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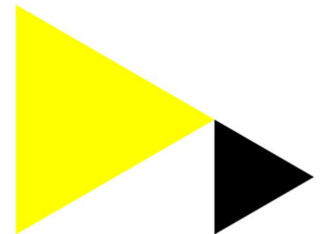

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Reflections on the Multiple Layers of Organisational Change

Didi M. E. Griffioen

Introduction

The developments that have led to this book were more practical than theoretical: The many conversations over time about this single, large change programme in an applied university resulted in the awareness that a thorough and systematic body of knowledge that could underpin such changes was lacking. Many in the Amsterdam university as well as from outside of it reached out to the change team for support, asking for insights and ideas about how to get a university moving towards a change in research–education connections. Asking for proof about what would work in their change process. Obviously, the option of change already had entered these colleagues' minds, but many others were made aware of these possibilities, often by pointing out an opportunity for improvement just placed in between the lines of conversations about other topics. This awareness of potentially large effects of simple efforts sparked the idea that telling our change story in a book, positioned in the context of the current body of literature on change management and the body of knowledge on the research–teaching nexus, could assist many in seeing new options for change in their own setting. Hopefully, others are also willing to systematically share their experience, so a collective body of knowledge about changing research–education connections is brought to life.

By way of conclusion, this chapter offers a reflection on all previous chapters, lightly touching on what has not yet been stated, but more so integrating the different perspectives of the previous chapters. First, the actual changes in the Amsterdam setting are considered through the lens of successes of change programmes. Second, the combined findings of the different monitoring

instruments are examined. Finally, this results in a reflection on the usability of the multi-layered model for change presented in this book.

Success of Changing Research–Education Connections

There is not much systematically known about the success of change programmes in higher education. Only very few scholars have contributed to this field of successful change. Mostly found are the reflections of former presidents, generalisations of instruments, change instruments as isolated actions due to the lack of theoretical frameworks and a lack of detail for choosing quantitative measures. Kezar and Eckel (2002) did empirically study the change process of multiple higher-education institutes. Based on six of these higher education institutes and following a teleological framework, they identified five common core instruments across all six institutes: senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development, and visible action. The Amsterdam programme is here reflected upon based on these five factors.

The first factor to consider is senior administrative support, which implies that the senior administrators take ownership of the change process, including launching the initiative, chairing discussions, providing financial resources, creating new structures, and actively valuing of what is going well. The senior administration takes full responsibility for the change programme, although there also is a visible division between the different administrators. At the top level, not all easily follow the path of sensemaking and the stages of awareness and desire. Often, top administrators are asking for interventions that resonated more with ADKAR's stage of reinforcement, such as imposing definitions of research, or making judgements about changes made in individual educational programmes instead of providing the individuals in the organisation with the time to create their own definitions and become owners of the new research–education connections. Top management and their secretaries need to become aware of the potential that could be unleashed if stakeholders are put into motion without initial restrictions, obviously to provide guidelines and therefore implicit later on in the developments. At the programme level, the dean responsible for the strategic programme played his public role well, making time to chair sessions and discuss strategy frequently and very publicly. However, with a structure of making the faculty deans each responsible for a different strategic programme, the other faculty deans differed a lot in their investment in this

particular strategic programme, ranging from almost co-partnering to being almost fully absent from the public eye on this topic.

As explained in Chapters 1 and 2, the Amsterdam programme very much leaned on collaborative leadership, also Kezar and Eckel's (2002) second factor of success, which yields to 'creating avenues for involvement through workshops, symposiums and roundtables, open invitations throughout the process' (p. 312). They explain how examples also show central administrators providing the autonomy to develop their own change results and craft their own new system.

The difficulty of the programme being heavy on collaboration and autonomy reduced its success on the visible action factor, which consists of both visible and active participation in change activities and the visible (intermediate) effects of the change process. Forums, newsletters, various groups' presentations and visible pilot projects can be part of this instrument. The collective activities of the programme were very visible, also because visibility across the university was part of the programme's mechanism for change: To see change makes wanting to be in the change. However, its foundation in collaborative leadership made it difficult to scale up or even capture changes, and it was therefore not easy to make successes visible, while there were so many successes. Administrators and policy officers often asked for examples of some specific development for formal reports and often find the changes too subtle and only context relevant. Furthermore, the programme team was strategically reluctant to present 'best practices' because it would result in copying behaviour and/or a reduction of the autonomy the educational teams needed for their sensemaking processes. This reduced the changes' formal visibility across the university. Thus, where the programme execution was very visible, its success is not so easy to show or see.

The next factor of success is a robust design that focuses on the results of the change process, including a direction to move forward and a flexible plan to guide institutional actions. As explained in Chapter 1, a design for change can rise from long-term debate of grassroots development, or be planned, but it is important for the plan's content to be embraced by the wider group of colleagues, therefore making the change programme more formal. The Amsterdam programme was very much based on planned change, but was only thinly defined. This strategy provided the firmness derived from top management's involvement, combined with the space needed to be flexible. However, due to having limited planning on paper, the Amsterdam programme very much leaned into the strategic choices made between the programme-owning dean and the programme leader, which was backed by the university's chairman. With this approach of feeling where to go next, not many strategic choices could be delegated, as was difficult for giving

workshops and masterclasses. Therefore, the increase in competency was placed within very few colleagues and the increase of activities across the university provided a risk to its quality. Efforts to transfer the insights and skills were not too successful. The 'on-the-go' design just based on a few sharply formulated overall aims provided wonderful flexibility up to a certain number of educational teams, but particularly the shift of the programme leader additionally becoming a full professor illustrated how thinly spread the competences in the programme team were. A different set-up would have made the programme much less flexible and much slower in providing developments across the university, but would potentially have made the changes more robust in the long run.

There are two relevant perspectives to the last factor of staff development. This factor should assist in providing people with the leadership and skills 'to more effectively communicate, make decisions, and provide input on the change initiative' (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 312). First of all, staff development can be seen as similar to the awareness and desire stages of the ADKAR model. The Amsterdam programme focused on these two stages and was very successful in bringing leadership and skills in this regard to the stakeholders in the different educational teams. Towards the end of the strategic programme's five years, this success was even expanded to policy departments, research teams and participatory councils across the university. However, there is another perspective to this factor, which the ADKARs stages of knowledge and ability can capture. These stages were not part of the five-year plan.

The need for these next stages became more visible towards the end of the five-year term. The more stakeholders that were actively and willingly getting involved in changing research–education connections, the louder their request became for 'the right solutions', 'the best choices', and 'the most proper practices'. As explained throughout this book, these examples are lacking and one can wonder if they are conceptually possible due to the contextuality of research–education connections. Also, there was an increased request for full partnership in detailed curriculum changes, for which no sufficient funding or personnel was available. Optimistically, one can say that the university had been made ready for the next two ADKAR stages. However, the feeling of disappointment with the educational teams about limitations to the help offered also was very present. This disappointment might partly be countered by the newly created research group (project 5). Paradoxically, as long as the ability of those involved does not stretch to the awareness that research–education connections cannot be realised through quick fixes, likely the disappointment remains.

Not disregarding its potential for improvement, we can conclude that in the Amsterdam programme, origin, content, approach, phases, and factors were made interdependently fitting to its particular situation; an Amsterdam balance was created for its change programme for research–education connections. This makes the Amsterdam programme an important example for future change programmes to alter research–education connections. As Kezar and Eckel (2002, p. 304) state: 'What elements and strategies specifically need to be balanced and the ways in which balance occurs are defined within each organisation as dictated by institutional type, culture, and context'.

Therefore, the Amsterdam programme has been consistent with Buller's (2015) three more fluent guidelines that can be considered the most important ones: It has considered changing the university as a collective voyage of discovery and not a line of firm decisions; it has provided the time and energy to let change grow from within, even when the start of the change was top-down imposed; and the programmes' content, approach, phases, and factors were not only focused on the proposed changes, but also built further on its origin. To appreciate the current situation and to understand how the organisations' people might change from there, provided the foundation of an effective change programme.

The Monitored Changes across the University's Layers

Change agents can often provide the perspective of success as described above: they reflect on the successes and failures of change programmes. While these insights are valuable, they also lack a more objective insight that could follow from a more scientific, longitudinal approach that takes place during the change programme and is closely designed in reference to its mechanism for change.

As explained in the Introduction and in Chapters 1 and 2, the mechanism of a change programme consists of:

1. the combined direction for action that follows from a topic origin,
2. a clear definition of the proposed content connected to particular organisational layers,
3. insight into the change context that can influence its result,
4. an approach that is flexible and fits the content, and
5. some type of phases the stakeholders can be expected to go through in their development.

Finally, Chapter 3 has shown that hands-on tools are needed to put the mechanism into action; in the Amsterdam case to let the stakeholders start discussing research–education connections, with different discussions relevant for each of them.

The systematic, objective monitoring of changes was designed across the university and closely related to the mechanism of the Amsterdam change programme. The systematic monitoring of change over time was captured in four measurement instruments: in the changes in the lecturers' and students' perceptions (Chapter 4); changes in the rationales of bachelor's curricula (Chapter 5); changes in the learning goals of bachelor's curricula (Chapter 6); and changes in the job descriptions of searched-for employees nationally (Chapter 7). Including such systematic monitoring instruments, which clearly reach beyond the generally more superficial focus of instruments of policy monitoring, provided a more in-depth insight into the developments across Amsterdam UAS.

These measurements have shown that there was a difference between the increased excitement among the stakeholders who chose to be part of changing research–education connections – about 600 at the end of the programme of about 3,700 lecturers – less substantial changes can be seen among the larger group stakeholders in the university, through the monitoring instruments that addressed the wider university or national developments. Chapter 4 by Bruinsma and Griffioen has shown that the lecturers' perceptions did not change so much between 2016 and 2019; lecturers continued to worry about the disconnectedness of research in the curriculum with other parts of the curriculum, especially the professionalism into which students are trained. Students mirrored these perceptions in 2019 (they were not asked in 2016) and generally felt that research could and should be better connected to the professional they were expected to become. Further, if research was to be expected of them, the build-up across the curriculum should be improved to serve them better.

The focus on the students' professionalism found in the perception measurements resonates with one of the four foci found in the chapter by Van Ooijen-Van der Linden and colleagues who wondered: Why would research be included in a bachelor's programme? They discovered four reasons, of which the first is similar to the perceptions found among stakeholders: to serve the profession. Other reasons were: to serve the student, to serve the educational programme by raising its quality and the university or national frameworks expect it. The last reason was rather instrumental: to work within the requested frameworks. In the first-time frame, a few educational programmes did not

mention any reason. In the second-time frame, all educational programmes had arguments about why they included research in their curricula, resulting in a relative increase of all four types of arguments. Based on that notion, one can say that at least the committees writing the quality enhancement self-reports of educational teams – the data unit of this study – increased in their language possibilities for research–education connections.

This again resonates with the findings of the chapter by Van Ooijen-Van der Linden and colleagues about changes in learning goals of bachelor's curricula. This rather time-consuming study provided a much more detailed insight into how the language educational programmes use in their own curriculum descriptions changed over time. The detailed findings per faculty can be found in the corresponding chapter. The overall conclusion of these colleagues is that the changes are subtle and can be mostly seen in learning goals changing from being rather fuzzy to being more focused. Similar to the changes in rationales, one could say that there is an increase in clarity of language to be used to argue about research in the curriculum, in this case about learning goals. Considering that learning goals are expected to capture the clear, testable content of an educational programme, clarity is highly beneficial. However, the authors argue that an increased clarity can result in a risk for the research's position in the curriculum when learning goals are formulated in a rather instrumental manner. Especially when the curriculum's rationale is more instrumental, and therefore the 'why' of what a student is expecting to learn is lacking, thus there is the risk of learning the student tricks instead of providing them with sensible and usable knowledge.

The final monitoring study by Daas and colleagues provides insight into whether changes at the national level can be seen in the type of lecturers that are hired to create teaching and learning arrangements together with their students that can connect research to professionalism. That study's findings are complex and yield how research competences are increasingly valued because fewer lecturers are sought after that have research tasks but no research competences. However, fewer lecturer-researchers are requested, and more teachers without research tasks or competences are requested. Thus, it seems that research competences are taken more seriously, but are less sought after, which most likely does not increase students' interactions with researchers. The authors argue that organisational characteristics – such as separated budgets and responsibilities for research and education – are likely limiting factors for hiring combined personnel. However, the presence of research ability in the wider organisation, especially at shop-floor level, is an important prerogative

to further the developments in research–education connections. A larger ability among new personnel would make it easier to create the changes in the knowledge and ability stages of the ADKAR model.

The Relevance of Multi-layer Change

The multi-layers of changing research–education practices have been visible throughout this book, and were explicated in Chapter 1. As argued here, it is important to be aware of the possible negative and positive influences that can result from the multiplicity of perspectives across the university's multiple organisational layers, and sometimes beyond to regional and national policy. This goes beyond Jenkins and Healey's (2005) notion that the different organisational layers should be aligned to best benefit student learning. The additional argument made here is that the multiple organisational layers can influence each other's change processes and therefore provide opportunities for university change agents. The argument shown through this book is that change agents need to have their own specialism at the crossroads of knowing about organisational change, knowing about the topic at hand – here the research–education nexus – and how to bring these hands-on into a change programme in a university. This specialism, as well as the multi-layeredness of organisational change on a certain topic, also complicates conversations with stakeholders, lecturers, and central administrators alike. Generally, university stakeholders reason from their own perspective and it is up to change agents to be knowledgeable across layers, to follow in the lead of their collocutor and to bring other 'layers' into their perspective when beneficial. This requests change agents to have a deep insight into theory and practice of organisational change, as well as knowledge of the specific topic at hand. Further, as long as systematic studies that could bring these perspectives together remain mostly absent, change agents need to benefit from theory-embedded case studies, such as presented in this book.

One conclusion from this book is that organisational change that addresses the core of a university is complex and takes a lot of time and energy to achieve small-level changes, such as in lecturers' language usage. Many universities work along a five-year plan, as was done in the Amsterdam case. As this book has shown, the changes achieved in the awareness about the organisational direction, and the desire to contribute to this direction were accomplished among a substantial core group. Educational programmes were changed and

debates about connections between research and professional practices took place in many educational teams. However, considering the changes found in the perceptions of the larger group of lecturers from a rather soft perspective, or in the job application texts from a more firm organisational perspective, then not so much has changed. This implies that administrators should perceive these types of changes in a much longer perspective, and should align different change programmes over time to achieve more substantial changes. Only very few are willing to do so at the national (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2015) or local level (Fung, 2017), and generally, they are countered as soon as they are replaced in office.

A similar call can be formulated for higher-education research. Where substantial changes in a university can only be captured across a university, in its multiple layers, and over a longer duration, it is important that instruments are developed to capture these changes. Obviously, it is easier to capture change through analysing documents as the carrier of a particular narrative or time frame. However, as we have shown in this book, some changes can be captured through documents – such as changes in written curriculum rationales, written learning goals, or job openings – but others can only be captured by actively asking, such as in the lecturers' perceptions in this book. The different data carriers resulted in different insights on the changes at this university, which showed a different segment – or layer – of the change at that time. These are again other perspectives than instruments administrators used in the same university, such as the judgement of educational quality enhancement agencies, the number of lecturers or students working in research or the increasing number of PhD graduates among lecturers. This case study has shown that it is important to consider what indicators are rich enough to capture the changes that one intends to see. However, the case study also shows that reaching for these indicators is time consuming and takes a lot of effort, energy and patience. That said, to have a proper insight into the shop-floor changes, it is wise to make at least some effort.

Final Remark

The authors of this book have aimed to contribute to the integrated conceptual fields of organisational change, the research–education nexus, and a more hands-on perspective of changing research–education connections across the university. Our ambition is to present more research-informed practices on

such a complex topic by providing a more integrated knowledge base between these fields. Hopefully, others follow in this lead to share practices positioned in the wider literature base. For the future, we hope for more instruments for systematic research, for more tools for changing practice, and that the conceptual connections between the three fields are deepened. This book's authors very much would like to invite others to share their own work to help achieve these goals.

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