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The material contained in this report has been written and/or collated by Lill Langelotz and Kathleen Mahon. The views and opinions expressed in the main body of the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the University or individuals who participated in the seminars.

## Abstract

This report provides a summary and analysis of activities and material generated in the seminar series *'Academic leading – with a focus on student learning'* developed for staff in management positions at the University of Borås (UB), 2017. The aims of the report are (a) to draw attention to some areas of need and concern that arose during discussions in the seminars (reflected in participants' written responses in seminar activities); and (b) to make recommendations for consideration of the University's executive team related to identified concerns/areas of need.

Seminar discussions highlighted that there are currently many practices (including leading practices) and arrangements within the University that enhance, or support enhancement of, the learning environment. However, discussions also highlighted some constraining university arrangements and challenges faced in fulfilling leading/managing responsibilities that have implications for the learning environment. These include a range of issues from staff workloads to staffing issues and staff relations. Such issues, it is argued in this report, warrant further discussion/investigation and potentially changes to practices and arrangements in order to sustain and create an environment more conducive to student learning and leading with a focus on student learning. As well as offering some recommendations in this regard, the report also presents an evaluation of the seminars.

## 1. Introduction

The initial motivation for the seminar series, *'Academic leading – with a focus on student learning'*, stemmed from findings of the report, *'Enkätkartläggning av behov och intressen för högskolepedagogisk utveckling'* (2016)<sup>1</sup>, and in particular, a concern that staff were very interested in professional development opportunities available to them regarding teaching and learning, but many were not able to make use of those opportunities (e.g., due to lack of time). From a theoretical perspective, it is clear that, in order to change teaching and learning practices within an educational institution, we also need to work for change in the different areas that make up the 'education complex' (Kemmis et al. 2014) of the university. This includes not only teaching practices and student learning practices, but also professional learning, researching, and leading and administration practices. UB's leaders (at all levels and in all areas) play a vital role in driving change to practices and arrangements at UB that affect all of these activities, and ultimately the learning environment and student learning. This is arguably so regardless of people's specific mandates, for example, to initiate and lead improvements in teaching and academic practices and programs (e.g., study directors, deans, and heads of department), or to initiate and lead developments in working conditions, administrative and support services, resource management, and/or community engagement. An opportunity to explore the notion of academic leading with a focus on student learning with the UB's leaders thus seemed very important and timely.

The seminar series was conducted over four x 3 hour sessions in a pre-scheduled activity referred to as 'Rektors chefseftermiddagar'. Hence, the Vice chancellor and/or the Deputy Vice Chancellor had a short introduction in each session. The series was aimed at enabling practices of academic learning, and exploring ways to promote student-centered teaching and learning through leading. It was planned and facilitated by the authors of this report (Lill and Langelotz and Kathleen Mahon). The seminars included a combination of small-group and whole group discussions, as well as research-based, interactive presentations by guest presenters, Maria Wollmensjö, UB, and Katarina

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<sup>1</sup> By Martin G. Erikson, Lill Langelotz, and Peter Sigrén

Mårtenson, Lund University. This report is based on an analysis of the material generated in Seminars 1 to 3, as well as participant evaluations completed at the end of the series.

The aim of the report is twofold: firstly to present an analysis of material generated in seminar activities; and secondly to provide recommendations for the consideration of the University's executive. The report also provides an evaluation and discussion of the seminar series as a professional learning initiative. It is organised in seven more sections. Section 2 introduces the practice theory underpinning the seminar series. Section 3 outlines each of the four seminars and explains how they fit into the series as a whole. Section 4 provides a snapshot of current practices, arrangements, concerns, and needs at the UB based on material generated by participants. Section 5 builds on this by discussing material generated about participant's visions and challenges regarding their own leading, and strategies for addressing challenges. Section 6 includes a general discussion of the material, with a focus on implications for future practice at the University. This is followed by the presentation of recommendations (section 7) and an evaluation of the series (section 8).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

A practice stance was taken as a point of departure in both the seminar series and the preparation of this report. To be more specific, the theories of 'practice architectures' and 'ecologies of practices' (Kemmis et al., 2014) informed seminar content, seminar discussions, and analysis of material generated in activities. Although this is not a research study, we believe it is fruitful to articulate the seminar outcomes from this practice perspective since it offers possibilities for opening up discussions about what is going on at UB as well as what might be worth changing to support academic leaders to enhance the educational environment.

The main aspect of the *theory of practice architectures* that was useful for exploring leading in this respect was its attention to how practices are shaped, enabled, and constrained by the arrangements that make up a particular practice setting, such as a university<sup>2</sup>. According to the theory, practices are shaped by three kinds of overlapping arrangements: cultural-discursive arrangements; material-economic arrangements; and social-political arrangements. Cultural-discursive arrangements are arrangements such as discourses and languages that affect what it is possible to *say* in and about practice (e.g., deficit discourses, critical discourses, discipline-specific discourses, Swedish, English). Material-economic arrangements are material, technological, financial, organisational, and other resources that affect what it is possible to *do* in practice (e.g., buildings, schedules, workload calculators, people and things, funding, physical environment). Social-political arrangements are arrangements that affect the ways in which it is possible for people to *relate* to others (and things and places) in practice (e.g., organisational rules, mandates, social solidarities, hierarchies, employer-employee relations). Together these arrangements form the practice architectures of practices like leading, teaching, and learning.

The theory of practice architectures also makes clear that practices shape practice architectures within a practice setting like UB. For example, leaders, as part of their leading practice, may develop action plans (with staff) for their departments or introduce new technologies. These action plans and technologies become part of the material arrangements enabling and constraining what is and what

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed explication of the theory, see Kemmis et al. (2014) or Mahon et al. (2017), or for an explanation in Swedish, see Langelotz (2017). For a discussion of practice architectures of university education, see Kemmis and Mahon (2017).

is not possible for their staff to do as part of their everyday practices. Figure 1 is the representation of academic leading practice architectures provided in Seminar 1.

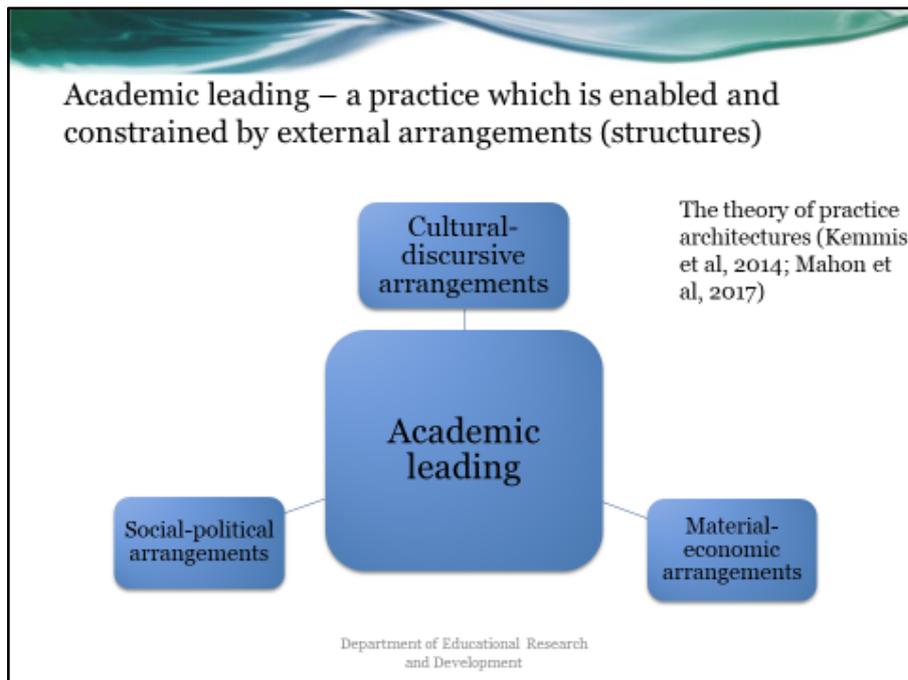


Figure 1. Powerpoint slide (Seminar 1) showing the three kinds of arrangements that combine to form the ‘practice architectures’ of academic leading.

The theory of ecologies of practices (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis et al., 2012) is useful for thinking about how practices are ecologically related to each other in a practice setting. It prompts us to think about UB as a web of practices (like a living system) in which many of the practices are interdependent. On this view, changes to one part of the system, like professional learning practices, can, where interdependencies exist, directly or indirectly affect practices in other parts of the system. Figure 2 depicts a web of core practices in a university setting.

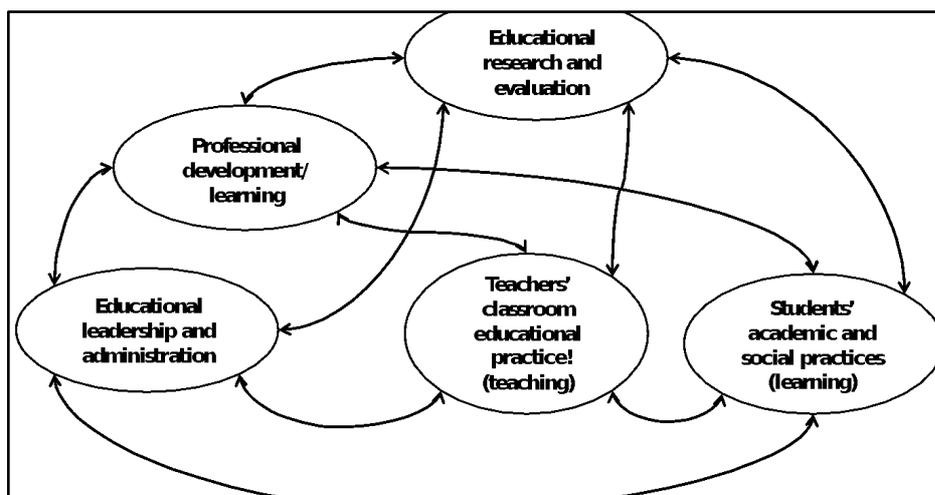


Figure 2. The theory of ecologies of practices (from Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 52).

The seminars outlined in the next section were underpinned by a belief that understanding the arrangements and practices that combine to make particular kinds of practice possible (and others not possible), can help leaders form a more complete picture of what is happening in their own contexts, and make more informed decisions (individually and collectively) about what may need to change and what ought to be done to bring about particular outcomes.

### 3. The seminars

The main aims of the seminar series were to

- enable practices of (collective) academic learning; and
- explore ways to promote student centered teaching and learning through leading.

The series was constructed as an opportunity for participants – that is, staff in leading positions at all levels and areas within the university – to think about their own practices, leadership, and immediate context, and to explore their role as leaders in the bigger picture of the University. It was purposively related to UB's mission to 'develop a learning environment based on current research' as part of its focus on the learning of students. (See the University's Prioritised area 2015-2017: the development of teaching & learning (högskolepedagogik)).

All seminars were set up in similar ways with a data-informed introduction and theoretical framing as a trigger for group discussions. Guest speakers were invited to inject the conversations with current thinking and research related to concerns and challenges in order to provoke thought and provide alternative perspectives and possibilities. The seminars were deliberately dialogic and collaborative to allow participant perspectives and knowledge to enrich discussions and build on the presented material. Following is an outline of each seminar, including prompts for participant contributions.

#### **Seminar 1**

(Facilitated by Lill Langelotz and Kathleen Mahon)

The aim of the seminar was to create a shared understanding of what is already happening at UB, and to put 'student learning' at the front and centre of the discussions. Small group discussions focussed on two questions:

1. What is already happening in your area (or department/academy) to enhance the learning environment? (current practices); and
2. What arrangements are constraining and enabling practices aimed at enhancing the learning environment?

The discussions were framed by the theory of practice architectures and the participants used the theoretical concepts while sharing the responses.

#### **Seminar 2**

(Facilitated by Maria Wollmensjö, HB)

This research-based seminar focused on leadership in general and participants' own leading in particular. As part of the seminar, all participants took part in individual or pair-reflections on post-it-notes that were shared in the whole group:

1. Visions: “In the best of worlds” - how does it look when everything is at its best? Everything is allowed and possible in the vision phase!
2. What is hard to handle in your leadership? Things you would like to leave behind in a well-functioning future.

### **Seminar 3**

(Facilitated by Lill Langelotz and Kathleen Mahon)

Seminar 3 started with a presentation of the results from earlier seminars. Three challenges for leadership that emerged from responses to question 2, Seminar 2 (recruitment and resource allocation; relations and trust; and balance in work as boss and colleague) were then chosen for further discussion in smaller groups (one challenge per group) with reporting back to the whole group afterwards. The aim was to:

1. Identify what else needs to be done – on both the university level and in our own practices – to address challenges; and
2. Come up with new and shared strategies for promoting student-centred teaching and learning – a sense of what we can do/will do as pedagogical leaders.

### **Seminar 4**

(Facilitated by Katarina Mårtensson, LU)

Katarina presented her research on university micro and macro cultures and implications for leading. In the seminar, participants engaged in a small-group discussion of particular cases. The intention of this broader focus was to locate discussions about leading in relation to discourses beyond the UB community. The seminar closed with a reflection on the seminar series by Lill and Kathleen from a PUF perspective (i.e., what is to be done in the practice of ‘högskolepedagogik’), followed by participants writing future plans and completing evaluations.

Throughout the seminar series, the material generated in each seminar (in response to the questions referred to above) was collated and examined through a ‘practice architectures’ lens, and then used to inform subsequent seminars. As the series was not set up as a research project, the material was not comprehensively analysed nor lines of inquiry pursued in ways consistent with a research project. There were also limitations regarding the conclusions that could be drawn from the material, especially since much of the substantive discussion took place in small groups and was not necessarily captured in the written text generated by those groups. Despite these limitations, there are benefits in examining the material and its implications for the university’s practices (especially leading) and arrangements.

## **4. What is happening to enhance the learning environment?**

A number of enabling practices and arrangements to *enhance the learning environment*, as well as concerns and challenges, were evident in the material, especially in the texts generated in Seminar 1 (in the form of diagrams). In this part of the report, we first summarise current practices identified as enhancing the learning environment (section 4.1). We then turn to arrangements that were identified as enabling (section 4.2) and constraining (4.3) such practices.

### **4.1 Practices that are currently enhancing the learning environment at UB**

Participants identified the following practices as currently enhancing the learning environment at UB.

#### Teaching practices -

- enactment of engaging pedagogies (e.g., student-centered, experiential, problem-based, practice-focussed, flipped classroom, reflection seminars etc.);
- collaboration between teachers, but also with students and external partners (i.e., industries or municipalities);
- individualised support for students (e.g., through tutoring and supervising);
- use of various technologies in teaching and learning; and
- practicum (VFU).

#### Professional learning practices -

- informal and formal practices (pedagogical discussions and collegial sharing through seminars, meetings, focus days, planning days, team teaching, conferences, subject/resource development in teams, discipline-specific courses);
- PUF-courses/offerings ('högskolepedagogiska kurser', nätverket för flexibelt lärande, workshops etc.);
- inter-university exchange programs/organisational visits;
- involvement of external lecturers;
- use of web resources (including films on the web) etc.;
- engagement in research; and
- generation of films about teaching courses.

#### Student practices -

- student involvement in teaching (e.g., doctoral candidates involved in laboratory work);
- student engagement in events (e.g., introduction days), practicum (VFU) and other learning activities;
- university alumni – team members taking part in courses; and
- social media/student web/social media.

#### Leading and management practices -

- meetings and regular communication (e.g., weekly letters to staff);
- holding development talks/development planning days;
- arranging events/conferences;
- use of KUT to support development of pedagogical learning + make projects possible;
- ongoing efforts to create a healthy workplace; and
- one-to-one support for teachers.

#### Research practices -

- research projects (individual and collaborative projects) – contributing to knowledge;
- funded development projects; and
- research-oriented activities (research pod, 'Research Friday').

Evidently, there is a great deal already happening in practice across multiple areas of the university to enhance the learning environment at UB, although it was not clear from the participant

contributions in which specific areas of the University the activities are occurring. Participant responses highlighted an emphasis on *communication, collaboration, and participation and engagement* across all areas of practice.

From a theoretical perspective, and in reality we suggest, many of these practices are overlapping and interpenetrating. For instance, research practices contribute knowledge that forms or informs the content and conduct of teaching and learning programs, and can be a form of professional learning; the production of student theses constitutes both a student learning practice and a research practice. This means that impacts and changes in one area are likely to affect changes in another area. In this sense, the practices form an ecology of practices such that questions about how leaders engage (or ought to engage) in leading practices to enhance the learning environment necessarily invite consideration of what is happening in terms of other practices to which the leading is ecologically related. This becomes more significant for future practice and the conditions of the university when considered together with the university arrangements that make the relevant practices possible (as we do in the next section).

In the process of identifying what is currently happening, some groups noted what was needed, or lacking, in terms of enhancing the learning environment. These are summarised here and discussed in more detail in Part 6 of the report:

- need more time for reflection in an organised way as well as informally (with fika) (professional learning);
- need more focus on the learning environment (leading and administration);
- need more discussion in subjects (teaching);
- need more distance subjects (teaching);
- need more research-based teaching (teaching); and
- there is not yet much focus in research on enhancing the learning environment (researching).

Reasons for these observations were not provided in the written participant responses, and it is not clear in all cases what was intended. For instance, it is not clear if the reference to 'need more discussion in subjects' is hinting at the need for more dialogic teaching approaches or something else.

#### 4.2 University arrangements that are enabling the practices identified above<sup>3</sup>

In response to the question, '*What arrangements are constraining and enabling practices aimed at enhancing the learning environment?*' (Seminar 1), the following enabling arrangements (or practice architectures) were identified. They are categorized here as cultural-discursive arrangements, material-economic arrangements, and social-political arrangements in line with the theory of practice architectures:

##### **Cultural-discursive arrangements**

- constructions of student learning as a priority;

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<sup>3</sup> There is some overlap between this section and the previous section because some features of the university environment were identified as both practices and arrangement. This is not problematic from a theoretical perspective since, according to the theory of practice architectures, practices can be or produce the practice architectures for other practices (Kemmis et al. 2014).

- constructions of research as a priority;
- diverse value bases [also labelled as constraining];
- discourses about TFU [also labelled as constraining];
- welfare of people always on the agenda; and
- focus on collegial learning.

### **Material-economic arrangements**

- TFU and KUT [also labelled as constraining];
- learning platform – Pingpong;
- ICT – allows communication which enables understanding; good technology [ICT also labelled as constraining];
- personnel - Non-Swedish speaking teachers [also labelled as constraining]; guest lecturers/professors; good, well-known teachers in teaching;
- support – technical support, event support [also labelled as constraining];
- central economic support;
- physical study environment;
- funding; and
- time (e.g., for interacting and communicating to reach shared understanding).

### **Social-political arrangements**

- positive spirit among colleagues;
- mutual respect of staff for each other's work and professions (also understanding);
- industry-university relations; and
- demands placed on and placed by heads of departments.

Particular departments (e.g., administration, PUF, Student support, IT) and activities that are made up of all three kinds of arrangements were also identified. Such activities/events included workshops (e.g., about assessment); academy fika; development talks; HPED; PUF courses; study visits; focus days, and research Fridays. External arrangements such as industry/relevant professional fields and external courses (e.g., profession specific) were mentioned as well.

Based on the frequency of mentions of particular arrangements, there seems to be a shared impression of time, funding, organized professional development opportunities, communication, and mutual respect and understanding as important for enabling the practices identified in section 4.1. It is worth noting that some of these arrangements *could be* in tension with each other, for instance 'prioritisation of research' and 'prioritisation of student learning' if the research is not connected in any way to student learning.

## **4.3 Constraints for practices that enhance the learning environment**

Despite the many enabling arrangements that were identified, participant discussions also highlighted some key concerns and challenges, some of which are evident in the following constraining arrangements identified in Seminar 1.

### **Cultural-discursive arrangements**

- diverse value bases;
- discourses about TFU;

- negative discourses about students (e.g., as ‘lazy’);
- different value placed on different subjects;
- language of students and staff (multiple), and language of instruction – (e.g., Swedish, English); and
- different cultural backgrounds of non-Swedish students.

Regarding language, concerns included non-Swedish speaking teachers; difficulties of expressing one’s self when communicating in English; and Swedish teachers with ‘bad English’ teaching in English. Having international teachers and students who are not native English speakers was also raised as a constraint.

### **Material-economic arrangements**

- TFU and KUT;
- good technology;
- people: teachers and students not fluent in the language of instruction; senior students in teaching;
- support – technical support, event support;
- funding – external, research funding, competing demands on limited funds;
- staffing; lack of in-house expertise and expensive external teachers; not enough people to do the work required to deliver good programs;
- time (lack of);
- external resources;
- own research; and
- administrative tasks (many admin tasks which take time from other things and require a high level of technical skills).

There were multiple references to TFU and staffing. One group described the situation as ‘not sustainable’ and commented that the desire to do more professional development doesn’t fit with economic frames. A lack of expertise in house, for instance, has meant reliance on industries and external organisations, which raises costs. Staffing issues (e.g., not enough persons to do the work) are also affecting time available for professional learning.

### **Social-political arrangements**

Other than references to constraints imposed by language, no specific social-political arrangements were recorded as ‘constraining’ practices mentioned in section 4.1.

As with the identification of current practices to enhance the learning environment, in identifying salient arrangements, particular *needs* were noted. These included the following:

- shorter, more flexible professional development courses advertised well-ahead (professional learning);
- common activities that make the learning environment more visible (leading and administration); and
- principles regarding good staff allocation.

Other concerns included people not attending professional learning events, and the challenge of finding student ‘lust for learning’. Changing arrangements were also alluded to, such as

organizational change, which can lead to old and new ways of doing things clashing, and the high rate at which a subject/discipline can develop. The latter raises questions about the need for ongoing professional learning, and how it can keep up with discipline changes.

Arrangements that were labelled as neither constraining nor enabling included

- discourses around what is changeable;
- Kronox;
- KWS information;
- technical aspects of everyday work; and
- HPED.

It is clear from these points that, despite efforts to enhance the learning environment, some of UB's current arrangements are limiting those efforts in some way. Since Seminar 1 activities only 'scratched the surface', there may be other arrangements that are relevant as well. The material discussed in the next section certainly suggests this is so, especially regarding staff relations (social-political arrangements).

## 5. Leadership visions and challenges

This part of the report attends to material generated in Seminar 2 (section 5.1) and Seminar 3 (section 5.2) and represents a direct shift in focus to the participants' own leading. Section 5.1 in particular sheds some light on what is driving and creating challenges for people's leadership.

### 5.1 Reflections on own leading

In response to the question about leadership visions *"In the best of worlds" – how does it look when everything is at its best?*<sup>4</sup> there was a wide range of responses. Many of the visions related to

- trust and relations (e.g., *"More trust – less control"*);
- having clear goals (e.g., *"You have the same goal in sight"*); and
- being in an enjoyable, stimulating, frictionless environment.

Interestingly, as one participant noted in a whole-group discussion, the visions were not context-specific. In other words, it was not clear from the vision statements that the visions applied to UB, or even to a university setting. Also, only three statements, in this vision part, were directly related to education and student learning:

- *"High student achievement"*;
- *"We have high quality education"*; and
- *"Possibility to promote the interests of employees and students"* (implied).

There is a sense, however, that people want to be going in the same direction (i.e., having a clear shared vision and aims). Indeed, the examples from the vision part show us that the social-political arrangements are crucial for leaders at UB to develop and change.

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<sup>4</sup> Sticky-note activity facilitated by Maria Wollmensjö.

In response to the question about leadership challenges, 'What is hard to handle in your leadership?', again the responses were wide-ranging. However, there were three clear themes in the participants' statements, which were taken up for discussion in the subsequent seminar (Seminar 3). These were

- relations and trust (including communication and academic culture)
  - Example: *"communicating between different levels (in many ways)"*
- recruitment and resource allocation
  - Examples: *"Recruitment (of the right skills)"; "Resources from administration to courses"*
- balance in work as boss and colleague
  - Example: *"Collegiality vs the leadership – be both and"*

There were also apparent overlaps with the responses summarised in section 4, for instance, challenges related to time (e.g., *"Time to discuss with colleagues and students is missing", "Space for strategic time"*).

## 5.2 Strategies for moving forward

Discussion in small groups in Seminar 3 about the three themes identified in section 5.1 gave rise to participant interpretation of the issues, strategies for addressing them, and new questions. The three themes are elaborated in this section based on this group work.

### Relations and trust

What are the issues?

- confidence and trust are not as high as they could be;
- relationships, time, and trust seem to be linked together;
- unclear goals – employees feel lost; where are we going?;
- ownership – employees feeling that 'verksamhetsplaner' och 'handlingsplaner' are not their own;
- clarity around roles – the division of responsibility has not always been clear (e.g., not clear what it means to be a course manager);
- three loyalties to relate to: academic manager, section employees and other staff members;
- difficult to get employees to take course responsibility;
- there are public beliefs that everyone is doing their best, but there is a risk of working within a small bubble instead of seeing the whole;
- over-management and control – individual employees feel questioned if management of work is overly detailed;
- over-regulation of practice – every task becomes a matter of explicit negotiation;
- need for stronger professionalisation for the university to continue to develop;
- more uncertainty (related to what people can and should do – which affects trust) in newer areas of the university.

Strategies:

- ensuring that employees are well-acquainted with goals, visions and strategies to know why a particular decision is taken;

- involving staff in the development of goals, visions and strategies (important for trust);
- being aware of relationships and what makes people comfortable/uncomfortable.

Emergent questions:

- How do we respond to people saying 'no' (for course responsibility for example)?

### **Recruitment and resource allocation**

What are the issues?

- the current wage situation – *“no longer as competitive”* (e.g., *“deterioration in certain areas, such as Teacher”*);
- fierce competition with other universities;
- often *“panic recruitment”*;
- resource allocation is such that we receive less resources from the ministry for each budget period;
- we may not need to do some things that we are putting resources into today;
- key questions - how to *“attract new employees with relevant competence profiles”*, *“how to postpone the process of job interviews so that early searchers get a personal relationship with our knowledge environments?”*.

Strategies:

- 85% workload instead of 100% workload (space for the unforeseen and creating productive working conditions – energy for development work);
- networking (e.g., through research seminars);
- educational development work and research in the area of putting student learning at the centre, ensure that resources are allocated to this;
- for resource-saving purposes: create clearer boundaries for students regarding their ability to complete their course, dissertation, raise grades by plus, etc.

Emergent questions:

- How can we account for 10% of the inefficiency in the business that exists but does not benefit the students?
- What should we not do? How do we handle increased collaborative demands? Process Mapping?

### **Balance in work as boss and colleague**

A powerpoint was not generated by the group examining this theme. However, some ideas were shared in the whole group discussion such as the frustration between tasks as a leader and a (new) researcher. There was also a discussion around the administration tasks that consume time. A few expressed their ambition to do 'management by walking' (i.e., building relations), although time restricted these ambitions.

## General

There was a general sense in the whole-group discussions that many of the challenges are insurmountable, and the questions unanswerable, and that more work is needed to look closely at some of the issues raised. One group commented that there is a *“need to analyse the material further: What groupings can be made, which questions and problems hide behind, what solutions can we see?”*

## 6. Implications and opportunities

The questions and concerns raised in the seminar series point to several areas of the university that need to be critically and constructively *interrogated* and/or *changed* in order to advance efforts to enhance the learning environment and enable leadership with a focus on student learning. This includes, from a cultural-discursive perspective, more explicit focus on the learning environment in everyday communications and planning, and clearer articulation of goals and visions on both institutional and departmental levels. This will potentially allow the kinds of shared understandings needed for growth and development in the area of student learning to emerge.

From a material-economic perspective, areas needing attention include opportunities (i.e., TIME) for staff to reflect in organised ways on practice and engage in professional learning activities, and for managers to engage in strategic development. This means looking closely at minimising activities and reorienting arrangements which take up time that could otherwise be spent on more developmental activities and good pedagogical work (e.g., administrative tasks). Staffing issues (recruitment and allocation of responsibilities) appear to be exacerbating time issues and creating financial pressures that also, in turn, affect staff workload (and time). Finding ways to address the identified staffing issues is therefore urgent, as well as challenging.

From a social-political perspective, there is a clear need for building more trusting, productive staff relations. It was pointed out there is a need for developed relations both within the different departments as well as in between departments, academies and administration. The emphasis by participants on clear, regular communication, and a collegial, stimulating working environment are evidence of the importance of this relational dimension of people’s work at UB. As one group commented: *“We are each other’s working environment”*. No quick-fix strategies related to this emerged from the discussions. This is not surprising given the complexity of the issues. However, the view that clear(er) goals or better communication of goals may help to address some of the outlined relations and trust issues is worth considering. Also worth considering is the extent to which tasks are being over-regulated and over-managed since this has implications for the sense of autonomy and professionalism experienced by staff, and arguably the value staff place on their work. Attention to how organisational change is affecting staff relations also seems prudent, especially in terms of how staff can be supported to overcome some of the insecurities that can accompany organisational change.

In the case of professional learning, there are many informal and formal opportunities for staff. We know from the report *‘Enkätkartläggning av behov och intressen för högskolepedagogisk utveckling’*, the seminar participant responses, and PUF course enrolments, that there is an eagerness to participate in professional learning activities, but not a corresponding number of people undertaking courses. However, the extent to which staff are engaging in informal professional learning is not clear from the material and needs further investigation. The discussions did highlight the need for shorter

courses (to allow flexibility for staff) and purpose-built courses (to cater for the specific needs of departments and teams), which the PUF department has already taken up in practice.

From a pedagogical perspective, the issues raised intersect in complex ways to affect teaching and learning at UB either indirectly or directly, and so there is a responsibility on the part of all UB staff to work towards change to address them. Many areas of change that have been gestured towards in the seminars relate to the need for balance in, professionalisation of, and a collegial approach to, the work people do at UB. These are areas that demand attention, but also present opportunities for collective problem-solving and development work between and across departments and teams.

Those in management positions are well-placed to lead change in these areas (although they need support to do so), and could be usefully informed by systematic site-based research examining the ways in which current arrangements enable and constrain key practices (and the impact on teaching and learning) and where in the university tensions exist. These questions relate directly to the university's educational mission and the notion of the institution as a sustainable university. They also affect many stakeholders (especially students, ultimately) whose voices would be important in any such research.

## 7. Recommendations

In light of the issues highlighted in this report, the authors make the following eight recommendations for future work at UB:

1. discussion within departments/teams about the challenges raised in this report – to put key issues on the agenda and work collegially towards practical 'solutions';
2. allocation of time for professional learning activities/courses and for reflection in more organized ways;
3. review of staff workload arrangements (and workload calculation systems) and exploration of the viability of the 85% workload suggestion raised in section 5.2 (perhaps there is a department in a position to trial and evaluate this approach?);
4. creation of opportunities (including support structures) for ongoing sharing/collegial learning across faculties and discipline areas, and for continuing conversations that began in the seminar series;
5. assessment of specific professional learning needs of managers/leaders, and development of strategies/programs to address the needs – for example, is there a need for a program focussing on developing collaborative cultures? or staff recruitment?;
6. creation of opportunities to discuss (and perhaps reshape) the missions and goals at departmental and institutional levels that drive and give meaning to people's daily practice;
7. further analysis of the material available about the issues raised in this report and/or the conduct of a systematic, site-based study (and development project?) to better understand the issues at UB and how best to address them, especially in terms of the impact on student learning and the learning environment. Current higher education literature and outcomes of initiatives addressing similar issues in other universities would be important resources for this work; and
8. continued celebration of the practices and initiatives that put student learning at the centre of UB endeavours.

## 8. Evaluation of the seminars (and process)

### 8.1 Participant feedback

Responses to the evaluation sheet (handed out in the last seminar) show that the series of seminars would have benefitted from being conducted over a shorter timeframe (*“it is easy to forget what happened last time”*). Some of the most interesting or valuable aspects of the series according to responses included getting together and having the opportunity to share experiences and thoughts (*“The most interesting was talking with colleagues and also a focus on leadership that contributes to learning”*); guest presentations; and being able to reflect (*“reflections around my own leading and pedagogy”*). One person said that the use of both English and Swedish created confusion. A few participants indicated that the focus on student learning (and teaching) was too far away from their every-day work. One or two people commented that they missed clear links between leading and student learning, more practice-based challenges/problems to discuss, a focus on the differences and similarities between administrative and academic leading, or an understanding of theoretical concepts used to frame the series.

### 8.2 Facilitator reflections

The insights that emerged in seminar discussions, participant feedback, and flow-on activity – such as several departments contacting the PUF department to discuss future professional learning plans – suggest that the series was worthwhile. It was intended as a starter for an important and ongoing conversation, and it appears that this goal was achieved. Time will tell whether the conversation continues and with what effect. We have of course learnt lessons from the experience. Firstly, we agree with participant comments that the seminars were a bit too spread out in time as this created a challenge regarding coherency. Secondly, at the outset, explanations of the underpinning theory and rationale for using it could have been clearer. Also, the relevance of student learning for those not directly involved with teaching and learning programs could have been discussed more explicitly. Thirdly, the first group activity generated an interesting picture of what is happening at UB, but was nevertheless very challenging (especially given the newness of the theory for many). So perhaps participants needed to be eased into this kind of task, and the seminar needed a more structured conclusion. Finally, we think it was very fruitful to have guest presentations grounded in relevant research and offering different perspectives and food for thought.

## 9. Conclusion and final reflections

To arrange a seminar series like this in one own’s university is not easy. Part of the process involved prompting people to think differently about leading within our university. Such tasks invite difficult conversations, not least because one’s assumptions may be challenged, or because of the sensitivity surrounding power relations and leadership. It has taken courage on the part of the management group (Rektors ledningråd) to enter into such conversations.

Conversations have started that need to be ongoing. In some ways, the process described in this report has only ‘scratched the surface’ so to speak. The issues that have been raised are very complex. Many demand complex approaches to address them, approaches that require a deep understanding of the issues and their implications, and require the concerted efforts of multiple stakeholders. It is easy to become overwhelmed by all that needs to be done, especially with limited resources, but there is hope and energy to be drawn from the reality that so many good things are already happening, and that UB arrangements and practices are largely of our own making. So they are changeable. At the risk of sounding idealistic, there is also a will and an almost palpable

imaginative spirit at UB that make change entirely possible. For the sake of student learning and realising the visions of UB as well as the visions participants expressed in the seminars, avenues for change are worth pursuing.

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