Appreciative development research to support the teaching culture of university academic staff

Katrin Karu and Katrin Aava, Tallinn University

ABSTRACT

The need for this study stemmed from the central idea of improving teaching competencies, as formulated in the development plan of Tallinn University. Following numerous, but ultimately fruitless, discussions with the university staff on the issue of learning culture we turned to an appreciative approach of development research, enabling us to listen to all of the stakeholders and to consider their previous positive experience. As a result of the development research, it became clear that the skills of supporting the academic staff should be learnt in the organisation on a daily basis in co-creation and inclusive participation of the parties, and we created a model to support the professional development of the academic staff. This article presents the outcomes of this approach, outlining a set of principles supporting the professional development of the academic staff at Tallinn University and providing an analysis of how the implementation of these principles has worked in practice. We based our analysis on the theoretical view that the professional development of academic staff at the university is supported in professional communities as collaborative learning. This occurs mainly through professional networks and communities of practice, providing important support in adapting to, understanding, and embracing educational change and thus enabling academic staff to take greater responsibility for the development of education, both in their organisation and in society at large, whilst transforming relationships at the university into more trusting and supportive ones. We also demonstrate how the development research approach has influenced the university's learning culture, and the importance of supporting networking and institutional learning at the university. This study offers one possible practical experience to support the professional development of academic staff using appreciative development research to study and develop learning culture.

Keywords: professional development, learning culture, institutional learning, development research

Introduction

The central idea in the development plan of Tallinn University (TLU) presupposes the application of a modern approach to learning and focuses on the improvement of teaching competencies. The new academic staff attestation system of the TLU launched in 2019 places more emphasis on teaching, supervision and study development activities alongside research and publishing. Already in 2014, the institutional accreditation assessment reports of the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency pointed out that it is important for universities to move from traditional staff and subject centred teaching to collaborative learning and teaching that supports the individual and social development of students (Udam et al., 2015).

Kindsiko (2020) points out that the high-level rankings of Estonian universities are based on the results of researchers, while teaching is of low quality. The assessment criteria for the ranking are the university's learning environment, the impact of research results, the return on contracts with companies, and internationalisation (The World University …, 2020). Tallinn University ranks on the 801th-1000th place,

and the lowest assessment has been given to the learning environment (16.9). The learning environment is understood as both the physical learning environment and teaching, including the prestige of the academic staff, their successors, and the teaching itself.

Based on research conducted at TLU, students perceive teaching as a one-way transfer of knowledge, while the academic staff perceive that they work together to support the students' development (Jõgi et al., 2015). Research also indicates that the academic staff at TLU do not see themselves as implementers of the modern approach to learning, but rather acknowledge their lack of strength in adapting to the change (Põlda & Aava, 2016). Students' perceptions of studying at university (Karu, 2020) also indicate that they do not want to remain mere performers in the role of a passive recipient and anonymous for the academic staff. In this case, teaching is only a one-sided activity that takes place under the dictation of the academic as an expert, and no in-depth learning experience is developed. According to Jõgi and Ümarik (2019) teaching practice in TLU has been experienced differently by academics, one of the problematic issues being that teaching is practised in isolation. Research also points to a clear dissonance between teachers' beliefs and behaviour (Feixas & Euler, 2012; Põlda & Aava 2016).

Every innovation in higher education is resource intensive, however, less than 30% of them are successful (Kezar, 2013). The researchers point out (Pata et al., 2020) that while innovation might be inspiring for a participant on an individual level, it may encounter opposition on an institutional level as it is not in line with established beliefs and evaluation criteria and, therefore, can be met with criticism within the spirit of the old organisational culture. According to researchers (Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 2009), good learning and teaching practices are not spreading and many educational reforms are failing because institutionalised political and economic relations primarily support subject-based teaching.

Various studies indicate that the ways in which academic staff understand their teaching practice are related and influenced by the local context, including the discursive ideology and the learning culture represented by the home university (Harris, 2005; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Sarv, 2013). International research focuses on finding innovative teaching practices in university education (Tasler & Dale, 2021; Sweeny, 2021) and supporting the professional development of academic staff (Feixas & Euler, 2012; Peacock & DePacido, 2018; Turner-Wilson, 2018) as well as institutional change, including the learning culture (Biesta et al., 2017; Euler, 2010; Feixas & Zellweger, 2010; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2016). These topics have also been highlighted in Estonian higher education research in the last decade (e.g. Kindsiko, 2020; Karu, 2020; Sarv, 2013; Uiboleht, 2019). According to the TLU Development Plan (2020-2022) new teaching practices can be born from evidence-based decisions, with a cross-disciplinary approach being a prerequisite for developing academic staff's teaching competencies, enabling collaboration and dialogue to influence changes in the learning culture both at university and in society at large.

A focus on learning culture has become an important research and development activity at universities, and researchers and developers from different institutions have joined international networks and communities (e.g. ISSOTL, EuroSOTL). In order to bring about change, a learning culture must be developed in co-creation at the university in order to support the comprehensive development of the academic staff. The initial task of our study was to develop a model to support the development of the academic staff at TLU.

The learning culture at the university for supporting the academic staff

According to the modern approach to learning, the central activities of learning are participation, working together, and co-creation, which emphasises the relationships between people, where everyone is in the role of a learner (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). In a changing educational environment, a supportive and inclusive learning culture for the academic staff is where effective solutions are created in cooperation networks and people learn from each other. The conceptual framework of the university's learning culture includes individual, communicative, and institutional dimensions, contained in assumptions, practical knowledge, implicit norms, and individual beliefs (Euler, 2010; Feixas & Zellweger, 2010). Support for learning is defined through trust and collaboration, and changing the learning culture is

linked to the development of academic units (Euler, 2010). The university's learning culture cannot be changed by one party, it cannot be changed institutionally from the top down or from the bottom up; all parties must be empowered through cooperation to bring about educational innovation, and this happens in social interaction between education stakeholders (Biesta et al., 2017).

The individual dimension of the learning culture focuses on human agency and empowerment. People are effective and empowered when they have the influence/authority and expertise to make decisions (Cross et al., 2017). Empowerment means valuing self-efficacy, commitment and motivation (Luechauer & Shulman, 1992), and it is a collaborative learning culture that increases self-confidence and the courage to manage situations (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Biesta et al. (2017) present ecological factors that hinder the development of agency in teaching; and while in a psychological approach the individual is accused of not using their autonomy, the ecological view stresses the impact of the environment. Therefore, in changing behaviour, it is not so much the individual, but social practice - a network of meaningful talks and actions in a specific social environment – that is considered key (Warde & Southerton, 2012). Instead of changing the individual, the focus is on interpersonal networks of relationships, including power relations (Vihalemm et al., 2015). Fullan (2001) and Fullan et al. (2018) also accentuate the improvement and involvement of relationships as the biggest success factor. A new learning and teaching culture is shaped by organisational culture, administrative procedures and regulations as well as positive and negative feedback from teaching and colleagues (Pata et al., 2020).

The idea of the nature of learning plays a culturally decisive role in determining the parties' attitudes towards teaching and learning, which in turn is expressed in interpersonal communication in the organisation (Säljö, 2003). The change in learning and teaching culture is supported by the move from individual, formal learning to collegial and informal learning, which can involve conversations and discussion groups (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009). One of the factors in the well-being of academic staff is the opportunity to make sense of/reflect on their teaching activities together (Ylänne et al., 2019). Therefore, individuals and communities should be meaningfully involved in interventions and empowered to bring about change (Blue et al., 2016). The role of the university is to create these opportunities institutionally, and in addition to the formal ones (assessment, reporting) to also support informal ones, such as networks where staff can share their experience and collaboratively study and develop teaching.

According to a report issued by the Association of European Universities (Gaebel & Zhang, 2018), there is an important focus on institutional learning. This is confirmed by the view that individual learning can remain tacit, while institutional learning enables members of an organisation to create repetitive learning processes based on a critical analysis of past practices and experiences to drive change (Smith, 2016). This supports continuous adaptation, learning from one's own experience, but also questioning the validity of earlier activities and positions. It is important to do this in communities of practice.

The learning of academic staff can be interpreted in communities of activity with the help of Wenger's (2009) theory, according to which social learning includes goal-setting, meaningfulness, and belonging to the community. Collaborative learning, mainly professional networks and learning communities, is an important support for adapting to, understanding and embracing educational change (Brouwer et al., 2012). Networking gives greater responsibility for the development of education in one's own organisation and in society at large, making relationships more trusting and supportive (Johns-Shepherd & Gowing, 2007; Forte & Flores, 2014). The non-hierarchical management/leadership style in educational institutions supports the model of practice communities characteristic of the knowledge society, which promotes the sharing of knowledge and experience and problem-solving that is horizontal and non-hierarchical (Wenger et al., 2002), giving the academic staff the opportunity to contribute to the development in line with the university's mission (Serrano & Kreber, 2014).

The identity of the academic staff is strengthened by contextual factors (work environment, contact with students and development activities) and psychological processes (sense of acceptance, competence, connection and vision of the future career) (Van Lankveld et al., 2017). Institutional empowerment and scholarship of teaching and learning have thus become the main focus of supporting the professional

development of academic staff (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2016). Learning and teaching at university are influenced by (Euler, 2010):

- awareness (programmatic messages, constant keeping of academic staff's teaching methods and practices on the agenda both in the media and in management activities, involvement of managers);

- empowerment (training courses, coaching / supervision, provision of teaching materials, sharing of good practices, activities of communities of practice);

- grants (resources for supporting innovative teaching, awards for excellent / best teaching, highlighting outstanding courses);

- structural framework (teaching as a requirement when working at a university, teaching as an important part of an academic's career model and promotion)

In order to support the professional development of academic staff, it is important to create common meanings and a common language through co-creation and development activities, to search for solutions to problems on the basis of research, and to develop ideas in networks in order to achieve common action plans and their implementation. This activity must also be supported at the normative and legislative level at the university.

The methodology of the development research

As developers-researchers, we set the goal of creating a model for supporting the professional development of the academic staff at TLU. The value of development research is in combining theory and practice. It offers a practical research-based solution to complex practical problems in educational research, for which there is no single answer. Theoretical sources, past experience and best practices are used to define the problem, and the primary application is outlined on this basis (Plomp, 2010).

We conducted the study based on the logic of the development research process and using the principles of appreciative inquiry (AI). Namely, AI helps first to clarify the best available practices and participants' experiences through a collective discovery process, then a vision is formulated and, through collaborative dialogue, an understanding is created of how to move forward (Bushe, 2012). Appreciative research has also been used successfully by academic developers to support change in other universities, such as the development of nursing at Kristianstad University (Fäldt & Larsson, 2017). First, one needs to know the context, then achieve authentic involvement, create a safe zone for the desired change, and only then will the group start formulating the desired change. What was perceived as the biggest challenge was that when working on a voluntary basis, not everyone gets involved and the whole team may not accept the change (Fäldt & Larsson, 2017). According to Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) an AI approach involves 4 distinct elements: grounded observation to identify the best of what is; vision and logic to identify ideals of what might be; collaborative dialogue and choice to achieve consent about what should be; and collective experimentation to discover what can be.

In the preliminary study phase, we developed a theoretical framework by using Estonian and international experience. To collect the data we analysed documents (various strategy documents, summaries of higher education didactics projects, analyses of teacher development activities) and conducted interviews with key people. The parties to the learning culture in our study are the management of the institutes, the student council, the coordinators of the innovation project integrating various disciplines, and the rectorate. Using the AI approach, based on the assumption that organisations are socially constructed phenomena and that involvement of a university's various stakeholders into creation of the prototype also supports implementation of the change, we organised development days (in January and May 2017) to create

intra-university cooperation networks and strengthen the trans-university network. To create the prototype, we asked for input from the university's staff development network, representatives of the institutes that participated in the development days, and the teaching skills development consultants of the university of Tartu. Based on the preliminary study, we compiled research questions and conducted eight focus group interviews with the management of seven academic units (one college and six institutes) on the basis of AI. As interviewers, we focused on solutions, not criticism.

We interviewed members of the management from different academic units of Tallinn University: Institute of Educational Sciences (HTI), the Institute of Humanities (TÜHI), the Institute of Digital Technologies (DTI), the Institute of Natural Sciences (LTI), the Baltic Film, Media Arts and Communication Institute (BFM), the Institute of Social Sciences (UTI), and Haapsalu College in order to understand their experiences in supporting the professional development of their academic staff. The central interview questions were as follows.

- How do you envisage support for the professional development of academic staff in your institute now and in the future?

- What support and collaboration do you need from the university?

- What cooperation opportunities with other institutes do you think are required to be able to create a common learning culture?

In the prototype phase, we developed a model to support the professional development of academic staff. Based on AI we used collective design which helps to implement the desired vision and ensures sustainability (Kessler, 2013). The aim of the evaluation phase was to assess whether and how stakeholders could use the model effectively. The prototype was evaluated by internal stakeholders (representatives of institutes and academic staff) and external experts (from PHS Zurich, University of Durham). Based on the evaluation results, we implemented changes and finalised the model to support the professional development of the academic staff and submitted proposals to the Vice-Rector for Research. The principles presented in the model started to be implemented in 2019, and in the reflection phase we assessed their functioning, highlighting good initiatives, bottlenecks and challenges in implementing the model, which we present in the discussion part of the article. We evaluate the outcome of the model's implementation as of 2022.

Results

Based on the analysis of the documents, it became clear that Tallinn University has competence in the field of higher education didactics and long-term training activities; experience in participating in working groups and networks, including international ones; and research. Since 2001 the subject of higher education didactics has been an optional subject in doctoral studies. In 2005-2008 the staff participated in the LÜKKA programme that focused on increasing the competitiveness of the TLU graduates via the development of the teaching quality. The programme 'PRIMUS' in 2009-2014 increased the quality of teaching at the tertiary level. TLU is developing an academic staff evaluation system and the student feedback system is improved. The educational innovation is supported by the university-wide integration of disciplines (ELU) and the active network of academics and management culture that has developed around it. In 2016 the EU structural support project, 'Implementation of a modern approach to learning and development of competence centres in universities', was launched, where higher education didactics is one of the measures. It became apparent that the university lacks the mechanisms to involve the academic staff in training and development activities in order to support their teaching and deal with the students' feedback. As the new evaluation system being implemented is based on the academic staff's self-assessment, it is essential to support self-analysis and self-reflection skills.

The results of the interviews revealed that the institutes and the college offer different opportunities for academic staff for professional development, e.g. special training courses, seminars, experience cafés, curriculum development days, etc. University-wide regular working groups and networks for both the academic staff and heads of institutes (daily informal communication is also valued) and supervisors (example 1) also serve as a form of professional development. Working groups set up to address different topics (e. g the Good Academic Practice Working Group) that support professional development were highlighted.

> Such a common learning culture in some ways takes place through a network of study heads. In fact, we have such networks all over the university, other networks where we share problems, find universal solutions, both for students and academic staff … The working groups also exist so that different institutes can learn from each other. (Example 1)

The interviewees pointed out that the academic staff are trusted, their autonomy is valued (example 2) and over-regulation avoided (example 3), and the voluntary participation of the staff in development opportunities is supported (example 4).

> … it is important to emphasise the academic staff's own responsibility more, because then they will understand it most accurately. (Example 2)

> Excessive over-regulation is not good, rather such rules come when there is a problem … A good example of creating a learning culture is the discussion taking place [at the institute] about the competence teachers should have. (Example 3)

> The idea of a development format is, for example, an experience café, which is voluntary. (Example 4)

The short training seminars offered by the human resources department (for example, the training seminar for new employees, digital skills) and language courses are viewed as satisfactory. In several institutes development days for academic staff, training in teaching methods, and curriculum development days have been organised within the framework of the inspiration project regarding university didactics.

It is considered important that the university values the professional development of both academic staff and the heads of the curricula and finds resources to develop a mentoring system (example 5) and provide individual and group counselling opportunities.

> A mentoring system should exist, but not on the basis of personal eagerness, that we find an academic staff in the institute who does it for free. (Example 5)

Launched in 2016, the interdisciplinary project LIFE is a success story, supporting the teaching and mentoring competencies of the academic staff.

According to the interviewees, the so-called 'money pack walls' have grown between the institutes, making competition an obstacle to development, but there is a new hope in the inter-institute cooperation fund.

In addition to the previous shared part, in the Institute of Educational Sciences (HTI), the Institute of Humanities (TÜHI), the Institute of Digital Technologies (DTI), the Institute of Natural Sciences (LTI), the Baltic Film, Media Arts and Communication Institute (BFM), the Institute of Social Sciences (UTI) and Haapsalu College, the following observations were highlighted as relevant in supporting the professional development of the academic staff (see Figure 1).
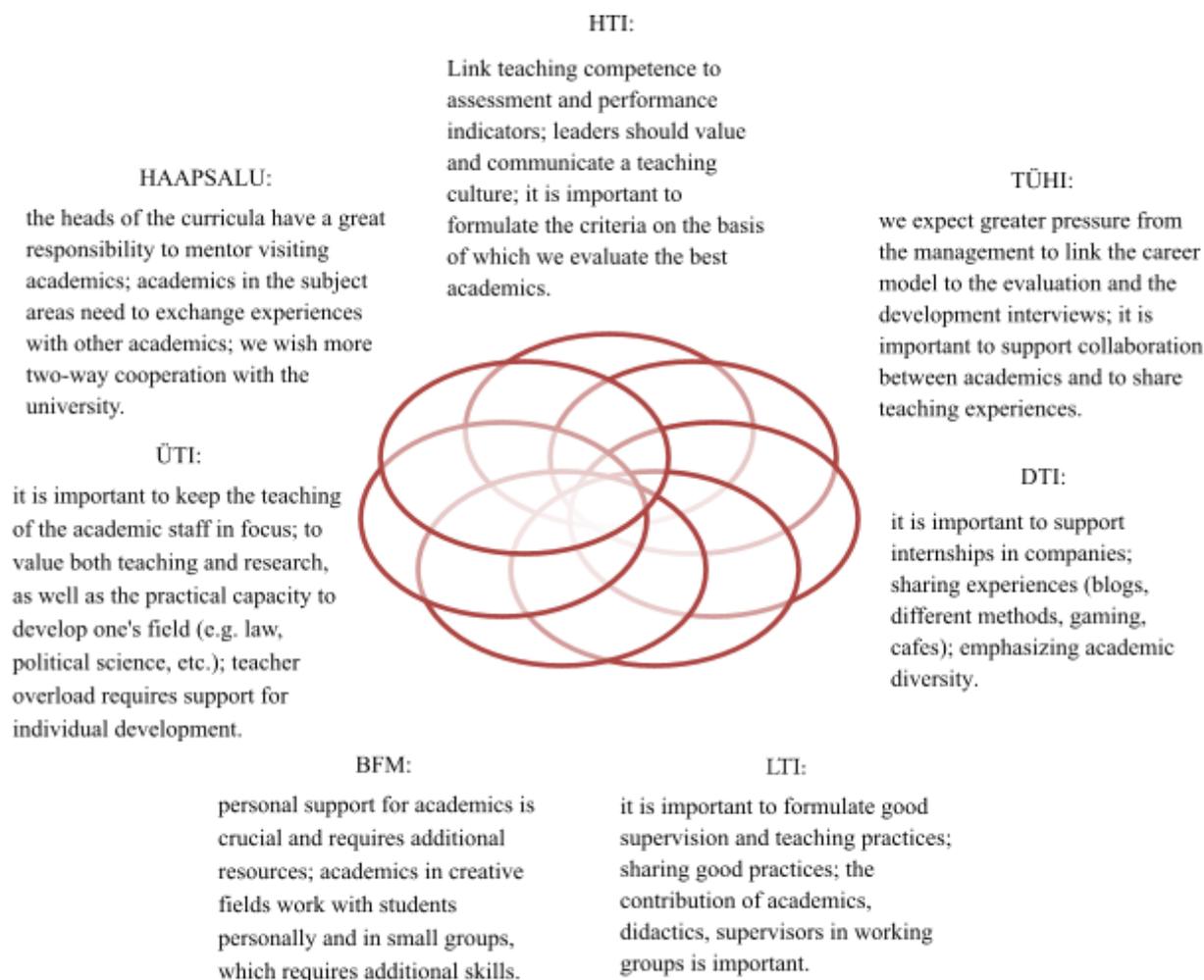
HTI:

Link teaching competence to assessment and performance indicators; leaders should value and communicate a teaching culture; it is important to formulate the criteria on the basis of which we evaluate the best academics.

HAAPSALU:

the heads of the curricula have a great responsibility to mentor visiting academics; academics in the subject areas need to exchange experiences with other academics; we wish more two-way cooperation with the university.

TÜHI:

we expect greater pressure from the management to link the career model to the evaluation and the development interviews; it is important to support collaboration between academics and to share teaching experiences.

ÜTI:

it is important to keep the teaching of the academic staff in focus; to value both teaching and research, as well as the practical capacity to develop one's field (e.g. law, political science, etc.); teacher overload requires support for individual development.

DTI:

it is important to support internships in companies; sharing experiences (blogs, different methods, gaming, cafes); emphasizing academic diversity.

BFM:

personal support for academics is crucial and requires additional resources; academics in creative fields work with students personally and in small groups, which requires additional skills.

LTI:

it is important to formulate good supervision and teaching practices; sharing good practices; the contribution of academics, didactics, supervisors in working groups is important.

Figure 1 The proposals by the management of the institutes for supporting the development of their academic staff

Based on the above theory, empirical research and the experience of the researchers, we formulated the findings that we took into account when developing the prototype.

1. Supporting the professional development of university academic staff must be a systematic process. So far, the academic staff have used various opportunities based on individual choices, e.g. participation in training programmes (e.g. with the support of PRIMUS) that have been wish-based rather than needs-based. We see the culture of interruptions as the biggest threat at TLU. The impact of previous projects (Lükka 2005-2008; Primus 2009-2014) has not been studied and therefore also not made meaning of, and the cooperation between different educational innovators is accidental. A project-based approach is not always needs-based and does not promote sustainable networking.
2. Heads of institutes, heads of studies and academic staff must be involved in the analysis / assessment of the development needs of the academic staff. Management support is important for the academics, as is making it visible in joint activities.
3. Communication on the support and appreciation of academic staff is important, since it makes this

   area of focus visible at the organisational level.

4. It is important to support academic staff networks that ensure the dissemination of good practice across institutes and to disseminate the practices of the working groups of academic staff's education didactics more widely in the university.
5. In the view of students, initiatives on learning and teaching disappear after a while. On the one hand, this is due to the lack of involvement of students and, on the other hand, to the fact that these initiatives are not visible and disappear when the enthusiasts get tired or leave.
6. It is important to unambiguously define 'good' academic staff, but at the same time, we want to maintain variability, because in the academic environment it is good to accept different cultures and ways of thinking, based on university-wide communication practices.

The principles for supporting the professional development of the academic staff

We developed the model in the form of cells and on three levels, emphasising the horizontal nature of the relationships and highlighting the importance and interconnection of networks (Figure 2). Based on the scientific literature (Euler, 2010; Feixas & Zellweger, 2010), we focused on the personal, communication and institutional levels. To do that, we created three levels in the model: for members of academic staff, for the learning and collaboration community, and for the organisation. The model focuses on supporting and facilitating inter-institutional cooperation, taking into account all the existing working groups and institutional practices, namely the system of recognition, assessment, feedback, and in-service training. Development is accentuated in the model, because development activities aimed at the academic staff are multifaceted and involve different parties, which is why the cooperation of stakeholders at each stage is crucial. To ensure sustainability, we mapped the resources that create the preconditions for implementing the model.

In the model, we also highlight the principles of the university's strategy, which are professionalism, quality, solidarity and openness. The university's strategy also stresses that the needs of society should be in focus, with the goal of being a leader of a smart lifestyle. This means, in particular, evidence-based decisions to help members of society cope better with complex social challenges and to design solutions together with stakeholders. It is important to focus on the same principle in the created model, because university members' coping abilities, including those of academic staff, enables their leadership.

A MODEL FOR SUPPORTING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACADEMIC
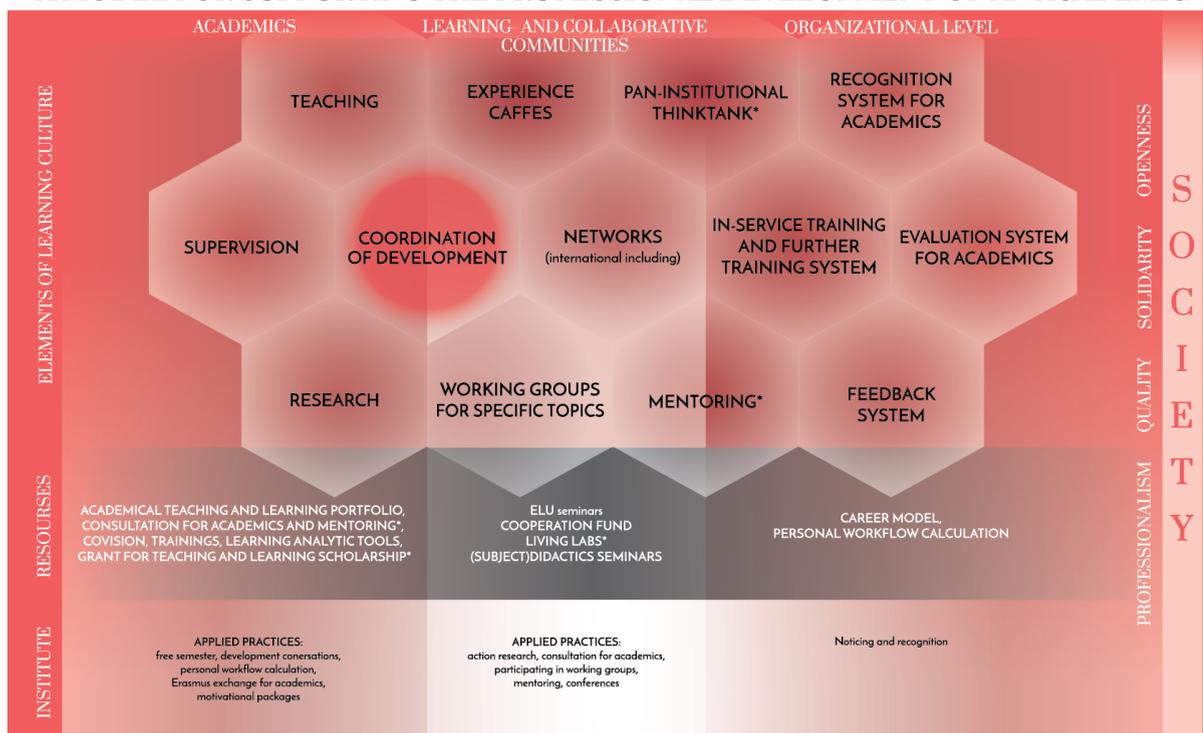
Aava, K., Karu, K., Leppiman, A. & Pae, R. (2018). A model for supporting the professional development of an academic

Figure 2 A model for supporting the professional development of the academic staff

Reflection and discussion of results

Next, we analysed the implementation of the principles of supporting the professional development of academic staff by presenting the proposals made on the basis of research results to the Vice-Rector for Research and comparing them with the activities that have been introduced in university practice as of 2021 (Table 1). We discuss the successes of the model implementation and further development tasks and challenges.

Table 1 Proposals for supporting the professional development of academic staff and the activities launched by working groups as of 2021

Proposals made to the Vice Rector of research in 2018	Activities launched as of 2021
It is important to support cooperation across institutes, based on the specific nature of learning cultures at the institutes and academic diversity. This specific nature needs to be made heard by highlighting the enriching differences, e.g. the interdisciplinary approaches to inclusion in	Good initiatives involved the staff development support network convened by the Rectorate, which included people from different units who were engaged in the professional development of academics. The working group, which included staff involved

teaching and participatory democracy (JTI), the principles of open education (DTI) via sustainable development (LTI), creativity (BFM), practical learning (Haapsalu College), didactics and non-formal learning (HTI) and the like. It is important to accept and emphasise the autonomy of institutes and the specific nature of their teaching culture, encouraging the mutual sharing of experiences.	in the personnel development of the university's employees, created principles for staff development. Academics can learn from each other and reflect together in experience cafés and within the projects LIFE. The observation month, launched as a new initiative, allows one to visit a colleague and learn from each other. In the spring of 2020, in the Covid-19 conditions, experience cafés became virtual cafés for learning the basic skills of teaching online.
Evidence-based teaching and studies on it need to be kept in constant focus so that it is valued alongside research work. TLU already conducts the analysis of students' learning experiences, the use of learning analytics in teaching, the development of co-teaching and the sharing of experiences. The annual teacher-to-teacher conferences and teaching grants issued at the University of Tartu are worth following.	In implementing the model since September 2019, we have launched an action research initiative, focusing on the creation of learning and collaboration communities, with the example of a network of academic staff researching it. In 2020, we launched a SoTL research seminar for members of the university. We initiated the publication of a research collection. We participate in local and international conferences on teaching sciences.
Creating awareness and communicating the teaching culture at the level of management, including the heads of institutes, requires the preparation of a long-term internal and external communication plan (in cooperation with TUKO). The institutes need general agreements – what is good teaching at our university.	The principles of 'TLU good academic practice' have been created under the leadership of the ethics working group and 'Good teaching and supervision practice' by the stakeholders at the university. The university's different stakeholders were included in the creation of good practices, and the outcomes are outlined on the university's homepage under the heading 'Ethics and good practices'.
At TLU, it is important to maintain and support an international network and to find the best sustainable ways to develop and support networks of practitioners and researchers, to organise and participate in international conferences.	We have developed co-operation relations, conducted joint seminars in co-operation with the Zurich Pedagogical College and the University of Durham, participating in SoTL conferences.
At the university, it is important to develop a system of academic counselling, which is understood as activities involving empowerment and meaning-creation. This includes, for example,	The development of co-vision groups has been launched. International workshops have been held, and we participate in international reflection groups and conferences.

combined individual and group counselling, decoding, co-vision, supervision, mentoring.	A study was conducted to develop the principles of mentoring in the academic units of the university.
It is important to create a structural framework that supports the teaching culture of the university, and addresses the issues of how the teacher evaluation system would be applied in the new career model and what the role of development interviews in it is.	An action research initiative will be carried out to support the evaluation of teachers with an emphasis on teaching activities. The development of the best practices of the development interview is done in cooperation with the institutes.

As previous research (Euler, 2010) suggests, institutional learning takes place when the leaders support it. In addition, their involvement and presence in important cooperation networks and development activities is important. The challenge is the changes in management that take place during development processes, as indicated by previous studies (e. g. Fäldt & Larsson, 2017). The staff development of Tallinn University now has a management culture based on more inclusive cooperation, i.e. mutual agreements help create needs-based networks, such as networks of researchers and digital learning designers. Based on the fundamentals of appreciative research (Bushe, 2012) and institutional learning (Smith, 2016), mistakes are not highlighted, but the work builds on the strengths and good practices that help to adapt to change. A learning culture that includes an individual, communicative and institutional dimension (Euler, 2010; Feixas & Zellweger, 2010) means for our university, that things are no longer done *for* the academic staff but *in co-creation with* the academic staff, increasing their involvement and autonomy. This enables academic staff to systematically improve themselves throughout their careers as developers of teaching in their field of research. The 'good practice' documents created at the university provide input for mutual agreements in cooperative activities and networks in order to find the best ways for one's professional development. For example, TLU's 'Good teaching and supervision practice' gives valuable input for creation of a beneficial system of teaching grants, which we envision as meant for cooperation and inter-institute research groups. The designer and developer of this system may be a pan-institutional 'think-tank' which has the potential to develop the university's learning and teaching culture.

As for the individual level, we may point out that in TLU the academic staff are given large autonomy to be responsible for their own professional development. It raises the question from an institutional learning point of view whether all academics have suitable opportunities for development. In the model we designed a learning culture of support and appreciation of diverse involvement and learning practices which empowers members of the organisation.

The principles of supporting the professional development of the academic staff, outlined in the model, are included as of today in the TLU's new development plan for 2023-2027. The implementation plan's sub-objective is to support the academic staff's co-operational learning and development in order to promote organisational learning, appreciate the evidence-based and learning centred approach, and to both recognise and disseminate best teaching practice. An additional point is to go on designing the attestation system to evaluate and appreciate more the content of the academic work.

Lessons learned

During the course of the research we acquired a lot of valuable experience that we wish to share.

In the initial phase of the development research, we experienced how the vocabulary of educational innovation (e.g. the concepts *new*, *changed modern approach to learning, lecturer vs. student centred approach to learning*) created confrontation and made the parties very vulnerable. As common

understandings are constructed in the university through mutual discussions and agreements, it is crucial to create a common discussion space, a common language, supporting discussion with science-based arguments and avoiding contradictions and labelling. Therefore, we adopted an appreciative approach to accepting and listening to the parties and constructing a common future.

We saw the problem of finding a common time slot in the schedule for networking. Academic staff describe their large workload as an obstacle. That is why it is important to recognise more than before the academic staff's contribution to the professional development activities and to commend them at attestation and in promotion.

In terms of consistency and sustainability, it is important to support the institutional learning of the entire university through well-established networks and development activities. As a threat to institutional learning, it is important to be aware that the involvement of the majority of the organisation's members and their contribution to their own professional development are important for educational innovation which, however, should not be based on an individual's bare enthusiasm.

The idea of sharing teaching practices between institutes has been developed. We were granted the role of the developer from the university's management and initiated as well as managed a community of practice. Its aim was research and advancement of one's own teaching and development of the organisation. As the leader of the development of organisational learning culture it is important to be persistent and appreciative of others and oneself. We experienced that bringing about an educational innovation is time-consuming and requires contribution from members of the organisation, which we have done in different cooperation work groups and networks.

Communicating the changes to different stakeholders requires great effort. At the end of the development research we compiled a TLU journal "Õppejõud õpib[1]" ('A learning academics') in which we focused on teaching issues and introduced the model we had developed. The paper version of the journal was disseminated among all the members of the organisation.

Conclusion

This developmental research set out to create principles of support for the teaching culture of the university's academic staff. The findings clearly indicate that it is essential to offer variety and take into consideration the specific nature of individuals, professional areas and institutes when supporting the academic staff's professional development. At the same time, it is important to find the common part for institutional learning.

This research shows the importance of appreciative inquiry as a tool which involves and enables us to design solutions cooperatively in the organisation. Developing a better model and principles, we need to think more how to create a sustainable learning culture. A big number of people we cooperated with in the research have left the university and as a result, several activities have died out. We are experiencing the culture of interruptions: when the time or finance resources are depleted, people go back to the old habits and discard the innovation. The research showed that the best ways for promoting changes are dialogues between university members, their collaboration and empowerment, and encouragement and involvement. That is why we continued with action research, during which we initiated the collaboration network of academic staff who carry out evidence-based research and develop the teaching practice, and thus the university.

Universities are in the process of big changes caused by developments in society and the world as a whole. Even more than before, the university and its members need assistance and opportunities to cooperatively create best modes of action in pan-institutional networks and communities of practice. We require research on how to support academic staff and other university colleagues in designing such evidence-based practices which would support the adaptation to changes in the organisation.

---

[1]

Biographies

Katrin Karu is an Associate Professor in Andragogy at Tallinn University in Estonia. She has worked the last 6 years as an academic developer and researcher in Tallinn University. She is also Head of Curriculum in Adult Education. More information from ETIS: https://www.etis.ee/CV/Katrin_Karu_001/est?tabId=CV_ENG

Katrin Aava is an Associate Professor in Communication at Tallinn University in Estonia. During the last 6 years she has been an academic developer and researcher in Tallinn University. More information from ETIS: https://www.etis.ee/CV/Katrin_Aava/est?tabId=CV_ENG

References

Biesta, G, Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2017). Talking about education: Exploring the significance of teacher agency. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 49(1), 38-54. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2016.1205143

Blue, S., Shove, E., Carmona, C., & Kelly, M. P. (2016). Theories of practice and public health: Understanding (un)healthy practices. Critical Public Health, 26(1), 36-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2014.980396

Brouwer, P., Brekelmans, M., Nieuwenhuis, L., & Simons, R.-J. (2012). Communities of practice in the school workplace. Journal of Educational Administration, 50(3), 346-364. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231211223347

Bushe, G. R. (2012) Appreciative inquiry: Theory and critique. In Boje, D., Burnes, B. and Hassard, J. (Eds.), The Routledge Companion to Organizational Change (pp. 87-103). Routledge.

Bushe, G. R. (2013), The appreciative inquiry model. In E. H. Kessler, (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Management Theory, (pp. 41-45). Sage.

Euler, D. (2010). Shaping learning cultures: A strategic challenge for universities. In U.-D. Ehlers, D. Shenkenberg (Eds.), Changing Cultures in Higher Education (pp. 75-84). Springer.

Cooperrider, D., L., & Srivastva, S. (1987) Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In Woodman, R. W. & Pasmore, W. A. (Eds.), Research in Organizational Change and Development (pp.129-169). JAI Press.

Cross, R., Davis, S., & O'Neil, I. (2017). Health communication. Theoretical and critical perspectives. Polity Press.

Elmore, R. (1995). Getting to scale with good education practices. Harvard Educational Review, 66(1), 1-26. http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.66.1.g73266758j348t33

Euler, D. (2010). Shaping learning cultures: A strategic challenge for universities. In U.-D. Ehlers, D. Shenkenberg (Eds.), Changing Cultures in Higher Education (pp. 75-84). Springer.

Feixas, M., & Euler, D. (2012). Academics as teachers: New approaches to teaching and learning and implications for professional development programmes. The International HETL Review, 2(2), 115-127. Retrieved from https://www.hetl.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HETLReviewVolume2Article12.pdf

Feixas, M., & Zellweger, F. (2010). Faculty development in context: Changing learning cultures in higher education. In U.-D. Ehlers, D. Schneckenberg (Eds.), Changing cultures in higher education (pp. 85-102). Springer.

Forte, M. A., & Flores, A. M. (2014). Teacher collaboration and professional development in the workplace: A study of Portuguese teachers. European Journal of Teacher Education, 37(1), 91-105. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2013.763791

Fullan, M. (2001). The new meaning of educational change (3rd ed.). RoutledgeFalmer.

Fullan, M. (2009). Large-scale reforms come of age. Journal of Educational Change, 10(2), 101-113. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-009-9108-z

Fullan, M., Quinn, J., & McEachen, J. (2018). Deep learning: Engage the world change the world. Corwin.

Fäldt, M., & Larsson, S. (2017, June 8-9). Exploring a positive approach in facilitating teachers personal and professional development [Conference presentation]. 2nd EuroSoTL conference, Lund, Sweden. Retrieved from https://konferens.ht.lu.se/fileadmin/_migrated/content_uploads/Mele__n_Fa__ldt_Larsson.pdf

Gaebel, M., & Zhang, T. (2018). Trends 2018: Learning and teaching in the European Higher Education Area. European University Association.

Harris, S. (2005). Rethinking academic identities in neo-liberal times. Teaching in Higher Education, 10(4), 421–433. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510500238986

Johns-Shepherd, L., & Gowing, E. (2007). Beyond the classroom door, beyond the school gates: The imperative for school-to-school networks for professional learning. In J. Pickering, C. Daly, & N. Pachler (Eds.), New designs for teachers' professional learning (pp. 116–132). London.

Jõgi, L., Karu, K., & Krabi, K. 2015. Rethinking teaching and teaching practice at university. International Review of Education, 61(1), 61-77. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11159-015-9467-z

Jõgi, L., & Ümarik, M. (2019). Negotiated professional identities of academics in the context of structural reform and innovation at the university [Conference presentation]. 5th International Conference on Higher Education Advances, Valencia. http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/HEAd19.2019.9453

Karu, K. (2020). Üliõpilaste arusaamad õppimisest ülikoolis: andragoogiline vaade (doktoritöö). [Students' beliefs about studying at university: An andragogical view. Unpublished doctoral thesis)] Tallinna ülikooli sotsiaalteaduste dissertatsioonid.

Kezar, A. (2013). How colleges change: Understanding, leading, and enacting change. Routledge.

Kessler, E., H. (2013). Encyclopedia of management theory (1st ed.). Sage. Retrieved from https://www.perlego.com/book/1005478/encyclopedia-of-management-theory-pdf

Kindsiko, E. (2020). Kas (eestikeelne) õpe ülikoolides hääbub? [Is (Estonian) teaching in universities dying out?] - Postimees, 12.10. lk 8.

Kohm, B., & Nance, B. (2009). Creating collaborative cultures. Educational Leadership, 67(2), 67-72. Retrieved from http://pdo.ascd.org/LMSCourses/PD13OC010M/media/Leading_Prof_Learning_M4_Reading301.pdf.

Luechauer, D. L., & Shulman, G. M. (1992). Moving from bureaucracy to empowerment: Shifting paradigms to practice what we preach in class [Conference paper]. Annual Midwest Academy of Management, St. Charles. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED360666

Ministry of Education and Research. (2017). Õpikäsitusest ja selle muutumisest. Elukestva õppe strateegia 2020 1 eesmärgi selgituseks. [About the approach to learning and its changing. An explanation to the first objective of the lifelong learning strategy 2020]. Retrieved from https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/har_min_broshyyr_12lk_est_veebi.pdf.

Pata, K., Jõgi, L., & Ümarik, M. (2020). Paths of professional transformation in the context of changing teaching culture at university. Larissa Jõgi, Meril Ümarik, Kai Pata (Eds.), Teaching and learning at the university: Practices and transformations (pp. 151-166). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Peacock, S., & DePlacido, C. (2018). Supporting staff transitions into online learning: A network approach. Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 6(2), 67-75.

Plomp, T. (2010). Educational design research: An introduction. In T. Plomp & N. Nieveen (Eds.), An introduction to educational design research (pp. 9-35). Netzodruk, Enschede: SLO, Netherlands institute for curriculum development.

Põlda, H., & Aava, K. (2016). Muutunud õpikäsituse keeleline konstrueerimine. [The linguistic construction of the changed approach to learning]. Eesti Rakenduslingvistika Ühingu aastaraamat, 12, 201-217. http://dx.doi.org/10.5128/ERYa12.12

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. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802597200

Roxå, T., & Mårtensson, K. (2016). Developing higher education organisations and evaluating effects. In R. Egger & M. Merkt (Eds.), Teaching Skills Assessment: Qualitätsmanagement und Personalentwicklung in der Hochschullehre (pp. 91-115). Springer.

Sarv, A. (2013). Õppejõu eneserefleksioon ja professionaalne identiteet (doktoritöö). [The self-reflection and professional identity of the academic staff. Unpublished doctoral thesis)] Tartu ülikooli kirjastus.

Serrano, I., & Kreber, C. (2014). Professionalization of the university and the profession as Macintyrean practice. Studies in Philosophy and Education, 34(6), 1-14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11217-014-9453-0

Smith, R. (2016). Organisational learning: An integrated HR and knowledge management perspective. Routledge.

Sweeney, K. M. (2021). Creating a safe space: Co-teaching as a method to encourage learning and development in the Higher Education classroom. Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 9(1), 54-61. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v9i1.436

Säljo, R. (2003). Õppimine tegelikkuses. [Learning in reality] AS Võru Täht: Eesti Vabaharidusliidu kirjastus.

Tallinna ülikooli arengukava 2020-2022. [The development plan of Tallinn University 2020-2022]. Retrieved from: https://www.tlu.ee/sites/default/files/TUKO/Dokumendid/Arengukava_2020-2022-EN(1).pdf

Tasler, N., & Dale, V., H., M. (2021). Learners, teachers and places: A conceptual framework for creative pedagogies. Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 9(1), 2-7. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v9i1.450

The World University Rankings 2021: methodology. (2020). Times Higher Education. Retrieved from: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/world-university-rankings-2021-methodology

Turner-Wilson, A. (2018). Teaching 'networking with others': A reflective account. Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 6(2), 76-81. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i2.308

Udam, M., Seema, R., & Mattisen, H. (2015). Eesti kõrgharidus institutsionaalse akrediteerimise tulemuste taustal ehk mida juhid peaksid teadma. [Higher education in Estonia in the light of the results of the accreditation or what the leaders should know] Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri, 3(1), 80-102. https://doi.org/10.12697/eha.2015.3.1.04

Uiboleht, K. (2019). The relationship between teaching-learning environments and undergraduate students` learning in higher education: A qualitative multi-case study (doctoral thesis). Tartu Ülikool.

Van Lankveld, T. A. M; Schoonenboom J. I; Volman, M., Croiset, G.; & Beishuizen, J. (2017). Developing a teacher identity in the university context: A systematic review of literature. Higher Education Research and Development, 36(2), 325-342. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1208154

Vihalemm, T., Keller, M., & Kiisel, M. (2015). From Intervention to Social Change. A Guide to Reshaping Everyday Practices. Routledge.

Warde, A., & Southerton, D. (2012). Introduction. COLLeGIUM: Studies across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, 12, 1-24. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10138/34220

Wenger, E. (2009). A social theory of learning. In K. Illeris (Ed.) Contemporary theories of learning, (pp. 209-218). Routledge.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. A., & Snyder, W. (2002). Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge. Harvard Business School Press.

Ylänne, J., Postareff, L. & Parpala, A. (2019). The interaction between university teachers' well-being and their pedagogical competence. EuroSoTL 3rd conference. Bilbao 13-14. June 2019. Retrieved from https://www.ehu.eus/documents/8301386/10560621/Actas-EuroSoTL-Conference-2019.pdf/1a7d5867-e222-4aab-6f92-a7948f1fbd67?t=1560417459000