTL results is the local level (as a level between personal and public), be that a work group, a department, a faculty, or a university. Much literature has focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning as a desired professional competence in academics, and something that higher education institutions should reward and recognize. The article by Roxå et al. (2008) and the studies reported in this thesis regard SoTL both as a desired individual academic approach to teaching and also, and perhaps more importantly, as a strategy with which it is possible to influence the local academic cultures in a faculty and/or a university. Recent literature has started to highlight this aspect of SoTL and how academic development can contribute to it (van Schalkwyk et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2013). However, incorporating this perspective as an organizational strategy for academic development also calls for perspectives on leadership, to which I will now turn.

3.6 Leadership at the meso-level

Since I have experienced a lack of specific research on leadership in relation to academic development I have chosen to frame this section by also using some perspectives from general leadership and organizational research.

Leadership is clearly a topic that alone is the focus of many theses. In the context of this thesis – focused as it is on the meso-level – I am intentionally limiting my perspective mainly to levels of leadership closest to the teachers and their teaching practice. In Swedish universities – and at Lund University – those leadership-roles mainly include heads of departments, programme leaders (or programme coordinators), and directors of studies (a director/head of studies has a managerial/leadership function within Swedish universities and acts on delegation from a head of department. The position involves coordination and management of teachers who are responsible for various courses/modules within a discipline or a programme). Ramsden et al. (2007) have shown a correlation between the experience

of leadership, and teachers' approaches to teaching (teaching-centred or learning-centred), which in turn has been shown to influence students' approaches to learning (deep or surface approach).

There is a vast amount of literature on leadership in general and Alvesson (2011:152) argues that "Understanding leadership calls for careful consideration of the social context in which processes of leadership takes place. Leadership is not just a leader acting and a group of followers responding in a mechanical way, but a complex social process in which the meanings and interpretations of what is said and done are crucial. Leadership, then, is closely related to culture – at the organizational and other levels." This thesis relies on this view of leadership in acknowledging that the social influence on and of teachers and leaders is crucial in trying to pursue academic development. The majority of research on leadership in academic contexts focuses on senior management of institutions. In other words, knowledge about how to lead a whole university is explored (for instance Allan et al., 2006; Askling & Stensaker, 2002; Neumann & Neumann, 1999; Stensaker, 2006), but less attention has been paid to leadership closer to teaching practice, although this body of research currently seems to be growing. Returning to the initial quote from Gibbs (2013), he writes "studies of why some departments are much more educationally effective than others have tended to identify the role of leadership of teaching…" (p.4). I therefore argue that if we aim for academic development to be a tool not only for individual development but also for development of teaching and learning cultures (and thereby in the long-term also organizational development), we cannot ignore the role of leadership. Some support, coordination or decisions need leadership engagement in order to go beyond what is an individual teacher's sphere of influence. Also the results from Graham (2012), where substantial change was dependent both on engaging teachers across the curriculum and on engagement from the head of department, indicate the importance of leadership.

A large Australian study (Scott et al., 2008) explored the experiences from deans and heads of schools, and used the results of the study to provide support for leaders in these roles. The major results indicate that most leaders experienced themselves as squeezed between their senior management and their collegial culture's needs or demands. Furthermore, the same study showed that the leaders needed and appreciated support for their leadership roles, preferably through networks used for exchange of experiences with others in the same types of roles. Vilkinas and Ladyshewsky (2012), also in the Australian context, demonstrated that academic programme directors have quite a strong focus on development and that there is room for those leaders to become more effective in their various leadership roles.

Gibbs et al. (2008) investigated leadership in successful departments in research-intensive institutions worldwide. The study shows that excellence in teaching and research indeed is related to leadership. Gibbs and his colleagues investigated

departments that were excellent in teaching as well as in research and found that "teaching excellence was achieved in entirely different ways involving widely contrasting leadership behaviour" (Gibbs et al., 2008:416). They therefore argue that rather than looking for generally applicable leadership behaviour, one must pay careful attention to the particular context in which the leadership and the teaching is taking place. Beyond personality traits, different discipline areas, different institutional contexts and major departmental challenges influence leadership practice. Knight and Trowler (2000) support this view, taking a cultural perspective, and claim that change initiatives, including leadership, must take as their focus and starting point the local, departmental culture. Taken together these authors highlight important aspects of leadership: local, contextual leadership is likely to be more important for academic development initiatives than institutional senior management. And local culture influences leadership as much as leadership influences culture.

However, focusing on departments and departmental leadership is not sufficient. Departments are organizationally structured entities, which might not always be solely responsible for an educational programme. Furthermore, at least in Sweden, there has been over the past decade a tendency to create large-sized departments, sometimes consisting of 300 or more staff. It seems reasonable to assume that one head of department in such a context cannot be solely responsible for engaging in the development of teaching and learning, and that such an organizational entity probably contains more than one teaching and learning microculture. In fact, going back to the microculture study by Roxå and Mårtensson (2011), the largest microculture consisted of 60 people, and the head of department there claimed that they probably couldn't grow much bigger without losing their excellence. In both the Roxå and Mårtensson (2011) and Gibbs et al. (2008) studies, leadership was enacted in very different ways, but it was highly appreciated and very active.

Bolden et al. (2008) present another perspective consistent with the aspects discussed above. They too emphasize the relational and contextual aspects of leadership, indicating "a close interdependence between individual, group and organizational development" (Bolden et al., 2008:370). Leadership takes place, they claim, at the intersection of social and structural factors where successful leaders navigate the need to build and maintain legitimacy in the formal organization as well as in the group/s they, as leaders, try to influence. The tension that leaders often experience from acting in this intersection indicates the importance of relational resources that, if wielded wisely, become a major asset in attempts to influence practices. Importantly, Bolden et al. (2012) highlight that colleagues do not necessarily need formal leadership positions to be able to influence each other. This view of academic leadership places attention on the group, where leaders interact directly with teachers as individuals or as a group, as part of a local teaching and learning microculture. This is where leaders have to delicately balance the values held by the teachers and the values promoted by

the formal organization of which they are part. It is therefore relevant to explore how this interface might be experienced, by leaders themselves and also by their colleagues while engaging in initiatives to develop local teaching and academic practices.

Altogether, this gives us an indication of the importance of leadership in relation to influencing teaching and learning microcultures. I will therefore return to this issue later, in Papers IV and V, and explore leadership at the local level as one potential source of influence on teaching practice and culture.

I will now move into the papers that together form the basis of this thesis, first with a section on methodology and research methods, and thereafter a summary of each appended paper.

4. Methodology and methods

4.1 Process and methodology

The studies and appended papers in this thesis were developed over a long period of time. In my work as academic developer I have searched for theoretical contributions in our field, and from other fields, such as sociology and organizational theory, that could enhance my practice. I have also, like many other researchers, considered my practice to be a very interesting field as the subject for research. This might be called scholarship of academic development (as suggested by Eggins & Macdonald, 2003). The issues addressed and questions asked have developed dynamically over time, rather than being a set of questions initially formulated and anticipated at the outset of the first paper. Usually one question has followed the other but some of them have also developed in parallel, such as in Papers II and III. There has been a dynamic interchange between my practice and my research where both have constantly enriched each other in an almost inseparable way. I will return to these double roles in my Methodological consideration (section 6.1).

This thesis has a qualitative research approach. Van Maanen (1998:x) highlights that "some principles that guide much qualitative work includes a focus on meaning, the use of analytic induction, maintaining a close proximity to data, an emphasis on ordinary behaviour, and attempts to link agency to structure through accounts based on the study of events (routine or otherwise) over time". This is a pertinent description of what has been sketched above: my research being focused on my own work in academic development, in close proximity to data, with a purpose to use analytical induction from my practice to create meaning. Furthermore, "[…] qualitative work is often characterized as exploratory, aiming at discovery, description, and theory building" (Van Maanen, 1998:xii). The main methodology in this thesis is a case study approach, following recommendations by Yin (2009) and Eisenhardt (1989). Yin (2009) suggests a case study approach when investigating "a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). In this thesis the university where I work as academic developer is the context. The case is therefore Lund University, and the phenomenon under investigation is the approaches to academic development and activities undertaken in this research-

intensive university with the aim of influencing not only individuals but also the teaching and learning cultures of which they are part. In other words, I investigate different perspectives used in the academic development practice within my own "real-life context". In the different sections of the thesis, theoretical perspectives from various research fields are explored eclectically in order to potentially enhance academic development practice within this research-intensive context. Also, the research presented here aims to contribute to and possibly broaden the theoretical underpinning of academic development in this and similar contexts. Eisenhardt (1989), like Yin, stresses the potential in using case studies for theory development purposes. Thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) used in case-studies allow empirical material to interact with existing theory. The papers presented in this thesis contain contextual descriptions, sometimes in the format of a narrative, or in the format of case-descriptions, or interview-quotations, in order to contribute to the thick descriptions recommended. As a researcher, I thereby make visible my understanding of the context and phenomenon of study so that others can scrutinize the results and analyses in light of that context. Thus it is my intention that through a case study approach academic developers and others interested in developing higher education might deepen the understanding of how teaching and learning cultures can be influenced.

Arguably it might be difficult to generalize and learn from a case study and to adopt results from one context to another. Yin (2009) addresses this too: "[…] case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment does not represent a "sample", and in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)" (Yin, 2009:15).

I will return to this analytical generalization in the Discussion section, when discussing methods, results, and aims.

4.2 Methods

Although the case study approach is the overarching methodology for this thesis, the different studies presented have used somewhat different research methods in order to collect and interpret material for analysis. Again, this follows recommendations by Yin (2009:11) who argues "[…] the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations [...]". Drawing on several different sources also provides the opportunity to *triangulate* data in order to reach a deep understanding of the phenomenon, which follows recommendations from Cohen et al. (2011). The triangulation consists of the

multitude of sources used for analysis (further developed below), and comparison between the studies in order to draw general conclusions addressed in the final sections of this thesis. Through empirical investigations into the micro-level (the individual teacher, Paper I), the meso-level (Papers III and IV), as well as meso-level-leadership (Paper V), together with the network conceptual framework explored in Paper II, it is possible to relate the perspectives put forward here to each other in order to sketch a bigger picture than any single paper does by itself. I return to this in the final Discussion section. First I describe what methods have been used and how the material has been analysed.

A paper-based *questionnaire* (Paper I) was distributed on four different occasions to a total of 109 academic teachers, of whom 106 answered the questions. The respondents indicated graphically how many conversational partners they had, as well as their partners' locations (options: within discipline/within department/within institution/elsewhere). Respondents were also asked to describe in writing the content and the character of the conversations. In addition, the respondents were asked to indicate their perception of the extent to which their local culture was supportive of such conversations by marking a cross on a line representing a continuum ranging from 'supportive' to 'non-supportive'. In total, 47 answers were received (out of 50 distributed questionnaires). All questionnaires were analysed by counting and summarizing the marking in each location category. The numbers were related to discipline and perceptions of supportive or non-supportive environments. The written accounts of the conversations were analysed by both authors, using thematic analysis.

A *narrative* was used in Paper II as the data collection method as one of the co-authors (Alveteg) wrote from personal experience in order to illustrate the arguments in an otherwise mainly conceptual article. As Cousin (2009) points out, a narrative can be used to research how people make sense of their lives through the selective stories they tell about noteworthy episodes. Using narrative was therefore a deliberate attempt to bring both the abstract conceptual ideas of network theory and the subsequent potential approaches to academic development down to the lived, contextualised academic experience. The author who wrote the narrative also read the network literature that was used, and all three authors iteratively discussed and documented the relation between the theoretical perspectives and the narrative. In that sense, an abductive analysis approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007) was used, meaning an iterative process between induction and deduction in order to let theory and practice mutually and dynamically influence each other.

The *case-study approach* was most clearly used in Papers III, IV, and V. Firstly the academic development strategy used at the university – and most systematically over time at one faculty – was used as a case in Paper III. The context was thoroughly described, as well as the different interrelated activities based in the strategy, which

uses the scholarship of teaching and learning as a vehicle for both individual and organizational development. All three authors are themselves active practitioners and scholars in the activities described. Paper IV relied on empirical findings from a previous study (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011), which used a case study approach to explore five strong academic microcultures in three different faculties at the university. In the original study, these five were characterized using descriptions that originated from individual semi-structured *interviews* with leaders, senior and junior academics and focus-group interviews with (4–7) students in each microculture. All interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, were recorded and fully transcribed, and used for analysis. Furthermore, both researchers in that study conducted the interviews together and documented memory notes immediately after each interview. These documents were used in the analysis together with the interview transcripts. The analysis was conducted first by the researchers separately, reading and thematically coding all interview transcripts and memory notes. Secondly, both researchers compared their codings and thematic categories that were visible in the material. The overlap was high between the two. Finally, some categories were highlighted in the reporting and writing of the original study. To some extent *observations* in each environment was also part of the empirical data. Both researchers visited each microculture several times when conducting the interviews, and on one occasion, a live teaching session was also observed. Observations were documented together with memory notes from each interview, and therefore also contributed to the analysis. In Paper IV the empirical findings from the original study were revisited and related to an overview of literature on quality assurance in higher education.

Finally *document analysis* was used as a primary method in Paper V. Twenty-five scholarly project reports were analysed, each 10–15 pages long and produced by four cohorts in a programme for local-level educational leaders. These reports contain examples of how local-level leaders work in order to promote educational development in their own sphere of influence, usually an academic undergraduate programme or a team of teachers representing a subject or an academic unit within a department. Both authors read each report independently, and coded them thematically and inductively. Coding and emergent themes were then compared, with a high degree of overlap. Based on a resulting matrix model of a strong or weak, external or internal mandate to lead, four of the reports were described as more detailed cases in Paper V, with the original report authors' informed consent. These four cases illustrated particularly well the contextualised tensions and challenges facing leaders when engaging in educational development.

5. Summary of appended papers

In the following each appended Paper (I-V) is summarised with focus on aim, research question, method, results and conclusions. At the end of section 5 an overview of these aspects for each appended paper is provided. For details the reader is recommended to read each full paper.

5.1 Paper I

Roxå, T. & Mårtensson, K. (2009). Significant conversations and significant networks – exploring the backstage of the teaching arena. *Studies in Higher Education 34*(5), 547–559.

Paper I explores with whom university teachers talk about teaching and learning and what the characteristics of the conversations are. The principal theoretical assumption in this study is that human beings (including university teachers) use significant others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) to try out ideas, discuss and solve problems, get new perspectives – in short to develop as individuals.

Results clearly indicate that academic teachers do have sincere and serious discussions about teaching with a few other people, in the paper labelled the teacher's *significant network*. 41% of the respondents have up to 5 people, 42% have up to 10, and only 17% have more than 10 other individuals that they have such conversations with. Interestingly, no respondent indicated that they had no one to talk to about teaching. The conversational partners are found in many different places: it can be a colleague in the office next door, as well as someone in another university, or someone at the kitchen table at home. This might have implications for the type of discussions occurring. If the discussions are between colleagues from the same discipline, disciplinary considerations can be made, while if the partner/s do not share discipline or even institution the conversational content is probably affected for instance by being less contextualized.

The qualitative descriptions of the conversations clearly show that these are based on high mutual trust and of a very private nature. Conversations take place in what Goffman (2000) calls *backstage* places: in a closed office, at the copy machine, in the

lunchroom (when only the significant other is present) rather than in formal meetings and committees. Furthermore, the conversations are clearly not just small talk or a way to give and receive emotional support. They are intellectually intriguing and deal with important disciplinary content, and challenges about how to teach and to best support students' learning.

The results show a clear link between how supportive the local culture is perceived to be and how many conversational partners the respondents have. When the culture is perceived as supportive of serious conversations about teaching and learning, the respondents report twice as many conversational partners than when the culture is experienced as non-supportive. This is true for the total number of partners as well as for the number of partners within the same discipline.

This study adds to our understanding of the individual teacher's social relations that influence his/her ways of thinking and practising teaching. Teachers do not act in isolation. The study shows that academic teachers each have a significant network – a few colleagues and other people with whom they have trusting conversations about teaching. These conversations are quite private and form an important basis for how teachers think and go about teaching. The significant network does not necessarily follow organizational formal boundaries, such as departments, rather the significant others can be found anywhere. However, the results also indicate that if the local professional context, such as a department, is perceived as supportive of intellectually and emotionally stimulating conversations about teaching, the number of significant others increases. This implies that if teaching and learning cultures are to develop, the local context should encourage and support such conversations openly and constructively.

5.2 Paper II

Roxå, T., Mårtensson, K., & Alveteg, M. (2010). Understanding and influencing teaching and learning cultures at university – a network approach. *Higher Education 62*, 99–111; Online First, 25 September 2010.

Paper II uses the results from Paper I as a starting point, and is mainly conceptual. Given that academic teachers are influenced as individuals by their significant network, rather than working in isolation, then perhaps network theory can help analyse and imply potential strategies for academic development.

In this article sociocultural theory is used together with network theory, in order to shed light on how meaning is created between individuals, networks and clusters in an organization. These theoretical perspectives add knowledge to how every individual has relations in which meaning is created with a few other individuals, as

shown in Paper I. These relations are, in accordance with Granovetter (1973) so called *strong ties*. Following from network theory an organization is built up by a large number of such networks, or clusters, held together by their strong ties. Between clusters there are relations of the character that Granovetter (1973) calls *weak ties*, with less density and frequency in interactions and relations. Granovetter (1973) also describes the function of so-called *hubs*, individuals who have a central position in receiving and forwarding (or not) information within clusters. This might be a formal leader but can also be other persons within a cluster, such as a senior colleague.

The hypothesis in Paper II is that the possibility to influence teaching and cultures within such small clusters implies that conversations and communication patterns need to be considered, both within clusters but also between them. The assumption is that by strengthening the weak ties in different ways, more, new, and stronger links can develop, which in turn will affect and influence internal interactions and meaning making within networks. A *narrative* was used in Paper II as the data collection method as one of the co-authors (Alveteg) wrote from personal experience in order to illustrate the conceptual arguments. Using narrative was a deliberate attempt to bring both the abstract conceptual ideas of network theory and the subsequent potential approaches to academic development down to the lived, contextualised academic experience.

There are clearly aspects from network theory that can help make meaning and create a deeper understanding of networks in relation to each other within an organization. This helps to see the organization as constructed not only as an organizational chart but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a web of relations and interactions. Thereby a better understanding of how different groups (clusters) interact with and influence each other comes forth. The narrative illustrates how a formal role, such as being a part-time academic developer in parallel to being a disciplinary academic, can empower an individual to become a hub in matters related to that role. It seems likely that the established social links within the cluster facilitated this process. The narrative also illustrates the importance of mutual trust and respect in backstage discussions.

The article includes five non-ranked possible general strategies for influencing communication patterns within and between clusters in an organization: 1) Influence the hubs (the person/s in each cluster who is the most central information-bearer), 2) Influence the clusters, 3) Influence the pathways for communication, 4) Improve the general ability to receive, share and send information, and/or 5) Reorganize (new roles, new rewards and new opportunities). Each strategy is described with possible advantages and drawbacks.

Network theory offers a fruitful and somewhat new perspective for academic developers and others who strive to influence academic teaching and learning cultures. It makes it possible to discern communication pathways in which cultural

meaning-making takes place. Thereby it becomes possible to construct a more multifaceted understanding of how academic cultures are constructed, maintained and possibly developed.

5.3 Paper III

Mårtensson, K., Roxå, T., & Olsson, T. (2011). Developing a quality culture through the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *30*(1), 51–62.

This paper builds further on Papers I and II and takes into account that individuals are influenced by their significant networks and that an organization such as a university or a faculty consists of many loosely coupled and inter-related networks. The paper investigates one particular strategy used in the case context – scholarship of teaching and learning – SoTL (see Research context and Theoretical framework) – in relation to an ambition to facilitate both individual and organizational development.

Ashwin and Trigwell (2004) have proposed a three-level matrix model in order to illustrate different aims and scope of investigation in SoTL: personal, local and public. The strategy within the case context uses scholarship of teaching and learning as a vehicle not only for individual development, but also and more importantly, for the development of the organization's aggregated ability to support student learning; in other words it is focused on the "local" mid-level in Ashwin and Trigwell's model.

The overall objective of the strategy therefore is to support the emergence of a local quality culture in relation to teaching and learning, where teaching develops slowly but constantly by the active involvement of academic teachers. This makes it somewhat different from many other earlier publications about SoTL (Boyer, 1990; Kreber, 2002), where the focus is more on SoTL as a personal endeavour. With a clearly stated expectation that teaching is no longer to be a solely private matter, but rather a concern for the organization as a whole there is a clear message about ambitions. Various activities support teachers to go public with their SoTL work, aiming primarily at colleagues in their working groups, departments, programmes and the faculty. Pedagogical courses function as essential arenas where teachers start to inquire and document their teaching experiences and produce a scholarly paper on teaching and learning (with a focus chosen by themselves). These papers can then be presented at the campus conference, they can be attachments in teaching portfolios and they can be part of an article in the campus newsletter. In this way, by emphasizing the local level, potential barriers for the academic teachers to engage is fairly low. The artefacts that are produced – scholarly papers on teaching and learning, conference proceedings, and so forth – are used in academic development

work to further fuel conversations and to thereby foster new significant relations within and between different networks in the faculty (as suggested in Paper II).

There is large resemblance between scholarship of teaching and learning and a general research approach that academics can recognize and appreciate. The paper therefore concludes that it appears fruitful in a research-intensive organizational culture to use these particular characteristics also when supporting the enhancement of teaching quality. However, it is absolutely central for this to work that the strategy respects academic freedom and allows for teachers to engage in whatever teaching-related issues they prefer that are meaningful to them. The strategy described and analysed generates personal commitment to teaching and student learning by nurturing significant networks and microcultures with the accounts of colleagues' teaching and learning experiences, sharing the same or similar contexts. The paper concludes that some critical and crucial principles of the strategy are that 1) Sustainable change must be owned by teachers; 2) Informed discussion and documentation is paramount for achieving a quality culture in relation to teaching and learning, at least in a research-intensive environment; 3) The driving force for change is peer review among teachers; 4) Clarity in vision and careful timing while taking structural measures is crucial on the part of leadership.

5.4 Paper IV

Mårtensson, K., Roxå, T., & Stensaker, B. (2012). From quality assurance to quality practices – an investigation of strong micro-cultures in teaching and learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–12, iFirst Article.

This paper sets out to explore, in the same university context as the other papers, in what way quality in teaching and learning is achieved in high functioning so called microcultures. This local quality practice is in Paper IV related to literature about quality assurance – an area that has been identified with gaps between policies and the practice that they are supposed to influence.

The overview of quality assurance literature highlights some of the challenges it is facing, one of which is the problem of not knowing well enough in what ways quality assurance systems actually have any effect on daily practices in academia in relation to teaching and learning. The overview of literature is then related to empirical findings from a study of strong academic microcultures (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011).

The microcultures under consideration shared some common features in relation to quality practice: they all took teaching and learning very seriously, all members of staff expressed how teaching was as important in their microculture, as was research. The empirical findings support the conclusion that these microcultures continuously

work on teaching-related quality matters. They displayed an almost taken-for-granted assumption that their teaching was and should be of very high quality. The findings also revealed constant internal monitoring of quality including taking issue with or supporting colleagues who occasionally did not match expected teaching quality. Student evaluations were used in all microcultures as material and inspiration for change, but also analyses of exam questions, collaboration with student representatives, and support in the form of pedagogical courses for teachers. The investigation revealed that the microcultures responded quite differently to the national quality assurance policy, from re-structuring all their courses (and course syllabi) and even actively using the formulated learning outcomes in collaborations outside the university, on the one hand, to not really changing anything but the formal course syllabi, on the other.

What strongly influenced the microcultures was their own so-called saga (Clark, 1998) – their internal history of what they are like, and what they do (as it is told and retold). They were also guided by what they wanted to achieve and how they wanted to get there. If a quality-related policy was in line with this saga, the microculture used the policy to boost something that they already wanted to do, but otherwise policies were not the main vehicles for quality work. The microcultures had different strategies for keeping themselves up-to-date with what went on in their organization in order to be able to influence important decisions that might concern them. They were inclined to collaborate and relate to other groups, in both research and teaching, but it was of utmost importance to them that they could decide on such collaborations by themselves. Leadership locally in these microcultures was highly regarded and appreciated. All members of microcultures trusted their leaders to do what was best for the microculture as a whole. Internal relations and interactions, as well as internal leadership, played a significant role for how quality work was valued and enacted. The paper, through its empirical basis, therefore confirms one of the challenges that quality assurance faces: namely the difficulty for a (quality) policy to effectively influence teaching practice.

5.5 Paper V

Mårtensson, K. & Roxå, T. (accepted for publication in *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*) Leadership at a local level – enhancing educational development.

In Paper V, leadership and its potential influence on teaching and learning cultures is explored, again within the case context. The paper describes an initiative to support so called local-level leaders: Directors of studies, heads of departments, programme leaders/coordinators (corresponding to what Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky (2012) call

academic programme directors), and people in similar roles. The initiative started in 2008, and is designed as a programme for local-level leaders. The programme design is based on Wenger's (1998) learning model of a community of practice so that interpretations of leadership situations and practices as well as leadership-identities are constantly discussed, negotiated, and reified.

The programme comprises five weeks of participant time, over a period of one year, with monthly half-day meetings. Participants volunteer for the programme and apply individually or in groups with a draft of a project involving educational development and leadership in their own professional context. The projects constitute the core of the programme as the participants continuously read relevant literature and discuss the progress of their projects in programme meetings as well as submitting increasingly finalized project reports that are peer-reviewed within the group. By the end of the year, all projects are reported in a scholarly format, as they are underpinned by literature on leadership and educational development and are peer-reviewed by fellow participants. The instructions for the project reports state that they should be written so that other leaders in similar roles can benefit from reading the text. Complementary to the projects, the programme is also visited by a number of guest lecturers that are experienced educational leaders of departments, programmes, faculties, and national higher education organizations.

As of September 2013 the programme had been offered four times with a total of 47 persons (27 women and 20 men) participating and with a completion rate of 60–70%. The participants represent six faculties at Lund University and two other higher education institutions in the region. The authors are the initiators and leaders of the programme. The programme provides an arena for emerging scholarship of leadership, as demonstrated in the participants' own contextualized projects. These have been disseminated from one cohort to the next, as sources of inspiration and locally produced scholarly artefacts of leadership, and they are therefore in themselves interesting artefacts to study. Paper V describes the programme and analyses the 25 finalized and peer-reviewed project reports that so far have been produced through the programme.

Three main categories of aims are defined when performing document-analysis of the project reports: 1) Developing/changing teaching (programmes), 2) Leading a programme through quality assessment procedures, and 3) Implementing a policy. On the surface these may seem straightforward, but when reading closely and analysing the content of the reports the foci for action are revealed. In other words, the analysis brought to the fore what the programme participants wanted to do or did more specifically as a means to achieve their aims, namely: A) Handling relations between themselves as leaders and the people they lead, B) Getting a group of academics to work together, C) Defining and clarifying leadership-role/s, and/or D)

Balancing discrepancies between the formal organization and the local teaching culture.

Taking category D) further, the paper uses a matrix where mandates to lead can be (perceived as) externally and or internally strong or weak. Four projects out of the 25 are developed and described in more detail in order to illustrate four different positions in the matrix: 1) strong external mandate and strong internal mandate; 2) weak external – strong internal, 3) strong external – weak internal, and 4) weak external – weak internal. Each case is described in terms of leadership initiatives and actions within each teaching and learning culture, along with its consequent results. One conclusion drawn is that depending on the balance between a strong or weak external or internal mandate to lead, this opens up quite different possibilities for the leaders in relation to educational development. Another conclusion is that, based on the projects analysed in this paper, it seems important, perhaps even crucial, to establish and cultivate an internal mandate to lead in order to be able to develop the local teaching and learning culture.

Table 1: A summary of the appended papers in the thesis, with highlighted purpose, question, method and main result/s for each paper.

	Purpose	Question	Method	Main result
Paper I	To investigate with whom teachers have significant conversations about teaching and learning.	How and to whom do university teachers talk in order to develop their own thinking and practice related to teaching and learning?	Questionnaire to 109 academic teachers from different disciplines.	Teachers have a few trusted people, a *significant network*, with whom they discuss teaching and learning.
Paper II	Through network theory, conceptualize how an academic organization can be understood, and possible development strategies following from that.	How can a sociocultural perspective on academic development and network theory contribute to understanding the development of teaching and learning micro-cultures?	Conceptual paper, based on sociocultural theory and network theory. Narrative.	A sociocultural perspective and network theory point to several possible strategies for the development of teaching and learning cultures. Each strategy has pros and cons.
Paper III	Describe and analyse the multitude of systematic and interrelated academic development activities in a research-intensive university, based on scholarship of teaching and learning, aiming at developing local teaching and learning cultures.	How can the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) be used as a strategy to develop teaching and learning microcultures in a research-intensive university?	Case-study	It is successful to use the scholarship of teaching and learning as a strategy in order to develop teaching and learning cultures. Artefacts, a multitude of inter-related activities, and academic freedom are crucial.
Paper IV	Explore teaching quality practice as enacted in strong academic microcultures and the relation to quality assurance, as formulated in policy.	How are teaching and learning quality practices in strong microcultures related to quality assurance policies?	Case-study Interviews Observations	Local teaching quality is not primarily guided by policy or quality assurance. Local quality practices have a stronger influence.
Paper V	Explore in what way leadership close to teaching practice matters in developing teaching and learning cultures.	How can local-level leadership influence local teaching and learning microcultures?	Case-study Document analysis	Local leadership can enhance teaching and learning culture. Differentiated due to external and internal mandates and highly sensitive to context.

6. General discussion

This section is structured in three different areas: methodological considerations of my research, followed by discussion of results and aims. The final section (7) will then address conclusions and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Methodological considerations

The research presented in this thesis is mainly of a *qualitative* character. Van Maanen (1998:xiv-xxiii) argues that over the past four decades much organizational research has been dominated by what he categorizes as quantitative methods, and he calls for more qualitative organizational research. This thesis follows that call. Qualitative work "allows for – indeed insists on – highly contextualized individual judgements" (Becker (1993) cited in Van Maanen (1998)). Furthermore, "lots of reasoning enters, information gathering is always selective, and any exploration is governed in large part by theory that determines (at least partly) what counts as facts, evidence, story, and so forth" (ibid: xii). My research has focused on academic development practice at Lund University, and theoretical perspectives where social interactions largely shape meaning making and actions at the individual and the meso-level, thereby creating organizational cultures. This has been my deliberate selective focus, rather than other possible ones (for instance political and policy influence on teaching practice).

On the whole, this thesis has used a *mixed-methods research approach* (Cohen et al., 2011). This means that a variety of specific research methods – case study, questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document analyses – have been used in order to gather an understanding of the case (Lund University) and the phenomenon under scrutiny (academic development with the aim of influencing teaching and learning microcultures). By using different methods, the research reported herein draws on several different sources and provides the opportunity to triangulate data in order to reach a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, which follows recommendations from Cohen et al. (2011) and Cousin (2009).

However, by using different methods for different parts of the research, the *validity* of the findings may be questioned. Cohen et al. (2011) differentiate between internal and external validity. The first concerns whether the material collected and

interpreted explains the phenomenon under study in a satisfactory way. I would argue that it does. The perspectives used here have helped inform a systematic approach to academic development practice over many years, with a focus on the meso-level and the complexity of the culture as a system of networks, rather than as a large number of individuals that need to be trained in teaching. External validity, in contrast, relates to whether the interpreted results are generalizable outside the particular context studied. In this case study the empirical material is gathered in one context, Lund University, which like any other organization has its own specific features and characteristics. This thesis has provided in depth data gathered at this university in order to provide a detailed understanding of my subject under study. Of course there may be limitations regarding the extent to which the results can therefore be generalized to other contexts. And as Gibbs et al. (2008) point out, there are huge variations as to how high-quality teaching comes about in different contexts, so precisely because of this, careful attention needs to be paid to any specific research context. Nevertheless there are higher education institutions in Sweden and in other countries that might share at least some of the same features as Lund University: the research-intensity, the organizational structure of many faculties as part of a large, loosely coupled university, the academic culture signified by academic freedom and autonomy in designing teaching and curricula. Therefore, some of the research results presented here might be useful also in other higher education contexts.

In relation to Yin's (2009) recommendation that case study research should be able to offer not statistical generalization, but *analytical generalization* (p. 42), meaning generalizing in relation to existing theory, some contributions in terms of perspectives on, and models for, academic development have been put forward through the results presented and discussed here. Although those are induced from one specific research-intensive context, it would be unlikely that they could not apply analytically to other knowledge- and research-intensive contexts. Given that even in this one type of university, there are many different ways of influencing and achieving strong microcultures, the results presented here could potentially be applicable also in institutions that, on the surface, are very unlike Lund University, but which at the meso-level share many characteristics, such as attitudes of the individuals, pressures from external professional bodies, the disciplinary leanings in terms of broad ways of thinking and practicing. Perhaps future research can shed light on the extent to which these perspectives are useful in other contexts, similar or not. Likewise, the model replicated from Hannah and Lester (2009) was not specifically developed in an academic context, but has proven to be useful here.

As stated in the Foreword, I have researched the activities and a context of which I myself am a part. Lund University is my daily working environment and I am paid to engage in academic development in this organization. As a researcher, I cannot be entirely objective in my choice of questions, respondents, methods, analyses and interpretations. Equally, one might fairly ask whether any research can be truly

objective – the researcher in any field chooses questions, methods, analyses, and interpretations. Cohen et al. (2011:221) point out that at the heart of qualitative educational research is the context. I therefore consider my being part of the research context as a strength that has provided me with the opportunity to come close to the phenomenon under study over a long period of time (15 years) and has given me insights and "culture-knowledge" along the way that has helped me interpret the findings I have reported here. I am in one sense therefore an insider in my own research. However at the same time I am an outsider to the microcultures that I have studied and in which teachers and leaders live their inside-lives. I have explored questions and perspectives that have helped me pursue my scholarly practice as an academic developer. Gradually, as the research questions and the results of the studies have developed over time, I have also found new questions and perspectives to explore. This iterative process has been largely influenced by cooperation and discussions with teachers, leaders and fellow academic developers locally at Lund University. Also I have on a number of occasions put forward my research and academic development practice for scrutiny and discussions at national and international conferences, and through anonymous peer reviews in several journal publications. Thereby I have continuously reflected upon my perspectives and interpretations, and have had the opportunity to filter my thinking through the scrutiny of others.

6.2 Results discussed

Since all appended papers contain separate discussions my aim in this section is to tie some of the threads together between the separate papers and discuss implications for academic development. I will concentrate on the individual as part of a microculture, and how microcultures can be influenced internally and externally. I will also discuss how the scholarship of teaching and learning can function as a strategy for influence at the meso-level, and finally discuss the role of leadership in academic development.

The research presented here has confirmed earlier results (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Merton et al., 2009) that organizational culture is important in relation to sustainable educational change. Perhaps this is not really surprising – in academic development conferences the particularity of national and institutional contexts is discussed extensively. However, what this thesis points to is that organizational culture is not one coherent entity, not even within one institution. There is a need for an even more fine-grained tool for understanding differences in educational change and development in relation to organizational culture. This thesis puts forward some perspectives for academic development in order to explore the social, collegial contexts in which teachers are embedded, here called *microcultures*.

Since the core of teaching boils down to the interaction between teachers, students, and the subject, any change and development has to start here. The results in this thesis show that individual academic teachers are influenced by their *significant network*, a network of a few individuals with whom the teacher has trusting inspiring conversations about teaching issues and student learning. These conversations are usually of a private nature and differ from day-to-day talk of a somewhat more administrative character that might take place in department meetings and the like, as shown also by Thomson (2013). The significant others are found within the discipline, within one's department, one's university, and/or outside the professional context. Thereby the significant network does not necessarily follow the boundaries of the formal organization. Using Van Maanen's (2007) lenses on an organization (section 3.2), relations and influential pathways become visible through the *cultural lens* that might not be visible through the strategic lens (i.e. the strategically designed organization) or the political lens. This is important to remember and consider when designing academic development initiatives and activities (Papers III, IV and V). However, Paper I also shows that there is a correlation between the number of significant people within one's closest collegial context and teachers' perceptions of whether or not that environment is supportive of such conversations about teaching. In a research-intensive context, where research generally has the highest status and first priority, it is therefore necessary to work systematically, explicitly, and consciously in order to develop a critical, constructive collegial discourse around teaching. Knight's (2006:35) words about the need for "workplaces, departments and teams that give plenty of opportunities or affordances for self-actualization" point in a direction for academic development: Local initiatives to create and support significant networks in the workplace are one way to enhance possibilities for discussions about teaching-related matters, exchanging experiences and ideas in the local microculture. Connecting this to Paper V on leadership means that local-level leaders can work with an ambition to create stronger internal interactions and the growth of significant networks within their groups, whether that is a programme, a teaching team within a department or similar groups. And leaders do do this, and they meet challenges along the way, as shown in Paper V. I will return to this later in the discussion, but first I will discuss academic development in and between microcultures.

Moving beyond the individual, the organization (the faculty/school or university) can be seen as comprising a *web of microcultures.* Some have high density in terms of being significant internally to each other and also reaching outside their own microculture for influence and collaboration (Paper IV). Others might be more scattered internally, where individuals work side-by-side rather than together. This variety and its implications for higher education organizations has recently been explored by Roxå (2014). He suggests a categorising matrix of four different types of microcultures depending on the experience of a shared responsibility and the degree of significance to each other: the Commons, the Club, the Market, and the Square.

When using network theory in order to understand the individuals in a network and a system of networks, as in Paper II, some crucial features and implications for academic development come forward: The title of Granovetter's classic article (1973) reveals a clear message: "*The strength of weak ties*". Hannah and Lester (2009) also provide similar recommendations: in order to develop a learning organization, one must provide the opportunity for both homophilic (with those who are alike) tight interactions but also heterophilic (with those who are different) encounters. In other words, one must *both strengthen interactions within networks but also between them*. For academic development focusing on the meso-level, this indicates first of all a necessity to create what Granovetter (1973) calls strong ties – the possibility within clusters, work-groups, teaching teams, and so on, of becoming part of each other's significant networks. The result is close to what Wenger (1998) describes as a community of practice. In the research presented here, this can come about through, for instance, requirements in pedagogical courses to discuss the scholarly papers with critical friends in their professional context, as well as with fellow participants in the course. In this way bridges are constructed from what is learnt in pedagogical courses towards the professional context where the teacher is active. Furthermore such bridges might help to strengthen internal "ties" within these contexts (Figure 3 below). Other similar activities are described and analysed in Papers II, III and V.

There is also an implication to create possibilities for the weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), namely *interactions between microcultures*, in order to develop new ideas and sharing good practices. This is supported by Hannah and Lester (2009:41), who argue that "weak links within organizations can in fact act as fulcrums for knowledge flow and learning." Pedagogical courses play an important role here in terms of people from different microcultures coming together, reading literature from research on teaching and learning and exploring teaching and learning issues, acting as one another's peers and building new knowledge together. But this is likely not sufficient if it is not supported by other more structural measures that reinforce the weak ties in other ways too. Examples of such measures are campus conferences, newsletters and rewards schemes that encourage the establishment of weak ties, as discussed in Paper III. Thereby cultural developments at the meso-level and structural measures at both meso- and macro-level are interrelated. Consequently an organization can be viewed as a multi-layered construction of meaning-making (Figure 3).

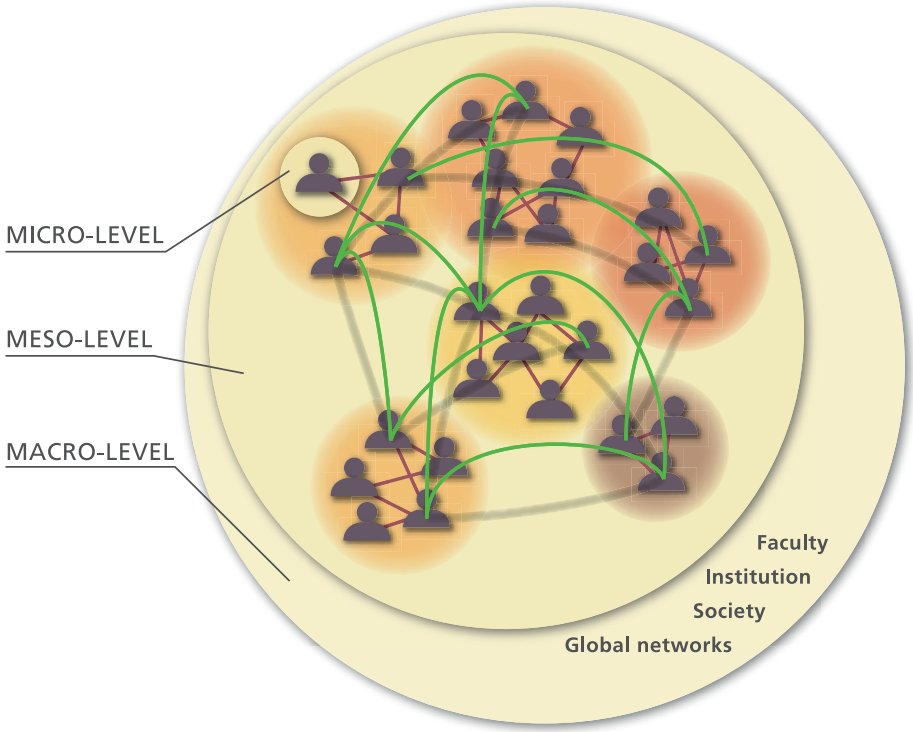

Figure 3: Illustration showing how a cultural perspective on the organization can be viewed as a multi-layered construction of meaning-making, and how the microcultures can be influenced by building strong ties (purple links) internally, as well as weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) – the green links – between microcultures. Both strong and weak ties are crucial in a strategy that aims at influencing the microcultures.

The purple links in Figure 3 symbolize interactions with significant others in a microculture. The green links on the other hand symbolize communication and interactions between microcultures where information, new ideas, and experiences can be shared, discussed and potentially scrutinized. Figure 3 illustrates how a cultural perspective on the organization can be viewed as a multi-layered construction of interactions and meaning making. However, Figure 3 shows us nothing about the quality of the interactions. This is where *the scholarship of teaching and learning* (SoTL) provides a research-intensive environment with a recognizable quality aspect and a vehicle for creating the strong and weak ties. Teaching issues should be treated in a scholarly way, meaning they should be observed, systematized, analysed through theory and relevant literature, and then documented and made public, put up for peer review. In the following I will turn to some critical features of scholarship of teaching

and learning as a strategy for academic development: particularly I will discuss the role of artefacts, organizational ignition of and inter-related incentives for SoTL, and finally timing and leadership.

As reported in describing the research context (section 2.2) and in Paper III, the scholarship of teaching and learning has permeated interrelated systematic academic development activities at this university since the early 2000s. The most important aspect here is the move from personal knowledge to local knowledge (cf Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004). It builds on the assumption that a gradual shift in the local culture will occur if teachers start conducting systematic observations and inquiries into their teaching and assessment practices and into their students' learning and challenges encountered, if they underpin this inquiry with educational (or other relevant) theory and literature, and finally if they share their findings and conclusions with those who share their local context. This is a deliberate interpretation of SoTL where it is considered both a desirable competence of individual academics and a development strategy for the organization. In the strategy described here, the *artefacts* – the scholarly accounts of inquiries into teaching and learning that are produced within the local context – are crucial. One important advantage to using artefacts like the ones described above (reified scholarly accounts of locally important teaching issues) is that those can travel within the organization, from one microculture to another. So papers written in pedagogical courses are put into a searchable database, they are distributed to new cohorts of course participants, they are presented at the campus conference, they are a source for discussions at local seminars, and a basis for documenting and assessing teaching excellence. As illustrated in Figure 3 the green arrows indicate the importance of increasing the number and pattern of interactions between microcultures, and for that purpose the artefacts are useful.

One issue of concern, however, is the amount and character of theory used in these scholarly accounts. In a research-intensive environment like this case, most academics are researchers in their own disciplines. They are not primarily expected to conduct research on teaching and learning with the same kind of quality demands as within their own research fields. So, as pointed out in the model from Ashwin and Trigwell (2004), and elaborated in Roxå et al. (2008), the strategy in this case stresses *the local level* – be that an academic programme, a department, a faculty or the university – as a focus for verification of the inquiries. The educational theory used should be sufficient to feed into knowledge-building at that local level. Thereby the scholarship of teaching and learning can be the vehicle with which teaching-related issues become not only a personal practice but also scholarly intellectual work. One could argue, using Schein's (1984) analytical layers of organizational culture (artefacts, values, and underlying assumptions), that the artefacts created from teaching inquiries draw on values that researchers recognize generally from research quality. It is therefore a vehicle to slowly influence the culture.

However, Hannah and Lester (2009:34) suggest that "leaders approach organizational learning by setting the conditions and structure for learning to occur, while limiting direct interference in the actual creative processes." In other words, it is important for the strategy not to set a specific content agenda of what the teachers should focus on in their investigations. This has to be of their own choice, in relation to issues that are considered relevant to their own teaching and learning microculture. Often, during pedagogical courses in this case context, participants are introduced to research on student learning, assessment, supervision, curriculum design and other relevant content issues, but mainly in relation to first having identified issues that are important to them in their own context. That way, there is a respect for academic freedom as a sign of "loyalty" to the discipline and its most important teaching and learning challenges; but this can also be scrutinized and challenged by peers and academic developers in the pedagogical courses.

Of course, SoTL being used as such a strategy has some important implications and features that deserve highlighting here:

a) **Something has to ignite teaching and learning inquiries**, which in this case most often happens when teachers participate in pedagogical courses. They are required to write about an issue that is relevant for teaching and learning in their own discipline and underpin this with relevant literature. They are commonly also asked to show this paper to "critical friends" (Handal, 1999) in their own professional context as a basis for a collegial discussion on teaching-related matters relevant in that context.

b) There have to be **arenas and incentives for sharing** ("going public") these inquiries and meeting others (bridging links/weak ties) interested in similar topics. In the case of Lund University, campus conferences have been established, both within faculties and university-wide, in order to facilitate sharing; some departments arrange seminars on topics addressed in the papers that teachers write, and in the Faculty of Engineering (LTH) there is an internal teaching and learning newsletter several times per year where inquiries are presented and disseminated.

c) There need to be **organizational incentives, cultural and structural,** that encourage, recognize and reward the scholarship of teaching and learning, showing that this is also taken into account in formal appointment and promotion procedures. Several faculties in the university have established reward systems and appointment structures that are based on SoTL (Mårtensson, 2010; Olsson et al., 2010; Olsson & Roxå 2013).

In sum, all these different activities, and particularly the documented inquiries that teachers undertake, make up the strong and weak ties that Granovetter (1973) advocates (Figure 3).

Returning again to Van Maanen's (2007) lenses on an organization there is apparently not a clear boundary between the strategic lens (structures) and the cultural lens. From what has been discussed above, one can conclude that both of these interfere with each other (and most likely with the political lens as well although this has not been the focus of the present thesis). Structures in terms of resources, requirements, reward systems and the establishment of local scholarly arenas for teaching and learning are likely to be crucial in supporting the influence on culture. However, as shown in the different papers in this thesis, these *structural changes have to be interrelated, well-timed and in tune with the cultural development*. And based on the research from this case study I would argue that without considering the culture, changes that only focus on structural issues, policies, appointment procedures and so forth, are not likely to have much effect. As indicated by Hannah and Lester (2009) at the macro-level, it is, among other things, crucial to consider timing and stages of diffusion, to codify what really matters into infrastructures and resources, and to scan for and sanction emergent knowledge.

This university has had academic developers since the early 1970s. Individual consultancy, seminars, workshops, and pedagogical courses have been offered to teachers for a very long time. Usually these activities are highly appreciated and considered meaningful by participants (Gran, 2006; Lindström & Maurits, 2014; Åkesson & Falk-Nilsson, 2010). The strategic aim to increase potential for organizational learning (and competition) was pioneered by one faculty. Here consultancy with individuals and teams, and pedagogical courses constituted a kind of ground preparation when the reward system mentioned above was introduced in 2001. Teachers had had the opportunity to write scholarly accounts of teaching and to share them with colleagues (most likely in their significant networks), but the faculty so far had lacked an arena where teachers could go public. Therefore a campus conference was initiated, and later also a campus newsletter. The faculty senior management initiated a faculty-wide common system for student evaluations, theoretically underpinned by the same student-learning paradigm that underpins the pedagogical courses, and consequently initiated academic development research in the faculty. Finally, as shown by Mårtensson (2010), the model for assessing and rewarding SoTL in the reward system has gradually migrated into the formal structures in the faculty, in its appointment and promotion procedures. Most likely, this timing and dynamic growth of interrelated cultural and structural activities that support and strengthen each other have been crucial.

The results in Papers IV and V, taken together with the discussion above, indicate that the macro-level has a somewhat limited influence over what quality practices are enacted at the meso- and micro-level. The strong microcultures that were used for empirical analysis in Paper IV all expressed their own stances in relation to the quality assurance framework. This did not in any way stop them from working on developing teaching quality – on the contrary. They each responded in localised ways to the

challenge to develop quality teaching. It was, however, primarily student evaluations, professional organizations, the microculture's own ambitions and relations to future employers of their students that were the driving forces in their quality work. Perhaps this is no bad thing, if we follow the suggestion from Hannah and Lester who argue against purely top-down-processes (2009:34) and advise that leaders set "the conditions and structure for learning to occur, while limiting direct interference in the actual creative processes". Perhaps a more important thing at the institutional macro-level is to scan precisely for and to sanction emergent knowledge, to reinforce and reward, and to delicately manage the timing of different initiatives.

This brings us back again to *leadership*. Papers IV and V show that local-level leadership (i.e. on the meso-level), can make a difference in influencing a local teaching and learning microculture. Often such influence starts by organizing teachers within a microculture to come together and start sharing teaching experiences, taking part in seminars on teaching and learning or starting jointly to discuss the implications of a restructured course or programme. In other words, local-level leaders start consciously to support an emergent local significant network. The leaders appreciate support provided (in this case in the format of a year-long programme across the university provided by the academic development unit), and to share experiences with other leaders in similar roles. Potential difficulties for local-level leaders lie in the perceived delicate balance between external mandate given from the organization when taking up a formal leadership role and the internal mandate given (or not) to the leader on behalf of the colleagues that s/he is supposed to lead. The results from Paper V confirm Alvesson's (2011) definition about leadership being "a complex social process in which the meanings and interpretations of what is said and done are crucial" (p. 152). It is suggested here that depending on where a leader is in that balancing act, and whether the mandate is perceived as strong or weak (see matrix in Paper V), different actions are possible. Based on the findings in Paper V it seems as if local-level leaders need first to build an internal mandate within the microculture before the full potential of any development initiative can occur. This is again in line with Hannah and Lester's (2009) model, suggesting that leaders at the meso-level make efforts to improve network structure, and network functioning.

Generally the research presented here confirms what Graham (2012:19–20) has identified in terms of sustainable development of engineering education: the importance of vertical as well as horizontal communication, and the role of leadership engagement. However, and somewhat differing from Graham's results, what is presented here is weighted more at the meso-level, the interactions and communications within and between networks, rather than communication between meso- and macro-levels. Furthermore Graham's work largely focuses on leaders as heads of department, but as shown in this thesis, other forms of leadership, such as directors of studies and academic programme leaders/directors have as much or even more potential to influence the microculture.

In relation to Edström's (2011) metaphor of organizational gravity, I would argue that organizational culture could be a more fruitful way of thinking if academic developers want to influence it. Gravity connotes quite a robust physical condition whereas, as shown here, culture can be influenced, even if it is dynamic, complex, and takes time. The strategies that Edström puts forward – the force strategy and the systems strategy – are both used in the research-intensive context described here, and perhaps that is necessary. The force strategy where "new energy constantly has to be added", is represented by the high number of teachers taking part in pedagogical courses, workshops, seminars and consultancy activities. The systems-strategy is in place mainly in terms of the reward system promoting and rewarding individuals and departments who engage in scholarship of teaching and learning. Also, over time, the organization has promoted those engaging in SoTL, by appointing them to strategic positions in programmes, committees and even faculty leadership roles. So by working at the level of both force-strategy and systems-strategy, it is, according to my research, possible – very gradually – to shift the organizational culture in a way that favours high-quality teaching and learning practices that are informed by relevant academic literature and are embedded in a locally relevant, disciplinary context.

Finally, Hannah and Lester's multi-level model has proven to be valuable in the research presented here, although it was not originally developed specifically for academic contexts, but for knowledge-intensive organizations in general. The model, though, focuses largely on what leaders at the different levels could and should do. In my research, leadership is one important dimension but not the only one. Based on the findings presented here, perhaps collegial influence, peer-to-peer, significant networks and the microcultures teachers and leaders are part of, exercise the strongest influence on how teaching and learning develops locally.

6.3 Discussion of aims

This thesis has explored perspectives on academic development in a research-intensive university with a focus on the organizational meso-level. It has done so because previous research has indicated that this is where teachers are influenced in their ways of thinking and practising. Furthermore, previous attempts to influence teaching practice by either pure policy- and top-down initiatives or individualistic bottom-up initiatives have had somewhat limited effects. And these perspectives meet at the meso-level, as illustrated by Figure 1 in the introduction to this thesis.

The thesis set out to address five questions, each explored in the papers appended. I will here briefly summarise the main findings in order to discuss the aims of the thesis.

How – and to whom – do university teachers talk in order to develop their own thinking and practice related to teaching and learning? (Paper I)

This study adds to our understanding of the individual teacher's social relations that influence his/her ways of thinking and practising teaching. Teachers do not act in isolation. The study shows that academic teachers each have a significant network – a few colleagues and other people with whom they have trusting conversations about teaching. These conversations are quite private and form an important basis for how teachers think and go about teaching. The significant network does not necessarily follow organizational formal boundaries, such as departments, rather the significant others can be found anywhere. However, the results also indicate that if the local professional context, such as a department, is perceived as supportive of intellectually and emotionally stimulating conversations about teaching, the number of significant others increases. This implies that if teaching and learning cultures are to develop, the local context should encourage and support such conversations openly and constructively.

How can a sociocultural perspective on academic development and network theory add to our understanding of the development of teaching and learning microcultures? (Paper II)

The article highlights aspects from network theory that, along with a sociocultural perspective on academic development, can help make meaning and create a deeper understanding of networks in relation to each other within an organization. This helps to see the organization as constructed not only as an organizational chart but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a web of relations and interactions. Thereby a better understanding of how different groups (clusters) interact with and influence each other comes forth. The article includes five non-ranked possible general strategies for influencing communication patterns within and between clusters in an organization: 1) Influence the hubs (the person/s in each cluster who is the most central information-bearer), 2) Influence the clusters, 3) Influence the pathways for communication, 4) Improve the general ability to receive, share and send information, and/or 5) Reorganize (new roles, new rewards and new opportunities). Each strategy is described with possible advantages and drawbacks.

The article thereby offers perspectives for academic developers and others who strive to influence academic teaching and learning cultures, which makes it possible to construct a more multifaceted understanding of how academic cultures are constructed, maintained and possibly developed.

How can the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) be used as a strategy to develop teaching and learning microcultures in a research-intensive university? (Paper III)

This paper takes into account that individuals are influenced by their significant networks and that an organization such as a university or a faculty consists of many loosely coupled and inter-related networks. The paper investigates one particular strategy used in the case context – scholarship of teaching and learning – SoTL (see

Research context and Theoretical framework) – in relation to an ambition to facilitate both individual and organizational development.

There is large resemblance between scholarship of teaching and learning and a general research approach that academics recognize and appreciate. The paper therefore concludes that it appears fruitful in a research-intensive organizational culture to use these particular characteristics also when supporting the enhancement of teaching quality. However, the results indicate it is central for this to work that the strategy respects academic freedom and allows for teachers to engage in whatever teaching-related issues they prefer that are meaningful to them. The strategy described and analysed consists of a number of inter-related and integrated activities. It thereby generates personal commitment to teaching and student learning by nurturing significant networks with the accounts of colleagues' teaching and learning experiences, sharing the same or similar contexts. Some critical and crucial principles of the strategy are highlighted in the paper, namely that 1) Sustainable change must be owned by teachers; 2) Informed discussion and documentation is paramount for achieving a quality culture in relation to teaching and learning, at least in a research-intensive environment; 3) The driving force for change is peer review among teachers; 4) Clarity in vision and careful timing while taking structural measures is crucial on the part of leadership.

How are teaching and learning quality practices in strong microcultures related to quality assurance policies? (Paper IV)

This paper explores in what way quality in teaching and learning is achieved in high functioning (strong) microcultures. This local quality practice is related to literature about quality assurance – an area that has been identified with gaps between policies and the practice that they are supposed to influence. The results indicate that the microcultures under consideration shared some common features in relation to quality practice: they all took teaching and learning very seriously and that they continuously work on teaching-related quality matters, through various measures, not necessarily related to a quality policy but rather to the microculture's own "saga".

How can local-level leadership influence local teaching and learning microcultures? (Paper V)

In this article, leadership and its potential influence on teaching and learning cultures is explored. The paper describes an initiative to support so called local-level leaders through a yearlong programme, based on the idea of community of practice where leaders work on projects in their own professional context. The analysis of the project reports reveals that leaders have to delicately balance between external mandates, given to them from the formal organisation through their leadership-positions, and internal mandates from the group they are there to lead. Through a description of four authentic cases, the paper shows that this balance between external and internal mandates provides leaders with different possibilities to develop the local

microculture. It is concluded that an internal mandate seems to be a prerequisite in order to contribute to cultural development.

Let us return, finally, to the shifts in dimensions of academic development that Gibbs (2013:2) describes as means to "understanding of the way change comes about and how it becomes embedded and secure within organizations": a) from a focus on the classroom to a focus on the learning environment; b) from a focus on individual teachers to a focus on course teams, departments and leadership of teaching; c) from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning; d) from small, single, separate tactics to large, complex, integrated, aligned, multiple tactics; e) from change tactics to change strategies; f) from a focus on quality assurance to quality enhancement; and g) from a focus on fine-tuning of current practice to transforming practice in new directions (Gibbs, 2013).

Setting the results in this thesis in relation to Gibbs' observed shifts, the research presented here aimed to explore mainly the following three dimensions:

a) from a focus on the classroom to a focus on the learning environment;

b) from a focus on individual teachers to a focus on course teams, departments and leadership of teaching;

c) from small, single, separate tactics to large, complex, integrated, aligned, multiple tactics.

This research has done so by investigating firstly what influences individual teachers and their ways of thinking about and practising their teaching. The particular focus is on the social, collegial contexts where academic teachers are professionally active, where their identities are shaped and meaning is created. In other words, I have investigated the collegial learning environment of the teachers outside their 'private' classroom settings. The main framework used here is a sociocultural one, exploring the significance of the organizational culture in general, and teaching and learning microcultures specifically as well as the role of leadership in relation to influencing the microcultures. The thesis as a whole thereby contributes to knowledge in dimensions a) and b). Finally, dimension d), from small, single, separate tactics to large, complex, integrated, aligned, multiple tactics, is explored through the use of a multi-level model of organizational learning, network theory, leadership, and scholarship of teaching and learning. These particular perspectives are used in order to move beyond only the support of individual academic teachers and instead investigate how academic development can, by focusing on cultural (and to some extent structural) aspects of the organizational meso-level, also contribute to organizational learning. To fulfil the aim of this thesis, I have therefore analysed these aspects, used in the academic development practice at Lund University as an inter-related, complex, and integrated systemic approach.

Van Maanen (1998:xi) when arguing for more qualitative approaches to organizational research writes: "The aim of most qualitative studies is to produce a more or less coherent representation, carried by word and story, of an authorially claimed reality and of certain truths or meanings it may contain for those within its reach". As I have been researching my own practice, in the context where I work, I believe this quote encapsulates my work: I have produced a more or less coherent representation of academic development at Lund University, it is carried by my word and story. I am the investigator and the author, and it is therefore my claimed reality of truths and meanings that it contains.

7. Conclusions

Based on the research that is presented in this thesis, I want to highlight the following conclusions:

- Academic development as a field of research and practice has much to gain by researching itself. In particular if academic developers have the ambition to contribute to organizational development, then a focus on the organizational meso-level and perspectives from network theory, organizational culture, organizational learning, and leadership provide some promising insights.
- Academic development should be designed for the benefit of both the individual and the meso-level and thereby potentially contribute to organizational development. This, however, needs careful consideration in the design of various activities (such as the design and role of pedagogical courses), it requires interrelated activities and supporting structures at various levels (micro-, meso-, and macro-), as well as considerate timing of activities.
- Academic teachers have significant networks, a small number of people who strongly influence their ways of thinking about and practising teaching. These networks are not restricted to organizational boundaries, but they should be encouraged and supported locally in order to develop existing teaching and learning microcultures. Academic development therefore benefits from considering the organization as a system of such networks and to find ways to strengthen communication and interactions both within and also between the networks in order to influence local teaching and learning microcultures.
- The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is a fruitful way in a research-intensive environment to produce and make use of scholarly artefacts of teaching and learning inquiries. These artefacts are tools that can be transferred easily in the system, and have the potential to exert influence both within and between microcultures. This in turn implies the need to decide on the quality and character of the artefacts, to create arenas for sharing and scrutinizing them, as well as establishing locally adapted systems for rewarding and recognizing them.

- From an organizational point of view local meso-level leaders play a significant role in influencing teaching and learning microcultures, provided that an internal mandate is created as a prerequisite for change.

8. Future research

In relation to the research presented here there are still many questions that need further exploration. First and perhaps foremost it would be relevant to investigate if the perspectives presented and used here are generalizable and relevant to other contexts. If the research is relevant and applicable to other higher education contexts, to what kind of contexts? Is the research mainly relevant to research-intensive institutions or could it be useful in other institutional contexts as well? The research on significant networks presented here has sparkled other similar research investigations that mirrors the results put forward here (Pyörälä, 2014; Thomson, 2013) and some more quantitative approaches to the same issue also exist (Pataraia et al., 2013a, 2013b). Are there common traits between academic development in higher education institutions that can benefit from the perspectives used in this case? Recently Williams et al. (2013) explored the idea of informal networks as important for influencing higher education cultures, much inspired by research presented in this thesis. But more such research is needed. Furthermore, what are significant unique traits and characteristics in other institutions that might prevent these perspectives being usable?

Also, future research needs to explore what kind of effects this way of regarding and understanding academic development might have. As highlighted by Trigwell (2012), there is a lack of follow-up-studies of the organizational effects of pedagogical courses, so there is definitely a need and a space for further research. It must be pointed out though, that according to Senge (2005), measuring effects is not a straightforward thing. Complex processes in complex and dynamic organizations need careful consideration to evaluate. Perhaps that makes the call for such research even more necessary.

As shown in this thesis, teaching should be considered a social, collegial business rather than only the responsibility of each individual teacher. Further research on how such teamwork in academic workplaces might be supported and developed would be useful. The concept of collegiality in higher education has an almost mythical value, but the concept and its implications could benefit from more unpacking and exploring. In the microcultures investigated here, collegiality existed together with clearly hierarchical structures and active leadership. These almost contradictory phenomena are worth further investigations. Furthermore, the research presented here focused on strong microcultures in terms of research and teaching (particularly Paper

IV). However, it must be assumed that there is variation in terms of microcultures within every university: some are stronger, some are weaker, and they dynamically develop and change. This perspective is recently explored in Roxå (2014) but further research is needed in order to examine the significant features across the variety of microcultures, and also in order to understand what triggers development of different microcultures.

Finally, this thesis barely scratches the surface of the role of leadership. Research on leadership in academic contexts is in itself an underdeveloped area, and specifically leadership at the local level, within the microcultures. Yet the research presented here shows us that this is where perhaps the most important influence might take place, in the interactions between teachers and colleagues sharing the same context, where academic identities are shaped and meaning is created. This is therefore most definitely an area in urgent need of more research.

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Paper I

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Significant conversations and significant networks – exploring the backstage of the teaching arena

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This article presents an inquiry into conversations that academic teachers have about teaching. The authors investigated to whom they talk and the forms that these conversations take. The findings indicate that most teachers rely on a small number of significant others for conversations that are characterised by their privacy, by mutual trust and by their intellectual intrigue. Individual teachers seem to have small 'significant networks', where private discussions provide a basis for conceptual development and learning, quite different from the 'front stage' of formal, public debate about teaching. Individual teachers seem to have more significant conversations and larger networks where the local culture is perceived to be supportive of such conversations. The findings are interpreted in relation to socio-cultural theories, and have clear implications for the development of teaching.

Introduction

There is evidence in the literature that academic teachers are better teachers if they pay close attention to their students' learning, and reflect about and design teaching with the students' learning in focus, rather than if they put the teaching activity first (Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Martin et al. 2000; Ho, Watkins, and Kelly 2001; Entwistle and Peterson 2004). There is also an established link between teachers' conceptions about teaching and learning, and the quality outcome of student learning. These conceptions range from teachers who are mainly concerned with how to display disciplinary content to students as effectively as possible ('*teacher-focused teaching*'), to teachers who focus on how to effectively support students' ability to master the discipline at hand ('*student-focused or learning-focused teaching*') (Barr and Tagg 1995; Ramsden 2005).

These accounts, and their links to the quality of student learning, are not without challenges (Malcolm and Zukas 2001; Lindsay 2004). But, for the purpose of this article, it is enough to acknowledge that a variation exists in how academic teachers understand teaching and learning, and that this understanding is in some way linked to how they plan, perform, and interpret their professional practice, which is to support student learning. The focus of this article is to discuss what influences a teacher to move from one understanding to another. In doing so we use a socio-cultural perspective, focusing in particular on the conversations teachers have with colleagues. The assumption is that during some of these conversations teachers allow themselves to be

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influenced to such an extent that they develop, or even sometimes drastically change, their personal understanding of teaching and learning.

That a person's individual interpretation of a situation influences his or her actions means that individuals are knowledgeable in their relationship to the world. Humans live their lives 'as reflexive beings cognitively appropriating time rather than merely "living" it' (Giddens 2004, 237). This implies an active and deliberate way of living that should be true also for university teachers. They construct their understanding of teaching, and they teach in ways they believe in. This does not mean that they are all excellent teachers, but it means that most of the time they believe in what they do, or at least they try to make the best of it. On the other hand, teaching does not happen in a vacuum; it takes place in the context of, among other things, a discipline and a departmental (or other organisational entity) culture. Trowler and Cooper (2002) and Trowler (2005) explore how teachers are influenced by disciplinary traditions and other cultural structures constructed over time, i.e. 'teaching and learning regimes' (Trowler and Cooper 2002). These traditions, or, in Trowler's terms, 'moments', include recurrent practices, tacit assumptions, conventions of appropriateness, subjectivities in interaction and power relations. This cultural influence has also been identified in a joint study in Finland and the UK, where it is documented as 'systematic variation in both student- and teacher-focused dimensions of approaches to teaching across disciplines and across teaching contexts … In other words, teachers who experience different contexts may adopt different approaches to teaching in those different contexts' (Lindblom-Ylänne et al. 2006, 285, 294). Therefore, even if teachers are knowledgeable agents, they are also placed in a dialectical relation with the surrounding world.

This surrounding context can be material in nature – for instance, a physical environment – but it can also be social in nature, as in the interactions between individuals working together within a particular department. In this article we use a socio-cultural perspective to focus on the social context of university teachers. To pursue this line of inquiry we move even closer to the social life of university teachers, recognising that university teaching is individually constructed as well as socially influenced. On the one hand, the individual's thinking is highly important, and teaching is a skill dependent on the individual's capacity. On the other hand, the teaching role is also one where the social context governs some of the available scope for action. In the classic book, *Academic tribes and territories* (Becher and Trowler 2001), the authors, in order to understand academic life, consider both the discipline (the territory) *and* the social life of those inhabiting the discipline (the tribe). Our attempt with this article is to make a contribution to our understanding of the latter.

Learning about teaching

The perspective on teachers' learning used here stems from phenomenographic research. Learning is seen as a development of the individual's relation to the world (Marton and Booth 1997). The learner interacts with the world by focusing on a limited number of aspects. The individual uses these limited numbers of aspects in order to construct, or activate, a conception of the specific situation. A few aspects perceived by a teacher are enough to recognise a teaching situation. The teacher will base his or her decisions on this conception, rather than on all aspects available. Consequently, learning can be viewed as the activation of processes when further aspects are incorporated into a comprehensive conception, or where new aspects force an old conception to change.

Conceptions are not fixed formations (Marton and Booth 1997), nor do they determine any specific sort of practice. Conceptions interact with the context (Demastes, Good, and Peebles 1995), and therefore they do not necessarily result in excellent skills or teaching performances. But the focus on conceptions offers a useful perspective while trying to understand how teachers learn about teaching, and, as mentioned before, there are empirical studies which claim that teachers' conceptions about teaching and learning relate to the quality of student learning (Kember 1997; Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Ho, Watkins, and Kelly 2001).

Since conceptual development and change results in a different perception of the world, it also affects the perception of the individual's own identity (Marton, Dall'Alba, and Beaty 1993), and his or her perception of others in the social context. In short, this means that if a university teacher learns something of importance about teaching and learning, he or she, via an incorporation of new aspects into his or her previous knowledge, develops his or her view not only on teaching in general but also on his or her role as a teacher. For a fuller account of this process see Entwistle and Walker (2000).

We will explore the social interactions between academic teachers which, from a socio-cultural perspective, influence their understanding of teaching and learning. In doing so, we have to understand more about academic communication.

Academic communication

Many writers, including ourselves, have described university teaching as a solitary business (Ramsden 1998; Handal 1999; Roxå and Mårtensson 2004; Gizir and Simsek 2005). Becher and Trowler (2001) describe the seemingly contradictory nature of communication in academia. Communication is the driving force for development, often in the form of peer-review. Simultaneously, academics seem strangely reluctant to engage in discussion and debate: 'The inclination to play safe – to minimize the risk of making professional enemies by opposing or being critical of colleagues' views – is also reflected in the preference, noted earlier, of many academics to steer clear of direct competition with others' (127).

But there are more nuances to academic communication. Becher and Trowler (2001, 92) also describe how academic researchers tend to rely on two networks: one is large, containing sometimes several hundreds of individuals, used for referencing and orientation. Here researchers decide what to do and how to position themselves and their research. The other network, as small as up to 10 individuals, is used for the testing of ideas and feedback on draft papers, involving more personal matters than orientation and referencing. Here researchers develop and nurture new ideas and new thoughts until these are mature enough to be presented to the larger network.

Following from that, it seems interesting to explore what social processes are significant for the way teachers construct and maintain an understanding about teaching and learning. We have, therefore, investigated the conversational partners that university teachers have, and the nature of these conversations. The intention is to identify smaller networks in relation to teaching within a larger social context. If such networks exist, teachers should be able to report on how they differentiate between colleagues while talking about teaching. We hypothesise that teachers are able to name rather few colleagues with whom they have sincere discussions about teaching, and that they express themselves differently while talking to colleagues not included among those few. If this is the case, it would be reasonable to assume that conversations in small

networks have greater implications for how teachers construct, maintain and develop an understanding of teaching and learning, than would be the case for conversations going on in large networks.

The investigation

This investigation started off from informal discussions with teachers and colleagues, and from buzz-group exercises during presentations at conferences. These discussions were concerned with whom academics talk to seriously about teaching. The anecdotal accounts we gathered from these discussions supported our hypothesis – university teachers have a few people with whom they have sincere conversations about teaching and learning (see Table 1 and Figure 1). Encouraged by this primary confirmation of our hypothesis, we started collecting evidence in a more systematic way. On five occasions data was collected concerning the number of conversational partners, where these were found, and the character of the conversations. Later we also included a question concerning the local culture in which these conversations took place.

A questionnaire was distributed to, in total, 109 academic teachers, of whom 106 answered the questions. The questionnaire was distributed on different occasions: during a national teaching and learning conference (40 answers) and at the beginning of pedagogical courses (66). The pedagogical courses were either mandatory (49 respondents) or voluntary (17 respondents). The data collected at the national conference was not categorised with regard to discipline. The data collected from the pedagogical courses was from engineering studies (17), the social sciences (17) and the humanities (32). The questions were presented in a questionnaire where the respondents indicated graphically how many conversational partners they had, as well as the location of them.

As part of the instructions for answering the questionnaire, we introduced the respondents to the concept of *critical friends* (Handal 1999), as a way to focus the respondents on individuals with whom they had sincere and serious discussions about teaching and learning.

The questions posed to all 109 respondents were:

- With how many people do you have engaging conversations about teaching and learning?
- Where are these conversational partners found?
- What characterises your conversations? (Please describe them.)

In our later data collection we added the following question:

- Do you consider your local professional culture to be supportive or non-supportive of such conversations about teaching and learning?

Results

With how many people do you have engaging conversations about teaching and learning?

In total 106 teachers answered the question, clearly showing that everybody could relate to our instructions. As clearly, they indicated that they had a limited number of conversational partners with whom they had serious discussions about teaching. Some 83% of the respondents had up to 10 conversational partners (Figure 1). The result mirrors

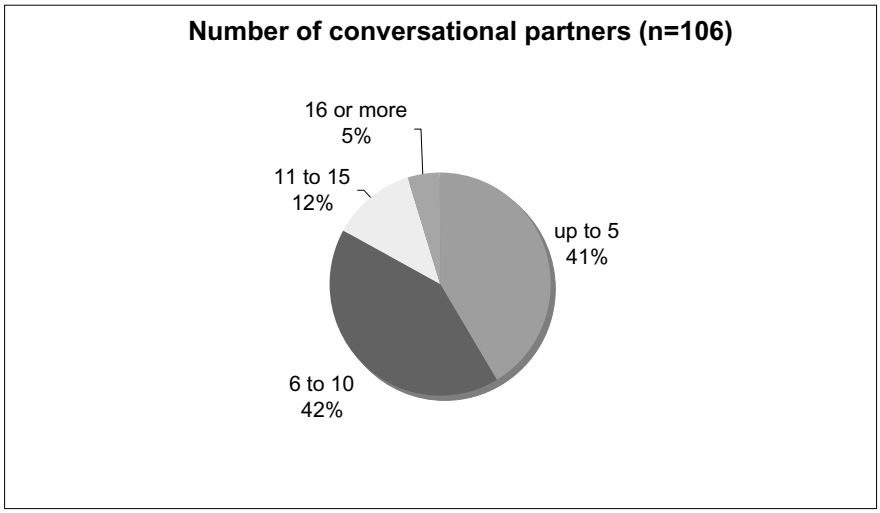

Figure 1. The number of people with whom university teachers have sincere discussions about teaching and learning.

what Becher and Trowler (2001) describe in relation to communication patterns among researchers.

There are differences between disciplines within the sample, even though the number of respondents is relatively small. Engineering studies reported an average of 5.4 conversational partners, the social sciences 8.4, and the humanities 8.2.

That teachers in engineering report fewer partners than in social sciences and the humanities again mirrors Becher and Trowler's (2001) accounts of research. These accounts are explained as a result of the level of competition, which they claim is higher in the hard sciences than in the soft sciences such as the humanities. It may be that this is true also for teaching. Even though we see in our data that teachers in engineering have fewer conversational partners, there is no clear evidence supporting Becher and Trowler's explanation in our sample. This issue would require further inquiry.

Where are these conversational partners found?

In our initial data collection, at the national teaching and learning conference, the 40 academics stated that their conversational partners could be found anywhere: within their discipline, in other universities or outside academia. In our later data collection, the teachers were asked to specify the number of conversational partners found within their own discipline, within their department, within their institution or elsewhere. This might have implications for the type of discussions occurring. If the discussions are between colleagues from the same discipline, disciplinary considerations can be made, while if the partners do not share discipline or even institution the conversational content is probably affected. The results are shown in Table 1.

It is noteworthy that university teachers discuss teaching with colleagues within their own discipline. In our sample, only three teachers indicated that they did not

Table 1. How many people university teachers have sincere discussions about teaching and learning with by discipline.

	Where are the conversational partners found? (average number of partners)				
	Within discipline	Department	Institution	Elsewhere	*n*
Engineering	1.9	2	0.6	0.8	17
Social sciences	2.5	2.7	1.2	1.3	17
Humanities	3.6	1.5	1.2	2	32

have a single disciplinary colleague to discuss teaching with. A further question concerns the teachers' use of the same partners for discussions about both teaching and research. This is a question we have not explicitly asked, and an issue that also needs further inquiry.

What characterises your conversations?

We asked the teachers to visualise their conversations and write accounts about them, either as stories about particular conversations or as more general comments about them. The accounts revealed a multitude of types of situations and topics. Some commonalities will be elaborated and illustrated.

Private conversations

Over and over again the accounts emphasised the private nature of these conversations. They almost always occur in a sheltered place, and almost never in formal meetings. In their accounts, teachers emphasised that these conversations are not overheard by anyone uninvited. These accounts are translated from Swedish:

> We were sitting in X's office behind a closed door. It was not locked, but we knew that no one would dare to open it … We were upset because our colleague A did not think it was necessary for the students [in engineering] to calculate nutrition. (Engineering studies)

> I had one such conversation today, with A in the car, on the highway. About the criteria for assessment formulated by this other department and a text produced by the students. Basically it was about how our department seems to be moving in another direction. Suddenly there was a traffic jam and the conversation shifted. (Humanities)

> These conversations are never planned but occur spontaneously with different intervals in the small group (3 individuals), who often have lunch together … There it is possible to discuss ideas, thoughts and opinions that are not directly comme-il-faut. (Engineering studies)

Trustful conversations

The next common theme is the degree of trust that the teachers have in these conversations and in their conversational partners. The conversations sometimes contradict the official agenda, and they are also very personal. The quotes below illustrate that the conversations are permeated by trust:

> An important foundation is respect, that we have full respect for each other as persons and for each other's opinions. (Humanities)

> The foundations of conversations are often problems, obstacles and challenges rising from the teaching practice; that is, 'real' difficulties. Reaching out for external support to help with 'your' teaching problems, seeking suggestions for possible solutions. (Humanities)

> Student evaluations in our department show that some teachers intimidate some students. Have discussed this with my closest colleagues in order to understand what is going on. It has led me into reflections about my own behaviour towards students. (Engineering studies)

Intellectually intriguing conversations

These conversations are not just small talk or a way to give and receive emotional support. They deal with important disciplinary content, and challenges about how to support students' understanding:

> The conversation took place on the bus, on the way back from work. It is often about concepts or procedures and how to explain these. Mostly these things start with a story about something that occurred during today's lecture or seminar. (Engineering studies)

> We talk after my teaching. We meet, or bump into each other by the copying machine. Someone wants to tell something, or complain, or compare – What do you think? Do you have any ideas about how to explain … Have you experienced the same? How did you solve it? (Humanities)

> She came to my department, and she talked about certain things in ways that helped me to understand things I had been working on for a long time. But never really understood. I started to use her illustrations in my teaching, modified them gradually. These conversations happen at random. They can start with research and end with teaching, or vice versa. (Engineering studies)

One teacher from the humanities summarises all these themes in one single account:

> The conversations with my significant others concerning pedagogical questions/teaching and learning are characterised by the fact that they are informal, originate in different situations and different contexts where the topic of discussion initially might have been another, and, consequently, they are spontaneous. The conversations can nevertheless be quite long (sometimes), around 25–30 minutes. An important foundation is respect, that we have full respect for each other as persons and for each other's opinions. Another important condition is reciprocity, i.e. a mutual exchange of ideas and experiences. These conversations have quite a different nature from the formal meetings with other teachers that are arranged by people responsible for study programmes. These formal meetings/conversations have more a character of diplomatic conferences, where each word is carefully chosen, the truth is not always at the forefront (truth is another characteristic of the conversations with the significant others that I just forgot) and one must bite one's lip (sometimes).

Significant conversations in relation to the perceived local context

This question – do you consider your local professional culture to be supportive or non-supportive of such conversations about teaching and learning? – was posed later in our investigations to 50 of our respondents, as we gradually became interested in

Table 2. Respondents' perception of cultural support, and their reported number of conversational partners, in total and within their own discipline.

Culture perceived as supportive or non-supportive to discussions about teaching and learning.	Supportive	Non-supportive
Number of respondents indicating supportive or non-supportive culture	31	16
Total number of conversational partners	231	56
Number of conversational partners per respondent (mean)	7.4	3.5
Number of conversational partners within discipline	121	33
Number of conversational partners within discipline, per respondent (mean)	3.9	2.1

possible relations between the conversational partners and the local culture as perceived by the teacher. The teachers were asked to indicate their perception of the local culture by marking a cross on a line representing a continuum ranging from 'supportive' to 'non-supportive'. We received 47 answers.

There seems to be a clear link between how encouraging the culture is experienced as and how many conversational partners the respondents have (see Table 2). If the culture is experienced as supportive of such conversations, the teachers report twice as many conversational partners than if the culture is experienced as non-supportive. This is the case for the total number of partners as well as for the number of partners within the same discipline.

Discussion

This inquiry focuses on how university teachers create and maintain their understanding of teaching and learning. The perspective is mainly socio-cultural. So far our findings clearly indicate that teachers have sincere conversations about teaching with a few specific colleagues. The data also indicates that some features of these conversations are critical: they are permeated by trust, they have an intellectual component of problem solving or idea testing, and they are private and involve only a few distinct individuals. In relation to conversations in the larger social context, there are indications in our data that those conversations are less sincere and less personal.

There are, of course, a number of themes worth exploring in relation to the issues addressed in this article. However, in our material three themes emerged as characteristics of the conversations – trust, privacy and intellectual intrigue.

Trust

It is important to emphasise the component of mutual trust in the accounts of conversations that we have collected. The people who have these discussions are sometimes close colleagues with a long history together, and often with similar interests and values. They regularly return to their trust for the other person's judgement and state that they can often foresee the other person's reaction. The range of topics also indicates that the conversations deal with intellectual as well as emotional material, with ideas and problems, and with issues that sometimes are in contradiction with the official agenda.

Deci et al. (2006) have investigated the effects of receiving, and giving, what they call 'autonomy support' in friendship relations: 'Autonomy support is defined in terms of one relational partner acknowledging the other's perspective, providing choice, encouraging self-initiation, and being responsive to the other' (313). They show that, in such a constellation, both parties experience increased well-being and overall satisfaction. They also show that such a relationship, over time, leads to a capacity to view things through the other person's perspective.

It is likely that these conversations open up the possibility of constructing and maintaining – and perhaps partly changing – an understanding about the realities of teaching. They offer the possibility for autonomy support, and they also create a situation where it is possible to see the world through the other person's perspective, at least to a certain degree where aspects of reality hidden to one individual become accessible by a mutual exchange of perspectives. We claim that such relations qualify as what Berger and Luckmann (1966) call a relation with a *significant other*. Significant others, they state, 'occupy a central position in the economy of reality-maintenance. They are particularly important for the ongoing confirmation of that crucial element of reality we call identity' (170). Following from this, these conversations are likely to influence teachers' conceptions of teaching.

We use the term *significant conversations* for the discussions university teachers have provided us with accounts of. The significant conversations arguably hold an exclusive position in the socio-cultural context, where university teachers continuously construct, maintain and develop an understanding about teaching and learning. These significant conversations also, we assume, have implications for the individual's identity. The individual may expand his or her identity into something which offers new possibilities, both in his or her teaching practice but, possibly, also in more official disciplinary and departmental discourse. Yet another implication is that, considering the personal nature of the significant conversations and their sometimes very long history, the resulting understanding of reality may, in some cases, take forms that official discourse may find both strange and alien.

Privacy

These significant conversations take place in private, meaning that the individuals involved are well aware of whom they want to talk with, and that the conversations take place where they cannot be overheard. The privacy and the teachers' descriptions of the conversations relate to what Goffman (2000) calls *backstage* behaviour. Backstage behaviour refers to situations where we are private, or at least feel that we know who is watching, and we behave in a more unrestricted way than when we are 'front stage'. When we are observed by others, especially when we are not sure about their interpretation of our actions, we behave more according to what we consider to be the appropriate code.

However, even though these significant conversations take place backstage, they are not isolated from the surrounding culture. The participants carry with them discursive material from the outside, they react and relate to things going on outside, they are presumably aware of a whole range of things while having the conversations, but it is the atmosphere of privacy and trust that allows them to open up in a way that makes learning possible. Overall, these significant conversations that take place backstage are all part of a greater culture that flows through them. They are dependent on that culture, but they are also free to interpret its elements, and they do. This interplay

between different levels of culture is examined in more depth by Alvesson (2002), Trowler and Cooper (2002) and Giddens (2004).

Intellectual intrigue

Many of the accounts in our data reveal conversations where the individuals try to make sense of experiences, where they deal with problems, and plan and evaluate actions. In many ways, what they do is to use their agency in the way explored theoretically by Giddens (2004). They use whatever knowledge they have to interpret experiences, and they use these interpretations while planning and conducting teaching.

But, similar to what Giddens points out, the teachers only have a limited view of the situation. There are numerous unintended consequences of what they decide to do. There are also an endless number of aspects they fail to recognise during interpretations. But it is still a way to understand a practice that they are engaged in. While doing so they use significant conversations with a few other colleagues for support.

Although the overall purpose of these significant conversations is to interpret teaching and learning realities, an external observer might be critically concerned with the quality of the reflections discernible in the accounts. According to the scholarship of teaching and learning literature (Boyer 1990; Hutchings and Shulman 1999; Trigwell et al. 2000; Kreber 2002), inquiry into teaching and learning for developmental purposes should make use of pedagogic literature and theory in order to deepen the individual's understanding, and the result of the inquiry should be made public for others to learn from and/or to criticise. Even though traces of this can be discerned in the accounts, they are not common or well developed. Rather, what can be seen are 'personal theories'. This should not be used as a reason to criticise the teachers. Instead it has to be recognised that teachers act in a cultural and historical context, where demands on scholarly approaches to teaching and learning vary considerably.

Conclusion

The data presented here suggest that university teachers rely on a limited number of individuals to test ideas or solve problems related to teaching and learning. We conclude that teachers relate to a small network in the same way that researchers do, as described by Becher and Trowler (2001).

Because of the character of the conversations in these small networks, we call them *significant networks*. There are no signs of boundaries surrounding them, neither organisational nor physical. The networks rather appear as a number of exclusive relations where every individual has his or her significant relations, as illustrated in Figure 2. Each star indicates a teacher. The stars 1, 2 and 3 are individual teachers. Teachers 1 and 2 have significant conversations with each other, while 3 has them with 2 only as mediated by conversations through an additional teacher. The thick arrows bind together significant conversational partners, and the thin arrows indicate other individuals, less significant. The square indicates a department or working unit. Together, all of the arrows illustrate the web of relations that can be found inside and outside a department. Consequently, it is apparent, and supported by our data, that the significant networks do not acknowledge organisational boundaries such as departments.

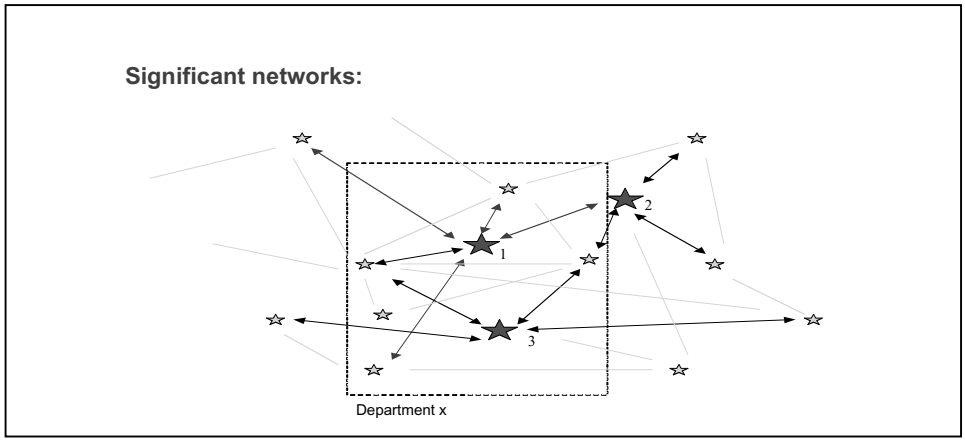

Figure 2. An illustration of a significant network for three teachers.

The existence of significant networks has implications for leadership and management as well as for academic development. By recognising significant networks it becomes possible to further understand why policies, organisational strategies or bureaucratic requirements have such a limited impact on university teaching (Trowler 1998; Bauer et al. 1999; Newton 2003; Hedin 2004; Stensaker 2006). The messages displayed in policies are interpreted and evaluated during many significant conversations, more or less independently of each other. The outcome of these conversations will determine the impact of each policy. If the outcome is unfavourable a policy would most likely fail in its attempt to influence practice. The significant networks and conversations are arguably quite resilient to external pressure, though the validity of this claim remains to be tested, since we have not asked specifically for accounts in relation to policies.

Another topic for further inquiry is the relation between significant networks and the wider social culture, departmental and institutional, appropriately exemplified by the concept of teaching and learning regimes (Trowler and Cooper 2002; Trowler 2005). We have attempted to explore that relation elsewhere (Roxå and Mårtensson 2009).

A third area for further inquiry is to deepen our understanding of significant networks more generally. Since they, in many ways, appear to be gatekeepers for development and change, it would be interesting to firstly investigate the quality of the conversations in relation to academic standards. Secondly, one might investigate how conversations about teaching and learning could be influenced, for instance in order to fuse a culture permeated by scholarly attempts to improve teaching.

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Paper II

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Understanding and influencing teaching and learning cultures at university: a network approach

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Abstract Academic cultures might be perceived as conservative, at least in terms of development of teaching and learning. Through a lens of network theory this conceptual article analyses the pattern of pathways in which culture is constructed through negotiation of meaning. The perspective contributes to an understanding of culture construction and maintenance with a potential to aid academic developers and others in the endeavour to influence teaching and learning cultures in academia. Throughout the discussion the importance of supporting the weak links between clusters of individuals stands out as a feature to focus upon. We propose that the sheer complexity of culture construction and maintenance in academic organisations is likely to cause any single, isolated attempt for change to fail Instead, we argue that a multitude of inter-related initiatives over a long period of time is likely to distinguish strategies that are successful in influencing academic teaching and learning cultures.

Keywords Academic culture · Teaching and learning development · Network · Leadership

Introduction

Managing change seems often to be a frustrating task. Van der Wiele et al. (2007, pp. 572–573) argues that change processes in business organisations are likely to become unpredictable and that very few change programmes ever achieve their initial goals. This because internal factors, such as individuals opposing the suggested change, as well as external factors, such as customers and competitors, influence the change process. From our experience, it seems not to be far fetched to suggest that academic organisations have much in common with business organisations in this respect. Understanding mechanisms

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within these internal and external factors thus seems important for understanding change processes within academic organisations.

The focus of this text is on internal factors, more precisely how teaching and learning cultures might be influenced. Teaching and learning cultures have already been described and discussed in depth by Trowler (2005, 2008), and Trowler and Cooper (2002). In this text the existence of teaching learning cultures will therefore be taken as a point of departure. However, before we continue the discussion about influencing teaching and learning cultures, we need to establish a firm understanding of how organisational culture can be conceived.

What is organisational culture?

In this text we will focus on culture as a process (Ancona et al. 2009). This approach to culture focuses on the *sense-making processes* within a group. From this perspective culture is 'a set of meanings, and values shared by a group of people' (Alvesson 2002, p. 29). The shared norms, beliefs, values, and traditions of the group guide the sense-making processes and produces behaviour and products somewhat different from those of other groups. When aspects of shared norms et cetera become taken for granted by the individuals enacting them, these aspects tend to become invisible to them (Trowler and Cooper 2002). The culture can therefore often be regarded as a conserving force, meaning that it preserves practice. When change is asked for, it can appear as an obstacle, but it also defends core values and practice in harsh times.

Organisations are, however, rarely culturally homogenous. Each organisation hosts *subcultures* that may more or less explicitly oppose the norms and value systems dictated by the predominant culture. Regardless of the nature of the subculture, expressions of opposition to the ruling culture are mainly located 'back-stage' where the listeners are carefully chosen and approved of (Goffman 2000). Consequently, what we often talk about as *the* culture is in fact the over-arching, predominant culture. This predominant, ruling culture needs to be actively maintained in order to survive e.g. by rewarding/punishing certain behaviour or reinforcing myths or histories illustrating the culture's core values. What survival strategy is used depends e.g. on if the culture supports growth and initiatives from its members or if it is a conservative culture where, for instance, a few members benefit more than the many (Ancona et al. 2009).

As indicated above, individuals within a culture have the option to follow their personal intentions and act as knowledgeable agents (Giddens 2004). An individual agent might thus make observations, interpretations, and/or actions that have the potential to challenge the norms and beliefs of a predominant culture. But such behaviours do not automatically change the culture. As the knowledge of the agents is limited, agents might fail to see the relevance of the new, potentially challenging observations or for other reasons decide not to act according to them. Furthermore, challenges may mobilise defenders of the ruling culture since the effort invested in a culture and the experienced benefit of belonging to the group might be substantial.

From this somewhat theoretical and general perspective on culture, we will explore culture in relation to academic teaching. A cultural approach to change in academic teaching and learning would mean to focus on the norms, values, shared assumptions, et cetera, that guide university teachers and their practice. If such an effort would succeed it would show itself in changed classroom experiences as well as in changes in the ways academic teachers talk about and interpret teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Academic culture and network theory

Culture as described above is constructed and maintained as members act and interact, thereby establishing the meaning of what is said and done. This is reified in memory and in artefacts and is subsequently incorporated in the history of the group (Alvesson 2002; Ancona et al. 2009; Wenger 1999). Conversations where meaning is negotiated are thus crucial components of cultural construction and maintenance. But conversations are elusive. They take place in many different situations and under many different conditions. Even when people try their best to say what they mean there is no guarantee that this meaning is correlated to the meaning constructed by the listener. Even if these conversations were accurately documented, it would not necessarily help while trying to *influence* the culture. So, instead of trying to describe the culture in detail we will try to map the conversational pathways from a meta-perspective by applying network theory.

Academic cultures are often described as collegial with an emphasis on the archaic term peer. In a group of peers, where everybody is supposedly equal, everyone would be treated in the same way, and be given the same opportunities. However, everyday experience and network theory contradicts this assumption. Instead, an academic network is stratified in terms of status and opportunity to negotiate and establish meaning. The focus here is not how this status is earned but the fact that differences in status do exist, and that the network does not entirely follow the principle of peers interacting with peers on an equal basis.

In most social networks status is assigned to a limited number of individuals who by virtue of this status occupy the centre, leaving the periphery to the others (Newman et al. 2006; Shirky 2008; Watts 2004). While mapping out the pathways along which information flows, different patterns emerge: The central individuals have access to more information than others (Hemphälä 2008) and participate more often in discussions where meaning is negotiated. They function as *hubs* do in a network of computers. More information travels through their spheres of perception than through the spheres of more peripheral members of the network. The hubs therefore become key-players in the cultural process where meaning and values are assigned to different types of behaviour.

Another important feature of social networks is that individuals do not communicate in the same way with everybody. Each individual belongs to a smaller and denser network. More time is spent with these few; the communication is more emotional and characterised by reciprocal confidence (Pearce 2008). In network theory these relations constitutes the individual's *strong links* (Granovetter 1973). But the smaller network in turn is situated in a context of many other small networks each connected to the others by *weak links* lacking the type of emotional characteristics of the strong links.

Thus, individuals bound together with strong links and dense interactions form small groups, *clusters*, within a larger network. The gaps between clusters are linked together by *bridges*, which tend to be connected to a few individuals in each cluster, the *hubs*, who have more links than the average person in the networks. In general terms the proportion of hubs in a social network typically follow the 20/80 rule (Barabási 2003): a clear minority (about 20%) is far more active in terms of number of links than the majority (80%).

Network theory applied in an academic environment provides an opportunity to understand communication pathways where meaning is negotiated. Through these pathways culture is constructed, maintained and possibly changed. Mapping these networks may not give us a clear idea about what is talked about in different clusters and bridges, but that may not be crucial. Since the construction of meaning in a conversation is dependent on who is taking part, *a way to influence culture would be to influence the communication*

pathways. Thereby new people can be engaged in the discussion, and new members of a network can take on the role of being a hub. If this is achieved, both the flow of information and the negotiation of meaning will be affected.

Before we continue the discussion about how that could be accomplished, we have to assess to what extent these ideas from network theory are applicable in the academic environment. Do links, clusters, hubs, and bridges exist in academia?

In *Academic Tribes and Territories* (Becher and Trowler 2001) the very title signals that members of tribes or social clusters inhabit the higher education continent. The authors claim that academic researchers tend to rely on two different networks, one small and one large. The small network consists of up to a dozen individuals. This is where new ideas are tested, serious problems are debated, and the first versions of research papers are discussed, features indicating dense interaction. The large network sometimes contains hundreds of individuals, and is mainly used for referencing and orientation, that is interaction with less density.

Further, Barabási (2003, p. 49) refers to studies on networks of researchers. He concludes: 'the day-to-day business of science is conducted in densely linked clusters of scientists connected by occasional weak ties'. Similar results emerge from research exploring the relations between different communities of practice in higher education research (Tight 2008).

Roxå and Mårtensson (2009a, b) investigated how university teachers discuss experiences from teaching in small 'significant networks'. Teachers in that study reported that they selected these conversational peers carefully and they emphasised time allocated, emotions invested, and reciprocality as characteristics within these small networks.

Given this, there is no reason to believe that academic networks differ drastically from other networks as described generally in network theory. Academics do form clusters where the links are stronger, and they orient themselves towards a wider community to which they have weaker links. In research, senior members act as hubs providing their personal network to be utilized as bridges to a much larger network, for the benefit of younger researchers. In relation to teaching and learning, the role of hubs is not easily defined, as the hubs might be formal or informal. The mandate associated with formal roles such as "head of department", might empower an individual to become a hub. Recent research on academic leadership has underlined the growing importance of leaders in teaching and learning (Gibbs et al. 2008; Kallenberg 2007; Middlehurst 2007; Ramsden et al. 2007; Simkins 2005; Turnbull and Edwards 2005). Informal hubs might be individuals without any formal power or mandate but who nevertheless are respected and trusted by many colleagues.

A striking aspect of communication within academic clusters is the possible degree of specificity (Feito 2002), which provides a high degree of complexity in the interaction. This points towards a possibility that academic clusters are characterised by an exceptional density. The implication is twofold: (1) It allows for discussions using highly sophisticated intellectual tools, theories, models and concepts. It is therefore demanding to participate in terms of required pre-knowledge and skills. Consequently, induction of new members is time-consuming. (2) The use of such particular intellectual tools can also be used to exclude people from the communication. Consequently, the degree of complexity can very well be an important feature of academic communication in general, and a critical feature when we address the question on how to influence these links, bridges, clusters, and hubs that together form the communication patterns of the academic culture.

Nuances in networks: a narrative

As an illustration, rather than a representative sample, of the complex dynamics of communication within academic networks, we will here look at a Department of Chemical Engineering as experienced by one of the authors. It should be noted that what follows is a simplified description.

Senior lecturer in Chemical Engineering:

> Before a voluntary merge of three different departments I belonged to a unit that was divided into a number of research groups that had little contact with each other. The scientific discussions open to me were almost entirely limited to discussion within the research group including scientists outside our department with whom we collaborated. The contacts with such scientists were often initially mediated by the senior members of our research group. Discussions within the research group were typically vivid and multitopic and often included pedagogy, although influenced by systems thinking rather than educational theory. Many things that were said within the group, e.g. regarding pedagogy, were socially impossible to articulate within the unit as a whole. At the same time I also experienced, especially during my time as a doctoral student, subtle changes in the discussions regarding research depending on whether the two supervisors were present or not.

We see here examples of nuances in front-stage and back-stage discussions, senior members acting as hubs, providing access to a larger (national/international) network as well as a densely linked cluster of scientists that only partly overlap with the organisational unit.

> When the units merged, deliberate attempts were made to increase networking between the former units, including joint department seminars, moving of offices and enlarging one of the two coffee rooms. My office moved to the former domains of one of the other units and I started to teach a course that previously belonged to that unit. Initially, I was the key programmer in the research group I belonged to, but the financing was declining rapidly. Consequently, the group soon started to fall apart and I, partly as a survival strategy, started to turn my focus to pedagogy, which eventually resulted in me working part time as chairman of an education board and as a pedagogical developer.
>
> Although judging the causes behind how ones own links form is difficult and prone to bias, I would nevertheless claim that there were three different topic arenas involved: social, science, and pedagogy in that order, both chronologically and with regard to their importance for the formation of the links. I found the new environment very welcoming, but we initially rarely touched upon research issues.
>
> As these new social links formed and we started to get to know each other better, the coffee room discussions more frequently touched upon research issues. Based on my former research experience, I rather frequently argued for increased usage of a certain technique in uncertainty analysis. One doctoral student got interested and started using it and that was my first clear scientific link with my new colleagues. As it turned out, the research group he belonged to had much more in common with my previous research than we first thought.

Note here the deliberate attempts to influence the clusters by creating new links within the department and that it despite these attempts took time before research related

conversations were common. Just as induction of new members is likely to be time-consuming, so is merging of existing networks. A change in funding is in this case an external factor as it is outside the immediate control of department management decisions.

> Throughout time, the increasing number of social and scientific links made me feel an integral part of the network. Since many knew I also worked with educational issues I started getting questions about rules and regulations related to higher education. Slowly I began to initiate discussions regarding pedagogical issues and to support similar initiatives by others. However, the back-stage characteristics of the coffee-room conversation when dealing with social or research issues were not always present in the discussions of pedagogy. Once I tried to initiate a discussion on exam design by saying that I sometimes find it difficult to determine from a written exam how much a student really understands. One teacher replied matter-of-factly, "That is no problem for an experienced teacher", a response which caused me to avoid further discussions with that person for some time. However, other times I was deeply impressed by colleagues who during coffee breaks initiated discussions regarding rather sensitive, personal issues related to teaching.

The narrative illustrates how a formal role, such as being a pedagogical developer, might empower an individual to become a hub in matters related to that role. It seems likely that the established social links facilitated this process. The narrative also illustrates the importance of mutual trust and respect in back-stage discussions.

Despite the fact that the narrative above is simplified and furthermore only describes what happened from the narrator's perspective, a whole series of links changed over time as new network constellations emerged. This complexity makes the process difficult to analyse. For analytical reasons we therefore suggest a schematic illustration (Fig. 1) of two hypothetical outcomes of a process initiated by a contact between a member of an academic network and an academic developer. The illustration also relates to what we previously have labelled trajectory 1 and trajectory 2 in the scholarship of teaching and learning (Roxå et al. 2008).

In Fig. 1, the dynamics of conversations regarding teaching and learning are schematically illustrated. Links related to discussions of pedagogic issues are drawn as arrows,

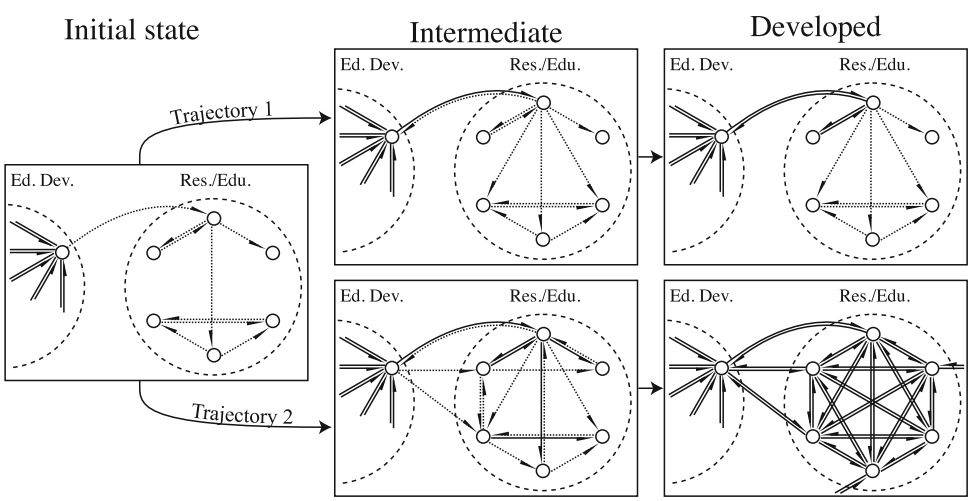

Fig. 1 A schematic illustration of the dynamics of pedagogic conversations

individuals as circles. Discussions concerning other issues, e.g. research, are not included. Initial state: An individual in a group of researchers which has some limited but superficial educational conversations (dotted arrows), gets in contact with an academic developer (well connected in his or her network). In trajectory 1 (intermediate state), the link between the individual and the academic developer deepens (solid arrow) and it becomes a two-way communication where both parties learn something. Developed state: Other colleagues with whom the individual, the hub, has two-way communications are engaged. But not much happens with the communication with the other individuals in the group, as the pedagogic ideas, which the hub tries to convey, may not be considered as relevant. In trajectory 2 (intermediate state) other individuals in the group also get in contact with an educational developer (the same or a new). This influences their relevance structure and makes it easier to create new and more elaborate links also within the group. If taken further (developed state), this might lead to deep conversations regarding pedagogic issues among all members of the group, it may even lead to individuals creating new links around pedagogical matters with individuals outside the group.

How to influence the conversational patterns?

In which direction do we want to influence the cultures of teaching and learning in academia? The obvious, and typically academic, answer is probably that it depends. Different institutions have different cultural profiles and significant features (McNay 2002). The historical background might call for different approaches as well as the institutions' degree of research intensity and its societal setting. The particular objectives must therefore be contextually adapted. Even so, higher education also has some global similarities, as expressed in the growing literature about the 'scholarship of teaching and learning' (Boyer 1990; Huber and Hutchings 2005), according to which teachers in higher education should be encouraged to reflect on and document student learning with the support of theory for peer-review purposes. We argue for a development in this direction.

Culture is, as discussed above, constructed during practice and during communication (Alvesson 2002; Ancona et al. 2009). Here we explore the possibility of influencing those processes by influencing the *pathways* for the communication (strong and weak links, hubs, clusters, and bridges). Let us consider some different alternatives to do that:

(1) Influence the hubs
(2) Influence the clusters
(3) Influence the pathways for information
(4) Influence the skills of sending and receiving information
(5) Reorganise.

These approaches, used to a various degree by academic developers, all have their advantages and limitations. Before we comment on them, remember that we are considering cultural change, which implies a few important things. Firstly, everybody within a culture is affected by a cultural change (Alvesson 2002), even a manager who is often in a position to start the five processes listed above. A manager should execute power only with caution. Measures that deviate too drastically from cultural norms may backfire on the person implementing them. Secondly, since culture is a complex system (Ancona et al. 2009; Senge 2006) actions driving change in one direction will most likely be counteracted by balancing forces from within the culture; and the result of a specific action may not show itself until after some time of delay. In between action and effect many other things

will take place. Both these properties will, within a complex system, cause countless unintended and unforeseen outcomes, just as in the narrative above. Consequently change will in general appear chaotic, unpredictable, and slow. Let us keep that in mind, and return to the five possibilities to influence the pathways.

Influence the hubs

Barabási (2003, p. 237) states: 'While the dense interconnections within each module [cluster] help the efficient accomplishment of specific tasks, the hubs coordinate the communication between the many parallel functions'. This implies that although clusters of academic teachers do a good job, they are still in need of guidance and coordination. This is also supported by Trevelyan (2001), who studied academic researchers' perception of leadership and autonomy. One strategy would therefore be to educate middle managers, such as programme directors, heads of departments, or subject coordinators. Literature also highlights the important and complex role of middle managers in academia (Anderson et al. 2008; Ramsden et al. 2007). However, normally and somewhat surprisingly the hubs do not drive change. On the contrary, as described by Becker (cited in Granovetter 1973) they appear conservative and defend their position by playing safe even though it might mean blocking productive development. This is explained by the fact that the hubs get their status from the other cluster members. If the hub drives change, the other members may degrade his or her status. Hence the somewhat conservative nature sometimes displayed by hubs.

Influence the clusters

Wenger (1999) and the subsequent literature on 'communities of practice' deal with how small working-units develop their practice and create a shared history of learning. One strategy therefore is to encourage such clusters with resources and ask of them to disseminate what they are doing to others. This strategy, also visible in the narrative above, is deployed at different scales in higher education, for instance in England by the creation of 'Subject Teaching and Learning Networks',[1] or in the US as 'Faculty Learning Communities' (Cox 2004). The purpose is to create development around the shared interest for a subject/discipline/issue. Granovetter (1973, p. 1373), however, advises against this strategy. It could lead to the development of isolated cliques, such that each person is tied to every other in his [or her] cluster and to none outside. It is difficult to estimate how large a risk this is, but an excessive commitment to this strategy could mean severe drawbacks. Clusters, or groups of clusters that pay little attention to what goes on outside their own boundaries may be at risk because of unawareness of changes in the context. Such isolationistic tendencies did appear at a CDIO conference one of us attended in Linköping, Sweden in 2006, CDIO being a movement (group of clusters) within Engineering Educations: Most presenters at the conference referred exclusively to pedagogic literature from within the CDIO community. On the other hand, it is within the clusters that the actual practice—teaching being one—is performed. So, supporting clusters or groups of clusters is again an act of balance. Senge (2006) in his comment to this risk suggests the establishment of a strong, shared vision within the archipelago of clusters.

[1] http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/networks/subjectcentres (2008-10-06).

Influence the pathways for information

It is tempting to influence how information flows and how it is used, by making everything available to everybody; a democratic strategy, as it appears, and further, much possible through information technology. However, research about complex networks shows that this too could make things worse (Barabási 2003). An increased demand on the many to raise their awareness of all available information may disturb the practitioners' focus on their practice, here teaching. In order to avoid this distraction the practitioners will most likely, as a defence mechanism, rely even more on the hubs to sort and prioritise information. The likely result, therefore, is increased power among the hubs and a relative decrease of influence among the practitioners. This threatens again to partition the organisation, to alienate the practitioners even more from the sources of information, and to reward even more power to a group already associated by conservatism (see "Influence the hubs").

Influence the skills of sending and receiving information

This strategy resembles the one above, but instead of changing the information flow, its focus is to develop the capability of the individuals to process information horizontally and vertically within the organisation. While trying to improve communication horizontally, we must keep in mind that intensified communication within one stratum of the organisation could mean a further support of a powerful layer of meaning interpreters (hubs) with emerging shared interests. In the long run this can prevent the vertical flow of information in the organisation and therefore alter the locus of power. Such a scenario can distort the senior management's possibility to influence the practice—here the teaching.

One can also improve communication top-down by summarising important aspects in policies and plans (a strategy widely used). The impact on higher education through policies has, however, been limited (Bauer et al. 1999; Hedin 2004; Stensaker 2006). It has lead to what Newton (2003) calls 'policy-overload', where individuals are exhausted by an endless stream of new directives.

A bottom-up strategy where experiences made by individual practitioners are communicated upwards is also problematic. If all individuals in an organisation would send accounts about their practice to the managers, the sheer number of messages would be overwhelming. Such information needs to be aggregated e.g. through surveys. Investigations like these, however, are often experienced as based on terms dictated from above, and therefore not considered relevant by practitioners. Furthermore, they are published as aggregated results, which makes it difficult for the practitioners to identify themselves with the content (Ancona et al. 2009).

Reorganise: new roles, new rewards and new opportunities

This strategy is what Ancona et al. (2009) call change by *strategic design*, meaning a top down, well planned and thought through change process purposed to rearrange both roles and links between subunits and individuals. It means assigning new tasks to people and shifting their location within the organisation. The authors point out that this type of drastic redesign in an organisation is often risky and almost always requires a severe and palpable threat to the organisation's survival in order to be successful. In higher education institutions this strategy is sometimes used while implementing new teaching paradigms, such as problem-based learning. The aftermath is often an ongoing struggle to prevent practice from slipping back into old habits (Trowler 1998). It should be noted that structural

changes *can* also be initiated bottom up, as was the case in the narrative above, in which case the dynamics is likely different from that of a top down process.

Cluster to cluster and the importance of trust

So, what is left? From the literature on network theory as well as from the literature on organisational culture two things emerge as important: *Trust*, and the location of the *weak links*. These two things can make the initiatives listed above fail or succeed. Let us start with weak links since they also appear to be the key to trust.

The title of Granovetter's article (1973), *The Strength of Weak Ties,* mirrors the message. It is the weak ties (or 'links' in the terminology used above) between clusters that create opportunities, inspire new ideas, and develop the practices. The perspective is consistent with Wenger's theory on communities of practice (Wenger 1999; Wenger et al. 2002). Communities will, over time, refine their practice, but they always run the risk of being so ingrained in their own perspective that it results in isolation. The organisation thereby runs the risk of being partitioned.

Wenger suggests several options to counterbalance this risk: Boundary objects (reified knowledge that flows from one cluster to another, in academia often texts), brokers (individuals who participate, often peripherally, in several clusters and thereby carry ideas and practices from one cluster to another, often academic developers), and the creation of arenas (conferences, projects, commissions et cetera) where members of different clusters can meet and focus on problems or areas of common interest.

In order to link clusters directly to clusters, we need practitioners with the interest and the capacity to do so from the centre of one cluster to the centre of another. We also need to lower the risk of doing so by creating experiences of *trust*. In higher education the importance—but also the lack—of trust has been pointed out by Kezar (2004), who summarises, after going through several studies on leadership and governance in higher education: 'Unless there are relationships of respect and trust, people do not share ideas.'

How then can trust be constructed, nourished and supported in an academic context where open-minded and critical discussions about teaching and learning are scarce (Becher and Trowler 2001; Roxå and Mårtensson, 2009a, b)? Feito (2002) studied academic seminars where the participants truly experienced inspiration and intellectual achievements in collaboration with others. He labels this experience '*intellectual intimacy',* a state where participants share a sense of what is being explored and share the ambition to do so. Similar accounts have appeared in the research on university teachers' significant networks (Roxå and Mårtensson 2009b), significant because it is where academic teachers allow themselves to by influenced by others. It is in interaction with a few significant others (Berger and Luckmann 1966) that the understanding of the teaching and learning reality is constructed and maintained. Therefore, it is most likely that trust grows outwards from the clusters, or the significant relations, and into the gaps between clusters, making the constructions of bridges possible. Thus, trust cannot be instrumentally installed; it has to be based in personal experience (Luhmann 2005).

Conclusion

Network theory offers a perspective for academic developers and others who strive to influence academic teaching and learning cultures. It makes it possible to discern

communication pathways in which cultural meaning is negotiated. Thereby it becomes possible to construct a more multifaceted understanding of how academic cultures are constructed and maintained.

Based in a tentative discussion about a few strategies used by academic developers we would advise against relying solely on the individuals referred to as the hubs. These individuals have their status and identity reinforced by the other members of the clusters. Consequently hubs to tend to act as a conservative force as their status in the culture might be undermined if they act against the culture. This does not mean that the hubs should be neglected as change agents, on the contrary. But academic developers should be cautious about relying *solely* on them.

Elinor Ostrom has, in her exploration of the commons, showed the importance of trust and useful information. By a multitude of empirical data she shows how trust is constructed through face-to-face interaction, that information is actively retrieved and transformed into knowledge by members of a shared context and that much of this information remains hidden from external observers (Ostrom 1990). In parallel with her findings this analysis of academic culture through a lens of network theory suggests a similar emphasis on trust and information flow. Trust grows within the culture through weak links which allow information to flow directly from one cluster into another, without passing and thereby being filtered by one or several hubs. To include initiatives for influencing the skills of sending and receiving information is thus likely important in the long term. The objective is to encourage individual cluster members to interact directly with members of other clusters without management loosing contact with the organisation. To achieve this, support is needed in terms of establishment of arenas and deployment of rules guiding the interaction.

But most importantly, we argue that the sheer complexity of culture construction and maintenance will likely cause any single, isolated attempt for change to fail. This since (1) its fate likely depends on the position of weak links, (2) the difficulty in acquiring knowledge about these links and (3) that links may change over time. Rather we deem it likely that a multitude of inter-related initiatives over a long period of time distinguish any strategy successful in influencing academic teaching and learning cultures. However, even if a multitude of inter-related initiatives were necessary to make a change happen it might still look as if one of the initiatives succeeded and the others failed since our ability to acquire crucial information regarding the dynamics of these complex systems is limited. Thus, if our argument is correct, proving its validity empirically may be very difficult.

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Paper III

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Developing a quality culture through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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The critical features of a strategy to promote improved teaching and learning are explored in this article from a socio-cultural perspective in a research-intensive institution. The paper presents theoretical underpinnings and implications as well as an empirical case study of such a strategy and its seemingly successful results. The strategy builds on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning beyond individual development and aims at cultivating a culture of continuous improvement of teaching and student learning. The case study describes a number of co-ordinated and interrelated activities at various institutional levels to support the strategy. The results are discussed in terms of academic engagement. Important aspects such as academic freedom, professional identity and leadership are also discussed.

Keywords: academic freedom; culture; identity; leadership; Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Introduction

Academic teaching appears peculiarly resilient to all sorts of reform efforts made by managers and politicians. Despite attempts made by both internal stakeholders, such as individual academics, heads of departments and deans, and by external stakeholders, such as governments and other policy-makers, to influence practices in higher education, teaching mostly remains unaffected (Bauer, Askling, Marton, & Marton, 1999; Gordon, 2002; Newton, 2002; Stensaker, 2006; Trowler, 1998). The lack of visible effect is intriguing and constitutes the main question discussed here with a focus on how educational development initiatives relate to academic freedom. How can academic teaching be understood through a socio-cultural lens so that this durability becomes transparent? Answers to this question could support the academics themselves in their effort to preserve their core values and help external stakeholders to constructively direct their efforts.

The critical features of a strategy geared towards continuous development of teaching and learning, in a research-intensive academic environment, are discussed in this article. We will describe a case where such a strategy is used. The overall objective of the strategy is to support the emergence of a quality culture in relation to teaching and learning, where teaching develops slowly but constantly by the active involvement of academic teachers. It offers a possible direction for academic developers, leaders and university managers who struggle with academics' low interest in teaching and learning, as it might appear on the surface. The strategy is based on the

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Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (Boyer, 1990; Kreber, 2002) and is guided by the following important principles:

- Sustainable change must be owned by teachers.[1]
- Informed discussion and documentation is paramount for achieving a quality culture in relation to teaching and learning.
- The driving force for change is peer review among teachers.
- Clarity in vision and careful timing while taking structural measures is a crucial part of leadership.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning includes systematic observations of student learning and analysis within explicit theoretical frameworks. It also implies documenting and making results public for peer-review purposes (Kreber, 2002; Trigwell & Shale, 2004). In the strategy described in our case, the socio-cultural perspective of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is emphasized in order to develop and enhance the teaching and learning culture, be that a working group, a department, a faculty or at the university as a whole. In other words, the strategy uses *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* as an instrument, not only for individual development, but also, and more importantly, for the development of the university's aggregated ability to support student learning.

Why, then, would any individual teacher want to engage in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, especially in an environment where research is the major driving force for personal engagement and institutional ethos? In order to understand this we need to explore *academic identity*. Henkel (2005) refers to two international studies she conducted on reform in higher education. She concludes that 'the two things that emerged as most important for academic identities were the discipline and academic freedom' (p. 166). Supported by this, we claim that attempts to change academe and academic practices tamper with identity and therefore make it difficult to succeed. In fact, the defence put up by the people concerned can be fierce: 'When people's identities are at stake, passions run deep', as Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 126) put it in their book *Academic tribes and territories*.

In the following we will discuss implications of this perspective. We take a cultural approach to academic identity, meaning that we foreground the social processes within and beyond the discipline. We also discuss academic freedom as crucial to change in academic teaching. A case study from Lund University, Sweden, is the empirical source for the claims that are made. The case unwraps a strategy which has attracted national and international interest for its success in engaging academics in the development of teaching and learning in an old, research-intensive institution.

A socio-cultural perspective on academic identity

If university teaching is to be discussed through a socio-cultural lens we have to start by defining a perspective on culture. Following Alvesson (2002) *culture* is what constitutes a group and makes it visible as a variation to its background. The group can be small or large, but as in all groups, the members share something: for instance, a tendency to use certain phrases during conversations more often than what others do, certain ways to act in specific situations or common ways to react to people outside the group. A group of teachers and their culture can be distinguished from other teachers because they have an inclination to favour particular teaching methods, to

explain students' mistakes in similar ways and to base their practice on commonly shared assumptions about learning. Trowler and Cooper (2002) and Trowler (2009) describe these cultural traits as 'Teaching and Learning Regimes' (TLRs). These TLRs influence individuals and thereby make some teaching methods, explanations or assumptions more prevalent than others.

An individual teacher can choose not to comply with a regime, but he or she cannot choose not to be influenced by it. Therefore, acting according to a regime or against it will result in positive, neutral or negative responses from the other members (colleagues and others) of a local teaching and learning arena, e.g. a department or a work group. These responses will in turn, and in the long run, affect the individual's status and academic identity.

The socio-cultural perspective offers a representation of how university teachers act in interplay with socially constructed structures and how this interplay is strongly connected to their identity and status. It can also shed light on how improvement of teaching and learning relates to the professional identity of teachers.

Complementary research of communication in academe shows how academics have a tendency to avoid conflicts with colleagues: 'The inclination to play safe – to minimize the risk of making professional enemies by not opposing or being critical of colleagues' views – is also reflected in the preference, noted earlier, of many academics to steer clear of direct competition with others' (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 127). This is important in relation to teaching and learning. In fact, as we will demonstrate, these communication patterns have to be influenced if a culture of quality in teaching and learning is to evolve.

Roxå and Mårtensson (2009a) have explored how academic teachers do engage in sincere discussions about teaching and learning. These conversations include only a limited number of selected peers – a '*significant network*'. Furthermore, the conversations mainly occur backstage and therefore remain hidden from the majority of colleagues. It is during these conversations that teachers develop or maintain a personally integrated understanding of teaching and learning. As these conversations are outside the official agenda, teachers have the opportunity to carefully choose when to bring a personal opinion into the open and challenge a ruling TLR or any other part of an institution's or a department's official agenda. (For a fuller account of the relation between TLRs and significant networks, see Roxå and Mårtensson [2009b].) We will return to the importance of the significant networks in the final section of this article.

Taken together, these accounts indicate how university teaching takes place in a structural landscape where individual teachers often choose not to oppose the traditional way of teaching. They do so in order not to jeopardize their academic identity. But, this does not mean that opposition is non-existent. Instead, it shows itself within the significant networks where conversations are earnest, personal and sometimes rebellious – however, these conversations mostly remain hidden backstage.

There are several lessons to be learnt from the above regarding change in relation to university teaching and learning. First, brute external pressure does not work as teachers activate defence strategies and at best comply, but only as frontstage behaviour and without personal commitment. Second, traditions and TLRs can be affected from within if involvement and critical perspectives from significant networks are brought into the open. The latter have a potential to create a climate of sincere peer scrutiny and, possibly, start a process of continuous drive for development similar to the cybernetic and self-propelled processes causing constant development in research. But the question is: How can this be brought about? Are academics not liable to hide

under the banner of academic freedom? The answer is that engagement in developing teaching and learning has to become a natural part of the culture, in the same way as the peer scrutiny they must engage in while involved in research. Before we offer a possible answer to how this engagement can be incorporated into the professional identity of an academic teacher, we look at academic freedom and explore its meaning and existence among university teachers, students and others.

Academic freedom

Academic freedom is an important consideration as we strive to understand how teachers can be influenced to willingly choose to change their teaching practices. The concept, however, is open to many interpretations. A starting point is to track its origin from Humboldt and the word *Lehrfreiheit*: the 'right of the university professor to freedom of inquiry and to freedom of teaching, the right to study and to report on his findings in an atmosphere of consent' (Rudolph, 1962, as cited in Tierney & Lechuga, 2005, p. 8). One interpretation of this is that academics have the freedom to do whatever they want without interference from anyone except their peers. This interpretation is not without opposition. Tierney and Lechuga (2005), among others, investigate the concept through a historical lens and place it in an American context. They declare that any 'investigation of academic freedom needs to include not only examples of individuals who faced sanction or dismissal because they had a particular viewpoint and were penalized, but also a consideration of the larger social and cultural contexts in which academic institutions are embedded' (p. 12). Such a statement points towards academic freedom as dependent on society.

A similar perspective emerges in an Australian study conducted by Åkerlind and Kayrooz (2003). They analysed data from 165 social science academics who were asked to respond to the following statement: 'Academic freedom is not a well-defined concept. We would like to know what academic freedom means to you'. The authors' phenomenographic analysis results in a range of conceptions of academic freedom – from an absence of constraints on academics' activities, to an absence of constraints in combination with responsibilities on the part of the academics and loyalty to the institution where they work. Åkerlind and Kayrooz view these conceptions as a nested hierarchy, where those conceptions that include responsibilities in relation to academic freedom are the most complex. Consequently, academic freedom might be understood as an experience of absence of constraints, but also as an experience of professional responsibilities towards an institution and towards society.

These accounts of academic freedom tell us more about how the concept may be interpreted than about the importance of academic freedom among university teachers. Since the case presented below is located in Sweden we employ three sources – students, academics and government – where each is used to place academic freedom within a national context. The first source is a questionnaire answered by 1867 students who were active within the Swedish higher education system in 2004 (Barrling Hermansson, 2005). The results reveal that the concept of academic freedom is not used by a majority of the students. Many of them exhibit values related to academic freedom as well as expectations of higher education that correspond with the concept, although the term itself is not used. The second source is an evaluation of a major national reform in the early-1990s (Bauer et al., 1999), which pursued decentralisation and quality issues. The evaluation reveals that the reform had little impact upon the basic values held by university teachers. Cautiously, the authors conclude that some 'changes in

values, therefore, may occur concurrent with the pressure for new tasks and shifts in the roles for the academics. Even so, under the surface, the basic academic values seem to be as strong as ever' (p. 246). The displayed values, according to the authors, correspond with a 'humboldtian' view, including a concept of individual autonomy and freedom. A third source is a governmental directive to a national investigation, *Ökad frihet för universitet och högskolor* ['increased freedom for universities', our translation] (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2007). Notably, the term 'academic freedom' does not appear anywhere in the text even though it expresses views complementary to academic freedom: '… the freedom of research is not to be jeopardized … the management of an institution shall not carry the main responsibility for the content in teaching or in research. … A balance must be maintained between the interest of strong management at all levels in the institutions and a more decentralised, collegial influence' (p. 11 – our translation from Swedish).

Thus, academic freedom appears as being important in Swedish higher education, even though the term itself is not often used. It is not possible to determine what the perspective means in a Swedish context but we assume that the meaning is embedded rather that explicit and close to that presented by Åkerlind and Kayrooz (2003).

The case of Lund University

A primary conclusion that can be drawn from the previous discussions is that any strategy for change in university teaching that does not consider identity issues and academic freedom will most likely have a limited or even zero effect on teaching practices and, consequently, on student learning. Another conclusion is that any strategy must aim for commitment from the academic teachers. If these terms are not met, the teachers will at best comply instrumentally with the formulated strategy, but not charge the teaching with personal involvement. Such teaching would correspond to a surface approach to learning that is sometimes adopted by students and that often results in poor knowledge and fragmented skills (Ramsden, 1998).

The purpose of this section is to discuss a strategy for the development of teaching used in a research-intensive university and to focus on the level of involvement in pedagogical issues as shown by university teachers. Increased engagement on the part of teachers form evidence of a cultural shift in relation to teaching and learning. We claim that the level of engagement can also be seen as evidence of a developed professional identity for academic teachers.

The strategy described has emerged over the past decade and has achieved, among other things:

- a positive national and international reputation,
- a leading position in national conferences on teaching and learning,
- an increasing number of students stressing the quality of education as an important reason for choosing the institution and
- a positive evaluation from the Swedish national agency for the development of higher education.

Lund University is located in the southern part of Sweden. It is the largest university in Scandinavia and one of the oldest, having been founded in 1666. It is research-intensive and has 5500 staff, including roughly 4000 academics. It has 40,000 students in eight autonomous faculties: humanities and theology, social sciences, medicine,

engineering, natural sciences, economy and management, law, and fine arts, music and theatre.

The responsibility for development of teaching at Lund University is decentralised to the faculties. Consequently, academic development has grown mainly at faculty level, although there is also a central teaching and learning development unit. Different faculties have been 'ahead' of others in terms of activity and innovation. In terms of the strategy described in this text, the Faculty of Engineering has been the one to most systematically develop the various activities. Two important features of this decentralised tradition have emerged. First, ideas and innovations have migrated between the faculties. Second, at different times, some faculties have defined themselves as competing with others.

Embedding Scholarship of Teaching in order to cultivate cultural change

In the following section we will briefly describe a number of coordinated and interrelated activities that have gradually been launched with careful timing in order to promote the embedding of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and to cultivate cultural change.

Pedagogical courses

Since the 1970s, Lund University has had a history of offering pedagogical courses for its teachers on a voluntary basis, mainly within faculties. Courses have been well attended by both junior and senior staff and have focused mainly on developing reflective practice within the discipline in a theoretical framework of student learning (Ramsden, 1998). Participation has escalated in numbers since the 1990s. When the Swedish government made pedagogical courses mandatory for permanent tenure in 2003, Lund University's track record was recognised and it was offered the task of formulating the basic principles and learning outcomes of such training. The learning outcomes were based on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (see Lindberg-Sand and Sonesson [2008] for an account of this process and of the suggested learning outcomes). The result was also a consensus decision among all rectors for Swedish higher education institutions to recommend 10 weeks of training to be concluded within two years of employment. Thus, the development can be seen as a process where increased voluntary participation in pedagogical courses during the 1990s was recognised by the government and the rectors, who then decided to make pedagogical courses compulsory.

Thus, participation in pedagogical courses at Lund University expanded even further, and are offered to new as well as to established staff. The recommended 10 weeks of teacher training are modularised in order to support progression of knowledge and skills, as well as to support an increased sophistication of scholarship of teaching and learning (Roxå, Olsson, & Mårtensson, 2008). During 2007, more than 900 participants were registered in pedagogical courses at Lund University, most courses ranging from 40 to 200 hours total participant working time.

Project reports

Within the pedagogical courses, teachers reflect upon their own teaching experience and work on self-chosen projects directly related to their practice. These projects are

reported in a scholarly way, incorporating the use of educational literature and peer review by colleagues within the same course or within the faculty where the teacher is active. In 2007, the total number of peer-reviewed reports was more than 400. These reports are used by other forthcoming course-participants for inspiration or to build upon, again to support the enhancement of the local culture. The project reports have recently been subject to a meta-analysis within the university in order to inform policy about issues that teachers address when pursuing scholarship of teaching and learning (Ahlberg, Andersson, & Larsson, 2008).

Critical friends

A model based on the idea of critical friends (Handal, 1999) is used in order to build bridges between what is addressed in pedagogical courses and the socio-cultural context in which the teachers practice. This includes providing a critical friend of one's own choosing with the draft report from the pedagogical course, and to have a discussion based on the ideas and results put forward in the text. The result of the discussion is included in the final version of the text, which is the exam assignment in the pedagogical course.

Departmental seminars

As a result of the critical friends model, departmental seminars have been initiated in some places where teachers present their development projects to their departmental colleagues. This is done in order to support serious and theoretically underpinned discussions about teaching and learning within their disciplines. The projects are explicitly underpinned by educational theory to deepen understanding of the teaching practices. In this way new perspectives continuously fuel collegial discussions.

Campus conferences on teaching and learning

The high number of documented and peer-reviewed projects has contributed to the fact that three faculties now organise biennial campus conferences on teaching and learning. These are organised as a complement to the university-wide conference on teaching and learning, also organised every second year. Each conference has a call for papers, which are peer-reviewed according to pre-formulated criteria inspired by scholarship of teaching and learning. The conferences commonly attract about 30–50 abstracts each, resulting in 20–25 papers being presented to 100–200 participating academics. Each conference is documented and published as conference proceedings on the university website. As a consequence, teachers from Lund University are among the most represented at national conferences on teaching and learning.

Reward schemes

Three faculties at Lund University have introduced voluntary reward schemes for scholarly teaching. The most established scheme, the Pedagogical Academy at the Faculty of Engineering, was established in 2000. The intention was to promote pedagogical development and to increase the overall pedagogical competence by offering

monetary incentives not only to individual teachers but also to departments where rewarded teachers are active. Since no additional faculty funding is available, non-participating departments suffer reduced funding. Rewarded teachers focus their teaching practice on student learning, they show an advanced capability for scholarly reflection on their teaching practice and they strive to make their practice more public by engaging in scholarly discussions, conferences and publications. So far 76 teachers have been rewarded in the Faculty of Engineering. The scheme attracts teachers from all academic categories. The reward scheme is not an alternative career path; on the contrary, all teachers are encouraged to engage and show excellence in research as well as in teaching (Antman & Olsson, 2007; Roxå et al., 2008).

Tenure and promotion

The university is currently reviewing its processes for appointments and promotion. The two teacher appointment committees in the Faculty of Engineering have been inspired by experiences from the Pedagogical Academy – especially the research-based model for assessing reflective and scholarly practice (Antman & Olsson, 2007). This has led to an increased focus from the committees on applicants' abilities for scholarly reflection on their pedagogical practice and on participation in pedagogical training. Several applicants seeking promotion to the position of professor have been rejected in recent years because of shortcomings in this respect, something that has sent strong signals throughout the faculty. As an immediate result, the interest among experienced teachers in participating in pedagogical courses has increased considerably. The research-based approach and the alignment with basic academic values seem to be of fundamental importance in this development within the teacher appointment committees.

Evidence of cultural change

Aligned with the theoretical perspective in this paper, the numbers of individuals who engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning have to be linked to cultural change. Evidence of this type of impact is documented in an independent national evaluation (Gran, 2006). This evaluation draws on an extensive survey that includes 1100 teachers participating in pedagogical courses within five Swedish institutions, including the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University. Gran discusses, among other things, a classic problem in staff development: the 'return-problem'. Individual teachers may attend inspiring pedagogical courses, but once they return to their department they are confronted by a lack of interest or even hostility from their colleagues, making it hard to implement ideas and develop practice (Entwistle & Walker, 2000). In relation to the 'return-problem', Gran (2006) concludes that in the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University, where educational development is conducted systematically, the teachers 'are well aware of the fact that their contributions are valued' (p. 9). The report substantiates the teachers' experience that their departments use their developed pedagogical competence (p. 80) in contrast to teachers' experiences of the 'return-problem' in other universities.

Both levels of engagement by individual teachers *and* accounts about responses among colleagues after participation in staff development activities indicate effects on both professional identity and culture.

Leadership

Despite these encouraging results we would like to point towards another critical feature of developing a teaching and learning culture: that of leadership. Individual teachers only have control over a limited *space of action* (Bauer et al., 1999). They can decide to structure lectures, laboratory work, assignments and the like in different ways, but they are, at the same time, restricted by other structures such as curriculum design, regulations, resources and legislation. As a consequence, many teachers engaged in reforming their teaching perceive their space of action as smaller than their ambition. They may therefore choose to downplay their ambitions because they see no prospect in pursuing ideas they foresee as impossible to implement due to existing regulations. The phenomenon has been discussed in relation to university teaching by Trowler (1998).

Leaders often have a space of action where it is possible to influence these inhibiting structures. In an organisation characterised by internal responsiveness, leaders must be sensitive to the needs of teachers and change regulations when necessary in order to support and promote development. This requires methods by which leaders develop their capacity to listen to the experiences of teachers and also their ability to take appropriate measures in terms of supporting teaching and learning development. This is important for all the efforts made by individual academic teachers to reach their full potential in terms of collaboration and mutual support.

As leadership in academic institutions has been proven to have a direct impact on the success of the institution (Neumann & Neumann, 1999), it is important to develop both theory and practice in relation to how to lead university teachers (Middlehurst, 2008).

Concluding discussion

Lund University builds its strategy upon pedagogical courses, which are based on the assumption that university teachers already are concerned about teaching and student learning. This involvement is demonstrated in backstage conversations with significant others (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009a). Three factors are assumed to potentially obstruct this engagement from resulting in constantly improved practice. First, the tendency in academe not to challenge openly what is considered the dominating perspective (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Second, because the personally important conversations take place backstage in small networks and without any documentation, they do not affect the culture. Third, since the significant conversations normally do not use any other material than personal experience, they soon run out of ideas and new perspectives.

The strategy described here generates personal commitment to teaching and student learning by nurturing significant networks with the accounts of colleagues' teaching and learning experiences. This is achieved through careful introduction of documented accounts from university teachers or findings from educational research. Furthermore, the pedagogical courses function as essential arenas where teachers can start to document their personal teaching experiences and make a first acquaintance with educational research. They also 'go public' during discussions and interactions and thereby foster new significant relations. Because the conversations from within the courses are reified in written reports they can reach beyond the private domains. They can impact on the next generation of participants and the local culture within the department or faculty.

A critical issue concerns the ways in which teachers are supported on this journey from backstage, private conversations into open debate within university faculties. Perhaps the best example comes from the Faculty of Humanities and Theology where three subsequent modules of pedagogical courses deliberately guide the individual teachers into educational literature and onto the faculty arena where they contribute to the common effort for educational development (Roxå et al., 2008).

Another issue concerns whether or not the strategy should aim for a professional identity as a teacher that incorporates the identity of an educational researcher. This matter is discussed elsewhere by Roxå, Olsson and Mårtensson (2007) concluding that this would be un-productive. The demands on academic teachers to keep abreast with what is happening in their own discipline are already overwhelming. Some individual teachers will engage to a degree where they do educational research in its disciplinary sense, but probably not the majority. In order to have an impact on a particular culture, teachers engaging in scholarship at a *local level* (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004) are probably the most important category, in contrast to those operating on a *global level* (for instance by contributing publications in international educational journals). Even so, the category engaging in greater depth is, no doubt, important for inspiration and consultation.

A conclusion to be drawn is that the level of engagement and the subsequent cultural impact at Lund University is successful since the strategy is aligned with academic freedom and with the institution and its ethos as being research-intensive. It is, however, important to emphasise that it is the ethos and basic values of the institution, as experienced by the teachers themselves, that they show solidarity with – not necessarily with what the management does or says. It is also important to note that the focus for investigation in scholarship of teaching and learning is chosen entirely by the teachers themselves. Only the requirements for documentation, theoretical underpinnings and peer-review are prescribed, mirroring the quality criteria in research processes. Again this is related to the specific view of culture used in this paper. Both teachers and management are influenced by the culture of the institution and their possibilities to influence the culture are constrained. If managers formulate policies that are not aligned with the ethos of the institution, as perceived by the teachers, these policies will most likely have a limited impact.

The view of culture expressed in this paper also includes the issue of possible contradictions between voluntary engagement and the fact that courses are mandatory, and that teachers who refuse to engage get delayed in the promotion processes. Do people engage only because of these established formal structures? Are the structures a result of the process or a prerequisite to it? We argue that they are both. In the beginning of the process described here, starting some years ago, the obligatory nature of pedagogical courses was unthinkable. Later, as a result of many individuals engaging voluntarily in conversations regarding teaching and learning, elements of the formal structures emerged as possibilities. Once these formal structures became established they then continued to reinforce the cultural change.

Even though teachers do engage, and this engagement slowly influences culture and their professional identities as academic teachers, it is not evident that support for student learning develops accordingly. The strategy presented here aims to influence culture, driven by a multitude of engaging individuals. It focuses on encouraging teachers to commit to the development of the quality of their teaching. And as has been shown above, they do. Moreover, they use educational literature while reifying their experiences in written reports and they expose these reports to peer-review by colleagues.

Future work for increasing institutional capabilities to support teaching and student learning at Lund University will focus on leadership issues (Irhammar, 2007). This will most likely include support for leaders to carry out their roles in more scholarly and practice-based ways. In other words, institutions need to develop the type of leadership that is capable of supporting the engagement shown by individual teachers, which, in turn, has to be encouraged even more and combined with top-down initiatives. Not until then can the institution get the most out of its support for student learning and personal development.

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Notes

1. The word 'teacher' is in this text used for academic staff who do both research and teaching.

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Paper IV

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From quality assurance to quality practices: an investigation of strong microcultures in teaching and learning

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One of the main beliefs in quality assurance is that this activity – indirectly – will stimulate change in the work practices associated with teaching and learning in higher education. However, few studies have provided empirical evidence of the existence of such a link. Instead, quality assurance has created an unfortunate divide between formal rules and routines, and the daily practices in academia associated with teaching and learning. This article reports a study of 'quality work' – concrete practices in academic microcultures with a reputation for being strong in their teaching and learning as well as in their research function. We argue that the relationship between quality assurance and enacted quality practice needs to be understood in the light of how formal organizational structures, as well as cultural characteristics and academic aims, are balanced within working groups in universities.

Keywords: quality assurance; quality practices; academic microcultures; teaching and learning

Introduction

The introduction of systematic quality assurance is perhaps one of the most noticeable effects of interest in reforming higher education in recent decades (Dill and Beerkens 2010). While much attention has been devoted to establishing national systems of quality assurance, there is increasing evidence that higher education institutions have also built up internal quality assurance schemes – here understood as formal systems of evaluation and monitoring of their teaching and learning provision under strong organizational and managerial control. However, one could argue that such quality assurance schemes are currently facing new challenges.

First, quality assurance seems to face a problem in legitimizing its impact on the area of which it originally was introduced – improving and securing the quality of teaching and learning. In general, empirical studies show that quality assurance does produce effects, although these are more related to governance and accountability issues than to teaching and learning (Stensaker 2008; Stensaker and Harvey 2011a).

Second, quality assurance has also (increasingly) been met with scepticism by academics working in higher education. Many academics report that quality assurance is an instrument not related to their interests and activities, and as a consequence, that

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quality assurance has often been de-coupled from 'academic life' (Newton 2000; Harvey and Stensaker 2008).

Third, even among politicians one can find a growing interest in going beyond quality assurance as a way of addressing the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education. The current strong focus on learning outcomes, and the recent interest in implementing qualification frameworks in Europe is just one indication of the search for new tools to accommodate these objectives (Prøitz 2010).

The argument discussed in this article is that quality assurance has created an unfortunate divide between the formal rules and routines initiated to support quality and the daily practices in academia associated with teaching and learning. We argue that quality assurance has much to learn from what Massy (1999) calls 'quality work' – the seamless integration of the practices associated with teaching and learning, together with reflections on these practices. However, we also argue that teaching and learning practices can potentially be further improved by opening up to more systematic and scholarly ways to reflect on taken-for-granted practices, even if those practices may be seen as functioning well by those who use them.

This article mainly uses a cultural approach to opening up our understanding of the divide between quality assurance and daily teaching practices in academia. The article provides an analysis of five academic 'microcultures' with a reputation for taking teaching and learning issues seriously (Roxå and Mårtensson 2011). Microcultures here mean departments or working groups within specific departments or educational programmes, in other words a group of people working together in an academic endeavour. Our aims are as follows: first, to identify more theoretically the various perspectives that could characterize such strong microcultures; second, to compare how the theoretical perspectives match key characteristics in the five microcultures studied; and third, and perhaps most importantly, to discuss the links between quality assurance and quality practice, not least the relationship between formal procedures and daily practices. We wish to underline that we do not intend to try to define quality as such nor 'solve' the problem of grasping the qualities of quality. Rather, the implications of the article are that a practice-oriented approach, influenced by a cultural perspective, might bring us forward in solving some of the challenges facing quality assurance by highlighting activities that seem to have an impact and add value to the quality of teaching and learning.

Quality practice: theoretical perspectives and some reflections

In recent years, we have witnessed a renewed interest within the social sciences for more anthropological and ethnographic-inspired studies, inspired by research in the sociology of science (Knorr Cetina 2007). Some examples are the interest in analysing institutional work within neo-institutional theory (Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca 2009); the emphasis on studying strategy-as-practice in the field of management (Whittington 2006); or the use of the concept of epistemic cultures in the sociology of knowledge (Knorr Cetina 2007). In the field of higher education research one can also find studies analysing strategic processes more in detail (Jarzabkowski 2005).

The common denominator in all these contributions is an attempt to identify and investigate the 'machineries of knowledge construction' (Knorr Cetina 2007, 363). Such machineries contain not only social structures, but also material structures such as technology, budgetary and evaluation arrangements and requirements, or managerial tools (performance and management information systems). While such material

structures are often seen as 'technical' arrangements to which culture and identity are attached, we agree with Knorr Cetina (2007) in that culture and identity are integrated parts of how the social and material structure is constituted through practice. In this process, we focus particularly on how those working in universities and colleges manage and try to control their professional lives, and how they also contribute to change and influence the realities they are facing. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998, 962) have pointed out, human agency can be described as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past, but also oriented toward the future (as a 'projective' capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a 'practical-evaluative' capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

Three perspectives to analyse quality practice

The key question following an ambition to analyse quality practice is of course related to the factors conditioning the enhancement of such a practice. A point of departure here is the distinction, touched upon above, between quality assurance as procedures found in formal organizational structures – stated in policy-documents – while quality practice is understood almost invariably in cultural terms – the continuous creation of meaning and value in the daily practice. One could also argue that higher education reforms and various policy initiatives play a significant role in affecting the development of both quality assurance and quality practices (Newton 2000) suggesting that there might exist several perspectives on how to understand and interpret quality practice.

Hence to analyse the conditions that affect the intersection between quality assurance and quality practice, we adapt three perspectives on organizations presented by Van Maanen (2007) and further developed in Ancona et al. (2009). Organizations can, according to this view, be analysed through three different lenses: formal, political, and cultural. All three overlap to some extent, and in order to fully understand a complex organization one must use all three. The *formal lens* reveals the rationally designed organization and how it is intended to work. Here, structures are seen as a way of steering organizational behaviour and practice (Schmidt 2008). Crucial for organizational success through this lens is the degree of alignment between different organizational subunits and an overall objective; but also an accurate and efficient flow of information making it possible for managers to make rational decisions, which in turn can guide practitioners while they collectively add value to the organization. Typically in universities, this lens focuses on formal roles in the organization: senior management, deans, heads of departments and so forth. The *political lens* reveals alliances, power struggles and negotiations between different stakeholders. Through this lens the arena where control over practice is resolved becomes visible. The political lens is important for understanding the consequences of reforms inside higher education institutions. According to the political lens, reform is a measure that, amongst other things, is intended to change internal power structures – potentially empowering some actors while disempowering others. But power and authority are complex entities that are also influenced by structure and culture in ways that are not always easy to predict (Arendt 1961/2006). *The cultural lens* reveals how meaning is created and interpreted in everyday practices – how the organization over time is infused with value. Key concepts are professional identity, traditions and social networks. Practice becomes embedded in social relations while members engage in meaning-making

that over time result in traditions – 'the way we do things around here' – with further implications for how practice materializes. These traditions shape into 'teaching and learning regimes' (Trowler 2008), influencing individuals' views on teaching methods, students, epistemological perspectives, power relationships and so on.

These three perspectives, or lenses, should not be seen as mutually exclusive, although each of them, for analytical purposes, can shed light on how formal quality assurance procedures and daily practices are interpreted and handled by academic teachers. In this text we will mainly use a cultural lens.

Quality practices: some key elements

While the three organizational perspectives outlined above provide different 'world-views' from the point of the microcultures, they can, in principle, also be seen as opening up a potential divide between taken-for-granted quality practices and perceived forms of 'quality assurance' (Ratcliff 2003, 125). Hence a possible integration of quality assurance and quality practice would then be a form of reflective practice enabling the organization both to act and to reflect on its own behaviour. Three elements might be of particular interest as characterizations of reflective practices. First, reflective practices need to have an element of *self-monitoring* built into the organization. Recent research suggests that organizations with high self-monitoring abilities are better capable of assessing how their organization is perceived from the outside (Price and Gioia 2008). Self-monitoring is an important area of research in this context, as the whole idea of monitoring and reporting is perhaps the most criticized element of traditional quality assurance. The issue is then to study alternative means to conduct self-monitoring in organizations. Second, an element of *conflict* is needed within the organization to introduce dynamism into an interpretation of the outcomes of self-monitoring processes. This element may seem surprising since conflict is often seen to hinder organizational change and development. However, recent research has nuanced our understanding of conflict between actors with fixed self-interest. As Eisenhart, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois (1997, 60) point out: 'Rather, conflict reflects a continuing evolving understanding of the world that is gained through interaction with others around alternative viewpoints.' The same researchers also found that high-performing teams in knowledge organizations were all characterized by a very high level of substantive conflict, whereas low performing teams were characterized by low conflict levels (Eisenhart, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois 1997). The key seems to be that conflict needs to be played out in procedural forms centred on facts and alternative options, rather than as interpersonal frictions. Additionally, research focused on the self-governance of limited resource-pools or 'commons' (Ostrom 1990) strengthens this argument (Janssen et al. 2010). Intense communication and trust among individuals involved, including the potential use of sanctions, appear essential while forming the norms necessary for maintaining practice in relation to a shared interest.

However, conflict also needs some kind of resolution. Weick (1995) has consistently argued that since our ability to look forward is heavily dependent on norms and values created by history and traditions, *sense-making* – the process of creating coherence and meaning in situations characterized by complexity – is predominantly path dependent. This implies that one cannot choose freely among all alternative options. Rather, choices are to a large extent shaped by existing concepts, values and norms – and new interpretations and practices are added to, or transform, existing ones. Reflective practices from this perspective would entail a high level of sensitivity

towards the past identity and key characteristics of the organization, along with an ability to re-interpret these in accordance with the perceived needs for change. While universities certainly should not be conceived as one-dimensional organizations, we argue that the theoretical framework outlined above provides valuable analytical tools for investigating how academic microcultures try to use quality assurance initiatives, and how concepts, perspectives and routines introduced as traditional, formal quality assurance are blended into everyday practices. In this way, the framework can also provide a better understanding of the complexity and the many paradoxes found within universities.

Empirical data and material for analysis

The material for our analysis originates from a recent investigation in a research-intensive university. The case-based study explored how teaching quality is viewed, reflected upon, and enacted in five strong academic microcultures (for details about the original study see Roxå and Mårtensson (2011)). Strong microcultures in this organizational context means successful in relation to both teaching and research activities. The microcultures are defined as groups of people working together within this university, tied together by sharing a discipline, department, working group or educational programme. The microcultures we investigated ranged in size from 10 to 60 members. The main focus of the original study was to enhance our overall understanding of how these academic microcultures function in relation to good practices of teaching and learning.

Process

Step 1

The five microcultures we studied were selected from three different faculties within the university. The selection process started by asking deans, vice-deans, heads of department and teaching committees (11 people in total), as well as student representatives in those faculties, to identify successful (strong) microcultures.

Step 2

Resulting suggestions were triangulated with documented results from internal and external national quality assurance evaluations. Criteria for selection were:

- Strong in teaching as well as in research (as defined by an external research assessment exercise conducted three years earlier).
- Teaching activities at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- Fairly large membership of the microculture (minimum of 10) as well as number of students per year (range from 150 to 1000).

Step 3

After selection, each microculture – here coded as S, P, R, K and F – was approached and asked if it was willing to be studied. All accepted. Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted; 4–5 interviews in each microculture, individually with senior and junior academics as well as with groups of students. Altogether 45 people were

interviewed: 17 academics and 28 students. All staff interviews in each microculture were completed before interviewing the students. Interview questions concerned internal issues such as group values and teaching practices, decision-making, group history, improvements and developments, as well as collaborations outside the microculture, relations to organizational structures and so on.

In this paper we revisit the empirical material and investigate how these microcultures relate to quality assurance initiatives introduced by senior managers of the faculty (school) or the university. Of particular importance in this context is the recently implemented European Bologna Treaty, a teaching quality framework stressing the introduction of, and reliance on, formulating learning outcomes, and a process of rewriting all syllabi. National and institutional quality assurance in this context is therefore currently focused on alignment of learning outcomes at different levels in the system, from course modules to entire educational programmes. We will therefore focus in particular on exploring how the microcultures have dealt with this policy in relation to their practice.

Quality practice enacted

Ambitions in teaching

It is striking that in all five microcultures, teaching is taken seriously, with high ambitions. The reasons for this are phrased differently, but all answers refer to a reputation of being excellent, which is a foundation for future activities: 'The freshmen, our junior students, are the most important. That is where we lay the foundation for our reputation' (R, senior). Another senior teacher (P) formulates a similar standpoint: 'If we have bad teaching, we cannot possibly have good research … uh, we must have, we must show that we have, the best courses.' Even though teaching and research appear as two practices, it is obvious that they are intimately connected for the respondents. Both are important means of advancing the field, of having an impact far beyond the microcultures' borders (Roxå and Mårtensson 2011).

The student interviews confirm statements about high-quality teaching made by teachers. Students express how they are challenged and exposed to high expectations, but also that they experience engagement and support. One teacher (senior, R) explains the importance of laboratory work for students in his field: 'It is a philosophy we have always had. Everyone that takes a course in our field must have done things in practice. So, we have … hmm … each year we have six hundred to seven hundred students working in the lab.' In the focus-group interview, students in R were asked the question 'What is it like to be a student here?' The immediate response was 'They know who you are', followed by, 'The work in the laboratory is excellent.' Similar patterns of convergence emerge in interviews with all five microcultures.

Very few teachers could explain the origin of this ambition in teaching when asked about it. It appears as a thoroughly integrated part of the tradition.

> Well, I don't know where it comes from. It is both … yeah … we want to be best … I honestly don't know. It is self-evident. (senior, F)

A junior teacher in the same context also tries to explain his personal reasons for being ambitious:

> They [those who taught him] were almost without exception very good lecturers, so … there is a kind of … there is absolutely no expectation about it or, like you have to be

> as good as … uh … because it is difficult, but uh they are putting up like a standard for how it should be. (junior teacher, F)

High ambitions in teaching thus appear as an integrated part of these microcultures' traditions, in other words, they are institutionalized. Ambition – as illustrated by the quotation above – seems to be handed over and internalized through socialization and has its origin in the history of the specific microculture. However, the tradition also appears to set boundaries for reflection with the result that almost all thinking about how to improve teaching materializes within the existing teaching paradigm in each microculture.

There are also examples in all the microcultures that sometimes teaching quality does not meet the high standards set internally. Examples include colleagues who do not put enough effort into teaching, or student evaluation results going down. It is apparent from the interviews that these – rare – occasions are dealt with immediately through collegial support, exchange of teaching materials, or even changing the teachers responsible for the course. None of the microcultures ignore this kind of problem.

Quality practice in an organizational context

The contexts we studied interact with the surrounding organization, but almost always on their own terms. According to the microcultures they decide when and how to engage, with whom and to what end.

When asked whose opinion they listened to and cared about, initial answers did not include the formal organization. One interviewee talked at great length about how they interacted intensively with representatives from the profession. After elaborating on this, she was asked 'You haven't mentioned the faculty … or the department?' Her response was 'No…. I guess you simply are where you stand…. I'm very much attached to the profession. And, seriously, contact with the faculty is very limited.'

All microcultures reported engagement in various committees and in departmental administration. They want to be well oriented and to have access to information in order to act when necessary. One interviewee revealed how an educational board had made a decision that was wrong from the microculture's perspective. 'So we had to take on the fight…. It is the kind of things … yeah … there were some decisions that had to be annulled … hmm' (senior, R).

All microcultures were also engaged in, and open to, various forms of collaboration, within as well as outside the formal organization. However, they wanted to choose the collaborators themselves, based on tradition, epistemological similarities, or other traits that make the potential partner *interesting.* 'It shall … it must contribute to the field' (senior, K). In some cases, microcultures are encouraged, directed, or even forced into collaborative projects by a head of department or a dean. This is often met with suspicion or hesitation and is even described as mainly time-consuming. In one example (P), though, collaboration was initiated partly because of critique from a research quality audit. In this particular case, however, the critique demanded more international collaboration in general, not with a specific partner.

These accounts offer a picture where the microcultures are far from isolationist. On the contrary, they are all active in influencing decisions and finding potential collaborative partners. Initiatives are triggered either by explicit awareness of where there is a need to develop, or by critique. When asked to specify why they do things, they are almost unanimous in their answers: It is interesting and good for the advancement of

the field. When pushed or forced to collaborate they oppose and/or obstruct more or less openly. But in all situations, they consider themselves to be the leading party; they govern themselves, and they relate selectively to directives from above in the formal organization.

View from the formal organization

Since we are exploring quality enacted by local microcultures situated in a formal or designed organization, it is important also to consider this relationship from 'above', i.e. from the perspective of senior management in the formal organization.

As described above, one of several strategies to select microcultures for this study was to ask formal leaders at faculty or department level to identify within their part of the organization, where to find strong microcultures to study. The main result of these interviews was that the leaders – with very few exceptions – had difficulty in identifying strong microcultures, or what might signify them (Roxå and Mårtensson 2011). Many of the leaders claimed that it would have been easier to identify problematic microcultures. They tried to reason their way through to an answer, all using different premises as indications of quality: lack of complaints from students, or the ability to balance the budget, or even equating strong microcultures in education with strengths in research. In sum, the formal leaders generally displayed an absence of a shared value system usable for identification of quality practice.

Relations between quality practice and quality assurance

Traditional quality assurance has, as stated, initially been performed mainly through the formal organization. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of this investigation therefore is to highlight from a more cultural perspective how microcultures respond to policies concerning quality assurance. As mentioned earlier, in this particular context, the Bologna Process is currently considered the major quality assurance system in higher education.

All interviews explored the issue of improvements in teaching practice (Roxå and Mårtensson 2011). The findings revealed constant internal monitoring of quality, including taking issue with or supporting colleagues who occasionally did not match expected teaching quality. Student evaluations were used in all microcultures as material and inspiration for change, but also analyses of exam questions, collaboration with student representatives, and support in the form of pedagogical courses for teachers. If and when students raised issues concerning teaching quality, they were listened to and taken seriously.

> We have a good relationship with the director of studies, uh, with … he reads all the student evaluations. He gives them to us … and I read them through, look through them and then … if there is anything interesting so … uh … we simply talk about it. And see if there is anything that can be done. (student, F)

As touched upon already a shared feature among the interviews, both with teachers and students, is that improvements appear to be discussed mainly inside the existing teaching and learning paradigm within each microculture. Thus, there appears to be continuous striving for improvement and development, but without questioning basic assumptions about teaching. In relation to the theoretical framework we introduced

at the start, the microcultures seem to have a continuous way of ensuring their self-monitoring from within, but choices are to a large extent shaped by existing concepts, values and norms.

A policy does prompt change initiatives. The interviews were conducted after the introduction of the European Bologna reform, and the consequent national and institutional quality assurance policy are aligned with it. As described earlier, the most prominent Bologna-related activity was the process of rewriting the syllabi and learning outcomes in every course/module at all educational levels. The investigation revealed that the microcultures responded quite differently to this policy, from re-structuring all their courses (and syllabi) at all levels, and even actively using the formulated learning outcomes in collaborations outside the university, on the one hand, to not really changing anything but the formal course syllabus, on the other.

One interviewee explained how she now uses the written learning outcomes in communication with the companies her group collaborates with:

> I send them to the five companies I have recruited into the course now … they have provided projects for the students this year. And then … I use them [the learning outcomes in the presentation] … but also the results of student evaluations and photos showing how we work. (senior, P)

In another microculture, the Bologna Process generated the possibility of dramatic change from the perspective of a director of studies:

> I got it. What Bologna was all about, because … I was at this meeting, and there was [the vice rector of the university] and we were perhaps thirty directors of study down there in [the location]. And she told us how this was supposed to happen and what the important aspects were. And immediately, I got lots of ideas. How I could reorganize and change all our courses. (senior, K)

Later she reveals the origin of these ideas: 'Well, it's an old thing from the sixties.' The ideas were old, but the possibility to realize them appeared during the implementation of the Bologna reform.

However, another example describes the Bologna reform as a wave, even a tsunami. 'Yeah, it was like that, a big thing … chock, and then … it's over. And it's really a pity' (senior, F). He describes how his microculture started to discuss how to 'use the syllabi more actively in teaching and so on … because we currently don't.' But formal, administrative procedures distorted the opportunity. 'It was all about what was allowed or not. It [his group's interest] drowned in this silly discussion, uh…. Lost interest.' The remark reveals a temporal component; the wave is dramatic, but short-lived, but also perceived as a conflict between administrative formalities and local ambitions.

What we glimpse here is an array of responses to a quality reform. The policy, launched largely as a quality enhancement reform, did contribute to change; it constituted a force that in some cases was usable for pursuing changes in enacted teaching practices. But there are few signs of systematic impact. Rather, the different microcultures evaluate the Bologna Treaty in the light of their own long-term ambitions to advance their field. The outcome of this evaluation determines whether they engage or not, whether the policy has an impact or not. It can be seen as an illustration of how the microcultures are the agents in control of the process.

Discussion

Apparent from the material describing five strong academic microcultures' views on education, is that quality in teaching and student learning is a major concern for them. They illustrate many of the significant features outlined at the beginning of this paper. *Self-monitoring* is exemplified by the array of strategies the microcultures use to advance their practice: they analyse signals coming from the organization and from quality assurance procedures, from audits, from students, from exam results – to mention just a few sources. Their collaborators are found almost everywhere: in the profession, in industry, in other disciplines, and so on – nationally and internationally. Sometimes this interaction is about solving *conflicts* as when students are dissatisfied with the teaching. The interesting feature here is that potential conflicts like these are tackled instantly, before they intensify, and on the basis of high collegial trust. All this is done, it seems, within the tradition developed within the microculture, meaning that the educational paradigm within the microculture set boundaries for what may be conceived of as an improvement or not. The importance of the tradition is stressed repeatedly, as the analysis of the material unfolds. In other words, the *path dependence* sketched out earlier as conditioning for sense-making is clearly visible. However, in these microcultures, the tradition does not petrify the practice; rather the tradition demands development and constant improvement of practice – although mainly within paradigmatic boundaries. The microcultures in this sample orient themselves to the tradition they have created over time, and from this position they actively pay attention to and evaluate various signals coming from the outside, including those from the formal organization. Furthermore, they consider themselves to be the best judges of whether these signals are useful or not for their overall purposes: the advancement of their field, as it relates to the tradition. If not, they respond rather superficially to demands from the formal organization.

In his analysis of distinctive colleges, (Clark 1970/2009) uses the term '*saga*' while discussing the importance of traditions. Saga refers to the history of a college, as the members of the organization perceive it. It is composed of narratives and symbolic material about important events and individuals who have contributed to the growth of the organization at hand. In this discussion we use the term saga while referring to the tradition. The saga is what stabilizes the microculture and what sets the limits to what can be done, but also demands, in an exemplary way, quality in whatever the individuals do. The saga, as we see it, relates directly to the basic assumptions of the culture, its raison d'être (Schein 2004).

Traditional organization of quality assurance in higher education institutions is often almost exclusively oriented towards the future. It commonly describes a need, an objective that is arguably worth achieving. It is trying to identify a problem, to change something, hence the orientation towards what should be done, and how, in order to achieve a goal. The *formal organization* (Van Maanen 2007; Ancona et al. 2009) and its attempt to align the organization in order to achieve certain aims, comfortably uses quality assurance policies in order to maximize a prescribed and desired output. Therefore – and hopefully emerging quite clearly – a saga and a quality assurance policy are oriented in opposite directions from the standpoint of the present state of affairs. The microcultures described here are all preoccupied with change and development but always within the frames of their saga. The formal organization, on the other hand, tries to fuel change and development with reference to the future. By highlighting this organizational contradiction we might better understand why the microcultures react so differently to quality assurance policies from the formal organization.

Quality assurance policies will therefore not be treated with the respect intended by senior managers (or whoever is in charge of such a policy) unless they relate to the tradition, the saga, as the practitioners understand it. There is no authority to be gained over the microcultures described here by sheer reference to the future. Unless quality assurance policies, or similar directives, resonate with their saga, different microcultures will view it as any other kind of material that is possibly usable for them to advance their field. They will not automatically relinquish authority to deans or rectors, who will have no other means than coercion if they want to pursue their intentions.

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Paper V

Leadership at a local level – enhancing educational development

Abstract

This paper explores, mainly through a sociocultural perspective, the role of mid-level-leadership in higher education in relation to educational development. It is argued that supporting and engaging local level leaders, such as academic programme directors, increases the potential for development of local teaching and learning cultures. The paper describes a programme in a research-intensive university, where leaders conduct scholarly projects focused on contextualised educational development and leadership. Projects are reported in writing and peer-reviewed within the programme. In this article 25 project reports are analysed through a framework focusing on the relational and contextual aspects of leadership. Four projects are specifically elaborated to illustrate important aspects of leadership that become visible through the analysis. These aspects relate to external and internal mandates to lead, i.e. the potential actions available to leaders when navigating the need to build and maintain legitimacy in the formal organisation as well as in the group/s they as leaders try to influence.

Keywords

Educational development, higher education, leadership, local, mandate, support

Introduction

The expansion of the higher education sector over the past decades has brought an increased attention to phenomena like internationalisation, 'massification', and various quality assurance procedures. Society places high expectations on higher education in terms of student employability and societal growth. All this has led to increased demands for accountability of higher education institutions, as well as demands for universities and academics to critically reflect on and develop teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Academic teaching as performed by university teachers is pivotal for the quality of student learning (Biggs, 1999; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 2003). Most institutional initiatives have focused on improving teaching practices by placing the bulk of expected improvements on individual teachers[1]. Since the complexity of structural issues often is greater than individual teachers' personal agency to bring about change, this leaves teachers

[1] The word 'teacher' is in this text used for any academic position that includes teaching and research, or teaching only.

limited to improve teaching practices inside structural limitations only. Furthermore teachers do not act in isolation – they are part of local collegial contexts in which their teaching is planned and performed; where norms and traditions guide, explicitly or implicitly, what are considered good or bad approaches to teaching and assessing student learning (Jawitz, 2009; Authors, 2011b; Trowler, 2008; Trowler and Cooper, 2002).

Parallel to targeting individual academics and their teaching practices, institutions have attempted to influence practices through policies and strategic plans. However, various studies indicate that there are limitations to this approach too (Bauer et al., 1999; Trowler, 1998). Policies are interpreted, embraced or even rejected within institutional meso levels, i.e. in the teacher's collegial contexts (Authors, 2012). Therefore it becomes relevant to understand teaching (and its development) as a collegial and collective responsibility. The limitations of the approaches that focus mainly on individual teachers or on policies converge at the *meso-level* (Hannah & Lester, 2009) in between university management and individual academics.

Sustainable development of teaching and curricula depends not only on individual teachers or groups of teachers but also on leadership; a leadership that engages with, supports, and coordinates development in local collegial contexts – departments, teaching teams, or programme teachers – as well as horizontally and vertically across disciplines and programmes (Graham, 2012). This kind of leadership – here called *local level leadership* – comes to the fore at the organisational levels in between senior management of institutions and the individual teacher/s, what Hannah & Lester (2009) refer to as the *meso-level*. It includes roles such as programme coordinators, Directors of Studies[2], academic program directors (Vilkinas and Ladyshewsky, 2012), and Heads of Departments. These are leaders that individual teachers interact with personally; leaders that individual teachers talk to, discuss with, and take instructions and advice from in matters that concern teaching.

The research presented here centres on the balancing-act that leaders have to perform in order to meet expectations from the formal organisation that has assigned them as leaders (external mandate), but also in order to gain and maintain an internal mandate from the teachers they

[2] A Director of Studies has a managerial/leadership function and acts on delegation from a Head of Department. The position involves coordination and management of teachers who are responsible for various courses/modules within a discipline or a programme.

work with and lead. Firstly, the article describes a leadership-programme to support local level leaders in their endeavours to initiate and lead improvements in teaching and academic practices. Secondly it explores and analyses the aggregated results over four cohorts of that programme. The results are expressed by participants in their documented project reports and are analysed in order to explore how leaders' engagement in change processes is manifested and how it contributes to local educational development. The ambition is to both describe a development program and to, through their documented accounts, 'follow' the participants into their leadership practices.

Leadership and educational development

Alvesson (2011:152) argues that "Understanding leadership calls for careful consideration of the social context in which processes of leadership takes place. Leadership is not just a leader acting and a group of followers responding in a mechanical way, but a complex social process in which the meanings and interpretations of what is said and done are crucial. Leadership, then, is closely related to culture – at the organizational and other levels." Leadership in this article is understood from such a sociocultural point of view. This is in accordance with perspectives from distributed leadership: "leadership may be said to be 'stretched over the social and situational contexts' (Spillane et al quoted in Gosling et al, 2009:299). Leaders influence and are influenced by the collegial context as much as are the teachers within it. Still, leaders who are appointed in their formal roles by the organisation have to perform an act of balance between the external and internal expectations. Middlehurst (2008) convincingly argues that leadership in higher education is in need of more exploration and research, especially pertinent to the relation between leadership in theory and leadership in practice. Much literature on academic leadership deals with leadership of universities (Allan et al., 2006; Askling and Stensaker, 2002; Neumann and Neumann, 1999; Stensaker, 2006). Less attention has been paid to what we here call local level leadership although some authors have indicated that leadership close to academic teachers is important and linked to student learning (Ramsden et al., 2007). Vilkinas and Ladyshewsky (2012) show that academic programme directors, APDs, focus on development and that there is room for those leaders to become more effective in their various leadership-roles. Gibbs et al. (2008) investigated leadership in 19 successful departments in research-intensive institutions worldwide. Their study supports the relevance of leadership and shows that "teaching excellence was achieved

in entirely different ways involving widely contrasting leadership behaviour" (Gibbs et al., 2008:416). They conclude that one should pay careful attention to the particular local context in which the leadership and the teaching take place. This involves an awareness of different disciplinary areas, institutional contexts and particular departmental challenges. This is consistent with Knight and Trowler's (2000) contention that change initiatives, including leadership, must take as their focus and starting-point the local, departmental culture rather than the institutional level.

Graham's (2012) global study of successful and sustainable development of engineering programmes found that the degree of engagement from the Head of Department was a crucial aspect, determining success or failure: " if their support is limited chances of long-term success will be severely diminished." (Graham 2012:65). Also, Gibbs (2013) reflecting upon four decades of educational development in higher education states that studies focusing on "why some departments are much more educationally effective than others have tended to identify the role of leadership of teaching […]" (p.4).

Departments however are often not solely responsible for educational programmes, and should therefore not be the only organisational entity to focus on in terms of local leadership. Vilkinas and Ladyshewsky's study (2012) makes an important contribution in focusing on academic programme directors. Furthermore, Authors (2011b) studied academic 'microcultures' that were strong in both research and teaching. These microcultures were identified sometimes as departments, but also as sub-departmental collegial contexts such as academic programmes, and teaching teams. Results emphasised collegiality as well as leadership as central in processes leading to high quality teaching practices. The results therefore confirm the importance of the local leadership whether this is departmental leadership or leadership in more informal constellations within departments.

Bolden et al. (2008) present a perspective consistent with Alvesson (2011) and the aspects discussed above. They too emphasise the relational and contextual aspects of leadership, indicating "a close interdependence between individual, group and organisational development" (Bolden et al., 2008:370). Leadership is possible, they claim, at the intersection of social and structural factors where successful leaders navigate the need to build and maintain legitimacy in the formal organisation as well as in the group/s they as leaders try to influence. The authors point out that the tension leaders often experience from acting in this

intersection indicates relational resources that if wielded wisely become a major asset in attempts to influence practices. Since academics generally are people with advanced critical thinking skills and a strong integrity, it seems reasonable to also pay attention to those who are led.

Followership

There is a saying that academics cannot be led; they are like cats without an interest in leadership. As indicated above and as we shall see this is not necessarily the case. In fact, although Alvesson and Spicer (2011) identify a shortage of research on followers, several recent studies support the seminal work on transformational leadership by MacGregor Burns (1978) and indicate that academics do indeed appreciate good leadership (Billot et al., 2013; Bolden et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2003; Trevelyan, 2001).

The term follower, however, connotes subordination and perhaps even compliant behaviour. Therefore, the term *followership* is recently suggested as a more appropriate term in higher education since it entails a more active and agentic stance (Billot et al., 2013). Followership emphasises the relational character of leadership processes, in line with Alvesson (2011). Leaders are as much part of the academic culture as the academics they lead: 'The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, these cultures will manage them' (Schein, 2004:23).

The above outlined view of academic leadership and followership places attention on the group level, the level where leaders interact directly with teachers as individuals or as a group. This is the meso-level in Hannah & Lester's (2009) multi-level model that focuses on leadership in relation to organisational learning in knowledge-intensive organisations. During interactions within local collegial contexts leaders have to delicately balance the values held by the teachers and the values promoted by the formal organisation of which they are all a part. Following Middlehurst's (2008) call for research that bridges the gap between leadership in theory and leadership in practice it is therefore relevant to explore how this interface might be experienced, as expressed by leaders themselves while engaged in bringing about change in local teaching and academic practices. It is assumed that if this local level interface can be influenced for the benefit of teaching, this will in turn positively affect student learning.

Analytical framework

Through a straightforward conception formal leaders are charged with authority resulting in a mandate to "do" things to or together with "their" teachers. In reality, and as stated by Alvesson (2011) and Bolden et al. (2008), leaders are active in a field of tension between an internal mandate and an external mandate. Thus, local level leaders depend on the ability to balance the mandate given to them *externally*, by the formal organisation, and the mandate to lead given to them *internally* by the teachers they work with where both these mandates can be either strong or weak (Table 1).

The situated balance between the two mandates hypothetically allows for different leadership-actions while attempting to influence teaching and assessment practices, curriculum design et cetera. The sum of the external and internal mandates therefore can be viewed as the *actual mandate* to lead.

Internal Mandate \ External Mandate	Strong	Weak
Strong	1	2
Weak	3	4

Table 1, illustrates four different possible combinations between strong or weak external and/or internal mandates to lead. The numbers 1-4 refer to illustrating cases described later in the text.

In this article 25 accounts that describe educational development projects from a local leadership perspective are analysed. The following questions are in focus for the analysis:

1. How does the balance between external and internal leadership mandates appear in the accounts?
2. In what way does variation in external and internal leadership mandates influence local educational development activities?

The context at a glance

X University is a comprehensive research-intensive university regularly ranked among the top-100 in the world. It currently (2014) hosts 47700 undergraduate and 3200 post-graduate students; and 7500 staff, out of which 5100 are academics.

X University has for almost five decades provided support for its academic staff, including PhD-students, in their teaching roles and educational development endeavours. The support has mainly been offered through pedagogical courses, seminars, workshops, and educational consultancy and lately also through reward schemes and initiatives promoting scholarship of teaching and learning with an organisational, cultural perspective (Authors, 2011a; Authors, 2008). Pedagogical courses are commonly centred around a project formulated by the participant/s, focusing on teaching and learning. These projects are underpinned by educational theory, reported in writing, peer reviewed and disseminated across the institution. Thus they contribute to and support an emergent organisational culture of scholarship of teaching and learning (Authors, 2011a).

Many academics that engage in these activities have highlighted the importance of leadership in relation to the development of teaching. Some leaders, on the other hand, have become increasingly aware that their organisational units (teaching teams, academic programmes, and/or departments) might benefit from this engagement if leadership could facilitate it further. Therefore, an institutional programme to support local leadership of teachers and teaching was initiated in 2008. In the next section the programme will be briefly described. Later in the text, material gathered from four cohorts of this programme will be analysed and discussed in relation to the analytical framework outlined above.

'Leading academic teaching' – a project-based support programme

An institution-wide leadership programme was developed, targeting programme coordinators, Directors of Studies, academic programme directors, Heads of Departments and people in similar roles, thereby focusing on leadership close to teaching practices. The programme design is based on Wenger's (1998) idea of a *community of practice* according to which interpretations of leadership situations and practices as well as leadership-identities are constantly discussed and negotiated.

The programme comprises five weeks of participant time, over a period of one year, with monthly half-day meetings. Participants volunteer for the programme and apply individually or in groups with a draft of a project involving educational development and leadership concerns in their own professional context. The projects constitute the core of the programme as the participants continuously read relevant literature and discuss the progress of their projects in programme meetings as well as submit increasingly finalised project reports that are peer-reviewed within the group. By the end of the year all projects are reported in a scholarly format, underpinned by literature on leadership and educational development and peer-reviewed by fellow participants and programme-leaders. The instructions for the project reports state that they should be written so that other leaders in similar roles can benefit from reading the text. Complementary to the projects, the programme is also visited by a number of guest lecturers that are experienced educational leaders at department-, programme-, faculty-, and national level.

As of September 2013 the programme had been offered four times with a total of 47 participants (27 women and 20 men) and with a completion rate of 60–70%. The participants represent six faculties at X University and two other higher education institutions in the region. The authors are the initiators and leaders of the programme.

Evaluations at the end of the programme are very positive across all four cohorts (response rate in web-based surveys 80–90%). Participants primarily appreciate the opportunity to reflect upon their leadership roles in a small group with others in similar positions from various academic contexts and teaching cultures. They form an emerging significant network (Authors, 2009) in which they can support, and to some extent challenge, each other in their leadership roles. In general the leaders lack this opportunity elsewhere. Participants also appreciate the ability to deepen their knowledge about various leadership models with the potential for them to adapt to their own contexts and local teaching cultures. The programme thereby, consistent with recommendations from Scott et al. (2008), cultivates a contextualised leadership network characterised by trustful conversations, emotional processing and collegial support. Through the participants' own contextualised projects, the programme also provides an arena for emerging scholarship of leadership, reaching beyond the specific group of participants. Project reports are disseminated from one cohort to the next, as sources of inspiration and locally produced scholarly knowledge about leadership.

Material

The main source for analysis here is the projects that the leadership programme participants work with. The projects are documented as completed scholarly reports, peer-reviewed within the programme. In total, 25 project reports have been completed and passed assessment (some projects are run by groups of participants and therefore have multiple authors). Each report consists of 10-15 pages, and describes a leadership-challenge in relation to educational development in a specific local context. It draws upon relevant educational and leadership-literature, and it documents results and conclusions from the project.

Method

All the finalised 25 project reports were analysed searching for what the respective leader (report-author) wanted to achieve and identifying how s/he or she went about achieving this This analysis used narrative inquiry (Cousin, 2009) as a framework. In this context that involved treating the project reports as holistic and personal narratives of local level leadership practices and reflections thereof. The two authors initially read all 25 reports and took notes separately, for every report, on what the leader had written about aims of their projects and also how the leader had described going about achieving that aim. Next, the individual analyses and notes were compared between the researchers report by report, with a high degree of inter-congruity. Identified aims and actions, expressed in somewhat different ways by the report-authors but similar in content, were grouped together and categorised thematically. The final step of the analysis focused on close reading of how the balancing act of internal and external mandates was described in the reports. In this phase four reports out of the 25 were chosen to be developed here as cases in order both to highlight nuances in the dilemmas but also to enrich the theoretical framework used (Bolden et al, 2008). Each of the four reports was chosen because of its potential to illustrate one of the four different positions in the field of tension between strong/weak external/internal mandates, and related leadership actions. In addition, the authors of these four reports were contacted by e-mail and asked to report on the outcomes of their project after completion of the programme as well as to give their informed consent to be used in this article as elaborated, non-anonymous cases.

Results

Project reports

The initial analysis of the 25 reports reveals the *aims* of the projects as they are expressed in the reports. These aims were through the analytic process described above clustered around three themes. Some reports dealt with more than one theme. The following broad themes, A-C, were identified, highlighted here with some examples of original expressions in the reports (our translation):

A. Developing/changing teaching

   "To lead the development of the future's nurse-education at X University"

B. Leading a programme through quality assurance

   "The internal review of teaching should expand in order to secure and develop quality"

C. Implementing a policy

   "[T]he main focus is to identify methods and ways to successfully implement university-issued strategies and policies – such as those described above – on faculty and discipline level."

These categories describe the overall aim/s of the projects, and in most projects these aims are achieved within the yearlong leadership programme, as described in project reports. Through the analysis of the 25 reports another set of categories, D-G, were identified describing the foci for action, i.e. what the programme participants wanted to do or did more specifically as a means to achieving their aim:

D. Handling the relation between themselves as leaders and the people they lead:

   "A crucial prerequisite was to reach a good working climate where our colleagues feel they want to participate and enjoy the process"; "By some people I was considered a 'traitor', only listening to the students' needs."

E. Getting a group of academics to work together:

   "One specific activity is the introduction of educational collegial coordination-meetings as an expansion of the recently introduced mentor-scheme for new teachers."

F. Defining and clarifying leadership-role/s:

   "I am not quite clear why I was asked to take on this leadership role"; "The report illustrates the rather complex role of the program manager and shows that one of the key attributes for a program leader is the ability to convince others about their vision and to be a good negotiator."

G. Balancing discrepancies between formal organisation and local teaching culture:

   "Despite a clear mandate from my colleagues I found it difficult to step into the leadership-costume"

In these categories the relational character of leadership is brought to the fore. A majority of the reports problematise the leadership role as well as the tension between external and internal mandate. It becomes apparent how leaders have to work through relations with their teachers. Simultaneously they have to balance the values and beliefs held by the group with values expressed by the formal organisation in which they all are embedded.

The result of the second phase of analysis reveals further nuances of this balancing act. Four reports were chosen to highlight, as cases, the various positions emerging in the framework above (Table 1). Cases were selected from different cohorts of the leadership programme with the purpose to further illuminate the contention that leaders have to strike balances in various ways depending on the specific situations they encounter. In other words, depending on the contextual situation and the specific balance between internal and external mandates that each leader experiences, different actions become possible. The descriptions of the cases are numbered 1-4 according to the positions in the framework (Table 1), and their relation to weak or strong internal and external mandates. All cases are described here with personal approval by their respective author.

Case 1: strong external – strong internal

Susanne has been an academic programme-director for several years. She is responsible for leading and coordinating a professional programme at Bachelor's level, involving 30–40 teachers. She has a background in the profession and is a dedicated teacher herself who teaches courses/modules within the programme. Her project when entering the leadership-programme concerned how to develop the different courses/modules within the programme in order to improve the programme as a whole, and to engage all teachers in that development (Brokop, 2010). Susanne explicitly used the European Bologna higher education reform in order to increase her external mandate. She saw the opportunity to implement new and up-to-date intended learning outcomes at programme level as well as on course/module level. She wanted to, again with reference to the reform, develop better alignment between courses/modules as well as constructive alignment (Biggs, 1999) within courses. Her project is based on the idea of 'critical friends' (Handal, 1999). It started with a day off-campus with all teachers having joint discussions about the programme as a whole and looking at what they thought were the best comparable programmes around the world. Moreover, they discussed what could be learnt from these programmes. Susanne then designed a yearlong

process where each teacher/teaching team responsible for a course had to document an analysis of what improvements that particular module needed in order to meet agreed programme level outcomes. These analyses were discussed with colleagues from other course modules acting as critical friends. Their comments were included in the documentation, which was handed in to Susanne. When all the documentation had been collected the teachers again met off-campus to discuss suggestions for improvements and priorities. Short-term actions, as well as long-term visions were discussed; and a revised programme-level curriculum-plan was handed in for approval by the Faculty educational board. Susanne describes the critical friend component as the core of the project and the activities around learning outcomes and alignment as a means to increasing internal discussions on educational quality.

The revised programme has recently been evaluated by the Swedish national quality audit agency, and received the highest possible quality accreditation. Susanne also testifies that her colleagues now are highly active participants in discussions about teaching and assessment issues; some of them voluntarily sit in during each other´s classes. The local teaching and learning culture appears to have been strongly boosted in favour of educational development.

Case 2: weak external – strong internal

Christian is an experienced teacher in a well-established high status professional programme at Master´s level. For many years he has been responsible for one of the courses within that programme, but apart from this he has no formal leadership role. As a representative of the profession, he has been working in developing countries for long periods of time, supported by large external grants. Based on these experiences, he has a firm belief that his profession could and should work to make a difference in the world. Backed up by discussions with students, his project within the leadership-programme is to develop his course/module so that it is available and interesting to students from other countries and so that they can participate together with Swedish students for one term of studies (Moell, 2010). Hence, his idea is to increase the internationalisation aspects of the programme, and to prepare students better for working internationally. There is no formal external mandate to re-design the course, other than a generally expressed strategy at university-level to increase internationalisation. Christian spends considerable time talking to colleagues and co-teachers about his ideas, and he gets mostly positive reactions. Some colleagues express hesitations concerning their ability to teach in English. He also talks to the course-leaders responsible for other courses/modules

during the same term in order to decipher the best way to co-ordinate the different courses. The overall aim is to recruit international students and to make their time in the course/module a rewarding experience. He visits other similar universities nationally with experiences relevant to his project; and he applies for grants to be able to provide his fellow teachers with language support. He investigates rules and regulations and financial predicaments in relation to accepting international students within the programme. He also invests a lot of time making detailed plans for the new design of his course, if it were to be internationalised. At the end of the leadership programme Christian has, based on his project report (Moell, 2010), developed a well-underpinned proposal to present to the educational committee within his faculty. As it turns out Christian gets his proposal approved, along with additional funding, and the first international course is launched one year after Christian's completion of the leadership programme.

Case 3: strong external – weak internal

Andreas has been Head of Department (HoD) for about a year in a department with approximately 30 members of staff. He has worked at two other universities for several years, and has now returned to the department where he worked for three terms before he was elected HoD. He describes his context as highly collegial and heavily dependent on its own traditions, drawing upon senior and significant persons with extensive personal networks that reach far outside the department. The department has a high quality teaching-profile, but over time external expectations of research production and international collaborations have increased. For decades the department has enjoyed a jointly constructed image of good finances that has lead to very generous and self-regulated working hours, specifically in relation to teaching. As a new formal leader Andreas discovers that this is a self-deception; the finances are not as good as they all think. In fact, he foresees considerable difficulties for the department if something is not done about this situation. In addition the faculty/school demands that he sets the finances right. On entering the leadership-programme Andreas' project initially focuses on how to maintain high teaching quality with the introduction of internal economical constraints (Inghammar, 2013). Broadly speaking, he spends a lot of time during the leadership programme thinking about and reading literature on different leadership-roles. Furthermore, as a leadership challenge he considers what implications there are for an external leader who enters into a stable, historically shaped culture and tries to change tradition.

In order to meet the external demands about research productivity he introduces two specific activities: 1) two weeks full-time "off-duty" for all researchers within the department to write research applications, and 2) a full day off-campus for all researchers with presentations of on-going projects, in order to vitalize the internal research agenda. In particular, the second activity had unpredictable consequences for Andreas. Members of staff that were not researchers were upset about being excluded. According to them, tradition dictates that everyone should be included in departmental activities off campus. This unexpected reaction led to other joint activities, this time to discuss teaching and education. As part of an upcoming national quality evaluation of their discipline, Andreas asked all academic staff to read and mark Bachelor- and Master theses. He reports that the "discussions about quality, methodology, and the boundaries of our discipline became engaged and initiated, and also led to discussions about progression, the purpose and intended outcomes with our programme" (Inghammar, 2013:12–13, our translation). Andreas himself regards his efforts as successful, albeit in somewhat unexpected directions. He concludes that "without the external threat, due to the financial situation, demanding measures of acute nature it would have been much harder to implement changes." (Inghammar, 2013:14, our translation). He also highlights the value of his own somewhat external experiences from other universities as a means of importing ideas, and suggestions into the existing internal tradition; in order to get new things started.

Case 4: weak external – weak internal

Marita is an associate professor dedicated to teaching and learning. She particularly engages in online teaching and is a pioneer within her discipline and her faculty. She is also Director of Studies within her department, and thereby responsible for the coordination and progression within and between several disciplines. Lena, co-author of the report, is head of the library in the same faculty, and has collaborated with Marita, particularly to support students in information literacy. From the library's point of view this is an area they are very enthusiastic about, and the librarians want to increase collaboration with other academic teachers and disciplines. Marita and Lena joined the leadership-programme with a collaborative project aiming at implementing the faculty's strategic plan to increase the generic skills outcomes of the student degrees, including information literacy. Neither Marita nor Lena had received this project as a formal assignment from the faculty; it was rather a self-defined task in which they are both highly involved. They want to explore how integration between academic disciplines and the library, such as the collaboration they have

experienced themselves, can be encouraged further. They set off exploring literature and research on generic skills as well as documented alumni-investigations within the faculty about the students' actual learning outcomes. They design a survey and focus-group interviews in order to further explore how academics within their faculty think about the teaching of generic skills but they get only a few responses. Their initial idea to implement the faculty's strategy turns out to be more complex than expected. They also discover that much more is going on within different disciplines than what has hitherto been made visible. They use their project-report to problematise implementation processes from policy level to the academic practice (Landgren and Ljungkvist, 2009). They conclude by highlighting the importance of individual academics as leaders within disciplines, and they suggest a possible way forward by collegial learning through networks. After finalising their project they initiate a series of workshops for teachers and librarians within the faculty, with external guests presenting experiences on working with generic skills. They also participate in working groups to set up a web site for students within the faculty about generic skills. Both authors have later left their positions in the faculty and are no longer involved in these specific issues.

Through these accounts we can see that the balance between internal and external mandate offers different possibilities to the various leaders. Susanne (1), already having a strong internal mandate can use the Bologna reform as a lever to immediately start her project, while the other to varying degrees have to build an internal mandate before they can start influencing practices. Andreas (3) puts effort into building an internal mandate, which can match his external mandate. Christian (2), on the other hand, continues to build on his already strong internal mandate before he launches his idea for an external mandate. Marita and Lena (4) spend much time orienting themselves in the field they want to influence. Arguably they are further from being able to influence practices than the others, since they start without neither an external nor an internal mandate.

Discussion

The project reports produced within the leadership programme offer insights into what leaders try to do when supporting local, contextualised educational development. Based on the analysis of the 25 projects reports, some key themes emerge. Interestingly, at first glance the project reports focus on the aims of the projects, gravitating around developing/changing teaching, leading a programme through quality assurance, and implementing a policy. So, those are things that local level leaders want to do when engaging with educational

development. The deep analysis reveals how they go about this, and what challenges they face when trying to achieve their aims. These challenges constitute a substantial part of each report and appear as four main themes occurring in a majority of the reports: 1) Handling the relation between themselves as leaders and the people they lead, 2) Getting a group of academics to work together, 3) Defining and clarifying leadership-role/s, and 4) Balancing discrepancies between formal organisation and local teaching culture.

This can be interpreted as firstly, the aim of a leadership effort is far from the same as what needs to be done; secondly, what leaders actually *do* is not only to achieve aims but also to work *with* other people. The first point is important since a common language used by managers is to formulate objectives for the organisation. The results presented here show that local leaders must translate these objectives into relevant leadership-actions. A task that in itself is a challenge. The second point might have a considerable impact on the language used while discussing leadership actions: It indicates that these actions are indeed relational and that leadership is a complex process between people in dynamic interaction, thereby supporting points made in previous research (Alvesson, 2011; Bolden et al, 2008; Gosling et al, 2009).

Consequently, and further illustrated by the four cases above, local level leadership appears as highly contextual and placed in a tension between external and internal mandates to lead. No report in our sample neglected this aspect. As illustrated by the four cases, a leader is in a better position to start embarking on a change process when both external and internal mandates to lead are strong (illustrated in case 1, Susanne). A leader with a weak internal mandate has to initially direct his/her attention and efforts towards the teachers he or she works with, and build an internal mandate before being able to act according to an external mandate (illustrated in case 3, Andreas).

In case 2 (Christian), the leader works through an already established personal network but initially with only limited attempts to approach the formal organisation. The entire project is spent strengthening the internal mandate and preparing an approach towards the formal organisational structures in order to receive an external mandate. With a strong case built from within it is possible to influence the formal organisation even though no external mandate existed initially.

When both internal and external mandates are weak, one of these dimensions or both have to be strengthened in the process (illustrated in case 4). Without a particular mandate Marita and Lena try to build relations that are useful for their intentions. While exploring possibilities to use the faculty policy as a mandate they encounter the entire complexity of an academic community in relation to change. This complexity is meritoriously described in their project report, thereby providing a valuable resource for other future local leaders acting from similar positions.

Based on the analysis of our material we propose that for local level leadership to have an impact on academic contexts, the balance between internal and external mandates needs to be taken into careful consideration. Given that various local contexts provide different possible actions, there is no general solution to that balancing act. However, as illustrated by the four cases, we conclude that internal mandate needs to be cultivated before the fulfilment of an external mandate. This is why Susanne (case 1), already from the start, uses her internal mandate when drawing upon the external mandate offered through both her formal position but also through the Bologna reform in order to influence her teachers. Andreas (case 3), on the other hand, has a strong external mandate: as Head of Department he sees to it that finances are set straight. But before addressing this he has to shape a process in order to construct a robust internal mandate. Without such an internal mandate, he reports, the achievements would not have been possible. Christian (case 2) uses and expands his internal mandate to build a strong case in order to get a decision from the faculty board, and thereby receives the external mandate to implement the suggested curriculum development. Lena and Marita (case 4), initially thought of using the faculty policy as an external mandate but then discovered that they had to take stock of what was going on at the teaching practice level, and they needed to support and encourage colleagues to engage with the issue at hand. If the external mandate takes presidency over the internal the situation might shift from being a leadership situation to being a management situation, and thus runs the risk of negatively influencing the followership of the teachers concerned. This phenomenon resembles what has been labelled ‘threat rigidity’ in previous research (Staw et al, 1981).

We suggest that further attempts to support local level leaders in higher education consider the balancing act between internal and external mandate. We however tentatively argue that of the two the internal mandate take precedence over the external as it provides leadership opportunities that the external mandate alone cannot provide.

Conclusions and future research

This article reports and analyses the results from a project-based leadership-programme that aims to support local level leadership for the benefit of educational development in a research-intensive university. Projects typically aim at developing an educational programme, quality assessment processes, or implementing a policy relevant for teaching and learning. In trying to achieve these aims, leaders deal with how to understand and exercise the leadership-role, how to get academic teachers to work together, and how to handle the balancing act between the formal organisation and the local teaching culture. This balancing act is illustrated through four cases, showing that variations in strong or weak internal and external mandates result in different possible leadership actions.

The results analysed indicate that leadership at the local level can indeed contribute to educational development. When leaders engage for the benefit of the local teaching and learning culture, it serves a purpose for educational development. Yet, leadership is enacted in very varied ways in relation to the specific local context and its followership, thereby confirming results from Gibbs et al. (2008) and Alvesson and Spicer (2011).

Our findings also point to leaders' need of carefully designed support in their leadership roles. It is therefore our recommendation that universities initiate such support for local leaders, and that further research explores designs and outcomes of such support. The programme described here builds on the idea of forming a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), providing leaders with an opportunity to create personal networks with other leaders in similar roles (as suggested by Scott et al., 2008), to reflect upon leadership and followership, to exchange experiences, and to develop a more complex understanding of leadership. The participants' projects in the programme provide the opportunity to actually develop something in their own context. Additionally the project reports, written and peer-reviewed within the programme, constitute scholarly artefacts that can be used for the benefit of other leaders in similar roles within and outside the organisation. These artefacts demonstrate leadership in theory as well as leadership in practice from different local academic contexts. The university as an organisation thereby creates a bridge across the gap, identified by Middlehurst (2008), between leadership in theory and leadership in practice.

The balance between external and internal mandates appears as worth considerable attention. This paper has described four different cases where that balance differs, to illustrate variations in possible actions, actions taken and resulting outcomes. One conclusion from our study is that the internal mandate is the most crucial for leaders aiming at development in their local teaching and learning culture. Future research could explore the relations between external and internal mandates further, in relation to leadership in academia. Taking our material into consideration we could potentially unpack the leadership metaphor about herding cats, and hypothesize that it comes from experiences where leaders lack internal mandate, even though they may have external mandate through their leadership positions. Future research could explore and reveal more nuances here.

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