

**EUA WORKSHOP
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*HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITIES: ITS
ROLE IN LEADING AND IMPLEMENTING CHANGE*

Case Study: Luleå University of Technology

**A university for the 21st century:
A modern organisation to promote academic quality**

Ingegerd Palmér

Leadership Development at Luleå University of Technology

In 2000 the university board at Luleå University of Technology (LTU) decided on a new strategy, The Creative University, for the period 2001-2006. It was an innovative strategy in several ways. Its range was longer than normally, 6 years instead of 3. It focussed on developing multidisciplinary areas of education and research (that came to be named "arenas") and on training the students in a much broader perspective than the regular subject learning. It would require many and new internal collaborations as well as many and new relations to external agents, firms as well as schools, hospitals, local and regional communities. The implementation of the strategy was in itself an innovative project: how was that to relate to the regular operating of the university with its decision lines and appointed decision makers?

One thing was clear, a strategy like this would require good, and brave, leaders. Particularly the deans and the heads of department, and of course the rector, would have to take firm standings, support and encourage those persons and groups that were to create the new arenas and create new ways of arranging the student's education, and present and discuss the new strategy and its realisations with staff of various kinds, not all of them in favour of the new strategy. Not least, as it appeared, to be able to handle various difficulties and conflicts both on resources and on ideas in the implementation process.

Thus it was decided on a large leadership development programme, the largest to this day at a Swedish university. Large in numbers of people attending and large in extent. It was an investment of 11 million SEK, that is about 1.2 million Euros, or 0.9 % of the yearly budget for the university. The programme ran over three years though, 2001-2003. Salaries of the participants were not included in the budget.

The extent and thus the cost of the programme required a formal procurement. The aim of the leadership development programme was formulated thus:

- identify, stimulate and develop the key staff that will hold in implementing "The creative university.
- increase the feeling of belonging and participation among staff
- develop personal networks over organisational boundaries
- act as a motor and support for implementation and management of new initiatives

Three different consultant groups were selected for a deeper examination, and that was an interesting, and very revealing, process in itself. The three groups were asked to meet for two days with groups of 10-12 prospective participants in the leadership programme, and present their ideas of how to work. They were evaluated by those participants, with a very clear result, although it meant selecting the most expensive alternative.

The programme format selected was a one-year programme with 22 active days and individual tasks to be performed between the meetings. 18 persons were to participate in each batch. Five batches were contracted. Participation was mandatory for the rector, the vice rector, the deans and the vice deans, the heads of department, most professors (those close to retirement were excluded), the registrar and the heads of units in the university administration, about 70 persons. A number of persons with designated tasks in the strategy implementation processes were also included.

The programme content had two foci: individual leadership development and organisational development, both for the purpose of stimulate and lead change. The consultants used a Gestalt-therapy-based methodology, making affluent use of actual experiences (mostly problems!) at work for the participants both as individuals and in the development tasks for their department, unit, board etc

A steering group was appointed to follow and guide the programme. The dean of engineering was chair of the group which comprised the vice dean of social sciences and humanities, a professor of management and the chief HRM officer. The group reported regularly to the rector.

I will give examples of the factual content in my presentation at the workshop. Every meeting of a group was evaluated by the participants, as well as after completion of the programme for each group. Every participant expressed a big amount of learning experiences, and a gratefulness for getting this training. The qualities developed were: interest and responsibility for the future of the university, interest in leading and developing the university, oneself and other persons, flexible and open to change, mature with a good self-image, ability to take initiatives, ability to handle conflicts. It is clear, though, that the personal experiences and the personal development as a leader dominates over the experiences of benefit for their part of the organisation and for the strategy project, as expressed by the participants.

A formal evaluation was made of a professor in sociology after the completion of the full programme. She could find clear evidence of the benefit for the individual participants. It was very difficult, though, to find evidence for substantial improvement of the leadership practices as viewed by employees under the participating leaders.

My personal reflections as a rector

Universities have a weak tradition of leadership. Leaders as rectors, deans, heads of department traditionally have operated in a *primus inter pares*-mood, professors "taking turns" for a few years on this kind of tasks. In my view that is an impossible option for the universities today, at least in Sweden. Sweden had a university reform in 1993 which meant a great autonomy for the universities. We get block funding, we have a considerable freedom to give educational programmes and choose research profiles, we have to handle strong competition about students, academic staff, funding, we must make strategic alliances with other universities as well as with communities and enterprises. In particular we will have to "shut down" research areas and educational programmes with severe consequences for the staff. This requires leaders with a very good understanding of the university's position in various fields, with the capacity to see good solutions and possibilities, with the courage to implement necessary changes, and with the capability and interest to stimulate and give feedback on good staff performance as well as handle effectively those not performing optimally.

To be able to work with all these issues and particularly with the difficult ones like down-sizing, closing down a research area, a development and good training of leadership qualities is necessary. Most important of all I find the capability to effective communication. This insight made it possible for me to set aside the quite considerable amount of money required and to see the programme carried through and make advantages of it in the strategy project as well as in other development projects

I recognise the outcome for individuals of the programme mentioned above, in myself and in the persons I worked with regularly. I was in office for four years after the first group completed their programme, and I observed clearly a good improvement of how management groups, and particularly the group of deans and the group of head of department grew much more engaged in and took responsibility for important issues of the university. The discussions of actual problems, the finding of solutions, the implementation of solutions, all of this was made in a very open and respectful climate, with serious and sometimes innovative ideas. The time from identification of a problem to an accepted solution is considerably shortened. A neat example of this is a serious problem on student recruitment in 2003 when the number of engineering applicants dropped by 35 % from the year before. Within three months a completely new organisation for student recruitment was formed, with a new market director recruited, all the departments and central units involved, all the money used for marketing and recruitment activities gathered and increased by 30%. In 2004 the recruitment was somewhat better than in 2003 and in 2005 it was well above

the level of 2002. The organisation of the recruitment work and the dedication from those working in the project and from their leaders were crucial for this success.

A lesson learnt from those four years is that it is necessary to support the upholding of the leadership qualities developed. At least once a year the groups I was responsible for, i.e. the deans and the heads of department spent a half-day or a day reflecting on our leadership both as groups and as individuals and training specific skills. In my personal meetings with individual deans and heads of department the issue of the personal leadership was a regular issue, mainly discussed from the actual tasks for the dean/head of department. My leadership towards them was also discussed, it was very valuable for me although I cannot judge the full openness in those discussions.

I know that some of the mini-networks that were created during the leadership programme maintain regular contacts with the main purpose to develop leadership skills among each others.

Luleå University of Technology has continued with a substantial leadership development programme. Normally once a year a new group starts and go through a year of training. To this day some 180 persons have participated. A method for identifying and selecting leaders-to-be have been developed and those persons are included in the programme. An interesting outcome of this selection process is that more women are identified for leadership tasks.

The climate for working with change and development processes has improved. An administrative reform for the whole university has been carried out, with streamlining of the administration at department level and every function needed clarified and detailed. That process has led to a development programme for administrative leaders and a set of competence development courses for the administrators.

Some time later the internal management structure of the department was streamlined. The main purposes were twofold: to make the organisation more effective and to make the organisation and the responsible functions clear to people outside the department, and in particular make it clear to the students with whom they should bring up important issues.

A positive effect of these two reforms has been the creation of competence networks (for administrative directors, for study directors, for student counsellors, for economic administrators etc) across the university, which make excellent platforms for exchange of experiences and for competence development activities.