



Shaping Change in Education:

A Case-study on MEL Participants As Change Facilitators

Sana S. Pervaiz
Kevin O'Brien

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the journey of Master's in Educational Leadership (MEL) participants in becoming effective change facilitators within educational settings.

Through a deductive approach centred on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), the research investigates how MEL participants enact change and assess their development as change facilitators. Employing an exploratory case study methodology, the study delves into the methods and strategies employed by MEL participants to initiate and manage change, as well as their self-perceptions and reflections on their growth.

The findings reveal that the MEL experience empowers participants with confidence, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of their role as change agents. Participants emerge from the program equipped to drive innovation and tackle challenges in the educational landscape, leaving a lasting impact on themselves and their communities. Recommendations are formulated for the MEL team.

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GLOSSARY

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
MEL	Master's in Business Administration, with a major in Educational Leadership
CBAM	Concern Based Adoption Model
CF	Change facilitator

1 BACKGROUND

The Master's Degree Programme in Educational Leadership (MEL) at Tampere University of Applied Sciences, offers a unique curriculum designed to develop 21st-century leaders in the field of education. The MEL program offers a blended learning approach with yearly cohort sizes of between 20-25 students. There are separate weeklong sessions of in-person classwork and distance learning is organised within study groups for the remaining duration of the program. The program can be completed in 18 months and aims to graduate students with a Master's in Business Administration (MBA). The degree was developed as a response to the growing demand for a degree program that focused on educational leadership (Cucher, 2017). The programme was carefully outlined to cater to the evolving requirements of educational leaders, particularly focusing on enhancing their capabilities in leading change in their working contexts.

The MEL program was conceived with the central aim of fostering leaders who serve as drivers of change, a philosophy underpinned by the insights of Michael Fullan's seminal work on educational change. Fullan (2015) emphasises the importance of cultivating leaders who are not just managers of change but active participants and facilitators of it. The MEL program employs a comprehensive approach to leadership development, emphasising critical thinking, strategic planning, and ethical decision-making. Its curriculum is crafted to equip participants with a wide range of skills crucial for driving change, such as adaptive leadership, collaborative problem-solving, and effective communication. The program's emphasis on skills development is supported by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky's (2009) work on adaptive leadership, which argues for the necessity of leaders to engage with and mobilise others to tackle tough challenges.

Probably one of the most distinctive aspects of the MEL program is its hands-on perspective, where the learning process is integrated with the participants' own working contexts. This approach is grounded in experiential learning

theory, as articulated by Kolb (1984), which puts forward that the deepest learning occurs through direct experience and reflection upon that experience.

By providing participants with opportunities to apply leadership theories and strategies directly to their unique challenges, the MEL program ensures that learning is not only abstract and theoretical but also practical and impactful. This method facilitates immediate applicability and relevance, enabling participants to enact change within their organisations, throughout their time participating in the programme.

Building on the work previously done by MEL graduate Scott Benzenberg in their thesis; “Experiencing Educational Leadership Development, A Phenomenological Impact Study”, in which they investigated graduates’ perceptions of their educational leadership development, this research aims to deepen our understanding of the MEL programme's influence, specifically how it shapes participants into leaders and facilitators of change within their institutions. Benzenberg highlighted how the programme enhances leadership skills and initiates organisational change, focusing on personal growth and the application of new leadership strategies in real-life scenarios.

One of the key findings from Benzenberg's research is the development in participants' views of leadership and their self-identification as effective agents of change. This evolution from conventional to more nuanced and inclusive perspectives on leadership indicates not only personal development but also the possibility for wider organisational change. The study illustrates how the MEL programme encourages a rethinking of leadership perceptions, highlighting the significance of adaptability, empathy, and teamwork in modern educational environments.

In addition, Benzenberg's study assesses the usefulness of the phenomenological approach in research on educational leadership. His conclusions support the method as an effective means of investigating complex subjects, like leadership development, where subjective experiences and personal growth are paramount. This methodological insight contributes significantly to the discussion on leadership studies, proposing that qualitative, phenomenological research can provide valuable, detailed insights into the effects of educational programmes.

However, while Benzenberg's study offers comprehensive insights into the personal growth and evolution of leadership among MEL participants, certain aspects related to the practical implementation of leadership skills within organisational contexts appear underexplored. Notably, the thesis abstract and results sections seem not to cover detailed exploration of how participants enacted change within their own institutions, led organisational change, or influenced their organisations directly. This observation indicates that, although Benzenberg's research significantly investigates the capacity for change management among participants, it does not consistently delve into the practical acts of change management. Additionally, the thesis lacks explicit discussion on the challenges participants may have encountered in applying their newly acquired skills to facilitate change and organisational development within their educational settings.

While acknowledging the value of Benzenberg's insights and in no way a critique of Benzenberg's work, the above analysis acknowledges the complexity of educational leadership development and the need for continued investigation into the real-world application of theoretical knowledge and leadership skills. By focusing on these additional elements, this study intends to bridge these gaps by focusing on the specific actions MEL participants undertake to initiate and manage change, and the challenges they encounter in applying their skills in diverse organisational contexts. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, this research will extend Benzenberg's findings by examining the real-world application of leadership training

provided by the MEL program, particularly how it equips participants to lead meaningful and sustainable transformations in their educational environments.

The emphasis will be on understanding the dynamics that influence the effectiveness of these change efforts and providing a comprehensive view of how theoretical knowledge is translated into practical change management practices. This approach aims to enrich the current understanding of the MEL program's impact, directly addressing the research questions related to how participants enact change and assess their development as change facilitators.

1.1 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of our study was to investigate whether MEL participants *become* change facilitators in their educational setting.

RQ 1: How do MEL participants enact change?

RQ 2: How do MEL participants assess their development as change facilitators?

2 METHODS

2.1 Research team and their approach to the study

The researchers of this study are part of the MEL21 cohort of the program. They are from Belgium and Ireland, but are respectively based in Sweden and the UAE. Neither has an extensive academic background in the field of education, nor a teacher's training, however both work in educational settings. Sana works for an NGO that focuses on women's health and sexual health. The NGO develops sexual education related programs for healthcare professionals, as well as for the general public. Kevin's professional background has mainly been in higher education with experience working student enrollment, academic operations, student services and campus management. He currently works for an educational group who specialise in building and developing international K12 schools globally. Sana has experience in qualitative research studies. To prepare themselves and limit potential bias, the authors have read extensively what previous research has concluded on the topic, qualitative research method books, reflected over their pre-understandings and chosen a theoretical framework to support them during the data collection and analysis processes, as well as secure a more transparent approach for readers. The researchers' supervisor (Jori Leskelä) was a teacher educator at TAMK, is a visiting lecturer within the MEL program and has a PhD in Education from the University of Tampere.

The researchers have decided to focus on interpretivism and constructivism as approaches to guide the exploration of this study. These perspectives are pivotal for delving into the transformative experiences of MEL participants, their professional development, and their capacity to act as agents of change within educational contexts. Interpretivism asserts that reality is constructed through social interactions and subjective interpretations. Interpretivism is instrumental in understanding how participants perceive their journey through the lens

of leadership development and change facilitation, underscoring the importance of individual perceptions and subjective experiences in constructing knowledge about educational leadership and change management (Takahashi & Araujo, 2020).

Complementing interpretivism, constructivism suggests that individuals forge their understanding and knowledge of the world through experience and reflection. This

perspective is particularly pertinent to this study as it shows how MEL participants construct their identities as leaders and change facilitators amidst their engagement with the programme's curriculum and their professional environments. Constructivism emphasises the active role of participants in shaping their leadership capacities, accentuating the dynamic nature of learning and transformation advocated by the MEL programme (Takahashi & Araujo, 2020).

The use of this dual approach (interpretivism and constructivism) gives a holistic view at both the personal, meaningful experiences of participants and how they actively shape their professional roles as leaders in education. This view not only deepens their understanding of how leadership grows in the MEL programme but also gives a detailed insight into how theoretical knowledge is used and adapted in practice.

This project has been commissioned by Païvi Mayor, program director of the MEL program at TAMK. Of particular interest to the MEL program's director is how well MEL equips participants to apply their learning in real-world settings, thereby influencing change within their institutions. The insights from this study are expected to highlight areas where the programme excels and where it could be enhanced, guiding future development of the curricula. This research seeks to affirm the MEL programme's role in shaping adept educational leaders, contributing to the evolution of educational leadership practices.

2.2 Study design

This is an explorative case study, allowing an in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of a complex issue in its real-life setting (Crowe, S. et al, 2011). This methodological choice aligns with the nature of the research inquiry, which seeks to understand the nuanced experiences, challenges, and strategies involved in developing and implementing change, in line with the expertise developed through the MEL program. Indeed, by using a case study focused approach, the researchers hope to gain insights into how these leaders approach change initiatives, from initial implementation to full integration and renewal, providing empirical evidence of how well the program prepares its participants for the challenging role of educational leadership.

Furthermore, the research team opted for a deductive approach to the study, centering around the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), originally developed by Hall et al., in 1974. While the initial development of the model was in the 1970's, the model has been refined over the decades to make it relevant and fit for purpose in the modern organisational setting. Areas such as enhanced frameworks and tools, integration with new research and theories, digital and technological developments, and global applications as well as cultural sensitivities have all been employed to build on the initial literature and studies. By systematically exploring the interviewees' input regarding change through the lens of the CBAM, this method offers an ease into identifying factors influencing participants' organisational environments' readiness for change. Grounding the study in established theory enhances rigour and credibility, facilitating comparability with existing research. Overall, the deductive approach using CBAM provides a robust methodological foundation for systematically analysing the process of becoming change agents among the MEL participants and graduates.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) is a conceptual framework developed for implementing and managing change within educational settings. It focuses on the psychological and behavioural aspects of individuals undergoing change. CBAM was originally developed by Gene E. Hall and Shirley M. Hord in 1974 and identifies stages of concern and levels of use that individuals experience as they adopt new innovations. Throughout their work on this project, the authors chose to use the term Change Facilitator (CF) as opposed to Change Agent or Agent of Change as this was the term utilised by Hall & Hord in their model. This decision is based on a deliberate alignment with the approach Hall & Hord advocate, where facilitating change is seen as a more collaborative, supportive, and enabling process than what might be implied by the term "agent.". This model is particularly relevant to educational leadership programs (e.g, MEL), which aim to prepare leaders to effectively facilitate and manage change within their institutions. The choice of the CBAM for this thesis stems from its capacity to offer a comprehensive framework, enabling a nuanced understanding of how individuals within an organisation perceive and adjust to change. This model is particularly relevant for investigating the understanding of MEL participants and graduates, as it provides a structured approach to understanding how these individuals, trained as leaders, facilitate change within their educational institutions. Figure 1 below shows the three components for assessing and guiding this process.

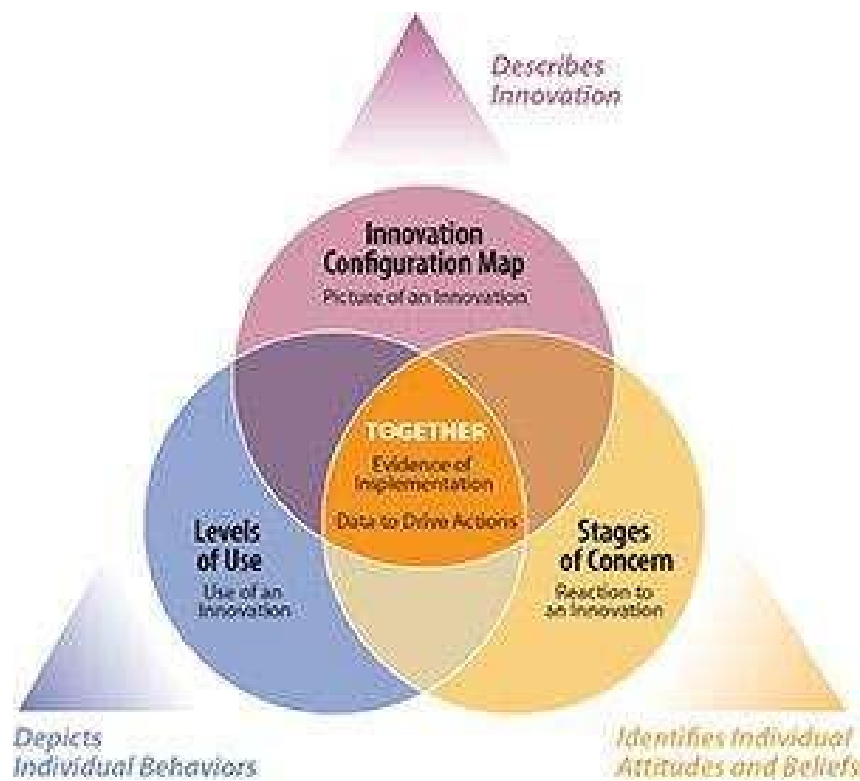


FIGURE 1. The Three Diagnostic Dimensions of the CBAM Model

Note: *Description of the CBAM theoretical framework and how each component intersects. From the American Institutes for Research. (2024). CBAM: The Concerns- Based Adoption Model. Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/resource/cbam-concerns-based-adoption-model>*

Utilising the CBAM should enable the researchers to assess the impact MEL participants have on their organisations through the Stages of Concern (SoC), Levels of Use (LoU), and Innovation Configurations (IC). This threefold focus permits a comprehensive examination of the participants' ability to implement change, scrutinise the depth and sustainability of these changes within their institutions, and evaluate the variability and quality of implementation practices (Hall & Hord, 2011).

Stages of Concern (SoC) : SoC provides insight into the feelings, perceptions, and motivations of individuals experiencing change. Within the MEL programme, SoC can reveal how participants progress from initial awareness to personal concern, and eventually to focusing on the impact of change. For example, early stages might include anxieties about new responsibilities, while later stages concentrate on optimising the change's benefits for the school.

Levels of Use (LoU) : LoU assesses the extent of use of the new practices or innovations. It ranges from non-use, through various stages of orientation, preparation, mechanical use, and eventually to integration and renewal. In the MEL context, researchers could evaluate whether participants advance beyond mere adoption to effectively integrate new leadership strategies into their daily practices, thus leading to sustainable change.

Innovation Configurations (IC) : IC refers to the different ways in which an innovation is implemented. It acknowledges that there can be variations in implementing change, which may affect its outcomes. For the MEL programme, examining IC can help understand how different leaders adapt and customise leadership practices to fit their specific educational contexts, thereby influencing the effectiveness of the change process.

CBAM's underlying assumptions about educational change emphasise the learning process, the necessity for a whole-system effort, and the pivotal role of leadership at all organisational levels. By applying SoC, LoU, and IC, researchers can obtain an in-depth view of how MEL participants enact change, the degree to which these changes are integrated into their practice, and the quality of implementation (Hall & Hord, 2015). This approach not only provides a way for assessing the tangible impacts of educational leadership but also offers insights into how theoretical competencies are translated into practical change facilitation in educational settings.

The CBAM asserts several fundamental assumptions about the nature of educational change:

- **Change as a Learning Process:** The CBAM emphasises that change is inherently a learning process, necessitating the acquisition of new knowledge and skills (Hall & Hord, 2015). This perspective aligns with the educational theory that learning is continuous and contextual, where individuals and organisations evolve through iterative cycles of action and reflection (Kolb, 1984). Understanding and adapting to change, therefore, requires not just the transmission of information but also the development of new competencies and mindsets.
- **Change as a Process, Not an Event:** CBAM advocates for viewing change as an ongoing journey rather than a discrete incident (Hall & Hord, 2015). This emphasises the importance of continuous adaptation and growth, advocating for a sustained commitment to change rather than a 'project-based' approach. It aligns with Fullan's (2007) assertion that successful change is a complex, long-term process requiring persistent effort and re-evaluation.
- **Whole System Effort:** Implementing change necessitates the engagement and commitment of the entire educational ecosystem (Hall & Hord, 2015). This assumption posits that change cannot be compartmentalised but should be systemic, involving all stakeholders, including administration, faculty, students, and the wider community. Such an approach ensures that change is embedded within the organisational culture, leading to more sustainable and impactful outcomes.
- **Individual Implementation:** While organisational decisions may initiate change, its successful implementation relies on individuals within the system (Hall & Hord,

2015). This view acknowledges the critical role of personal agency and the capacity of individuals to translate organisational objectives into action. Effective change, therefore, depends on empowering individuals to innovate and implement strategies that align with the broader organisational goals.

- **The School as the Primary Unit for Change:** In the context of educational change, CBAM prioritises the school as the main agent for implementing and sustaining change initiatives (Hall & Hord, 2015). This focus on the school underscores the belief that educational institutions are where significant changes begin, where theoretical models are tested and refined in practice. Schools, as microcosms of larger educational systems, are pivotal in driving the transformational change necessary for educational advancement.
- **Essential Leadership:** CBAM acknowledges the indispensable role of leadership at various levels in orchestrating successful change (Hall & Hord, 2015). Leadership is not merely about positional authority but involves influencing, motivating, and guiding others towards shared goals. Effective leadership in educational change fosters a vision, cultivates a supportive culture, and navigates the complexities of transforming educational practices and structures.

While CBAM has been extensively utilised in a range of educational settings, its initial development and primary application have been concentrated in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, including specific professional fields like medical and dental education (Garrison, 2024). In these settings, CBAM has supported diverse curriculum changes, demonstrating its adaptability and effectiveness across different educational levels.

This thesis employs CBAM to investigate its applicability and efficacy within the diverse settings represented by the MEL program participants. The MEL cohorts, comprising individuals from varied educational and professional

backgrounds, provide a unique opportunity to explore how CBAM's frameworks—Stages of Concern, Levels of Use, and Innovation Configurations—can be adapted and applied effectively across different educational contexts beyond the traditional realms of its prior application.

As mentioned previously, there also remains a significant gap in comprehensive studies that explore the full influence of the MEL program (as well as its similar study programs) in its influence on change facilitation within educational contexts. Nonetheless, existing literature highlights the importance of developing leadership and change facilitation skills tailored to the educational sector's unique challenges, indicating a strong demand for programs, such as MEL, addressing these specific needs. For instance, the effectiveness of transformational leadership in engaging all educational stakeholders is crucial, especially during times of crisis (Keele University, 2022). Moreover, the call for multidisciplinary leadership programs that incorporate global and ethical dimensions indicates a broad consensus on the need for comprehensive educational leadership training (Elmuti, Minnis, & Abebe, 2005).

2.4 Study setting

The data collection period spanned from Mid-February 2024 to Mid-March 2024 and took place entirely online (Google Form and Zoom).

2.5 Study sample

The study was open to all participants from the MEL cohorts between 2017 (1st year of the launch of the program) and 2022. Participants from the 2023 cohort were excluded due to slight curriculum adjustments introduced in the program recently, namely in the change management course, due to a change in teacher and hence, approach to the content taught. It is important to mention that not all participants had graduated by the time they took part in the study. The deliberate inclusion of both current students and graduates stemmed from the research team's assumption that MEL participants might take steps to enact change within their work environments while undergoing

the study program - as many course assignments are related to the students' work settings - rather than solely post-graduation. Participants were first hence selected through purposive sampling, and thereafter through snowball sampling, as the researchers identified fellow MEL participants (from various cohorts) they personally knew and invited them to take part in the study.

2.6 Data collection

The study was divided into 2 parts:

Part I: An online survey was launched via Google Forms, containing 3 sections, with multiple choice questions and brief open-ended questions. The sections covered topics such as their personal development through the MEL program, their understanding of being a change agent and their feedback on the MEL program. 31 people responded to the survey. The survey's questions are available as Appendix I. Although this approach may be limited in its capacity to delve deeply into individual experiences and nuanced perspectives, utilising an online survey methodology offers a streamlined and cost-effective means to reach a wide array of MEL participants.

Part II: 9 semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted in order to grasp interviewees' understanding of MEL participants and graduate's views on becoming CFs in their work context. These interviews took place over Zoom, and lasted an hour and a half each, on average. An interview guide was developed by the researchers conducting the interviews. The investigation's questions were employed in a pilot study, which underwent a feasibility check carried out by the research team. After the pilot interview, some questions were slightly reformulated, allowing the interview protocol to be easier to follow by the study participants. The data collected from the pilot investigation was added to the study's compiled evidence. Follow-up detail-oriented questions and rephrasing were used by the author to ensure no language difficulties or misunderstandings would alter the shared information. Two additional questions were added to the protocol later on, due to two interviewees bringing up questions the research team

found interesting in line with the aim and research questions of this study. All interviews were conducted by one of the two main researchers to ensure consistency throughout the data collection process. The interview guide is available as Appendix II. All interviews were audio recorded. Oral information about the study was provided at the beginning of each interview and oral informed consent was sought for each interviewee. Although semi-structured interviews demand more time and resources for both data collection and analysis, restricting the sample size and potentially introducing bias or interpretation errors through interviewer influence, they provide an invaluable opportunity to engage with participants on a deeper level, fostering rich qualitative data collection and yielding comprehensive insights into their lived experiences.

<i>Meaning Unit</i>	<i>Condensed meaning unit</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Sub-group</i>	<i>Main theme in the CBAM or Theme unrelated to CBAM</i>
And then we had a whole-school kind of change project going on, you could just see the people were getting burned out and stressed (interview respondent)	People were getting burned out and stressed	Challenges	Intra-personal	Stages of concern (Informational stage)
Made changes to the admission process for	Changes to the admission process	Types of change	/	Innovation configurations (Ideal configuration)
international students (survey respondent)				

There is a division between early years and the upper levels of primary school. So getting more collaboration between that.	More collaboration needed	Reason for change	/	Levels of use (Level 3)
Cultural Diversity, I think, was a bit weak. The cultural diversity unit	Cultural diversity course was a bit weak	Changes to make during the program	Courses	MEL

2.7 Data analysis

The collected data underwent analysis employing both inductive and directed content analysis methods (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), leading to thematic synthesis and case study description.

Indeed, frequency distributions were drawn for categorical responses and are available in the results section. Graphical representation was also made to put into light the rating the participants brought forth towards MEL equipping them to bring change. The data emanating from the survey was also analysed and presented with visual aids (i.e, charts, graphs) in the results section.

TABLE 1: Examples of the analysis process: from meaning unit to main theme

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, by the research team, thanks to the help of the Otter.ai transcribing tool. The transcriptions were verified by the researchers of this paper, to make sure no data or meaning was lost during the transcribing process. The data was then coded using a directed content analysis approach (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), with the use of both the Nvivo 14 software and the Excel 2003 workbook software.

A codebook was developed using the CBAM. Coding was conducted in English. Condensation occurred inductively where codes were independently and iteratively categorised by the 2 researchers, until consensus was reached. Thereafter, these were sorted under the broader domains of the CBAM whenever possible. Sometimes, some data was not possible to categorise under a CBAM theme as it was unrelated to any innovation the facilitators initiated in their context. For instance, feedback on the enhancements of the MEL program were categorised under a theme named "MEL". Questions relating to MEL, in terms of its enhancements were posed to the informants as this was part of the request of the commissioner. The researcher team's discussions of the data are reflected in the analysis and interpretation parts of the thesis.

3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participants received information about the study when invited to participate (in both the survey and the interview). The researcher explained that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. The data was collected following the declaration of Helsinki principles.

As with any interview study, there are questions regarding the pseudonymity of the participants who partake, and any possible implications participation may have on their current and future work experience. All efforts were made to preserve pseudonymity. Interview transcriptions were kept confidential and the data, including illustrative quotations, are presented without revealing interviewees' identity.

The data is stored securely in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679. The study did not require ethical approval from an Ethical committee. With that being said, all steps were thoroughly overseen and given a green light by the supervisor of the research team, prior to the launch of the study. No

conflicts of interest to disclose.

The researchers reflected on the pre-understandings and assumptions they posited towards the researched topic. This was further contemplated by both researchers, during the entirety of the study designing, data collection and analysis processes.

4 RESULTS

The journey of change facilitators (CFs) within educational institutions is multifaceted and complex. In this section, this study's exploration, into understanding the MEL programme's influence in shaping its participants into leaders and facilitators of change within their institutions, is presented. Through a comprehensive analysis of survey and interview data, the authors aim to uncover the intricacies of MEL participants' journeys as facilitators of change, highlighting the program's impact on their self-perception and professional growth.

4.1 Population Characteristics

Understanding the demographic characteristics of participants is vital to put into context their perceptions and experiences within their organisational context and its relation to the MEL program.

1. Age Distribution

Most of the participants are in the 30-44 age bracket, representing 70.97%, indicative of mid-career professionals seeking further development through the MEL program. This age group is particularly relevant because these individuals are likely at a pivotal point in their careers where advanced leadership training can significantly influence their career trajectory. Those aged 45-59 make up 25.81%, bringing to the program a wealth of experience that may enhance peer learning and the exchange of insights.

2. Gender Composition

The gender distribution, with females at 54.84% and males at 45.16%, suggests that the MEL program is achieving a gender balance, which is crucial for fostering a diverse learning environment. Gender diversity can lead to varied ways of facilitating change and perspectives, enhancing discussions, and learning outcomes within the program.

3. Geographic Location

Participants to this research study come from across 15 different countries, which shows the international appeal and reach of the MEL program. Geographically, the representation includes:

- Europe: With participants from Finland (5), Ireland (3), Germany (2), Greece (2), and single representatives from several other countries, reflecting the program's strong European roots and appeal.
- Americas: Encompassing individuals from Brazil (3), Canada (2), and a single representative from the United States, the data suggests the program is western hemisphere focused.
- Asia and Oceania: With the UAE (3) and Australia (1) accounting for participants, there is evidence of the program's growing resonance beyond its immediate geographic vicinity. While there are a few study participants based in this part of the world, no respondent to the study is a citizen of an Asian nation.
- Africa: While there is a single study participant based in Mozambique, no informant to the study is a citizen of an African nation.

4. Year of commencement of the program

The minority of the respondents commenced their studies in the earlier years of the MEL programme, with two participants starting in 2018, one in 2019, and two in 2020. The majority of respondents began the program in the years immediately preceding the survey, with 16 participants in 2021 and 10 in

2022, indicating that these individuals' insights into the program's influence in their work may be shaped by their recent experiences and the application of their learning may still be in its early stages.

5. Educational Background

The participants' educational background is evenly split between those with Bachelor's and Master's degrees, each at 41.94%. This suggests that the MEL program caters to a wide educational spectrum, appealing to those seeking advanced study beyond a Bachelor's degree as well as those pursuing continuing education post-Masters. The presence of participants with PhDs (16.13%) enriches the program to a greater extent. This demonstrates that the MEL program is appealing even to those with the highest level of academic achievement, who may be pursuing practical leadership applications to supplement extensive research experience. This can be beneficial in discussions of educational leadership and management amongst MEL cohorts too. It is interesting to note that it is quite atypical to have PhD students go for studies on a Master's level, yet it is not uncommon in the context of MEL.

6. Professional Experience

The range of professional experience in the educational field appears to be notable, within the participating group, as seen below in Fig 2. This demonstrates the program's attraction to individuals with established careers in education. These experienced professionals bring practical insights into the educational leadership challenges that the MEL program seeks to address. The smaller group with less experience (0-5 years, 1 participant) seems to indicate that the program may also serve as a stepping stone for

emerging leaders.

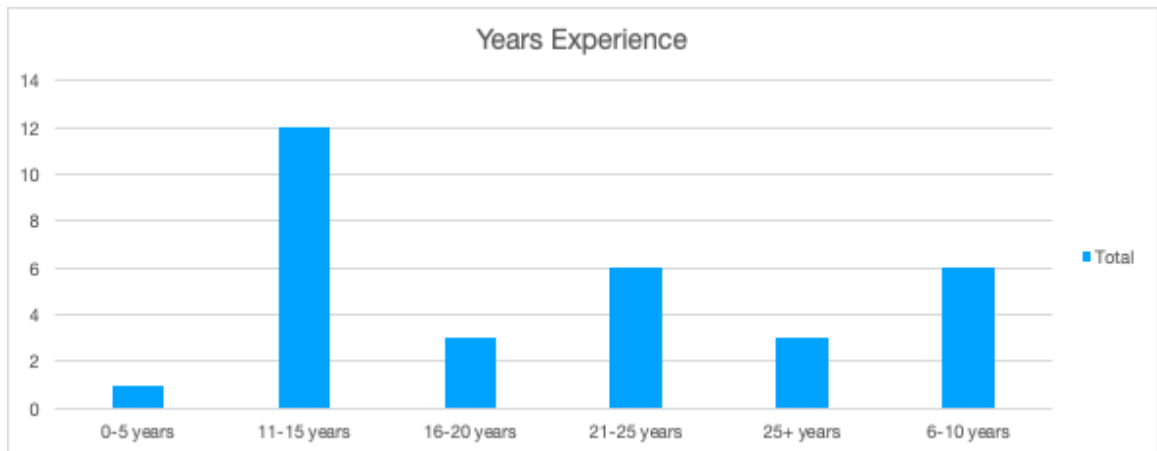


FIGURE 2. Professional Experience of MEL Program Participants

Amongst the 31 participants to the survey, 9 were further interviewed. The table below gives a brief overview of these informants.

TABLE 2: *Demographic data of the nine informants interviewed*

Informant	Cohort	Type of work context
I1	2019	Private education
I2	2022	Insurance
I3	2021	Education consultancy
I4	2021	Private education
I5	2021	Private education
I6	2021	Higher education
I7	2022	Private education
I8	2022	Public school system
I9	2018	Higher education

7. Leadership Roles

As seen below in Fig. 3, with 64.52% of respondents occupying leadership or decision- making roles, the MEL program seems to attract those in influential

positions within their organisations. This is particularly relevant to the thesis as it may elucidate how program content is applied in practice, with these individuals being in a position to enact change directly. The remaining 35.48% of participants without such official roles also represent an important demographic, as the program could play a pivotal role in preparing them in their work as possible CFs.

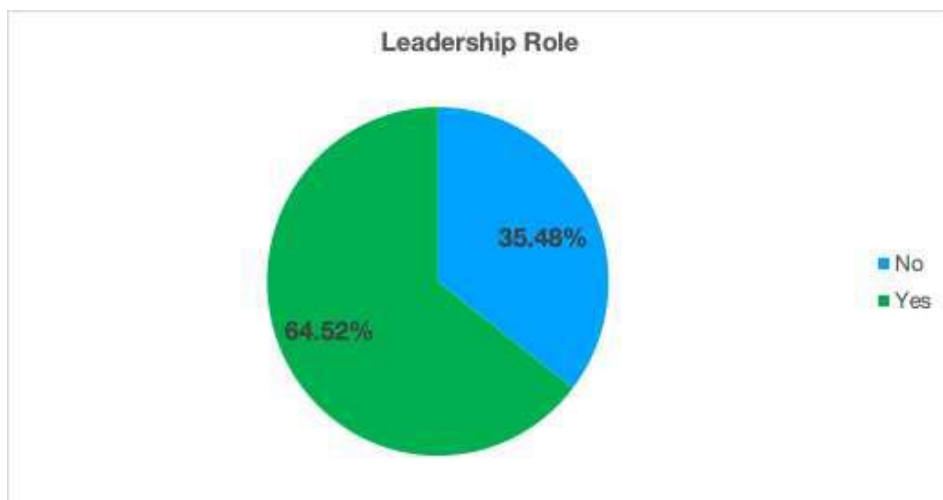


FIGURE 3. Distribution of Leadership Roles Among MEL Program Participants

These demographic variables provide a backdrop against which the impact of the MEL program can be assessed. The diversity in age, gender, geography, education, and professional experience among the participants implies a strong mix of perspectives, which can both influence and reflect the program's role in shaping 21st century leaders in education.

8. Change of Role During and After MEL

Of the survey respondents, 64.52% did not experience a change in their employment or position during the course of the program, while 35.48% reported that they did. The changes varied widely, reflecting both horizontal shifts and promotions. One respondent transitioned from teaching at a further education college to a part-time university position, citing the expansion of

their teaching role. Another maintained their function as an Education Export Specialist but moved to a new organisation. A noteworthy promotion was from a middle management role to Assistant Principal. Some participants reported geographical moves that influenced their employment changes, such as a return to Canada or a shift for a role with UNICEF. Job transitions within the field of education were also mentioned, such as from teaching to roles with a focus on organisational development, curriculum coordination, and increased leadership responsibilities. The reasons for these changes were diverse, including better job opportunities, the desire for career advancement, and personal factors like reuniting with family post-pandemic.

Following completion of the MEL program, 38.71% of respondents reported a change in their employment or position, while the majority, 61.29%, indicated no change. One individual progressed from Head of English to also coordinating the Theory of Knowledge department, achieving both a leadership expansion and a salary increase. Several respondents reported seeking and obtaining leadership roles, such as Head of Primary or Deputy Principal, driven by the desire for financial stability and personal reasons, including family considerations. Entrepreneurial ventures were also mentioned, with one respondent founding a startup in educational consultancy. The MEL program itself was highlighted as a catalyst for change by some, providing the impetus and confidence to seek new opportunities. Moves due to personal life changes, such as relocating cities, were also cited as reasons for post-program career shifts.

9. Equipment to facilitate change in their educational setting:

As part of the survey, the participants were asked to state from a scale of 1-5 how well the MEL program equipped them to effect change in their educational setting. Fig. 4, represents the results of this survey question with Axis X representing the number rating and Axis Y the number of respondents. The respondents generally feel well-equipped, thanks to the Master's program to enact change, with no participants selecting the lowest two options

(1 and 2). Seven participants rated themselves a 3, indicating a moderate level of preparedness. The majority, 16 participants, feel quite prepared with a self-rating of 4, and 8 participants feel extremely well-equipped with a rating of 5.

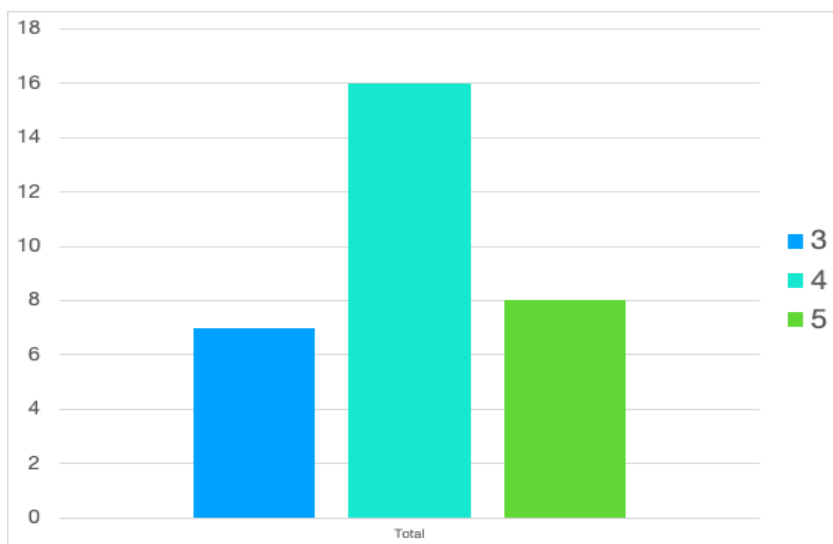


FIGURE 4. Self-Assessment of Change Facilitation Preparedness Among MEL Program Participants

Comparing and contrasting:

4.2 Participant Program Engagement and Self-Perceived Impact Analysis

Shown below in Fig. 5 is a comparison and analysis of the trends and correlations between two data sets from the survey, the first details when participants commenced the MEL Program, and the second shows their self-assessed readiness to effect change in their educational setting after completing the program.

The majority of survey participants began the MEL Program in recent years, with 16 in 2021 and 10 in 2022. A smaller group of participants commenced between 2018 and 2020.

The respondents generally feel well-equipped by the Master's program to enact change, with no participants selecting the lowest two options (1 and 2). Seven participants rated themselves a 3, indicating a moderate level of preparedness. The majority, 16 participants, feel quite prepared with a self-rating of 4, and 8 participants feel extremely well-equipped with a rating of 5.

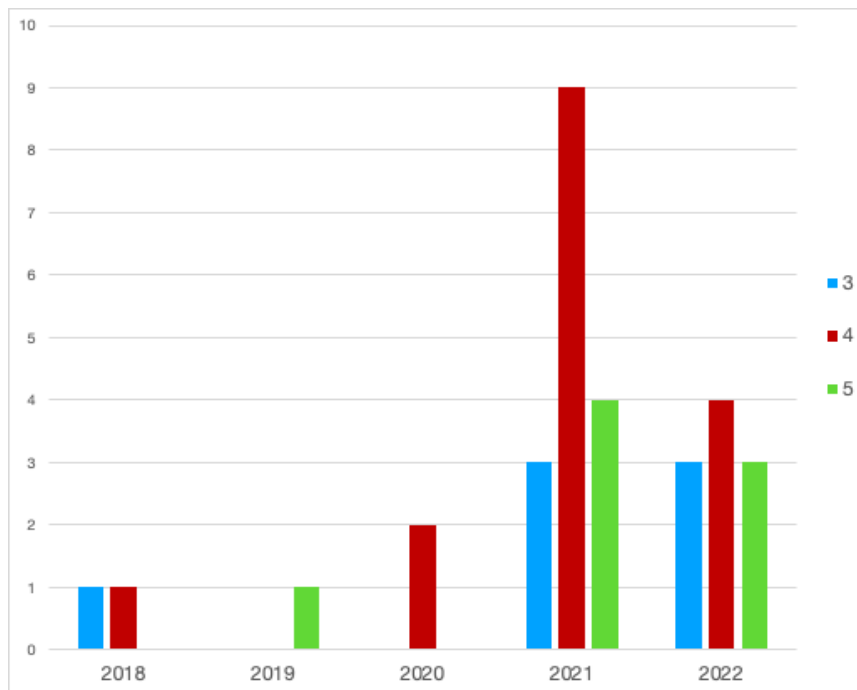


FIGURE 5. Correlation Between Program Start Year and Readiness to Implement Change Among MEL Program Participants

4.3 Associating Courses with Participant Readiness for Educational Leadership

As part of the survey participants were also asked to select the specific courses or content in MEL that contributed to their work as CFs, this data was then cross referenced against the data collected in Fig. 4. With the graph below in Figure 6, we see the comparison detailing the extent to which participants feel equipped by the MEL program to enact change (Fig. 4) which is shown on the X Axis, and the Y Axis, listing specific courses or content that

contributed to their work as change facilitators.

- 'Leadership Practices' (24 mentions) and 'Curriculum Design and Implementation' (23 mentions) emerged as the most influential, signalling their pivotal roles in shaping practical leadership skills and curricular expertise.
- Courses on 'Technology Enhanced Learning' and 'Contemporary Learning Theories' (18 mentions each), along with 'Communication and Conflict Management' and 'Emerging Trends' (17 mentions each), reflect the importance of modern educational strategies and soft skills in leadership.
- 'Change and Project Management Methods' and 'Educational Policy' (16 mentions each), and 'Managing Cultural Diversity' (13 mentions) also contribute significantly, underlining the need for systemic change approaches, policy understanding, and cultural awareness in leadership roles.

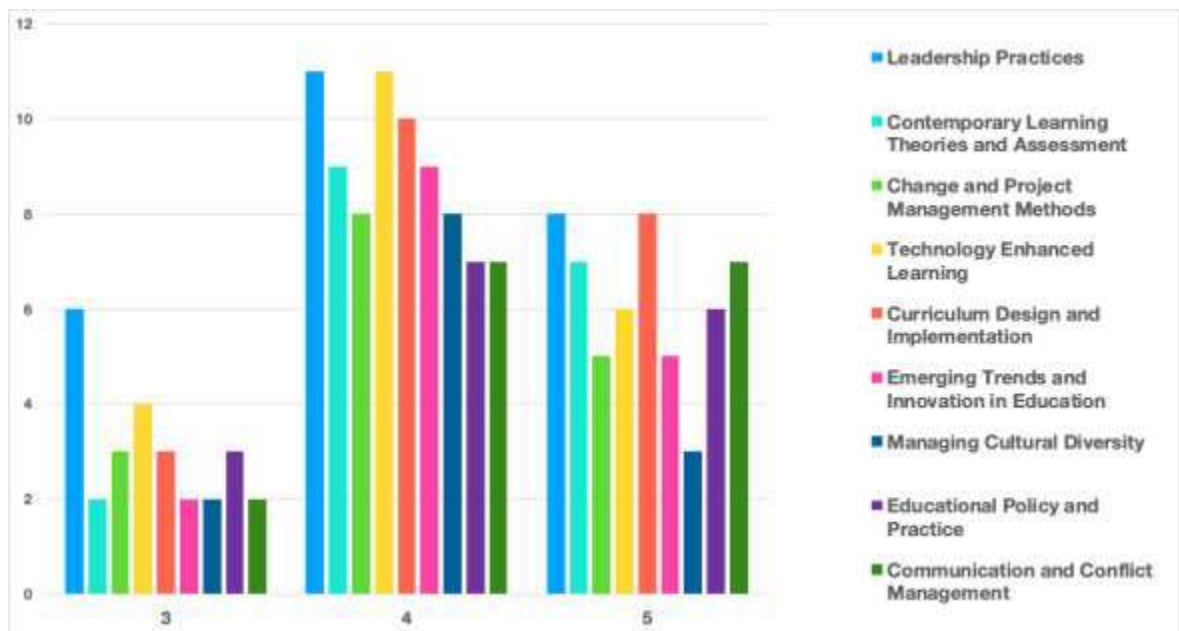


FIGURE 6. Impact of Specific MEL Courses on Participant Readiness to Facilitate Change

4.4 Triangulated Analysis of Courses, Readiness for Educational Leadership, and Current Leadership Roles

To develop further the analysis of the data from Fig. 6 where the impact of specific MEL courses on participants readiness to facilitate change was shown, in Fig. 7 below, the dataset incorporating leadership roles has also been added to the X Axis. This added variable shows if the respondent was in a leadership role and can help in understanding how the program's courses translate into leadership effectiveness and readiness to implement change.

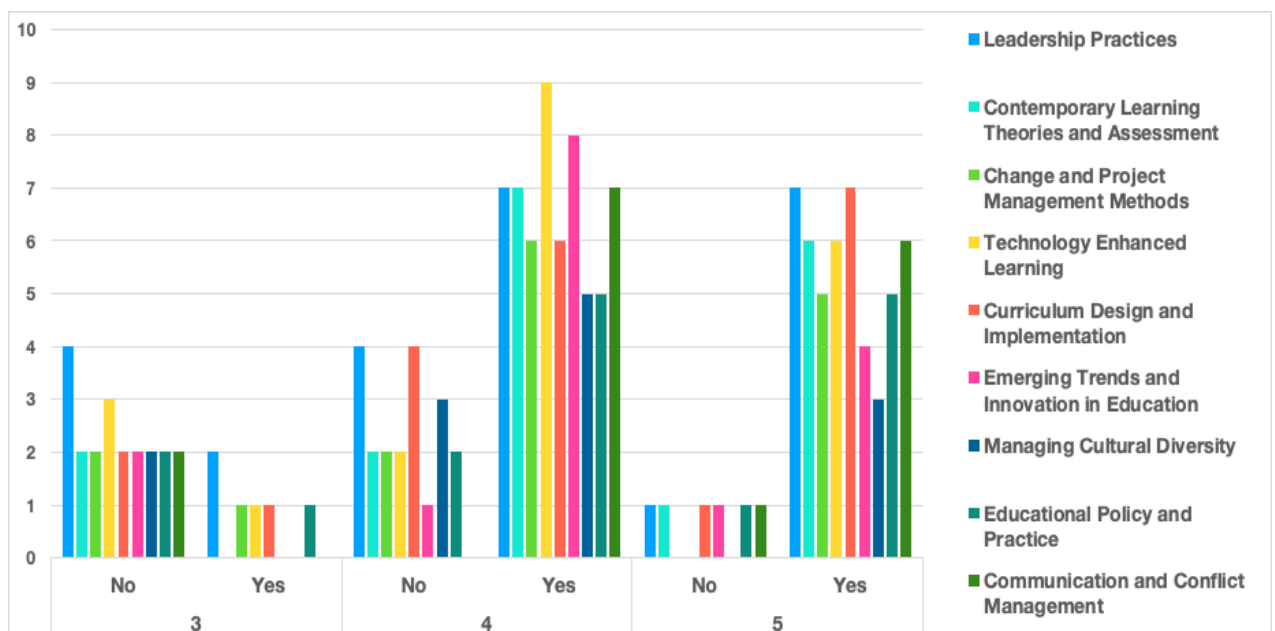


FIGURE 7. Triangulated Analysis of MEL Courses, Readiness for Leadership, and Current Leadership Roles

4.5 Who and what is a change facilitator VS a leader, according to MEL participants?

According to the study participants, a CF embodies qualities such as empowering, adaptive, resilient, and inclusive. They create an environment of trust and openness, encouraging individuals to explore new ideas and perspectives. With a keen focus on coaching and mentorship, they guide others through transitions, promoting continuous learning and growth. Advocates for change, CFs support innovative solutions and challenge the status quo, inspiring courage and determination in the face of adversity. By championing inclusivity and diversity, they ensure that all voices are heard and valued. As a survey participant shares, *“the role of a change agent is to amplify the things that are worth amplifying”*. Through their leadership and facilitation skills, CFs drive positive transformation, empowering individuals and organisations to thrive in dynamic environments. Not confined by traditional leadership structures, *a CF is not necessarily a leader*, but, as stated by I5, *“I would argue, has the potential to become one”*, through their efforts to advocate for change and drive development, aligning philosophy with

action. With a resilient mindset and a commitment to continuous learning, they highlight the need for change to those with the power to enact it and promote a non-traditional approach to leadership and change, emphasising a servant leadership approach and the importance of self-awareness and personal development.

Interestingly, some of the study participants used the terms “change facilitator”, “change agent” and “agent of change” interchangeably, whereas others showed a clear difference between the terminologies of “change facilitator” and “change agent”, stating that they saw themselves as a mix of both: *“I would say I’m probably a little mixture of both”*, as mentioned by I8. A leader, in contrast, wields influence and guides others, even without directly instigating change. While not all leaders may initiate change, *they have the potential to serve as CFs*, leveraging their leadership roles to advocate for and drive development. The study participants believe that in educational

settings, every teacher assumes the role of an independent leader, contributing to the overall leadership landscape. Some interviewees emphasised that everyone possesses leadership qualities, indicating that leadership is not restricted to designated roles or titles. In their eyes, CFs are inherently leaders because they identify issues, a fundamental aspect of leadership. Importantly, leadership is characterised by strong relationships built over time, rooted in trust, understanding, and empathy. Effective leaders exhibit self-awareness, empathy, and strong social skills, understanding and appreciating the diversity of individuals they lead.

4.6 Why is change needed in their respective educational setting?

Within the rich tapestry of the study participants' reflections, a diverse array of challenges and aspirations emerge, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the educational landscape and the need for transformative action. Participants observe a disconcerting misalignment between stated organisational intentions (i.e, from management echelons) and enacted behaviours (i.e, day-to-day experiences), indicative of a systemic disconnect that hampers collaboration and erodes trust. Moreover, they articulate concerns regarding the prevailing environmental conditions, pointing to a pervasive coldness within educational settings that warrants attention: *"it's very cold, you know, the environment. It's cold"* (I7). They lament the lack of consistency in educational approaches and decry an administrative ethos that prioritises bureaucratic tasks over pedagogical innovation, as shared by I6 *"just because of the way that the employment system works here, the ethos of the way that Australians work"*. The pressing need for enhanced collaboration, sustainability, and faith in teachers permeates their narratives, signalling a collective yearning for a more inclusive and empowering educational paradigm. Advocacy for interventions to break cycles of socio-economic marginalisation and address unmet educational needs of students with special requirements is voiced by many informants, such as number 8 who stated *"that's what I'm envisioning, is no matter where you come from, no matter how you are or what your appearance is, no matter if you have a*

physical or mental handicap, and no matter what, that you can pursue your own goals and your own happiness in that sense, if you will. And that is something that I think is a duty". They highlight the perils of organisational silos and underscore the imperative for quality education for all, condemning the commodification of pedagogical resources. These insights coalesce to paint a compelling portrait of the educational landscape, characterised by both systemic deficiencies and aspirational fervour for transformative change. Through their narratives, participants embody the agency and advocacy inherent to them, articulating a vision for a more equitable, responsive, and humane educational ecosystem.

4.7 What pre-understandings and attitudes are key to them, as change facilitators, in their work context?

The participants' perceptions of change facilitation extend beyond mere leadership roles, embodying a core aspect of their professional identity—a dedication to empowering individuals and catalysing meaningful transformation. They emphasise the importance of collaborative decision-making, recognising the value of collective wisdom in navigating complex challenges, as pointed out by numerous survey participants: *"Listening to the feedback from others and making a collective move towards change for the benefit of students and the organisation"*. Fostering open dialogue is deemed paramount, recognising that effective change facilitation thrives on genuine connections and mutual understanding. For these CFs, the journey towards change is not a solitary endeavour but rather a collective effort rooted in shared vision. *"Create a shared vision and lead others to create that shared vision, support and encourage their staff and create opportunities and possibilities for all by supporting and trusting their staff"*, was often stated by numerous survey respondents and interview informants. They view themselves as agents of change, responsible for driving positive outcomes and creating sustainable impact within their educational contexts. Through their actions and attitudes, they seek to inspire passion, nurture resilience, and instil a sense of agency in others, thereby fostering a culture of

continuous improvement and growth for themselves as well as others.

4.8 What challenges do these change facilitators face in their work settings?

Challenges mentioned by survey and interview participants are divided into 4 types: intra- personal, interpersonal, intra-organisational and external.

Intra-personal challenges involve the internal struggles and perceptions faced by CFs. These challenges include feelings of overwhelm from attempting to change too many things simultaneously, leading to burnout and stress. Additionally, CFs may encounter defensive attitudes or a tendency to do most of the work themselves, hindering the empowerment of others. According to the participants, uncertainties about how changes will be received, desires for control or compliance and challenging one's worldview, further complicate the change process. Indeed, a survey participant articulated how *“it can challenge people's belief that they've had a lot of interest and dedication for, over the years (...) Anytime you're asking someone to change their behaviour, you're kind of asking them to see the world in a way that was different than what they saw previously “*. Self-doubt, fear of wasting time, and feeling threatened by change are common internal obstacles. Imposter syndrome and uncertainty about desired outcomes add layers of complexity. Moreover, I2, as well as most interviewees, state the need to contend with personal development journeys - *“it's a personnel development task that we have to carry out and reflect on our cloud”* -, recognising their own fears, and balancing the need for patience with the desire for progress. Emotional support and the ability to navigate interpersonal dynamics are crucial, as change can evoke various responses from individuals, including resistance and ego-driven behaviours.

Interpersonal challenges in the change process often revolve around communication breakdowns, where misunderstandings or conflicting messages hinder progress. Participants noted instances where individuals within the organisation had difficulty expressing their thoughts or concerns openly, leading to a lack of clarity and consensus. Moreover, personality

clashes and differing communication styles exacerbated tensions among team members, hindering collaboration. I5 referred to it extensively, sharing how *“they are so unreal, and maybe it's them as a culture, you know, as Brazilians, part of their personality, (...), they don't really want to upset people”*. Trust issues emerged as a significant barrier, with some participants expressing scepticism about their colleagues' intentions or abilities, further eroding cohesion within the team. Leadership challenges also seem to play a crucial role, with some participants highlighting instances where leaders struggled to facilitate relationships among team members or model the expected behaviours. Power struggles and ego-driven behaviours also complicate interpersonal dynamics, leading to resistance to change initiatives, as mentioned by I6: *“Politics, power plays, and difficult people. My colleagues are mostly fabulous, but there are a***oles everywhere you go that just make life and work unpleasant, difficult”*. Additionally, the lack of shared responsibility and effort among team members contributes to a sense of disillusionment and disengagement, making rallying support for change challenging.

Intra-organisational challenges were mentioned the most number of times, both in the survey answers and interviews. These challenges encompass a myriad of complex issues. A prevailing obstacle was the resistance to change stemming from deeply ingrained cultural norms and institutional practices. Participants grapple with navigating through layers of bureaucracy and hierarchical structures, where decision-making processes are slow. The lack of a clear vision or direction from top management further leaves CFs feeling adrift without guidance. Additionally, the incessant demands of compliance and adherence to regulations, particularly in educational settings governed by strict curriculum standards, impose significant constraints on innovation and experimentation. Furthermore, financial constraints emerged as a recurring theme, with participants highlighting the perennial struggle to secure adequate resources for change efforts. Budgetary limitations stifle creativity and innovation. Inadequate use of technology and a reluctance to embrace digital transformation pose

significant challenges, particularly in adapting to remote work and online learning environments. Participants also grapple with the complexities of integrating technology into existing workflows and processes, facing resistance from staff members entrenched in traditional modes of operation. Moreover, the lack of shared responsibility and collaborative effort within the organisation hinder progress, with CFs shouldering the burden of driving change initiatives single-handedly, a point raised by I1 *“I think there's something about being alone in your sphere of knowledge (...) and you do this work, day in and day out. And a lot of it doesn't get seen. A lot of it is like really important stuff that isn't celebrated”*. Middle leadership resistance and opposition from senior management was mentioned by all participants as further compounding these challenges, creating roadblocks. Finally, the inherent instability and turnover in leadership contributes to a sense of uncertainty and disarray. CFs further mention struggling with the challenge of adapting to new leadership styles and priorities, often facing resistance from leaders with divergent visions or agendas, as illustrated by I6: *“A lot of senior managers come in and go: ‘Well I'm just going to change everything’. So, you know, they've changed the name of research training here three times since I've been there, in eight years. And they've changed the building numbers. So whoever's come in to take control of management of the campus, they've changed the numbers of the buildings, three times, they've changed the logo twice (...) So there's always the risk that anything you do at the University where I work could change again, like, because it's constant, the only certainty where I work is change”*.

Finally, amongst the external challenges was the pervasive influence of external regulations and mandates, which dictate the parameters within which change initiatives can be pursued.

External challenges include regulatory frameworks dictating change initiatives, navigating compliance demands, and adapting to remote work and online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Often being international to their workplace's country, these CFs grapple with the task of navigating

through cultural barriers and fostering a culture of openness and adaptability within their organisations. Furthermore, the stigma associated with change and innovation presents a formidable barrier, with CFs facing resistance from various external stakeholders wary of departing from established practices, viewing innovation and experimentation with great apprehension, as testified by I2 *“mainly, I’m trying to manifest changes with my clients. No, not my colleagues. And this is not easy. Because there’s a lot of resistance in people’s minds. So for me, it’s a challenge, not to quit, I mean, learn where, and to what point I can try to spread the message, and then stop and respect the resistance or the free will”*. External pressures such as shifts in government policies or economic conditions necessitate strategic planning and agility to navigate uncertainty.

4.9 So amidst all these challenges, what do these change facilitators do? What impact can they have in their educational context?

One fundamental aspect of their work involves driving change in curricula, spearheading efforts to revitalise and adapt educational content to align with evolving needs and priorities. By infusing curricula with innovative pedagogical approaches and contemporary content learnt through MEL, these CFs seek to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of educational programs.

Another key area of focus for these facilitators is the transformation of program delivery methods. Embracing new instructional models and leveraging technology, they strive to create dynamic and engaging learning environments that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences. By doing so, they aim to enrich the educational experience and empower students to achieve their full potential. I5 shares: *“how can I empower them and make sure that they have the opportunity to develop understanding and knowledge on their own, not just me giving them”*. They are also actively involved in creating learning opportunities beyond the confines of traditional classroom settings. Whether through the introduction of experiential learning programs,

international projects, or mentorship initiatives, they seek to expand the horizons of educational experiences and empower students to become lifelong learners.

CFs also play a pivotal role in driving policy reform within their educational institutions. Whether it involves streamlining admission processes, enhancing student support services, or promoting inclusivity and diversity, they work tirelessly to enact policy changes that positively impact students and educators alike.

Additionally, CFs are instrumental in fostering a culture of continuous improvement within educational institutions. Indeed, they endeavour to change the way people approach their work and interact with one another. Through targeted interventions and initiatives, these participants of MEL aim to cultivate a shared sense of responsibility and ownership among educators, empowering them to collectively contribute to the advancement of the institution.

Many of the interviewees state prioritising the development of pedagogical approaches and teacher philosophies that are responsive to the needs of diverse learners. Through coaching, mentoring, and professional development initiatives, they support educators in refining their teaching practices and embracing innovative approaches to instruction.

Overall, CFs operate at the intersection of policy, practice, and pedagogy, leveraging their expertise and influence to affect meaningful change within their educational institutions. Through their collaborative efforts and unwavering commitment to educational excellence, they strive to create learning environments that inspire curiosity, creativity, and lifelong learning.

The MEL participants to this study, who were mostly graduates, shared their short, mid-, and long-term hopes for the impact of the changes initiated or

implemented in their workplace. Through their reflection, they also outlined the "criteria" they would use as metrics to assess the success of the desired outcomes.

In the short term, they anticipate fostering trust and collaboration among stakeholders, laying the groundwork for sustained change. Through inquiry cycles, they expect to initiate a process of critical reflection and exploration, allowing ideas to take root and germinate within their educational community. Furthermore, they hope to get their organisation to align on a clear vision guiding their initiatives, ensuring that projects are launched with purpose and direction. Finally, they hope to see immediate improvements in student well-being and satisfaction. In the mid-term, these CFs envision the consolidation of their efforts into a strong core foundation, characterised by ingrained principles of collaboration, innovation, and adaptability. They aim to establish sustainable practices that endure beyond initial implementation, indicated by I3 *"As a mid-term, I would like it to have a strong core and become sustainable "*. Having their work organisation embrace a culture of experimentation is another hoped impact they mentioned. Finally, one interviewee stated wanting to achieve full digitisation of documents and platforms, streamlining data collection and storage processes to enhance accessibility, efficiency, and transparency in decision-making. In the long run, MEL participants aspire to foster a profound impact characterised by the empowerment of individuals in knowledge, skillset, and understanding, transcending traditional educational paradigms. They envision an educational landscape where the diverse needs of learners are not only met but exceeded, with learners actively engaged in the learning process and equipped to navigate an ever-evolving world. Central to their vision are the principles of transparency, accountability, and mutual respect. Embracing an inquiry-based teaching approach *"that is conceptual, that links up and concepts are transferred between different classes, and students, being active participants within their learning "*(I4), they anticipate a transformative shift in pedagogy in their organisational setting, fostering critical thinking and creativity, for themselves, as well as for others. Furthermore, they aim to shape

a work culture that values innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement, creating an environment conducive to professional growth and development. By connecting industry to academic practice and infusing global citizenship skills into the curriculum, they seek to prepare students to become active participants in society, equipped with the knowledge and skills to address complex challenges and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Ultimately, their long-term goal is to create a better learning context and environment, where resources are readily available, leadership is effective, and evidence-based practices drive continuous improvement and innovation.

4.10 What are some of their key understandings before enacting change in their context? What keeps them pushing to enact change, albeit the challenges?

Before embarking on the journey of enacting change within their educational institution, the MEL graduates state the need to undertake a series of steps and embody a proactive attitude towards driving meaningful transformation. Through inquiry cycles and other types of research, they delve into the nuances of educational practices, probing for areas that require improvement and/or redefinition. By recognising problems and raising awareness about unmet needs, they lay the groundwork for informed decision-making and targeted interventions. CFs prioritise building trust and fostering open dialogue with stakeholders at all levels, while creating spaces for critical reflection and collaborative problem-solving, aiming to empower their peers to shape the direction of the change initiatives. While challenging prevailing mindsets and promoting better dialogue, CFs approach their role with humility, recognising that they cannot effect change alone and must *“have the courage, the knowledge and the openness to see what’s for the best of the team and to collaborate with the people that will support your dream in the most efficient and effective way”* (survey participant). Change is often perceived as disruptive, but within this disruption lies a multitude of opportunities for growth, collaboration, and transformation. MEL participants play a pivotal role, as they harness these upsides, guiding their peers through

periods of transition and transformation. One of the most cited benefits of navigating change is the opportunity it presents for personal and professional reflection and growth. Indeed, the interviewees narrated that by engaging in introspection and embracing new challenges, they develop valuable skills, broaden their perspectives, and unlock their full potential. They also mentioned change serving as a catalyst for opening dialogue, fostering communication, and building trust among team members. Indeed, through meaningful conversations and collaborative problem-solving, obstacles can be overcome, and positive change can be driven together.

Most of the interviewees shared experiencing empowerment themselves, through their roles. *“All of that changes who you are, and how you do things. But it also empowers you to grow and that growth is also change”* shares I3. By leading change initiatives, they gain a sense of agency and purpose, driving momentum and inspiring others to act. Importantly, they often bridge the gap between senior leadership and frontline staff, cultivating a culture of inclusivity, transparency, and shared responsibility. As such, they also cultivate a supportive and inclusive culture where everyone feels empowered to contribute to the extent, they feel best for themselves.

Creativity thrives in times of change, as individuals are encouraged to explore new ideas, experiment with different approaches, and challenge the status quo. This environment of innovation enables skill development and empowers individuals to take on leadership roles, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement. This transition period of change is crucial, as it provides opportunities for professional development, and community-building. Ultimately, navigating change enables them to make a difference, not only in their own lives but also in the lives of others.

4.11 What are their key strategies to enable and enact change in their educational setting?

Strategies mentioned by survey and interview participants are divided into 4 types: intra- personal, interpersonal, intra-organisational and external.

Intra-personal strategies play a crucial role in the process of enabling and enacting change within educational settings. These CFs state finding themselves often navigating internal challenges and leveraging personal qualities to drive meaningful change. One of the key strategies is redefining the definition of learning, which involves embracing new perspectives and approaches to education. CFs lead by example, demonstrating a willingness to experiment and adapt to evolving circumstances. They recognise the importance of facing fears, containing uncertainties, and fostering acceptance of change, among individuals. I2 expressed how *“the main technique we have to develop is acceptance. Acceptance in so many different levels (...) we have to train ourselves in this technique, in this art”*.

Moreover, CFs engage in introspection and self-awareness, acknowledging their own strengths and weaknesses. Embracing humility, they acknowledge that they cannot control everything and are open to learning from others. They prioritise mental health and well-being, maintaining a balance between their professional responsibilities and personal needs. Therapy, mindfulness, and ongoing learning are integral parts of their journey, as mentioned by numerous interviewees.

CFs also emphasise the importance of alignment between their personal values and the goals of the change initiatives. They draw inspiration from their passion for making a difference and providing opportunities for others to lead (and live) better lives. Persistence and idealism drive their efforts, even in the face of challenges and setbacks. They cultivate supportive networks and gravitate towards collaborative environments where their contributions are valued.

Additionally, MEL participants recognise the value of being an active participant in their own growth and development. They seek out interesting problems and provocations within their professional environment, using these as opportunities for reflection and growth. By challenging themselves to think critically, they continually evolve as facilitators of change. They are willing to compensate for their own incompetencies, seeking support from others and being open to feedback.

Furthermore, CFs understand the importance of staying focused on the bigger picture. They acknowledge the inevitability of failure and view it as a learning opportunity rather than a setback. They mention cultivating resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity.

Resilience, empathy, and a deep understanding of themselves and others are mentioned as key features one must have, as a CF in this field.

Moving to interpersonal strategies they advise developing, these form the backbone of change facilitation within educational environments, fostering collaboration, trust, inclusivity and collective ownership of change initiatives. One fundamental aspect is the acceptance of others, recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives and experiences. CFs create an environment where individuals feel respected and heard, fostering a sense of *“belonging, relationships, (building) capacity”* and ownership is key in this process, shares a participant of the survey.

Another crucial strategy is the willingness to ask for support and take people's help. CFs understand that successful change initiatives require collective effort and expertise. They actively seek input and collaboration from stakeholders, leveraging their knowledge and insights to inform decision-making and drive meaningful change.

Moreover, CFs prioritise making people feel like they have a say and that their opinions matter. They create opportunities for open dialogue and feedback, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and participatory decision-making, CFs empower individuals to actively contribute to the change process and take ownership of the outcomes.

Recognizing the importance of pacing and prioritising well-being, CFs also employ strategies such as freezing the process when people are overburdened or slowing down

the process when needed. They understand the significance of balancing the pace of change with the capacity of individuals and teams, ensuring that change initiatives are implemented effectively and sustainably.

Additionally, CFs recognize the value of having a sounding board, a trusted source of guidance and support. They seek mentorship and advice from experienced colleagues or external experts, leveraging their insights and perspectives to navigate challenges and refine their approach to facilitating change. I7 shares their experience with seeking external experts' help: *"we reached out to professionals in the area. This all came from staff feedback, it wasn't just 'we decided or the leadership decided', it all came from what people were saying. So we ended up contacting the Department of Education Professional Support. And we said, 'look, this is what we are doing. And we would like your support on this, on site support, how can you help us'. So we ended up having a professional support team member come out. We had a facilitator come out who learned about the context of our school, has experienced that and then it made it more real for our staff, and we could openly say, 'Look, we're struggling with this, this and this, and that as a collective', but she didn't just tell us how to do it, she really facilitated, which was great (...) Facilitating those conversations as an external person was actually quite helpful".*

Interpersonal strategies also involve celebrating small successes and creating opportunities for dialogue and reflection. They recognise the importance of addressing individuals' concerns and needs. They provide support and guidance by building dialogue and fostering a sense of community.

An array of intra-organizational strategies is deployed by MEL participants to navigate the intricate landscape of educational change. These strategies encapsulate a nuanced understanding of the organisational dynamics and the diverse needs of stakeholders involved.

One paramount strategy is the cultivation of teamwork and collaboration among staff and leadership. CFs recognize the wealth of wisdom and expertise present within their organisation and actively engage stakeholders in decision-making processes. Through workshops, monthly meetings, and one-on-one discussions, they provide avenues for staff to contribute ideas, voice concerns, and co-create change initiatives. By fostering a shared vision and goal, CFs ensure alignment and commitment to the proposed changes, instilling a sense of ownership and collective responsibility among stakeholders.

In implementing change initiatives, CFs adopt a quality-over-quantity approach, emphasising the redefinition of learning and provoking critical reflection on educational practices. They advocate for experimentation and iteration, acknowledging that change is an iterative process that requires flexibility and adaptability. Through continuous trialling, revising, and 'freezing' during the process, CFs navigate the complexities of educational change, embracing risk and uncertainty as opportunities for growth and innovation.

Furthermore, these CFs leverage data-driven insights and tangible outcomes to assess the effectiveness of their initiatives. Metrics such as diversity of engagement, data from reports, and tangible outcomes like increased

contracts or partnerships, serve as indicators of progress and impact. By analysing these metrics, CFs gain valuable insights into the success of their change efforts, identifying areas for improvement, and informing future strategies.

Additionally, CFs place a strong emphasis on building a supportive and inclusive organisational culture. They recognize the importance of values alignment, and work towards fostering an environment where everyone feels respected, valued, and empowered to contribute. By celebrating successes, recognizing achievements, and providing opportunities for growth and development, CFs nurture a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within educational institutions.

CFs also engage in external strategies to navigate the broader landscape surrounding their educational institutions. Recognising the influence of their own culture, their work culture and the culture of the country in which they work, they strive to make the work environment more enjoyable and meaningful, aligning educational practices with the needs of the workforce and society. Moreover, quite a few interviewees stated leveraging external support, such as mentoring networks, external consultancy companies and collaborations with research and development organisations, to aid when time gets rough through the implementation phase of the change process. Drawing upon insights gained from programs like MEL (i.e, managing cultural diversity, change management), they adapt and integrate best practices into their own institutions, navigating context-specific nuances and dynamics. This is in accordance with the data retrieved from the survey, available under the *“Associating courses and Participants Readiness for Educational Leadership”* figure, at the start of the results section of this paper. Through these external strategies, CFs extend their impact beyond their immediate workplace, driving meaningful change within the broader educational landscape.

In summary, CFs employ a holistic approach to drive organisational change, leveraging mainly principles such as collaboration, trust-building, and experimentation. By prioritising open communication, transparency, and data-driven decision-making, MEL participants create an environment conducive to meaningful transformation, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within their respective educational institutions.

4.12 What was life like, for them, before MEL and why did they opt to study for this program?

Before starting the MEL program, these educational leaders already demonstrated leadership qualities and a strong commitment to driving change. Many interviewees described themselves as individuals who naturally led by example and embraced the role of change facilitators as an essential part of their identity. Despite uncertainties, they saw applying to the MEL program as a worthwhile risk, acknowledging it as an investment in their personal and professional development. Their decision to pursue MEL stemmed from a deep understanding of their own capabilities and a desire for a more structured educational experience that aligned with their ideologies. While many of their skills were already honed before joining MEL, they recognised the program as an opportunity to refine their abilities and expand their perspectives. I7 illustrates this in their interview: *“I think, some skills, you don't get it through to a Master's course. It's either you have it or you don't. You can learn the terminologies. But how you implement them, it's another thing. So I think that most of my skills were there before the Master's program (...) the Masters helped me to make it more official. Learn the terminology. (...) it just taught me the structure”*. Prior to MEL, they may have felt constrained in their career progression or lacked opportunities for advancement. Some even experienced feelings of suppression in their workplace, prompting them to seek a program like MEL to invigorate their professional journey. Additionally, they saw MEL as a platform to address gaps in their interpersonal skills, conflict resolution abilities, and strategic implementation approaches.

The CFs found themselves drawn to the MEL program for a multitude of reasons. Finland's esteemed reputation in education, coupled with the innovative structure of the Master's program, immediately captured their interest. They were impressed by the degree's emphasis on mental well-being and the belief that there are no limits to what MEL participants can achieve. The intentional selection process of MEL's future students resonated with them, as it ensured a diverse mix of backgrounds and perspectives among the cohort, enriching the learning experience. Moreover, the curriculum of MEL stood out as the first of its kind, focusing specifically on education and offering a holistic approach to learning. They appreciated that MEL was not solely for teachers but catered to individuals interested in various aspects of education and leadership, as noticed by I5 *"I think the best thing about the MEL course was that it wasn't just for teachers, you know, like, you would think it would be just for teachers from the name 'Master's in educational leadership' (...) But because it is so varied, and their selection of people is so varied, I think that's part of the strength of the course"*. The supportive environment fostered by program directors and instructors like Mark and Paivi - who served as inspirations, as mentioned by many study participants - further solidified their commitment to the program. Additionally, the hybrid model of MEL, allowing for both online and in-person learning, appealed to their needs for flexibility and accessibility, as MEL participants often juggle with full-time responsibilities in their private and professional life all at once. The affordability of the program, particularly for EU residents, was also a significant factor in their decision-making process.

4.13 What were the positive aspects of MEL, on a content and cohort level?

The MEL program proved to be a pivotal journey for its participants, profoundly shaping their perspectives and capabilities. While many participants entered the program with inherent leadership qualities and a drive for change, the MEL experience acted as a catalyst for their growth, offering a structured framework to refine their skills and deepen their

understanding of educational leadership. The MEL curriculum, with its rich content and diverse array of courses, offered a comprehensive exploration of various aspects of education, from curriculum design to digital communication and change management. It was *"the first formal course I actually have that really focuses on education"* (survey participant), that challenged their preconceived notions and broadened their horizons. The interconnectedness of the MEL curriculum allowed participants to develop a holistic understanding of educational leadership, touching upon critical areas such as financial management and policy analysis. The program encouraged participants to take ownership of their learning, empowering them to apply newfound knowledge and insights directly to their professional contexts. Through assignments and projects, they gained practical experience and honed their skills in areas such as conflict management, communication, and strategic decision-making. Instructors such as Mark and Sisko, as well as Paivi, emerged as pivotal figures for MEL participants, offering guidance, inspiration, and unwavering support throughout their journey.

One of the most transformative aspects of the MEL experience was its emphasis on self-reflection and self-awareness. Participants were encouraged to critically examine their own beliefs, biases, and assumptions, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves and their role as educational leaders. Moreover, the MEL experience went beyond academic learning, providing opportunities for personal and professional growth. The program instilled confidence and a sense of purpose, equipping participants with the tools and mindset needed to navigate complex educational landscapes and drive meaningful change. They also gained exposure to different cultures and perspectives, broadening their worldview and enhancing their ability to collaborate and communicate effectively in multicultural settings.

Participants also developed a strong sense of camaraderie and community, forging lasting connections with fellow learners from diverse backgrounds.

Bouncing ideas in study groups was a unique feature that allowed for lively discussions and the exchange of diverse perspectives. Participants found inspiration in their peers, admiring their passion and dedication to the field of education. Through peer-to-peer learning, participants gained valuable insights into different leadership styles, teaching methods, and educational philosophies. Despite the challenges they faced, such as imposter syndrome and personal setbacks, participants found solace in the supportive and empowering community of MEL. I8 particularly opened up and shared: *“I didn't realise quite how much it's the group, the collective, which I loved, absolutely loved. So I think that's surpassed my expectations, and I didn't realise the support you would get. I didn't realise how support of your colleagues on MEL, your study groups, but also for me, in particular Mark and Sisko, has been a really good source of support, but I didn't realise quite how warm. And a real, real tight group”*.

The MEL experience extended beyond the academic realm, forging lasting friendships and professional connections. Participants expressed hope for future events that would keep the MEL community together, recognizing the value of continued networking and collaboration. As they ventured into their respective careers, they carried with them the lessons learned and the relationships formed during their time in the MEL program, confident in their ability to make a positive impact in the field of education.

4.14 Who are they now, after going through MEL? What can be attributed to MEL specifically?

The study participants seem to now embody a mix of CF and change agent (terms used in the understanding of Hall & Hord), armed with a newfound confidence and strategic mindset. *“(MEL) encouraged me to take greater risks, to have confidence in myself as an educational leader and to feel that I 'belong' in this role and that I have value to others in doing so”, “after Mel, I don't feel insecure anymore. I'm trusting myself more, like the environment”*. As illustrated here by I2, no longer consumed by worries about the change process, they embrace spontaneity and timing, understanding that seizing

the right moment is crucial. Inspired by their MEL experience, they share having become more comfortable with the absurdities of challenging situations and have adopted a facilitative role, preferring to guide, rather than dictate solutions. This shift in perspective has led them to apply the principles learned from observing MEL faculty into their respective organisations, enriching their leadership style and capabilities.

Many have embarked on new endeavours post-MEL, driven by the desire to consolidate and expand upon their newfound skills and knowledge. Some have delved into mentoring roles, while others are looking into exploring educational policy and legislation, leveraging their MEL education to influence change at a systemic level, seeking out opportunities for growth and impact. The program, experience, and acquired tools, have further instilled in them a sense of agency and purpose; with an eye towards the future, they contemplate their next steps with readiness and anticipation

Moreover, the MEL program has not only bolstered their professional credentials but also shaped their understanding of leadership and education on a fundamental level, as vehicles for socialisation and citizenship (on individual and communal level). The title of an MBA, earned through the completion of the MEL program, affords them greater influence in traditional educational environments: continuing to flourish and evolve personally, contributing to a dynamic and collaborative learning environment, thanks to an ingrained lifelong learning mindset.

4.15 What enhancements can be brought to the MEL program to better equip these change facilitators in enacting change and make the MBA experience more pleasant?

The participants of the MEL program offered various enlightened feedback on the content and formatting of the courses, highlighting areas for improvement and suggestions to better align with their expectations and professional needs.

Some participants felt that the program's objectives should better align with those of the university as a whole, advocating for a stronger focus on career development and mentorship opportunities akin to traditional MBA programs. 16 strongly emphasised that *“it would be really interesting to have the opportunity to go and do an internship with each other's organisations or somewhere that we feel would be useful. And to use the program as an excuse to approach places where we might want to work in the future and go and get experience interning with them (...) I think a lot of us are looking to get out of our current job and to go into something more interesting. So I think that option to be able to go and intern or do research outside of where we currently work would be really interesting. For me, that would have been great”*.

Concerns were raised about the lack of support for students with (invisible yet present) disabilities and a Western-focused cohort, prompting suggestions for scholarships or allowances for participants from distant locations, hence attracting a more diverse range of participants.

One recurring theme was the desire for more real-life entrepreneurial exposure, underpinning the program's unique combination of education and entrepreneurship, additionally enabling opportunities to perform in organisations and industries different from their own. Shorter courses would allow for hands-on internships and collaboration with industry leaders, providing valuable practical experience in environments unbeknown to them, and an emphasis on applied sciences would grant them course tasks within real companies, empowering them to hit the ground running upon graduation.

Furthermore, participants expressed a need for more comprehensive modules on leadership, change management, and financial literacy, a better balance needing to be struck between theoretical concepts and practical application.

Engagement and commitment appear to be key concerns for the MEL

program going forward: 25% of the study participants considered withdrawing at some point, one main reason being the workload that seemed unbearable at times, possibly not aligning with participants' expectations upon entering the program. 18 enlightened the authors: *“there were different times when the course workload was very heavy. But that might be because of your personal circumstances or what was going on for you at work. If you had a heavy workload, which at different times we did, it can be very full on. It is very full on. I think maybe they under-sold how full on the course load is. I realised quite quickly. It was probably a heavier workload than I would have thought.”*

Perseverance stemmed from strong peer support within the program, study groups providing a space for sharing challenges and spurring stress relief moments, and the approachability and support of faculty members. What kept participants on track was the determination to finish what was started, despite the added pressures as fee-paying students or the intensity of returning to education after years, and the collective commitment to professional growth albeit the workload and the strained balance between studying and working full-time.

Participants further suggested restructuring certain courses to allow for more in-depth exploration of complex topics and a reduction in workload, alleviating stress and isolation and therefore facilitating balancing work and family commitments too. Adapting assessments to suit different learning formats, and the creation of a more flexible core structure, allowing participants to choose between focusing more on the theoretical aspect or opting for an internship format in their knowledge acquisition process, was voiced too when considering the structure of the program. Greater adaptability to individual needs and preferences, accommodating those going through life crises or requiring more flexibility with deadlines notwithstanding meeting the learning outcomes, were touted benefits.

Consistency and communication were also underscored, with calls for

transparency regarding program extensions and deadlines. Participants noted a lack of consistency among teachers in terms of response time and workload distribution, rooting for a further standardisation of assessments and assignments. Additionally, active pedagogy by means of greater personalisation of tasks, would play on individual strengths and foster tackling early on latent weaknesses, by the teachers, the learners, and by their peers too (through projects and reviewing).

Participants also highlighted the importance of improving the supervisor-student relationship, particularly in navigating cultural differences and ensuring effective communication. Providing adequate support and guidance, fostering a collaborative and empowering learning environment, enhancing the accessibility, flexibility, and supportiveness of the MEL program, befalls them or the institution they belong to, ensuring that it remains a transformative and enriching experience for participants from diverse backgrounds and circumstances.

After completion of the program, participants suggest several enhancements to further enrich their experience and foster ongoing engagement with the MEL community: one key recommendation is the introduction of a formal graduation ceremony, providing closure and an opportunity to celebrate achievements, solidifying the sense of accomplishment and camaraderie among participants, and with the collegial spirit within MEL, as highlighted by many informants, such as I7 *“I would have preferred graduation. I know that in Finland they don't do it. And for some, it might be an expense to come over. But for me, graduation day is a way to celebrate. Obviously, you still keep in touch, but it's so hard to close that chapter (without proper graduation). It's a form of closure, you know. I think it's needed. In Finland maybe they are a bit too cold on this. In my country we celebrate everything. So for me, I need to close that chapter and to celebrate our achievements. For me there's a lacuna there. The MEL program in itself, it's great collegiality, but then you end it in a very cold way. And it's a bit contradictory”*.

Additionally, participants proposed the organisation of study groups into task forces aimed at addressing real-life problems, through brainstorming sessions and collaborative problem-solving, enabling participants to stay connected and build their credentials beyond the program. Suggestions include hosting events similar to “hackathons”, in a MEL version, and organising reunions in Tampere every few years for all previous cohorts to join, facilitating networking opportunities and knowledge exchange among alumni and with current program attendants, and potential career transitions. Alumni would like to be more involved as guest speakers to provide real-world case studies and examples, enriching the program and fostering a sense of community for the generations to come.

Finally, participants emphasised the importance of leveraging the alumni network to its full potential by establishing charters within countries to facilitate regular meetups and exchanges between cohorts, fostering ongoing collaboration and support. By capitalising on the diverse expertise and experiences within the MEL community, a vibrant and supportive network extending beyond the duration of the program underpins professional development and meaningful contributions to the field of educational leadership alongside like-minded people.

5 DISCUSSION

The research aims to investigate whether participants of the MEL program evolve into effective facilitators of change within their educational settings. It specifically addresses how these participants enact change and assess their development as change agents, reflecting on the practical impact of the MEL program's experience. To do this the researchers conducted an explorative case study, which is ideal for in-depth, multifaceted explorations of complex issues within their real-life settings, as suggested by Crowe, S. et al. (2011). The research leverages a deductive approach centred around the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), originally developed by Hall et al. in 1974.

This section will discuss the results of our study in the context of our two main research questions.

1. How do MEL participants enact change
 - a. This question explores the methods and strategies MEL participants employ to initiate and manage change within their institutions.
2. How do MEL participants assess their development as change facilitators?
 - a. This question investigates the participants' self-perceptions and reflections on their growth and effectiveness in the role of change facilitators.

The discussion will critically analyse how well the MEL program equips its participants with the necessary competencies to fulfil these roles, drawing on specific instances and data collected throughout the study to evaluate the alignment of the program outcomes with its educational objectives.

5.1 Self-Perception as Leaders and Change Facilitators

Our findings suggest a significant self-selection mechanism among participants of our survey and the MEL program. Individuals drawn to this program typically possess an inherent motivation towards leadership and change facilitation, which predates their participation in the MEL program. This attribute is crucial as it underscores the nature of the MEL cohort; individuals do not merely seek education but are inherently driven by a goal to effect change within their respective educational environments. This intrinsic drive likely enhances the impact of the program, as participants are already predisposed to take on board and implement the leadership strategies they learn.

In fact, before entering the MEL program, many participants self-identified as leaders within their respective educational settings. This proactive self-

perception likely stems from their personal experiences and inherent motivations, where leadership is seen not just as a potential position, but as a role actively taken within everyday educational challenges. The participants take these leadership roles informally, driven by a need to address immediate issues in their classrooms or educational organisations. This early stage of self-recognition is critical, as it sets a foundation for the intentional development of leadership skills through the MEL program.

Day et al. (2014) highlights that leadership development programs significantly enhance individuals' self-awareness and operational skills through structured experiences and reflective practices. This aligns with the transformation observed in MEL participants in our findings, who report enhanced self-perception and leadership capabilities as a direct result of their engagement with the program's curriculum and cohort. The reason behind this self-perception can be linked to the fact that our participants are continually exposed to situations requiring leadership knowledge and skill sets, even if informally, such as resolving conflicts, planning educational pathways, or innovating teaching methods. Their decision to join the MEL program can be seen as a move to formalise and enhance these inherently practised skills, driven by a desire to maximise their impact within their educational settings.

The participants' early identification with leadership roles serves as a prelude to their reflective journey throughout the MEL program. This self-assessment is integral as it allows participants to measure their growth against a baseline of their initial self-perception. The program's influence is crucial in transforming this self-perception into a formal recognition and understanding of their capabilities. Participants assess their development by reflecting on their increased confidence and expanded competencies, which are continuously honed through coursework and practical applications in the program.

This reflection is also often based in real-world feedback and the validation of their enhanced roles, contributing to a more articulate understanding of their impact as change facilitators. Their growth from informal leaders to recognised change facilitators and often formal leaders, underscores the program's effectiveness in bridging the gap between leadership tendencies and formal leadership development. This ongoing reflective assessment helps them understand the practical implications of their decisions, underscoring the program's impact on their professional evolution.

After completing the MEL program, participants typically achieve a full recognition of their roles as both CFs and leaders. This post-MEL realisation is crucial as it marks a significant development in their professional identities, where they not only set directions for change but also engage actively in ensuring its implementation and sustainability. This stage aligns with the CBAM's refocusing phase, where the focus shifts towards optimising and refining change strategies. Participants' realisation that leadership transcends formal roles and requires active, continuous engagement in change processes highlights their ability to drive systemic and sustainable improvements within their educational settings. The findings indicate that the impact of the program becomes increasingly evident over time, particularly among older cohort members who can more specifically articulate how the program has shaped their professional practices. This observation suggests that as participants further integrate and apply the learned concepts and theories in their ongoing careers, they gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the program's influence. Such delayed recognition underscores a progressive maturation in educational leadership and change facilitation competencies, highlighting a distinct direction of growth that tends to be more pronounced in graduates with more time since program completion. According to Kolb's experiential learning theory, this process reflects the transformational learning cycle where concrete experiences are followed by reflective observation, leading to new abstract conceptualisations that are actively tested (Kolb, 1984). The feedback suggests that the MEL program

significantly shapes participants' capabilities, fostering a long-term development trajectory that extends beyond the completion of the program.

The emphasis on socio-constructivist approaches within the MEL curriculum is particularly notable, reflecting a broader educational trend towards collaborative and inquiry-based learning. This approach is not only prevalent in educational theories but is also actively embraced by the MEL participants, as evidenced in many interview responses. This matches with Jonassen et al. 's (1999) findings, which advocate for the effectiveness of constructivist pedagogies in promoting deep learning. These pedagogies facilitate a critical examination of one's practices and encourage ongoing personal and professional development. This alignment with collaborative inquiry-based learning underscores the program's effectiveness in nurturing a proactive, reflective, and dynamic approach to educational leadership.

5.2 What constitutes a Leader and CF

The feedback from participants about what constitutes a leader and CF was also quite interesting. It was observed that while the program broadens participants' understanding of leadership, extending beyond formal titles to include the capacity for influence and initiation of change, it also encounters the entrenched beliefs and biases of participants. This dichotomy suggests that the MEL program challenges participants to redefine what it means to be a leader, advocating for a more inclusive and flexible interpretation that values informal leadership qualities as highly as formal ones.

This spectrum of leadership views—from seeing leadership as tied to formal authority to recognising it as a broader, more accessible trait—mirrors the variety of experiences and backgrounds that participants bring to the program. It also underscores the challenge of reshaping pre-existing perceptions in educational leadership development. The MEL program's approach, which encourages a wide range of leadership styles, may help

participants navigate their own biases and expand their leadership capacities in ways that traditional definitions of leadership might limit.

Such findings prompt further examination of how educational programs can effectively address and transform deeply ingrained beliefs about leadership roles. They also raise questions about the effectiveness of current educational leadership frameworks in fostering a truly diverse and adaptive leadership skill set among educators. This reflection links well with our research which aims to understand how MEL participants enact change and assess their own development as change facilitators, particularly in how they navigate and potentially transform entrenched perceptions of leadership within their educational environments.

The “Leadership Practices” course appears to be a central experience for many participants in this realisation and significantly influences their perceptions and confidence in leadership roles. Post-course reflections show an expanded understanding of leadership diversity. The course not only broadens their understanding of what leadership and change facilitation can entail but has also empowered them with the confidence to assume leadership positions.

In addition to the insights gained from the “Leadership Practices” course and the participants' evolving roles as leaders and CFs, a shift in perspective can also be seen when comparing the roles and responsibilities of MEL participants across different educational settings. In traditional educational settings, such as primary and secondary schools, educators who participate in the MEL program tend to focus more intensely on student outcomes. This focus manifests in efforts to refine curricula, enhance instructional methods, and integrate innovative assessment techniques. The primary goal in these settings is to directly impact student learning and achievement, which aligns with the conventional goals of educational leadership aimed at boosting academic performance and student well-being. This emphasis on student

outcomes is deeply rooted in many of the accountability measures mentioned by the interviewees, where teacher effectiveness is often measured by student progress.

Contrastingly, MEL participants in higher education or non-traditional educational settings frequently adopt a broader approach to leadership. Here, the focus shifts from direct student outcomes to improving the overall workplace environment and strengthening interpersonal relationships among staff. The leadership practices in these contexts extend beyond the classroom to influence the organisational culture, employee satisfaction, and team dynamics. This shift reflects a strategic application of leadership that considers the holistic well-being of the educational ecosystem, recognising that positive workplace conditions are conducive to effective teaching and learning.

This variation in leadership application underscores the importance of context in educational leadership. It aligns with the broader research narrative that effective leadership is highly contextual and that leaders must be equipped with skills to navigate and adapt to different environmental demands (Spillane, et al., 2004). This ability to adjust and apply leadership skills in varied contexts not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the MEL program but also exemplifies how educational leadership can extend its influence beyond traditional boundaries to enact meaningful change across the educational spectrum.

5.3 Effective Educational Leadership

The MEL program not only fosters a comprehensive understanding of the multi layered change process across intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra-organizational, and external areas but also strategically embeds practices that align with long standing leadership theories. The focus and emphasis on elements such as building trust, fostering collaboration, and embracing

cultural diversity, are strategies recommended for effective change leadership in studies by Kotter (2012) and Fullan (2014), as studied in the program. Kotter (2012) emphasises the need for creating a climate for change, engaging and enabling the whole organisation, and implementing and sustaining change. MEL integrates these principles by fostering an environment that not only teaches change but embodies it. Participants experience and live within a transformative educational setting that mirrors the change they are expected to enact. This experiential approach allows participants to internalise and then replicate these dynamics in their own educational contexts. This is achieved through the development of skills that enhance participants' ability to build collaborative networks and engage in culturally diverse contexts, thereby facilitating a dynamic, learner-centred education that mirrors contemporary educational needs and priorities.

Fullan (2014) argues for the importance of moral purpose, understanding change, and developing relationships, in driving effective change. The MEL program reflects these principles by enabling CFs to apply innovative pedagogical approaches and update content that reflects emerging knowledge and skills. This approach not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of educational offerings but also demonstrates a proactive and continuous commitment to curriculum development.

By integrating this approach, the MEL program ensures that its graduates are not merely familiar with theoretical concepts but are also adept at applying these concepts in practical, impactful ways within their institutions. This empowers them to navigate educational complexities with resilience and ensures that initiatives are responsive to the needs of diverse stakeholders, mirroring the tasks and discussions they actively engage in through MEL.

5.4 Mirroring Innovative Pedagogical Approaches

One significant contribution of the CFs we interviewed is their active role in revitalising curricula to ensure it aligns with contemporary educational demands. By incorporating innovative pedagogical approaches and updating content to reflect the latest developments in knowledge and skills, they enhance the relevance and effectiveness of their educational offerings. This proactive approach to curriculum development demonstrates their dedication to a dynamic, learner-centred educational model, which is a core component of the MEL program's educational strategy.

According to Penuel et al. (2017), aligning curriculum with evolving educational needs is crucial as it underscores the importance of responsive and relevant curricula that meet the diverse needs of learners. This alignment is essential in fostering environments that encourage continuous engagement and adaptation, principles that are foundational to effective educational practices. Meaning the experience the participants have in the MEL program is mirrored by them in their approach.

Integrating this approach within the CBAM, these curriculum changes can be seen as part of the 'Refocusing' stage where CFs are not only implementing new teaching strategies but are actively refining these strategies to enhance their impact. This stage of CBAM involves deepening the understanding of the change process, enhancing the effectiveness of new practices, and ensuring that these are aligned with the ultimate goals of the educational organisation. The curriculum revitalisation efforts by MEL participants demonstrate their ability to move beyond the initial implementation of changes, as they critically assess and adapt their strategies to ensure they remain relevant and effective over time. This alignment with CBAM helps understand how MEL participants, as CFs, are prepared to continuously evaluate and refine educational strategies to meet the shifting demands of

the educational landscape, directly addressing the thesis question regarding the efficacy of the MEL program in preparing participants to enact and sustain meaningful changes in their educational settings.

In addition to the innovative pedagogical approaches, the MEL program's influences on curriculum design and implementation within educational settings can be directly associated with courses that participants found most resonant. Two main factors which may contribute to these curriculum changes:

1. The influence of professors and program directors like Mark, Paivi and Sisko who deeply understand and have been involved in the development of the program.
2. The alignment of these courses with the participants' direct work contexts.

This dual influence suggests that the courses in the curriculum aligned with these areas are both thoughtfully developed by knowledgeable educators and aligned with real-world educational needs, enhancing its relevance and applicability.

5.5 Change Facilitator vs Change Agent

During this research, it became evident that the roles encapsulated by the terms 'Change Facilitator' and 'Change Agent' are subtly distinct and in line with Hall & Hord's definition of a Change Facilitator and its nuanced difference from Change Agent where facilitating change is seen as a more collaborative, supportive, and enabling process than what might be implied by the term "agent."

However, it appears that not all participants in our surveys and interviews are aware of these distinctions. Often in our results, these terms are used

interchangeably by participants, particularly those who may not have an in-depth understanding in change management. In contrast, participants who have extensively studied change management or who have significant practical experience in this field often perceive their roles as integrating the characteristics of both facilitators and agents. This suggests a more complex understanding where these individuals see themselves as not just implementing change but also enabling and supporting others in the change process.

5.6 Reflection on the Necessity of Change

The analysis reveals that MEL participants possess a profound awareness of the necessity for change within their educational environments, an understanding that stems from both their professional roles and personal observations. This awareness often translates into proactive discussions about organisational deficiencies, highlighting issues such as educational inequities, mistrust among stakeholders, and overly restrictive systems. This heightened awareness is likely reinforced by the Change and Project Management courses within the MEL program, which not only spotlight these discrepancies but also provide the analytical tools needed to address them effectively.

Moreover, participants frequently note a significant discrepancy between the expressed intentions of educational leaders and their actual behaviours, a gap that manifests as systemic inefficiencies and erodes trust. This observation underscores a critical need for educational policies that are not only stated but actively implemented and adhered to, ensuring that they translate into meaningful outcomes. The emphasis on equity and accessibility, particularly noted by participants working in diverse educational settings, reflects a broader commitment to inclusivity. This commitment is often driven by personal values and a professional responsibility to ensure that education is equitable and accessible to all, especially marginalised or underserved groups. This focus on social equity is instrumental in fostering

environments where educational benefits are distributed more evenly.

Additionally, the importance of collaborative and empowering practices is recurrently emphasised by participants, who often experience or observe firsthand the transformative impact of such environments on educational outcomes. By advocating for and implementing strategies that empower both educators and students, MEL graduates contribute to a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. This approach aligns with the Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasises the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers through vision and support (Bass & Avolio, 1994)

5.7 Strategic Approaches to Change Facilitation

The MEL program equips participants with a comprehensive strategy for instigating change that spans intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra-organisational, and external dimensions, addressing the multifaceted nature of educational transformation. This holistic approach underscores the participants' deep understanding of both the nuanced and broader elements influencing educational change.

At the intrapersonal level, participants redefine their perceptions of learning and leadership by embracing new pedagogical perspectives and demonstrating adaptability. This self-transformation is crucial as it fosters an acceptance of change among their peers, facilitated by introspection and self-awareness which pave the way for personal growth and leadership efficacy. The focus on mental health and self-care underscores the importance of resilience in sustaining long-term change efforts, reflecting an evolution in the participants' roles from traditional leaders to proactive, continuous learners.

Interpersonally, participants advocate for creating inclusive environments that value diverse perspectives, thereby enhancing stakeholder engagement and ownership of change processes. This strategy of building trust and

fostering collaborative networks is vital for the effective implementation of change, as participants leverage collective expertise to navigate educational challenges. The strategy of engaging stakeholders in a step-by-step process and the readiness to "freeze" initiatives when necessary, exemplify a commitment to ensuring outcomes that are both impactful and sustainable.

Intra-organizationally, participants utilise regular interactions, such as workshops and one-on-one, as well as team meetings, to democratise the change process and ensure alignment with institutional goals. This approach not only facilitates a deeper organisational penetration of change initiatives but also emphasises the importance of iterative and flexible strategies that adapt to evolving educational landscapes.

Externally, the acknowledgment of broader societal and cultural dynamics enriches the participants' strategies, enabling them to align educational practices with global standards and societal needs. This outward-looking strategy ensures that educational transformations are not only innovative but also contextually relevant and empirically supported.

The participants' comprehensive approach to change, spanning intrapersonal to external dimensions, aligns closely with the stages of the CBAM. At the intrapersonal level, participants redefine learning and leadership perceptions, fostering acceptance of change and personal growth, reflective of CBAM's Awareness and Informational stages. Interpersonally, they build inclusive environments and collaborative networks, corresponding to the Personal and Management stages, ensuring stakeholder engagement and sustainable change initiatives. Organisationally, the democratising of the change process, mirrors the Consequence and Collaboration stages of CBAM. Externally, recognising broader societal impacts aligns with the Refocusing stage, where strategies are evaluated and adapted to ensure relevance and innovation. This strategic layering of change facilitation not only emphasises the participants' evolving roles as effective leaders and CFs, but also

showcases the MEL program's effectiveness in equipping them with the necessary skills to implement and sustain change across various educational contexts.

5.8 Mentoring by Change Facilitators

The data also shows that participants of the study dedicate significant time and effort to the professional development of their peers and refining teaching practices in their workplaces. This commitment extends to empowering colleagues by encouraging critical reflection on existing systems and advocating for active participation in discussions that challenge the status quo. This emphasis on mentoring and professional growth not only highlights the MEL program's commitment to fostering a community of reflective practitioners but also directly addresses the research questions of this thesis. Specifically, it explores how MEL participants enact change and assess their development as change agents within educational settings.

This approach is supported by the work of Louis & Kruse (2011), who advocate for collaborative professional learning opportunities as a fundamental driver for educational improvement. Their research underscores the significance of such collaborative environments in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of educational reforms. These initiatives not only enrich the educational experiences of their peers but also reinforce the CFs' roles as leaders in change facilitation. The transformation in their professional identities and the visible impact on their environments underscore the influence of the MEL program, highlighting its effectiveness in preparing educational leaders who are equipped to drive meaningful and sustained changes in their settings.

In the context of the CBAM, these activities can be seen through the lens of the 'management' stage, where CFs manage the implementation of change processes, and the 'consequence' stage, where they evaluate the impact of

these changes on their peers. By facilitating professional growth, CFs help their colleagues progress through these CBAM stages, effectively fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation to change. Insights from the results reveal that what CFs experience and learn in the MEL program influences their approach in their respective environments.

5.9 Growth in Network and Perspective

Our findings show that participants in the MEL program report substantial growth in their professional networks and perspectives, fostered through interactions with fellow learners. This networking often extends beyond the traditional academic boundaries with some participants sharing their experience of interacting with individuals outside of an educational context that they would have never interacted with if not for the program. Participants also spoke of involvement in think tanks and podcasts, indicating a dynamic community engaged in continuous learning and knowledge sharing. Such expansions in networking and collaborative projects reflect the program's effectiveness in building a community of practice that supports ongoing professional development and innovation.

5.10 Expanding Cultural Diversity in the MEL Program

Despite the MEL program's aim to have a diverse and varied cohort, there remains a significant opportunity to expand its cultural diversity. Currently, the predominance of Western participants may restrict the program's capacity to foster a truly global cohort. This limitation underscores the importance of diversifying perspectives and experiences represented within the program. Diverse groups are more capable of fostering creativity, innovation, and critical thinking (Hong and Page, 2004). By bringing together individuals from various cultural backgrounds, the MEL program not only enhances participants' problem-solving skills and creative capacities but also diversifies perspectives and experiences, which is crucial for effectively preparing

participants to navigate and lead in multicultural educational settings. By actively promoting and implementing strategies to enhance cultural diversity, MEL can better prepare its participants to lead with cultural competence, ensuring they are equipped to foster inclusive and innovative educational environments themselves.

This enhancement of cultural diversity directly addresses the program's objectives of preparing educational leaders who are not only knowledgeable, but also adept in applying their skills in a globally interconnected world. This approach aligns with the overarching goals of the MEL program to mould leaders who can drive meaningful change and is crucial for the development of leadership that is both effective and relevant in diverse settings.

5.11 Business Subject Focus

The MEL program, while offering a unique mix with its integration of educational leadership and business administration, could benefit from a more robust incorporation of business and finance content. This critique stems from the observation that the program, though innovative, still leans heavily towards educational leadership without sufficiently addressing the increasingly vital role of business acumen in this field. To truly equip educational leaders for the complexities of modern educational environments, a balanced curriculum that offers equal focus in more focused business management strategies is essential.

Looking at other similar programs at the University of Manchester and McGill University which seem to provide a more comprehensive program that blends these disciplines seamlessly. MEL's offerings, by comparison, could be perceived as not yet fully meeting the emerging needs of educational leaders who must navigate both educational and financial challenges.

Expanding the curriculum to include more in-depth finance and business

management courses could significantly enhance the practical applicability of the MEL program. Such an enhancement would ensure that the program remains at the forefront of educational innovation, providing leaders who are not only visionary in educational theory but also skilled in the essential dynamics of business management.

5.12 Methodological considerations, strengths and limitations

Although saturation was achieved after interviewing all study participants, only a small number of survey participants and hence interviewees were from previous cohorts (2017 to 2020). To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research questions and obtain a balanced perspective from a broader range of MEL participants, it would have been beneficial to have more participants from earlier cohorts. However, it is important to note that the selection of participants for the study sample is beyond the control of the researchers and can be challenging to manage.

When considering the four main criteria essential for ensuring the reliability of the study's findings—namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—credibility has been established. To enhance the transferability of the findings, the research team employed diverse data collection methods (survey and interviews) in this study. The study being done on a short time frame, a longitudinal perspective, with hands-on observations in the participants' work contexts, would not be possible to further validate the results. The coding process involved independent efforts by the two main researchers, and subsequently, the results were compared to ensure intercoder reliability. This, as well as documenting a clear coding schema that points out the codes and patterns identified in the analysis process and presenting the researchers' reflexivity, ensures dependability and confirmability.

Finally, a key limitation to this study is the number of pages available to report and discuss the data. Indeed, much more can be said, but to keep this interesting to the reader, the research team decided to focus on certain points

over others. With that being said, the authors recognise the results' section is still quite comprehensive. However, this reflects the important amount of data collected through the survey and interviews, as well as the analysis process. In addition, elements of the data may seem redundant to the reader, but the authors would argue that it is more a strong indication of the common themes that came up often in the data, which highlights what is most important to the participants.

Even so, this study poses numerous strengths, such as a wide variety of educational contexts represented through the participants. Moreover, this study allows one to address one of the research gaps available in the literature, be it about the CBAM model's application in other contexts than K-12 settings primarily, or on the influence in equipping CFs in their work, through programs such as the MEL degree. Additionally, the current global shift towards hybrid learning models due to the COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity for further research. It would be insightful to explore whether and how the shift to hybrid learning has impacted MEL participants, especially considering their adaptation to online and hybrid educational formats. Such studies could help understand the resilience and adaptability of the MEL curriculum and its participants in unprecedented conditions, further contributing to the evolution of educational leadership programs in response to global crises.

5.13 Further implications and/or recommendations

Through this study, we hope that the findings serve as a resource for the MEL team (e.g, program directors, teachers, university administration), offering answers to their inquiries and facilitating informed decision-making towards the further development of the program. We also aspire to provide valuable insights that may extend beyond the MEL program, for other universities and educational programs looking into developing a curriculum or structure, similar to the MEL's, offered by the Tampere University of Applied Sciences.

Through the data collected in the survey and interview, it became clear that

the following measures would be key highlights in the further development of the MEL program:

- **Enhanced Real-World Integration:** MEL participants wish to see more real-world case studies, and live projects with external organisations to provide them with practical, hands-on experiences. Integrating these aspects would directly address their need for practical experience, by providing tangible contexts in which they can apply what they've learned, enhancing their ability to facilitate change effectively.
- **Expanded Leadership Development Course:** Numerous participants highlighted their wish to see an expansion of the Leader Development course and the development of additional modules focusing on advanced leadership skills, such as strategic thinking, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Expanding the curriculum to include these would prepare participants for higher-level responsibilities and complex problem-solving scenarios, which are crucial for effective leadership and change management in the roles they wish to endeavour into, post-MEL.
- **Mentoring Program:** Feedback from participants suggests that mentorship and networking opportunities are critical components of their professional growth. Establishing stronger mentorship programs linking current participants with alumni and professionals in their fields could provide both guidance and a stronger network.
- **Curriculum Flexibility:** Participants express a desire for a curriculum that adapts more flexibly to their individual circumstances, professional trajectories and learning styles. An increase in flexibility and allowing more customisation within the curriculum (i.e, more elective courses, or modular course designs) would enable participants to focus on areas most relevant to their career goals and learning needs, enhancing the overall reach of the program within their respective personal and

professional lives.

- Communication Consistency: Data collected from participants points to some variance in communication from the MEL academic team towards the students, particularly around deadline extension, expectations and timelines associated with assessments, and variability in the support and communication from thesis supervisors. MEL participants also deplored the difference in engagement of teachers, whether they are part of the business part of the program or educational component of it. A recommendation would be to have further sit downs with the faculty from the business orientated sections of the program (e.g, Managing Cultural Diversity, Financial Management) to better their understandings of whom

the MEL students are, what their backgrounds are, how they could elaborate their course in order to answer the needs of professionals often based all over the world, and having different levels of understandings of various topics. A further recommendation would be to allow students with an educational background to take modules in the business field and for students with a larger economics/business background to take courses in the educational field.

- The integration of a statistics course into the MEL program curriculum is highly recommended. Given the diverse backgrounds and levels of statistical knowledge among participants, a tailored statistics course would ensure that all students have a foundational understanding of quantitative methods and prepare MEL students for their thesis. Additionally, we suggest incorporating an application of qualitative research methods within the course, as many students opt for qualitative-based thesis research. This dual approach would equip participants with the necessary skills to effectively analyse both quantitative and qualitative data, enhancing the rigour and depth

of their thesis work.

6 CONCLUSION

Through the data collected in this study, MEL appears to represent more than just a qualification. Although the MEL participants deem wanting to enact change or being CFs before entering the program, it still was a transformative experience that empowered them to navigate their careers with confidence, self-awareness, and more comprehension of themselves. It not only expanded their knowledge and skills but also empowered them to become catalysts for positive change in their organisations and beyond. Through their MEL journey, they emerged as more ready to effect positive change, drive innovation and tackle challenges and opportunities in the educational landscape, with passion and purpose, allowing them to leave a lasting impact on both themselves and their communities.

7 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

While the project was initially commissioned by the MEL program director, it is important to declare that there is no conflict of interest to disclose. The researchers did not receive any financial compensation or incentives for conducting this study. Our commitment to academic integrity and impartiality remained paramount throughout the research process.

8 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We are immensely grateful to the commissioner of this project for entrusting us with this opportunity. Their vision and commitment to advancing educational practices have inspired and motivated us throughout this journey.

To the entire MEL team (i.e, program directors, teachers), we extend our sincere thanks for creating an enriching and supportive learning environment. Your dedication to excellence and passion for educational innovation have been a constant source of inspiration for us. We are so grateful for your support, kindness, and availability to us.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all the participants of our study for their invaluable contributions, and willingness to share their experiences. Your perspectives have enriched our research and provided valuable insights into the complexities of educational leadership.

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As we reflect on the culmination of this chapter, we are filled with gratitude

for the experiences, lessons, and relationships (we see you, fellow cohort members!) forged along the way. While this journey may be coming to an end, we carry forward the knowledge and memories gained with immense pride and gratitude.

Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

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10 APPENDICES

1(7)

Appendix I: Survey questions

Thesis Survey on your participation in the MEL Program

Dear fellow MEL'ers,

As a fellow MEL participant, we are reaching out to invite you to participate in a survey that forms a crucial part of our thesis research, which aims to explore the influence of the MEL program on its participants/graduates within the educational sector.

Your experiences and reflections are invaluable to our study, and we would be deeply grateful for your participation. The survey consists of a series of open-ended and closed questions relating to your experiences during the MEL program, and the influence it has had on your professional life.

The survey is split over 3 sections (please make sure to complete all by selecting the next button at the bottom of each section) and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Some of you may be contacted for a short follow-up one-on-one interview, in the upcoming weeks, for the final part of our thesis' study, which is why we ask for a contact detail of yours, in order to reach out to you.

Thank you once again for considering our request, for your time, and for your potential contribution to enriching the MEL program's legacy. Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions or require further information.

Kindest regards, Sana & Kevin MEL 21 cohort

Consent

Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for this research's purpose and available only to the researchers (Sana Pervaiz & Kevin O'Brien). All data will be anonymized in the final paper. By proceeding with this survey, you consent to your responses being used for research purposes in a thesis project.

* Indicates required question

3. Email *

4. Name *

5. Email Address *

6. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other

7. Age

- Below 30
- 30-44
- 45-59
- 60+

8. Location (country) of Current Employment *

9. Highest level of education when entering MEL *

- Bachelor
- Masters
- PhD

10. Field(s) of previous study program(s) *

11. What year did you commence the MEL Program? *

- 2017
- 2018
- 2019
- 2020
- 2021
- 2022
- 2023

12. What is your current employment status? *

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Not currently employed

13. What type of educational institution or organisation are you working for? * If you do not currently work in an educational setting, please still include details of the organisation you work for.

14. How many years of experience in the educational field do you have? *

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 25+ years

15. Do you have any official Leadership or Decision-Making Role within the Organization? *

- Yes
- No

16. Did your employment or position change during the course of the MEL program? *

- Yes
- No

17. If the answer to the previous question was yes, can you describe your job title or function before starting the program and the position you moved into during the program? Was there a particular reason you decided to change position or employment?

18. Did your employment or position change after the course of the MEL program? *

- Yes
- No

19. If the answer to the previous question was yes, can you describe your job title or function before starting the program and the position you moved into afterward/the one you're in right now? Was there a particular reason you decided to change position or employment?

Section 2

20. During your time in the MEL program was there a time when you considered dropping out? If so, what made you stay? *

21. To what extent do you believe the Master's program has equipped you to effect change in your educational setting? (1 = Not equipped at all, 5 = Extremely well-equipped)

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

22. Can you identify specific skills or knowledge gained in the program that contributed to your ability to make a positive impact in education? *

23. Were there specific courses or content in the MEL program that directly contributed to your work

6(7)

as a change agent? Please select as many courses as you wish. *

Check all that apply.

- Leadership Practices
- Contemporary Learning Theories and Assessment Change and Project Management Methods
- Technology Enhanced Learning Financial Management
- Curriculum Design and Implementation
- Emerging Trends and Innovation in Education
- Managing Cultural Diversity
- Educational Policy and Practice
- Communication and Conflict Management
- Postdigital Media for Educational Leadership
- Advanced Topics in Educational Leadership
- Other:

Section 3

24. What does being a change agent mean to you? *
25. What does being an educational leader mean to you? *
26. Can you give an example from your professional experience where you acted as a change agent?

*

27. Have you encountered challenges in implementing that change in your educational context? *

7(7)

- Yes
- No

28. If your answer to the previous question was yes, please provide more detail on these challenges.

29. Was there anyone within the organisation who facilitated or acted as a positive responder to the enablement and/or implementation of change? *

- Yes
- No

30. If your answer to the previous question was yes, please provide more detail on this.

31. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in the Master's program and its influence on your ability to bring change in the educational "world"?

Appendix II: Interview guide

Section 1

1. Do you see yourself as a change facilitator in your educational setting? What kind of change facilitator do you see yourself as?
2. Can you elaborate on the philosophy or approach that guides and inspires your actions as a change facilitator?
3. What were/are the key changes you were/are advocating for within your educational organisation?
4. What made it visible that change was/is needed in the first place? What were/are your concerns and other people's concerns that brought a desire or need for change?
5. Can you provide specific examples of positive changes you have/are initiated in your educational work as a result of your MEL program experiences?
6. How was/is the enacting of changes received in the organisation? Could you describe the challenges you have faced in managing and implementing change in your educational setting? Were/are there concerns about how changes would affect the organisation?
7. How did/are you navigate/navigating these challenges? What

strategies or approaches did/are you use/using to overcome the concerns and successfully implement change within your educational organisation?

2(3)

8. Did/Are you receive/receiving adequate support and resources from your educational institution to implement changes based on your MEL program learnings? If not, could you describe the type of support or resources that you believe would/will have facilitated your change initiatives? If you didn't received/aren't receiving any or enough, what were/are the types of support or resources that you would (have) like(d) to get?
9. How do you envision the short, mid and long-term impact of the changes you have/are initiated/initiating in your educational context?
10. How do you assess the sustainability and the depth of these changes within your organisation? Do you use any specific metrics or indicators to evaluate the impact? What is your indicator of change made in your organisation?

Section 2

11. How would your working life look different without the MEL program?
12. What have been the key elements and most significant lessons learned, within MEL, about facilitating change in an educational context? Do you feel the MEL program equipped you with the change literacy/vocabulary competency and skill set to facilitate change within your educational organisation? What did/does that look like in

your work setting?

3(3)

Section 3

13. Based on your experiences, how could the MEL program be enhanced to further develop future leaders' abilities to manage and lead change effectively?