



Leading a Change in Higher Education

Initiating School of Common Studies

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ABSTRACT

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The national target in Finland is to increase the number of young adults with tertiary education to 50 % of the age group. This target challenges higher education institutions to develop their operations and organizational structures. This research analyses leadership actions on an organizational change of a Finnish university of applied sciences from the perspective of employees.

The research context was a new unit, a School of Common Studies, which was established to improve the operational results of the faculty, to reduce the number of personnel in existing schools and to provide more time for managerial tasks. The research focused on change management, psychological process individuals go through during the change and the leadership actions supporting the psychological process, transition.

A multi method research strategy including both quantitative and qualitative methods was used to find out experiences of the personnel of the new unit. Answers were collected with a questionnaire, surveys, and a semi-structured group interview.

The William Bridges Transition model was used to interpret the results which suggested the ending phase quite clearly. Concerns were raised on the losses but at the same time new opportunities and possibilities were seen.

To conclude, the role of leaders is essential in supporting the personnel in change. The key issues are to remember that the transition is an individual experience and that personnel should have enough time to adapt to the change. Communication should be systematic and diverse, and leaders should bring clarity to the change and help personnel to trust the future. The commitment of the management team is essential, and the key task of the unit head is to support the management team and ensure their endurance and well-being.

Key Performance Indicators will reveal the impact of the organizational change and leadership actions in the coming years. In addition, longitudinal study would be beneficial. Further, the study of the experiences of the employees in other units would deepen the understanding about the impact of the change process in organization.

Key words: organizational change, transformation model, leadership actions

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the research

This master's thesis work is part of the Master of Business Administration studies (Educational Leadership program) in Tampere University of Applied Sciences. Development tasks and research topics of Master theses in Universities of Applied Sciences are work-life oriented and aim to produce information that the broader professional community can benefit from.

The purpose of the research is to identify leadership actions that contribute to the successful implementation of organizational change from the perspective of employee experiences. The thesis is supported by the senior management of the organization based on the need to understand the impact of leadership actions in change process and to learn for the future. The motivation of the research is professional development as an educational leader.

Although this research is conducted in a higher education institution, the findings can be utilized in organizations of a different kind.

1.2 Research context and focus group

The national target in Finland is to increase the number of young adults with tertiary education to 50% of the age group. In the Faculty of Engineering and Business in Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) a strategic decision was made not to increase the intake but to invest in stronger support for first year students. The goal is to increase the number of graduates by reducing the number of students who discontinue their studies, rather than to increase intake. Many universities of applied sciences (UAS) have increased their intake, but at the same time studies are discontinued and the number of graduates is not increasing.

The research is conducted in TUAS where a new unit, School of Common Studies, was established in 2024 to improve the operational results of the Faculty of Engineering and Business and to support the well-being of the employees (Kontio 2023). TUAS is a higher education institute located in Southwest Finland with over 12 000 students and 800 employees. The education of TUAS is organized in three faculties which are divided in several schools.

Target group of the research is the personnel of the new school, and their experiences of change management. Personnel of the new school came from the existing schools and the Head of School was recruited internally.

1.3 Aim of the research and research structure

The aim of the research is to study the impact of the leadership actions in change. The research question is: How can leaders support personnel in a change?

The goal is to examine the impact of different leadership actions. The research excludes collaboration with internal stakeholders of TUAS, such as the employees in the other schools and the management of the faculty.

The study consists of literature review, which presents the theoretical framework for the study and sets the basis for interpreting research findings (chapter 2), description of the case School of Common Studies including the leadership actions (chapter 3) which are the target of the empirical research. The research methodology is explained in chapter 4.

The structure and timeframe of the study are presented in Figure 1. The leadership actions in the case School of Common Studies are reported during the period April 2023 – March 2024 and divided in three phases (Initiating, Preparing and Starting). The research data was collected using three methods (questionnaire, survey, and group interview).

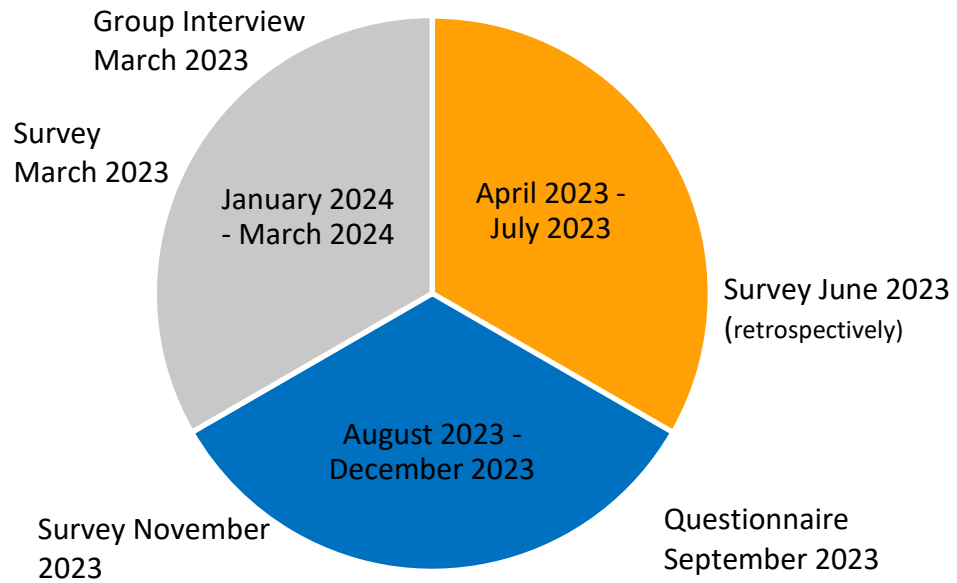


FIGURE 1. The timeframe of the case School of Common studies and the timing of data collection.

Chapters 5,6 and 7 describe results, present discussion, and the conclusions of the study. The results of the research are linked to the phases of the case School of Common Studies, and they are reflected to the findings of the literature review.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents perspectives on change management and experiencing the change and introduces the theory used in this study to interpret the results, Bridges Transition Model (Bridges 2011). The goal of delving into the theoretical background is to enhance understanding of the researched topic, lay the groundwork for data collection, and serve as a framework for interpreting research findings (Juuti & Puusa 2020).

2.1 Leading a change

2.1.1 Leading people

The change process is often depicted as a clear project with a beginning and an end. The path to successful change management can be presented, for example, through planning, implementation, and monitoring. Studies indicate that change processes are evolving and partly in unpredictable paths. Changing circumstances and people as decisions-makers and actors make the change process unpredictable. (Cameron & Green 2015, 13.) Flexibility and consideration of the human factor are needed in change management (Viitala 2020, 26-27). One of the most important aspects for a leader is to understand the difference between changes happening in an organization and the psychological transitions that are experienced by the individuals (Cameron & Green 2015, 13).

To lead a change, a leader must implement it practically and guide personnel forward through their own actions. The leader needs to commit to the goals, believe in the cause, and enact change through their actions. Behind the change is the vision of the management. The leader should succeed in sharing the vision with the personnel so that everyone strives for a common goal. In the best-case scenario the leader can share the enthusiasm. When implementing change, the leader's role also involves questioning established practices and encouraging

and assisting the personnel in finding and trying new approaches (Kouzes & Posner 2012, 12-14.)

When implementing change, the road is long. Along the way, there will be failures, weariness, and fatigue. The leader must persistently advance the change. The personnel should be encouraged and supported even in the most challenging moments. (Kouzes ja Posner 2012, 17.) Behavioral consistency, behavioral integrity, sharing and delegating control, communication and demonstration of concern are leader behavior that promote trust (Gardner & Pierce 2016, 40).

Uncertainty is a central reaction triggered by change and it is experienced more intensely when change occurs regardless of the individual's own desires (Hakonen 2020a, 2). According to Hakonen, managing uncertainty can be said to be one of the key tasks of a leader in organizational changes (Hakonen 2020a, 4). People have different desires and abilities to take risks and experience failures. It's important to recognize in change that not everything always succeeds, but progress occurs partly through experimentation and even through making mistakes. (Kouzes & Posner 2012, 15.)

2.1.2 Challenging role

There are high expectations to the supervisors, e.g. team leaders, since they are implementing the change, having a crucial role in communicating with personnel, keeping up the good spirit and at the same time, the changes may affect them the most (Helpap & Schinnenburg 2017, 82). While the team leaders are dealing with the change themselves, they also must address each team member's anxiety individually. Peer support from colleagues is considered important alongside the support from their own supervisor. The commitment of team leaders to the change and their success contribute to the implementation of the change. (Ponteva 2012, 45 & 60.)

Leadership is teamwork, as pointed by Kouzes and Posner (2012, 15). In their role, leaders should support collaboration by building trust and creating opportunities for interpersonal relationships to develop. To achieve results,

leaders must enable personnel participation, provide opportunities to influence, and make the implemented change their own. By fostering trust and confidence, the leader instills in the personnel the courage to take risks and try new approaches, as well as the opportunities to implement changes and succeed. (Kouzes & Posner 2012, 15.)

2.1.3 Communication

During a change communication is a powerful tool in sense-making, social interaction and understanding, not only a way to share information (Helpap & Schinnenburg 2017, 82). Successful change communication helps employees to cope with uncertainty, increases openness and positive attitude, and is the key in getting things done (Helpap & Schinnenburg 2017, 82). Lack of information increases frustration and uncertainty (Frahm & Brown 2014). Communication should be genuine, reflecting the leader's own style (Kouzes & Posner 2012, 12) and there should be formal and informal communication as well as planned and ad-hoc (Frahm & Brown 2014).

When studying change communication from the personnels' perspective, Helpap and Schinnenburg (2017) have identified three change communication dimensions: informative, empathic, and participatory. The informative dimension can be regarded as the basic requirement for change communication. Being informed is important and using several communication channels increase the effectiveness of informative communication. Empathic dimension is the personal and emotional tone in the change communication. Personnels' wish for personal statements from the supervisor as well as a possibility to talk about their own feelings. Participatory dimension is the level of participations in the communication. Top-down communication without changes to get involved is often regarded negative. If this dimension of the communication is failed, it increases negative emotions, such as fear or anger, and the change process suffers. (Helpap & Schinnenburg 2017, 84-85.)

2.2 Individuals experiencing the change

2.2.1 Individual experience

People are different and the nature of the change varies. The personality is a key factor in determining how an individual responds to the change. Each employee experiences the change through their personality and prior experience emphasizing the personal viewpoint, what does this mean to me? (Cameron & Green 2015, 53.) Some people can manage themselves; they are eager to take new duties and are resilient. Other people are performing in low level and not willing or don't have the courage to change the status. Leaders should be able to support the development of the self-esteem of the latter, and that way improve motivation and sense of belonging. People might be performing on low level because of fear of failure or low belief on one's abilities. Leaders should support the employees by giving feedback, emphasizing positive outcomes, and encouraging to try. (Gardner & Pierce 2016, 32-33.)

Each change case is different, and they lead to different attitudes and different behaviors. The change history of the organization has an impact as well as the individuals' experiences of previous changes. (Cameron & Green 2015, 53.) Thinking and emotional reactions are influenced by personal experiences of change and stories told about similar organizational changes in the past (Uotila 2020, 55). For some individuals, change may bring to the surface unresolved issues from previous changes (Ponteva 2012, 61).

According to Ponteva (2012), the success of change is promoted by involving employees at all levels. If employees feel like they are a mass subjected to change without the opportunity to influence it, it may hinder the implementation of change. When an organization has multiple levels, attention must be paid to participation opportunities and communication at different levels. (Ponteva 2012, 49–50.) People who have the experience that they are making a difference and can contribute to the organization, are more likely to help their colleagues, support their superior and make suggestions how to develop and improve work processes and environment (Gardner & Pierce 2016, 34).

2.2.2 Emotional experience

Hökkä et al. (2022) have studied emotional agency in work. Emotional agency refers to an individual's capacity to recognize, understand, and effectively manage their own emotions in various contexts. It involves the ability to regulate one's emotional responses to different situations, make intentional choices regarding emotional expression and behavior, and take responsibility for the impact of one's emotions on oneself and others. Emotional agency empowers individuals to navigate social interactions, cope with stress, and pursue personal goals with emotional awareness and adaptability. It is a crucial aspect of social-emotional development and can significantly influence an individual's well-being and success in life. The writers point out that in era of global and organizational changes, emotions and agency are very important. (Hökkä et al. 2022, 3-4.)

Positive emotions about the change predict readiness for change and create a possibility for the change to happen. During a change, leaders should create possibilities to experience joy and interest regarding the change. (Rafferty & Minbashian 2019.) Deetz, Tracy & Simpson (2000) emphasize the role of organizational culture. Positive corporate culture increases commitment, autonomy, and motivation. (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson 2000, 4.) In a positive organization employees feel good about themselves and about the organization, and the organizational climate promotes wellbeing and gives employees possibilities to thrive and develop a healthy self-esteem (Gardner & Pierce 2016, 27). If people are committed to the organization's mission, they are more likely to work to achieve the set goals, even if they are not fully behind these goals. A strong organizational culture promotes the feeling of belonging and the level of commitment. (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson 2000, 32.)

2.3 Transition model

According to Bridges (2011), transition is a process by which people let go of the old and step into something new. Bridges (2011) has modelled three phases of transition (Figure 2):

1. Ending is letting go of the old ways and identity.
2. The neutral zone is the time between the old and new.
3. The new beginning is the end of the transition.

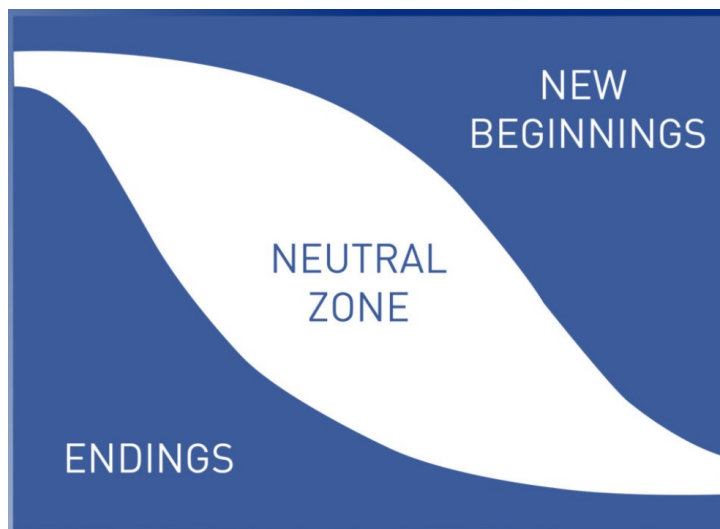


FIGURE 2. Bridges transition model (William Bridges Associates)

Managing transition is helping people through these phases (Bridges 2011, 4-5). Transition is a psychological process and people are going through it differently. And the phases are not happening linearly, but they often go at the same time. (Bridges 2011, 9.) It is also worth noticing that the managers have usually started their transition process earlier than the other personnel, they might have reached the new beginning while their personnel are working on an ending (Cameron & Green 2015, 121). Kubler-Ross model may be utilized to describe the emotional stages people go through during the Bridge's stages (Cameron & Green 2015, 32).

The Kubler-Ross model presents 5 stages people go through during a change. The stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. People can occupy different stages simultaneously or move back and forth between

them. The duration of each stage varies, and some may find it challenging to progress toward acceptance. (Cameron & Green 2015, 32; Larry 2017, 12.)

The clear stages in the Bridges model help leaders to understand the emotional journey of the people and manage the human side of the change. The model puts emphasis on uncertainty and pinpoints the need to support people. It is applicable in clear changes, such as acquisition or merger, where the endings and beginning are detectable. (Cameron & Green 2015, 120-121.) Samuel and Tsapayi (2023) have integrated Bridges Transition Model in their analysis on understanding the psychological difficulties leaders face in private higher education institutes during job role transitions (Samuel & Tsapayi 2023, 287). Larry (2017) has studied the experiences of individuals in IT teams during a transition process utilizing Bridges Transition Model and Kubler-Ross model (Larry 2017, 2-3). Miller (2017) has used Bridges Model in a university library when developing change management strategies to adopt new technologies, change workflows and reorganize (Miller 2017, 360).

2.3.1 Ending

Ending is the first step in transition. Something to be changed requires letting go of something. (Bridges 2011, 7.) In an organizational change people may have to let go of their colleagues, offices, boss, job role, desk, team meetings, annual parties, and several other matters (Green 2007, 213-214). If endings and losses are ignored, it is highly likely that the transition fails. And if the transition fails the outcomes expected of the planned change will not be achieved. (Bridges 2011, 7-8.) In the early stages of change, it's advisable to proceed calmly, allocate time for discussion, and build a common understanding. Involving the personnel from the beginning is seen as beneficial. (Hakonen 2020a, 5.)

Bridges (2011, 25-36) has described steps on the way leading people through endings and losses:

1. Identify who is losing and what they are losing.
2. Accept the reality and importance of the subjective losses.
3. Be prepared to overreactions.

4. Be sympathetic.
5. Tolerate grieving.
6. Compensate for the losses.
7. Keep people informed.
8. Define what is over and what isn't.
9. Respect the past.
10. Show how the ending gives a possibility for something new.

It is important to communicate and tell people what is going to change and why. The secondary changes should be identified and noticed as well. Not all losses are concrete, inner attitudes and expectations may need to change. When leading a change, talking with people is crucial in helping in transition as well as leaning what are their feelings and experiences. Committed people make the change happen and people are highly unlikely to commit if they are not heard and understood. A leader should bring the known losses out into open and express concern and sympathy for the affected people. Leaders are advised to be open and genuine in their communication. (Bridges 2011, 25-28.)

Leaders may experience that people are overreacting if they are reacting more than expected. People are reacting to the losses that are caused by the transition that is caused by the change. Because something is changing in personal life, it is impossible to foresee what are the losses individuals are experiencing. The personal change history affects as well. If old losses are not adequately dealt, there might be transition deficit. A new ending brings the old undealt experiences back and they need may cause a stronger reaction than the current situation would. If a leader can see these losses behind losses, it is possible to explain the current situation and show how it is unrelated to old situations. (Bridges 2011, 26-27.)

Losses should be compensated in some way. To be able to do that, leaders should know what the losses are. Status, team membership, recognition? E.g., if a person loss a team membership, building a new team and attaching to the team should be supported. (Bridges 2011, 30-31.) At the same time the past should be respected. The change has been initiated in the first place to change the old

ways, but people are identified with the old and if that is attacked the resistance against the transition is probable. (Bridges 2011, 34-35.)

There is a lot of confusion when things change. In uncertain times, communication becomes more important. Information must be available and same things need to be said again and again. People are experiencing the transition differently and the information is not absorbed at once. What is known should be communicated and it is ok to say that something is not yet known. The leaders should be specific what is left behind and what stays. (Bridges 2011, 32-33.) Management is expected to communicate openly and honestly; if expectations are not met, the information vacuum can be filled with speculation and even misinformation. Management should have a clear communication strategy. (DuFrene & Lehman 2014, 444.)

The supervisors may be in transition too, and support and communication from the top management is needed. It is important to show how ending something creates possibilities to continue as a successful organization. Sharing the future vision helps people to align with the new plans. (Bridges 2011, 36-37.) According to Frahm & Brown (2014) employees may have different experiences on the speed and results of the change. People who have open communication and who trust their leader, feel that a lot is happening, and things are moving forward. People who do not have open communication with their leader feel that things are not moving forward.

According to Uotila (2020, 56), recognizing the significance of emotional experience and managing it facilitate the successful implementation of change. For example, during the ending stage of Bridges' model, individuals may experience feelings of denial, anger, and depression, which are like the first three stages of Kubler-Ross's model: denial, anger, and bargaining (Cameron & Green 2015, 32-35; Green 2007, 208-212; Larry 2017, 94).

In the initial stage, denial, individuals may experience numbness and shock. They may say things like, "I can't believe it" or "This can't be happening." Denial serves as a temporary defense mechanism, allowing people time to absorb the news of change before moving on to other stages. In an organizational change people

might be saying: “Our current system works fine; why change”? During this stage, employees resist the change, hoping it won’t affect their routines. (Cameron & Green 2015, 32-35; Green 2007, 208-212.) If people get stuck on denial, a leader must address the issue. Understanding and sympathy should be demonstrated but at the same time a clear message to accept what is happening and to move on. Emotions of the people should be treated seriously. (Bridges 2011, 28-30.)

As the reality of change sinks in, denial often turns into anger. People might express sentiments like, “Why me?” or “It’s not fair!” Anger can be directed at various targets, including leaders, oneself, or even external factors like the economy. It’s a natural response when we realize that change is real and will impact us. In an organization people may say: “This is unnecessary! It’s just causing more work.” Anger can lead to resistance, complaints, and even sabotage of the change process. (Cameron & Green 2015, 32-35; Green 2007, 208-212.)

In the bargaining stage, individuals seek to negotiate or make deals. They might say things like, “Just let me take part in this last recreation day” or “I’ll do anything if you give me more time.” Bargaining represents an attempt to regain control or influence the situation. Employees might say: “Can we keep some aspects of the old system?” or “Can we delay implementation?” Bargaining reflects an attempt to regain control or find a middle ground. (Cameron & Green 2015, 32-35; Green 2007, 208-212.)

2.3.2 The neutral zone

The neutral zone is the time between the old and the new. The old way of doing things is gone, but the new way is not yet adopted. The neutral zone may be a very difficult time with increasing frustration and tension, but it can also be a creative time offering a fertile ground for new ways of working. (Bridges 2011, 39-43.) Many people expect to move straight from old to new and the journey in-between is neglected (Bridges 2011, 43). But this period of possible discomfort is crucial for the habits and inner processes to reshape and allow new patterns and actions (Bridges 2011, 53).

Bridges (2011, 40-42) has listed possible dangers in the neutral zone:

1. Anxiety rises and motivation falls. People may feel disoriented, and the energy is directed in coping instead of working.
2. Absence from work increases. There is evidence that people miss work more than other times.
3. Old weaknesses burst into bloom. Problems that have been present but maybe somehow coped with, get more serious.
4. There is a lot of confusion. People are overloaded, get mixed signals and systems are not functioning well. There will be uncertainty and frustration and the results may decrease.
5. Polarization may increase. Some people want to rush fast forward and others want to go back to the old ways.
6. Organization is vulnerable. Disorganized and tired people may not notice threats and resentful people may even sabotage the ability to respond to outside attacks.

Bridges (2011) advises to normalize the neutral zone. It is not wasted time, but it is time for re-orientation and re-definition. It is natural to feel frightened and confused when old ways are not working anymore, ambivalence increases and there are more questions than answers. (Bridges 2011, 43-44.) The time in neutral zone is also time for rebuilding the sense of identification with the group and connectedness with the group members. The role of communication is highlighted again. Communications help people feel included, and it reduces the number of rumors and untruths. (Bridges 2011, 47-48.) In times of change, such as when the organizational structure is evolving, initiating the operation of new teams is crucial. Merging different operating cultures can be challenging, and a shared goal for the new organization facilitates collaboration. (Ponteva 2012, 60.)

The final goal may be distant and abstract, but leaders can pave the way by creating temporary systems and milestones. Leaders protect people from further changes while the former one's are in progress. There is a limit how much people can take at once and even a small extra change can be sometimes too much. Hierarchy often breaks in neutral zone, but to ensure operation, e.g., decision-making processes must be clear. Short-range goals and checkpoints help in

giving people sense of achievement and movement on the way to the destination. Supervisors and managers may need support and training for leading their people through the neutral zone. (Bridges 2011, 45-46.)

The positive view to the neutral zone emphasizes the possibility for creativity and new ideas. The old ways are challenged or ceased and there is room for new. (Bridges 2011, 42.) Breaking the normal routines offers a possibility to do things differently and better. When things are open, people are more likely to try and adopt new things. Leaders should embrace experimental culture and encourage finding new ways to work. The environment should be safe to people to have the courage to try, even if there is a possibility for a failure. (Bridges 2011, 50-52.) Ponteva (2012) recommends combining the best practices from known models. If organizations or units are merged, it is advisable to incorporate elements from the former organizations. This is likely to facilitate the acceptance of the change. It would be beneficial to test the effectiveness of the new approach in practice. After the experiment, a decision is made on whether to retain the tested approach, make modifications, or try something completely different. (Ponteva 2012, 37 & 59.)

Employees who are used to high level of predictability, may find ambiguity and uncertainty uncomfortable. It is important to discuss vision and goals as it increases clarity and justifies the change. (Frahm & Brown 2014.) Leaders' role during the neutral zone is to protect and encourage people as well as give structures and opportunities (Bridges 2011, 54; Hakonen 2020a, 5).

During the neutral zone stage, individuals may experience feelings of confusion, disorientation, and anxiety, which are similar to the fourth stage of Kubler-Ross's model: depression. As the weight of change settles in, feelings of sadness and loss emerge. People may experience a sense of hopelessness or despair. It's essential to recognize that depression is a normal part of the process, especially when dealing with significant changes. Employees may feel overwhelmed and express sadness, regret, or anxiety about the change. For instance, if a company downsizes, employees might feel demotivated and uncertain about their future. Depression can lead to decreased productivity and emotional exhaustion. (Cameron & Green 2015, 32-35; Green 2007, 208-212; Larry 2017, 94).

2.3.3 The new beginning

The new beginning takes place when people are ready to commit to do new things and are ready to see themselves as part of the new. Change will start as announced e.g. in change management plan, but transition takes time, and the beginning cannot be scheduled. (Bridges 2011, 58.) A leader can help people to make a new beginning by ensuring they have the purpose, a picture, the plan and a part to play (Bridges 2011, 60).

The purpose behind the expected outcome must be clarified and communicated. It is worth noting that the purpose may need to be adapted to the interests and understandings of the personnel. The purpose must be clear, and it must mean something to an individual. Without a purpose, things are done but they will not solve any problems or lead to any change. (Bridges 2011, 60-64.)

A picture of the outcome helps in imagining the look and feel of the future. A purpose is abstract, but people need something tangible. A picture may present a new floor plan of a new layout, a picture of new production line or a visit to another organization where things are done in new way. A picture may be shared in the beginning of the transition process to share information and give guidelines where to head. Some people are soothed and reassured by the concrete goal. But if the picture paints future that is too difficult to reach, it may have a negative impact. (Bridges 2011, 64-66.)

A picture is enough for some people. A picture works for them as a map, and they can navigate to the destination. But many people need precise plan outlining the steps and schedule in practical level. The plan is for transition, not for the change. Transition management plan is more detailed and person-oriented than change management plan. It tells when an individual can expect to receive information and training and how they can participate. (Bridges 2011, 66-67.)

Plans give people a sense of security but that is not enough for all people. Some people are troubled if they don't have clear information what is their role in the plan. When people have a part-to-play it facilitates the new beginning. Being involved brings people together to solve problems and gives a sense of working

together. When people can join the work, more knowledge is available, and democracy and commitment are increased. (Bridges 2011, 67-69.)

A leader can support personnel moving from the confusing neutral zone towards the new beginning. Bridges has given four rules to follow (Bridges 2011, 69-72):

1. Be consistent. Messages must be consistent they can't conflict. Leaders' own actions must be consistent as well. Personnels' actions and reactions aligned with the new way must be rewarded, not those that are according to the old way. Conflicting messages and actions may give excuses to argue that the new beginning is not for real. Don't say that you know, if you don't know (Cameron & Green 2015, 121).

2. Ensure quick success. The neutral zone may have a been a difficult period, and success and achievement give personnel faith to the future. Quick success reassures the believers, convince those who doubt and confuse critics along the long way to the destination.

3. Symbolize the new identity. People are in the transition as a whole; it is not possible to separate reasons and feelings. Symbols convey a message that reinforces the new identity to be established. Small details matter, e.g. what color are the name tags.

4. Celebrate the success. Pay attention to the end of the transition and celebrate the success. The celebration doesn't have to be a big festival, but it is important to take to notice the transition period that is left behind.

The new beginning is about taking the transition to the end (Bridges 2011, 69-72) and it is reached when people are emotionally committed to doing something in a new way (Cameron & Green 2015, 120). In the final stages, building a shared identity and identifying potential new skill needs and opportunities are important factors (Hakonen 2020a, 5). Even the attitude and enthusiasm of a single person can increase the entire organization's intention and ability to implement change. Building belief in change and advocating for it in various situations supports the entire organization. Overall, positive emotions foster collaboration and reduce conflicts. (Ponteva 2012, 29 & 79.)

During the new beginnings stage, individuals may experience feelings of acceptance, hope, and optimism, which are similar to the final stage of Kubler-

Ross's model: acceptance. Acceptance involves acknowledging the new reality and adapting to it. It doesn't mean being thrilled about the change, but rather finding a way to move forward. Some individuals may struggle to reach this phase, remaining stuck in earlier stages. Employees come to terms with the change. They recognize its inevitability and adapt. For instance, when a company shifts to remote work permanently, employees accept the new reality and focus on making it work. Acceptance allows employees to embrace the change, learn new skills and align with the organization's goals. (Cameron & Green 2015, 32-35; Green 2007, 208-212; Larry 2017, 94.)

3 CASE SCHOOL OF COMMON STUDIES

A new unit, School of Common Studies, was established to enhance operational efficiency. This new unit aims to improve operational results, reduce the number of personnel in existing schools through redeployment, and provide Heads of Schools with more time and focus for managerial tasks. Several factors, on multiple levels, influenced the decision to implement this organizational change. These factors include policy-level issues, organizational objectives, and aspects impacting individual employees' work and student's experience. The operational efficiency and the impact of the change will be followed by using Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

3.1 Key Performance Indicators

The management of TUAS has established Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), which are monitored at faculty and school level. The KPI's connected to the organizational change measure the number of graduates, the overall satisfaction of students (AVOP) and personnel (PeoplePower® Rating), and the amount of external RDI funding.

Faculty level KPI's:

- number of graduates
- AVOP (Feedback questionnaire for UAS graduates)
- external RDI funding
- PeoplePower© Rating

The School of Common studies is responsible for teaching courses at the beginning of the studies in all the faculty's degree programs. The school has an impact on the number of the graduates but is not responsible for any program. First year continuation rate was selected as a KPI for the school, because most of the studies during the first year are organized be the School of Common Studies.

School level KPI's:

- first-year continuation rate
- external RDI funding
- PeoplePower© Rating

3.2 Drivers for change

3.2.1 Number of graduates

The national target in Finland is to increase the number of young adults with tertiary education to 50% of their age group to the level of the OECD's leading countries (Finnish Government 2023, 99). There has been an increase in enrollment in the universities of applied sciences (UAS), but at the same time studies are discontinued and the increase in the number of graduates is not yet seen (Figure 3) (Vipunen 2024; Tilastokeskus 2024). The increase in the number of graduates due to the addition of student places will not be seen immediately, as the expected study time is 3.5 to 4 years.

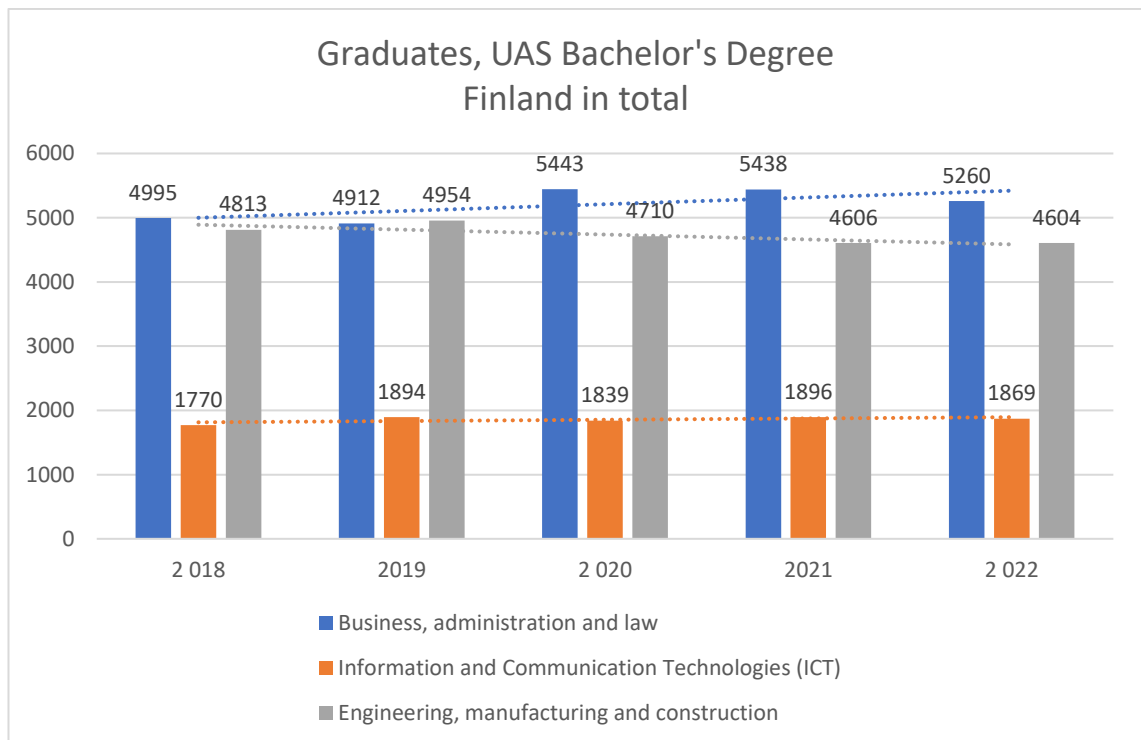


FIGURE 3. Number of graduates in the fields on engineering and business in the universities of applied sciences bachelor programs in Finland (Vipunen 2024).

In the Faculty of Engineering and Business in TUAS, there is no longer an intention to increase intake numbers; instead, it has been decided to invest in stronger support for students starting their studies. The goal is to increase the number of graduates by reducing the number of students who discontinue their studies, rather than increase intake. (Kontio 2023.)

The graduation of students is important for achieving national targets and ensuring the financial foundation of the university of applied sciences. A key aspect of the funding model for universities of applied sciences is the number of graduating students. The timing of graduation is also significant; funding for a student who graduates on time is greater than for one who graduates later (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2018, 20). In the upcoming years' funding model, the importance of graduating on time is expected to increase even further (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2024, 40).

3.2.2 Supporting students

In the Faculty of Engineering and Business in TUAS, the aim is to support students' engagement in their studies and in the university community, as well as the progress of their studies within the target timeframe. The goal is to both reduce study discontinuation and prevent study extensions beyond the target timeframe. (Kontio 2023.)

In the early stages of studies, all bachelor's programs include common studies such as mathematics, physics, and language studies. The teachers of these common subjects have been employees of the schools within specific fields (e.g., ICT, Chemical Industry etc.), but the organizational change brought teachers of the same subjects into one unit to support the ownership and development of the common courses. Some of the common courses are seen as obstacles for the students to advance in their studies and to graduate on time. There is an aim to increase student support equally regardless of the degree program. (Kontio 2023.)

The curricula in the schools of the Faculty of Engineering and Business include project courses throughout the studies (Ketola & Kontio 2022, 265). In addition to the field specific project courses all students participate in multidisciplinary project courses in both their second and third years of study. The implementation, coordination, and development of these project courses are significant investments at the faculty level. Approximately 1500 students participate in the second-year course annually, and around 1300 students participate in the third-year course. The coordination of these project courses is intended to be centralized, and efforts to develop the courses further will be undertaken as a whole within the School of Common Studies.

3.2.3 The role of RDI-work

In addition to providing education, universities of applied sciences conduct applied research, development, and innovation (RDI) in close co-operation with the regional working life (Ministry of Education and Culture). The volume of the RDI-work in UAS's have increased during the recent years (Arene 2023). There is a clear target to further increase the RDI-volume in TUAS and the organizational structures and functions must be aligned with this target (Kontio 2023).

3.2.4 Leadership and wellbeing

Heads of Schools have many subordinates, and the organizational structure does not allow the addition of new levels of management. There is an intention to invest in leadership work and to develop the conditions under which leaders work. Leadership work is seen as a key part of employee well-being and effective operations. Personnel surveys have highlighted the need to develop work planning, especially concerning teachers. Additionally, some employees feel their job descriptions as too fragmented. (Kontio 2023.)

3.3 School of Common Studies

The Faculty of Engineering and Business consists of seven schools (Figure 4). The Dean is the Head of the Faculty, and each school is led by the Head of School. A new unit, School of Common Studies, was established to improve operative results, decrease the number of personnel in existing schools by redeployment and enable more time and focus for managerial work to Heads of Schools.

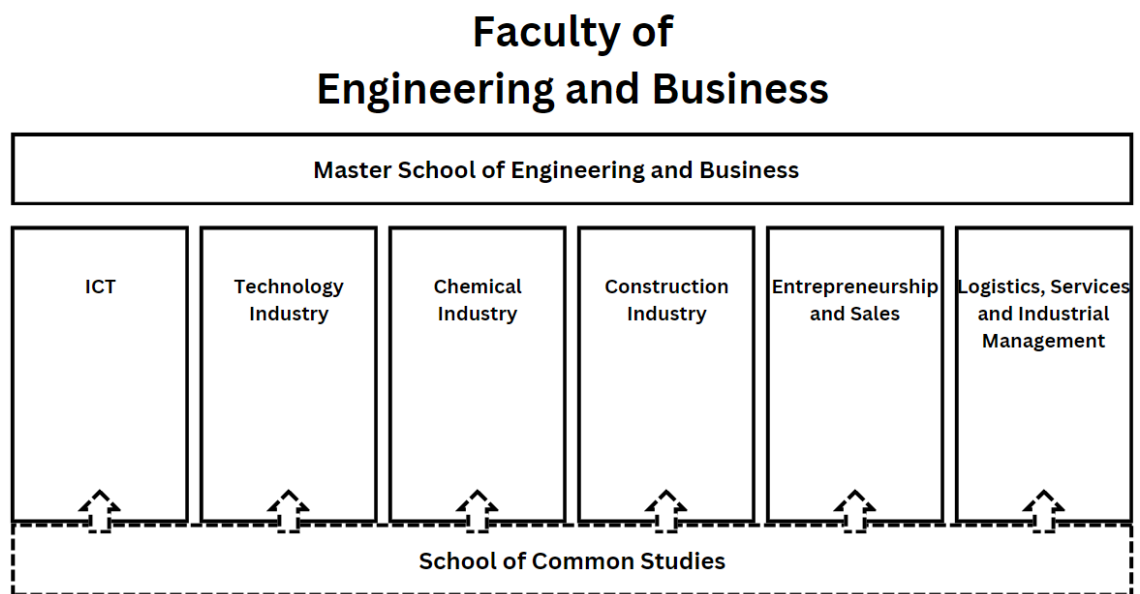


FIGURE 4. Organizational structure of the Faculty of Engineering and Business.

The responsibility of the School of Common Studies includes teaching common studies, orienting new students, supporting their integration into the university of applied sciences, and pedagogical research and development. Common studies include mathematics, physics, basic IT skills, as well as multidisciplinary project courses within the faculty.

3.3.1 Team structure

An effective and meaningful working environment is implemented through a team structure. The personnel are divided into teams, each with a leader (Figure 5). Within the same team, individuals have tasks in the same area. For example, language teachers form their own team, and in practical work, the team can be

further divided into smaller working groups, such as English teachers focusing on their subject.

In addition to the teaching teams, Practice-based Pedagogy research group is integrated into the School of Common Studies. Practice-based Pedagogy research group studies and develops the different sectors of higher education and learning and smoothly fits into the profile of the school.

School of Common Studies

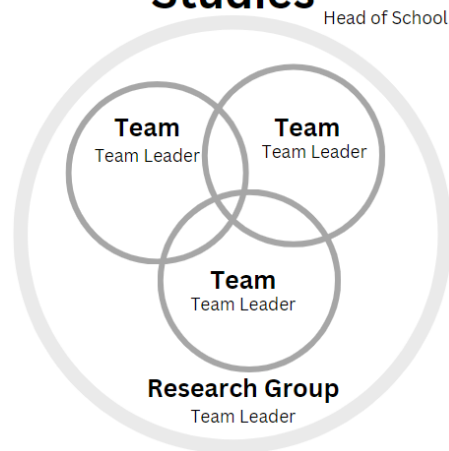


FIGURE 5. Team structure of the School of Common studies.

The team structure also aims to support leadership. In the School of Common Studies, the Head of School has 45 subordinates. Team Leaders are closer to the employees and more present in the daily life of the personnel. Team Leaders and Head of School form the management team of the school.

3.3.2 Forming the teams

The personnel of the School of Common studies were asked to choose their primary team, and in addition, they had the option to express interest in tasks that fall within the responsibility of another team. Teams were defined according to task areas, and for most individuals, placement was clear. Only a few individuals were uncertain in their team selection.

When considering the number of team members, the sizes of the teams are disproportionate (Figure 6). The biggest group is mathematics, physics, and IT skills teachers (45 %) and second largest is language teachers (33 %). However, it was decided to commence operations with this team structure because dividing the personnel of the largest team into smaller teams would be difficult, as individuals would then belong to multiple teams. On the other hand, tasks within the responsibility areas of the two smaller teams (project courses & student support 12 % and research group 10 %) affect the entire personnel of the school, even though the core group is small. In addition, not all the research group members are in this school, but the research group is multidisciplinary.

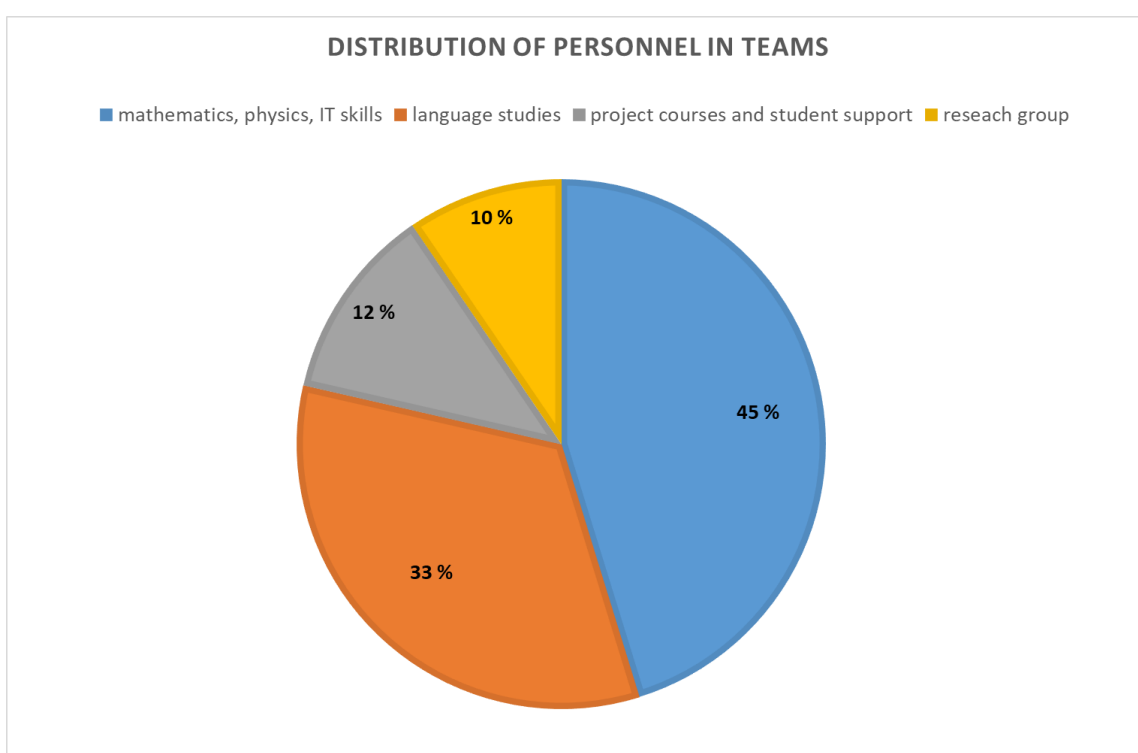


FIGURE 6. Distribution of personnel in the teams.

There were 3 team leader positions available in the new school but more applicants. The Head of School discussed with everyone who expressed interest and made the decision.

3.4 Implementing change

The Dean announced the establishment of the new school in April 2023. Actions on organizational level and the acts of the Head of the new school are described for one year to the end of March 2024. The research period is divided to three phases: 1) Initiating (April 2023 – July 2023), 2) Preparing (August 2023 – December 2023) and 3) Starting (January 2024 – March 2024). The first phase, Initiating, includes mostly faculty level actions led and implemented by the Dean. During the second phase, Preparing, the Head of School started in her role and the active preparation work for the change started but the personnel remained still in their old schools. The third phase, Starting, begins when the new school starts its operations and personnel start as members of this unit. The timeline is presented in Figure 7.

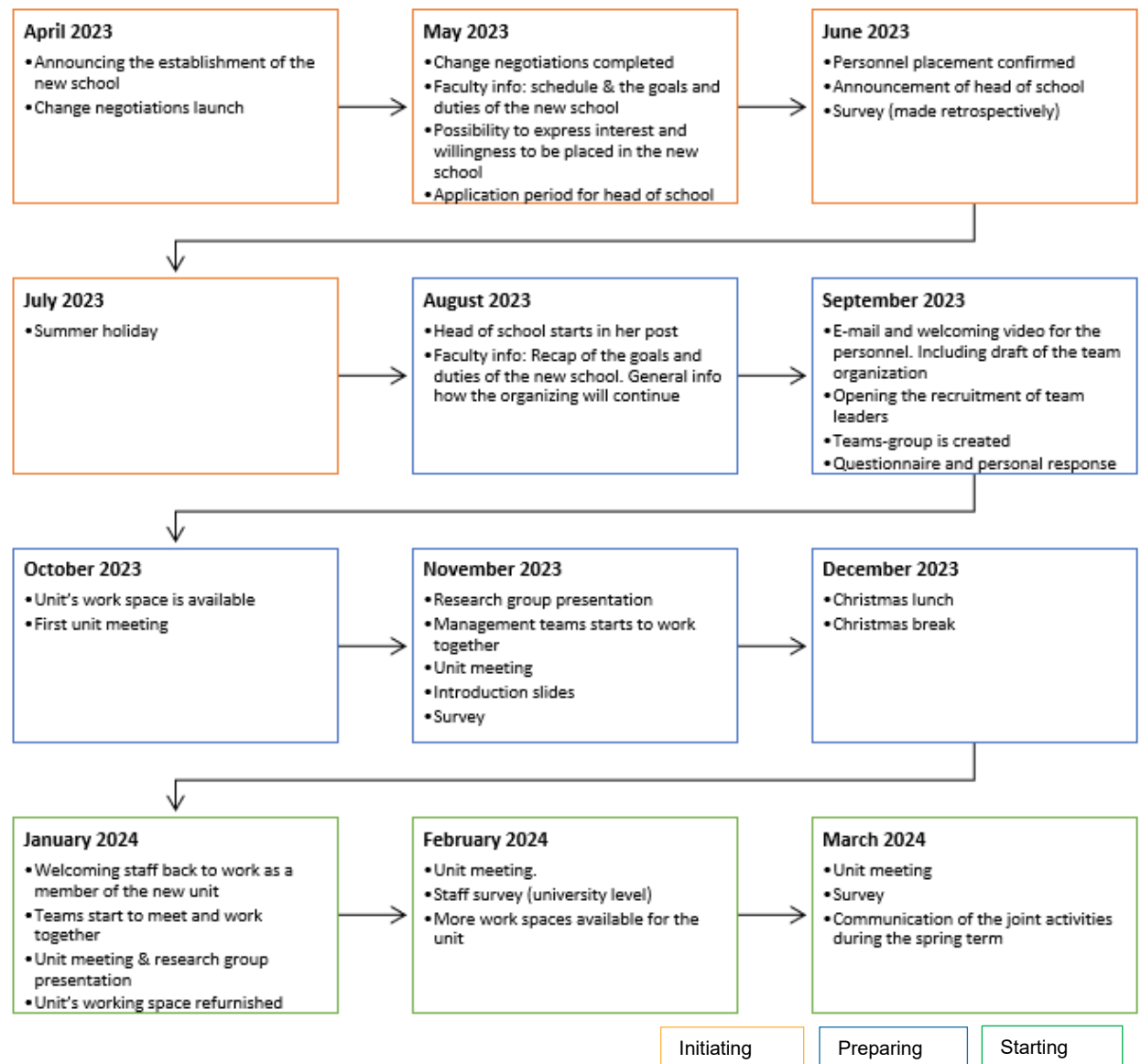


FIGURE 7. Timeline for the research period April 2023 – March 2024

3.4.1 Initiating (April 2023 – July 2023)

The decision to establish a new school was announced at a personnel meeting in April 2023. The new school was announced to start operating on 1 January 2024. The organizational change, which will lead to the transfer of personnel to a new organizational unit, requires the opening of change negotiations under the Co-operation Act. The change negotiations lasted for 3 weeks, during which the Dean communicated to the personnel about the content and progress of the negotiations. The change negotiations ended in early May 2023 and as a result of the negotiations, the key responsibilities of the new school and a timetable for moving forward were decided. At the mid-May personnel meeting, the future organizational structure, the name of the school and change process were presented. In the existing schools time was allocated for discussion and the opportunity to ask questions about the organizational change. It was informed, that the personnel transitioning to the new school would be confirmed by mid-June, and before this, personnel had the opportunity to express their willingness to move to the new school. Heads of Schools discussed with personnel in their own schools about moving to the new school or staying in the old one. The application for the new Head of School was opened in May 2023 and the decision on the selection was taken by mid-June. The new Head of School took up her post at the beginning of August 2023. The personnel received information about their placement in the School of Common Studies as well as the name of the new supervisor before the summer vacation. At the end on May the Dean shared a summary of change negotiations for personnel. The launch of the new school will change the placement of approximately 50 people. The changes are implemented by mutual agreement and by the employer's right to supervise work.

3.4.2 Preparing (August 2023 – December 2023)

In August 2023 people returned to work after the summer holiday and Head of School started to work in her position. There was a faculty meeting in mid-August with an info session concerning the School of Common Studies. There was a recap of the goals and duties of the new school and general information how the organizing will continue.

In the beginning of September 2023 Head of School contacted the personnel of the new school with e-mail and welcoming video. The message included draft of the team organization. Employees were encouraged to contact and meet with Head of School and some dates and times were announced when she was available. The recruitment of Team Leaders was announced. Few days after the e-mail a Teams-group was set up and information was shared via Teams. Head of School was available for an introduction and discussion.

In mid-September personnel was asked to answer a questionnaire to help building teams and share ideas, worries and questions. The end date of the earlier announced recruitment period for Team Leaders was informed and the questionnaire could be used to declare willingness to take the post. Each respondent was contacted personally by Head of School and their questions and worries were discussed.

In the beginning of October 2023 unit's first workspace was made available and the collection of ideas for refurbishing started. There was the first unit meeting with the new group. There was an update of the status of organizing the organizational change for the personnel of the whole faculty. The personnel of the School of Common Studies met for the first time and there was time for introductions and for the first meeting in teams. The teams were formed according to the earlier answers to the questionnaire and discussions with some people who were pondering between teams.

November 2023 started with research group presentation and invitation to join the research group's meetings and activities. To support getting acquainted, a PowerPoint template was created, where everyone was asked to write an introduction about themselves. The format of the introduction text was open, allowing individuals to share about themselves in whichever way they preferred. They could either stick to their work role or expand the narrative to include hobbies and other interests. Management team met for the first time and specified the responsibilities and interfaces with other schools. There had been the big picture from the beginning but when getting more into details a lot of questions and unclarities had been raised. These have been discussed and decided as

quickly as possible. Management team planned its own work and agreed on meeting dates for the following year.

There was a unit meeting at the end of November 2023. Survey was conducted asking: how do you feel about change? If feelings have changed, what has influenced. The survey collected for responses at two points in time, the current moment and June. Invitations to next year's (2025) unit meetings were sent. Joint meetings include the school meetings during the year, a recreation day in June 2024 and a development day in August 2024.

The employer provided a Christmas lunch in December 2023. An employee suggested getting together and enjoying Christmas lunch. Part of the group was able to have lunch together and this provided an opportunity for informal socializing. December was the last month in the old schools, after the Christmas break, people returned to work having moved to the new school, School of Common Studies.

3.4.3 Starting (January 2024 – March 2024)

On the first working day of January 2024, the Head of School sent a welcome message, which also included information and instructions, for example, on reporting working hours for the new school. There was an invitation for an informal coffee gathering to mark the beginning of the new semester. A large number of personnel gathered on campus. Team Leaders also provided information on practical matters and invited everyone to stay in touch. When the Head of School was on campus, she was mostly in the unit's office, which enabled encounters and discussions.

In mid-January, a unit meeting was held, focusing mainly on teamwork regarding action plans. A shared, voluntary coffee break was scheduled once a month. Teaching is carried out in three different campus buildings, and casual encounters may be limited. At the end of January 2024, the team workspace was rearranged, and information about additional workspaces was received. Not everyone who wanted to attend the November 2023 presentation of the research

group was able to attend, so another similar event was organized in January 2024. Information about the research group's annual meeting schedule was shared, and everyone was welcomed to join. Throughout January, Team Leaders met with team members individually, and regular team meetings and collaboration were initiated. The first new and concrete result of this collaboration was the support workshops offered to students in mathematics and IT skills. With mathematics teachers being in the same team, it is easier to coordinate cross-disciplinary support activities. Additionally, the prior standardization of mathematics studies during the curriculum reform supports cooperation and co-teaching.

The management team met as planned, and additional meetings were arranged based on matters to be addressed. The goal was to ensure smooth progress and involve the personnel. The Head of School provided information on the schedule for development discussions and invited everyone to both those and informal chats.

The first development discussions were held in February 2024, with the timing chosen according to the personnel's preferences. In mid-February, both the faculty personnel meeting, and the unit meeting were held. At the unit meeting, employees who had started in the fall wanted to celebrate the end of their probationary period by offering chocolates to their colleagues. The agenda of the meeting included implementing the university-level "Learning in a Changing World" development program into practice. Discussions at the meeting revolved around the development needs of the school's pedagogical competence and case examples we would like to share with other schools. Another topic of the meeting was practical matters related to planning for the fall semester's teaching and our school's guidelines, as well as discussions on common practices. An example was prioritizing campus teaching for first-year students. In February 2024, a university-level personnel survey was conducted. During the winter break week, there were changes in the premises, and the school gained access to three new workspaces.

In March 2024, there were more people in the team workspaces, and encounters among colleagues increased. Team Leaders have discussed the fall teachings

and gone through practical matters and schedules. Some employees have shared their concerns about changes in their work plan and the stress and uncertainty it has caused. Communication has emphasized the experimental nature of the first year and aimed to build confidence in finding preferred methods and better planning for the second year. In March, a multiculturalism workshop was held including sharing ideas and having discussions. Communication in March included information about the earlier agreed spring meetings and stated that the meetings would be structured to support getting to know each other, team building, and collaboration. Plans on joint activities are being made and implemented to highlight the advantages of the new school. When teachers in the same field are in the same team, it provides an opportunity to develop content and teaching methods together. A survey on feelings on the organizational change was conducted in March.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 The case School of Common Studies

The context of the research is described in chapter 3 in this thesis report. The research is conducted in the School of Common Studies at TUAS in April 2023 – March 2024 and the actions implementing the change are described. The researcher provides necessary information about the drivers of the change, the leadership actions, the timeframe, the unit structure and key performance indicators. The impact of the leadership actions will be assessed using the research data.

4.2 Research topic and aim the aim of the reseach

The research topic is a limited system, one organizational unit. The research topic is intrinsically bounded and can be described as a case study (Merriam & Tisdell 2015, 37). The research topic is the leadership actions in the School of Common Studies and the aim of this research is to understand the impact of leadership actions during a change process.

4.3 Research strategy and methods

A multimethod research strategy was implemented in studying the case including both qualitative and quantitative methods. The respondents are employees of the case unit.

Qualitative methods applied to this research are questionnaire, survey, and semi-structured group interview. Qualitative research studies a phenomenon in social environments, often focusing to the future aiming to improve or develop the subject by increasing understanding, enabling interpretations, and interpreting meanings (Merriam & Tisdell 2015, 24).

Qualitative data is supported by quantitative data. Quantitative data was collected in the surveys. Quantitative research addresses questions related to quantities and percentages. The results are described using numerical values, and often graphs are utilized to present the findings (Heikkilä 2014, 15.)

4.4 Data collection

The data was collected using three different methods: questionnaire, surveys, and semi-structured group interview (Figure 1 and Figure 7).

4.4.1 Questionnaire for personnel

The data collection began in September 2023 with a questionnaire exploring employees' thoughts on their role and expectations concerning the duties of the school, opinions of the team structure and free comments related to the organizational restructuring (Appendix 1).

4.4.2 Surveys for personnel

The second part of the data was collected through surveys at three different stages of the change process. Employees were asked about their attitudes towards organizational change using a Likert scale and were invited to provide verbal comments on factors influencing their attitudes (Appendix 2). There were two surveys (November 2023 and March 2024), but the first one included a time point in June 2023, which was reflected retrospectively. The respondents were asked to recall their feelings in June 2023 when answering the survey in November 2023.

4.4.3 Group interview for team leaders

The third data collection was semi-structured group interview of the team leaders. Semi-structured interview is a combination of less and more structured questions, that are used flexibly during the interview and the discussion in mostly guided by predetermined topics (Merriam & Tisdell, 1999). The interview was conducted as a group interview, which provides an opportunity to focus on issues that are common to individuals who are members of the group (Puusa 2020a). The purpose of the interview was to specifically focus on the views and experiences of Team Leaders. The interview questions concerned the role of the Team Leader in organizational change and psychological transition, Team Leaders' experiences on the personnels' reactions at different stages of the change, the initiated team activities, and Team Leaders' personal experience and their transition (Appendix 3).

4.5 Data analysis

Qualitative research data has been analyzed by sorting it into categories and further classifying it. The classification of the data arose from the data. Which is a typical method in qualitative research (Puusa 2020b).

Quantitative data was processed using MS Forms and MS Excel. Percentages were calculated from the results and graphs were plotted.

4.6 Ethics, reliability and validity

In addition to following the guidelines on responsible conduct of research (RCR) drawn up by TENK (TENK 2023), these general ethical principles are followed:

- a) the researcher respects the dignity and autonomy of human research participants, b) the researcher respects material and immaterial cultural heritage and biodiversity and c) the researcher conducts their research so that the research does not cause*

significant risks, damage or harm to research participants, communities, or other subjects of research (TENK 2021).

Reliability defines whether the target phenomena are measured reliably using selected measures, without the measurement situation, the measurer, or random factors affecting the research results (Aaltio & Puusa 2020). The research data was collected using several methods, which is said to increase to reliability (Aaltio & Puusa 2020). A researcher should be able to be neutral during the research, even though it is advisable to be close enough to the participants to gain trust and understanding (Juuti & Puusa 2020). In this research the researcher is actively involved in the implementation of the change and acts as the Head of School. This setup is highly likely to influence on the responses of the participants. They may emphasize the positive aspects and leave out some comments that criticize the Head of School. In this research, the participants in the group interview have worked together and know each other. This facilitates the creation of a trusting atmosphere for discussion. On the other hand, there may be locked roles in the group dynamics that may affect the course of the discussion and the issues that different individuals raise.

When assessing validity, one considers whether the phenomena are studied accurately and without bias, and whether the research examines precisely the phenomenon that was intended to be studied (Aaltio & Puusa 2020). The decision of using the questionnaire data as research data was done after the respondents had submitted their answers. The respondents were informed of the intention to use the data in this research, and they were given an opportunity to withdraw their answers. No one contacted the researcher, and all the data was used. The research data consist mostly of the individual respondents' experiences during the change process. Respondents were not asked about how they perceive leadership to have influenced the change process at a personal or organizational level. The responses and the conclusions drawn from them might be different if the questioning had been framed differently.

4.7 AI tools

ChatGPT 3.5 was used to translate text from Finnish to English and to review grammar and improve text fluency. All AI-generated text is based on authors' original text, and I have written the text first in Finnish, then used AI to do the translation. There are no fully AI-generated sentences in the final text.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire was to give personnel an opportunity to highlight the important issues in planning activities and launching the new school. The questionnaire was answered in September 2023. The response rate was 98% with 42 answers. Personnel seemed to be satisfied with the questionnaire in opening the discussion and building the new organization.

Thank you for asking such a question as a basis for discussion!

In the open field of the questionnaire, participants were asked to write down their own thoughts, for example, on organization or responsibility areas of the school. The responses to the questionnaire were grouped into four categories based on their content. First answers were sorted, and similar contents were grouped. Some of the answers included many aspects and they were divided in parts. The categories arose from the data. Categories are 1) leaving old behind, 2) new opportunities, 3) concerns, and 4) leaders.

5.1.1 Leaving old behind

People have concerns about their future duties and the ways possible changes are made. Many teachers brought up their willingness to continue teaching the same degree program they have taught so far, and there were concerns that teachers would be ordered to teach courses arbitrarily in any degree program. Practical matters such as distribution of the duties or attending the meetings were raising concerns.

There are concerns in maintaining connections to the degree programs at the individual level as well as in terms of teaching content. Even though the courses are common courses, the contents are targeted to the students' study field and

losing the contact to the curriculum is worrying. The fears of excessive standardization and the loss of field specific connections were mentioned.

Regarding the new organization, I am thinking about how to maintain connections with different fields of education so that we don't get stuck in the details of our own substance but know how to connect our courses to the students' studied field.

5.1.2 New opportunities

The new school was seen as a possibility to take new duties and find new directions to the career. Some people hope for better balance between teaching, that is experienced to be stressful, and other, maybe new, duties. Several people brought up development ideas and suggestions, both at the school level and at personal level. In some responses, practical suggestions were raised on how to promote common practices and procedures within the School of Common Studies. Many respondents mentioned pedagogical development and project work in the research group as areas of interest. The research group is seen as an opportunity to develop one's own job description and work.

I am eagerly looking forward to seeing what the new school will bring.

5.1.3 Concerns

The most often mentioned uncertainty is about which field's students one will be teaching in the future. Concern arises that the work that has been done previously may not be respected. The formation of new practices is worrying. For example, who will decide the size of a teaching group or whether the new school has full control on the courses' implementation or are the other schools able to dictate the practices.

I would like to continue as much as possible in the tasks related to my current school, and as a teacher for the school's courses.

Facilities and tools rose questions. Some employees have special computers and software needed for work and the question of the use of them in the future arises. The placement of physics laboratories was unclear; it was hoped that they would fall under the responsibility of the new school.

5.1.4 Leaders

People hope that team leaders are skilled and motivated. Team Leaders are expected to be competent in their work and to seek the position for the right reasons, not, for example, to reduce the number of teaching hours. Support, listening, and consideration of perspectives are expected from both Team Leaders and Head of School.

I hope that we get leaders that are down-to-earth and are familiar with the work in hand.

5.2 Surveys

The attitudes of the personnel towards organizational change were studied with two surveys. Results of June and November were collected using the same survey in November 2023 and the respondents were the same. The respondents to the March 2024 survey may not necessarily be the same individuals. The response rate in the first survey was 42% and in the second 31%.

In the survey, respondents indicated their attitude towards organizational change on a scale from extremely positive to extremely negative. Additionally, respondents had the opportunity to mention factors that influenced their experience and attitude in open-ended responses.

In June 2023, 37% of respondents viewed the change positively (very positive and quite positive), in November 2023 68 %, and in March 2024 57 %. Neutral feelings had 32 % of the respondents in June 2023, 26 % in November 2023 and 29 % in March 2024.

In June 2023, 32 % of the respondents regarded the change negatively (very negative and quite negative), in November 2023 5 %, and in March 2024 14 % (Figure 8). One respondent felt very negative in June 2023 and in March 2024 and none in November 2023. One respondent had quite negative feelings in November 2023 and one in March 2024, when in June 2023 5 respondents had quite negative feelings.

Feelings were the most positive in November 2023 and the most negative in June 2023.

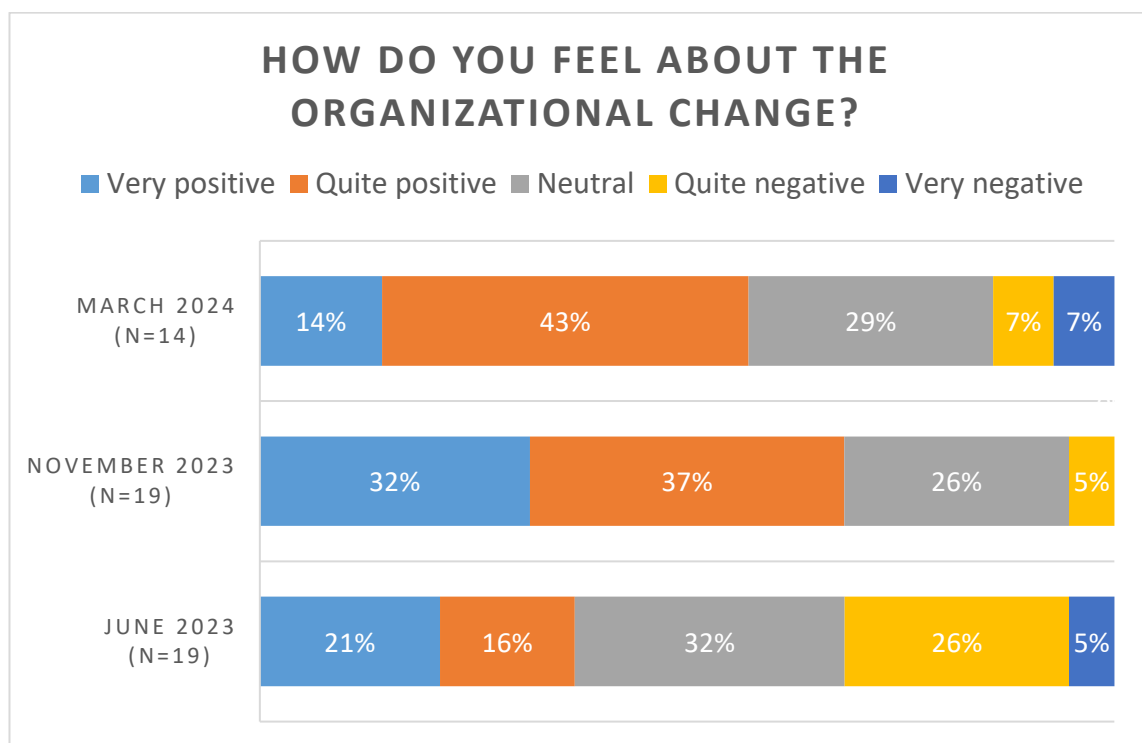


FIGURE 8. Respondents feeling towards the change in June 2023, November 2023, and March 2024.

The open-ended responses have been categorized into negatively and positively impacting factors. The responses from the two survey periods have not been combined because different issues were raised in the surveys. In November 2023 the respondents reflected the change between June 2023 and November 2023. In March 2024 the change between November 2023 and March 2024.

5.2.1 November 2023

Factors that have positively influenced the experience:

- More information. There was a lot of unclarity and uncertainty at the beginning and worst-case scenarios were present in discussions. Knowing who are the people in the new school and who will be the Head of School is reassuring.
- Getting acquainted and experiencing one's own work to linked to the school's activities.
- Enthusiasm on the development. Opportunities on positive development can be seen.
- Colleagues. Experience of positive atmosphere, being happy with the people of the new school and discussions with new team members.
- Leaders. Positive experience on the leaders and feeling that the Head of School is open for discussions, listens and is organized.
- Research group is interesting and seen as a positive opportunity.

In November 2023, the positively influencing factors are roughly related to the reduction of uncertainty and the emergence of new job opportunities. Uncertainty has decreased as more information has been obtained about the changes that will occur and how they will be implemented. Getting to know the personnel and leaders of the school has also reduced uncertainty, as well as observing how one's own tasks naturally fit into the responsibilities of the new school. New job opportunities are seen both within the research group and in opportunities to develop one's own work.

Factors that have negatively influenced the experience:

- Earlier experience on similar organizational structure that was not functioning.
- Concerns of difficulties at the interfaces of the units and losing touch with degree programs. Worst-case scenario the new school being on its own without co-operation with other units and losing the big picture of educating students.
- Fear that the development is a way to cut costs.
- Workspaces are reduced and maybe not supporting the co-operation with other units.

Negatively impacting factors included concerns about the smoothness of collaboration with other schools, previous experiences with organizational

changes, reduced workspace, and fear that the organizational change made is a prelude to future cost-saving measures.

5.2.2 March 2024

In March 2024, the issues raised are more concrete, and respondents already have practical experience. Getting used to the new and realizing that revolutionary changes didn't occur were seen as positive. Similarly, the communication channel used, and the experience of the leaders' solution-oriented working methods have had a positive impact.

Integration into the new group is still ongoing, and more support for team building would have been appreciated. Negatively, ambiguity about the school's responsibilities and the perceived workload being too high have also had an impact.

Factors that have positively influenced the experience:

- The overall impression that the basic idea is ok.
- Experience that in this unit genuine solutions to problems are sought and found, which has resulted in increased well-being at work.
- Getting acquainted. There are no dramatical changes to the old.
- Teams-group works well in communication.

Factors that have negatively influenced the experience:

- Sense of community is not strong yet. People have left former colleagues behind and building of the new community should have been supported more.
- The role of the new school is not clear and there are lot of unclarities in the responsibilities of this school and others.
- The workload is high and there has been changes in courses that teachers teach.

5.1 Group interview

All Team Leaders (4 people) and the Head of School attended the group interview. The Head of School acted as a facilitator and researcher in the discussion. The group interview was conducted on Teams and transcribed using Teams' automatic transcription feature. Themes of the semi-structured interview and related questions were distributed to participants before the interview.

The themes of the interview were:

- The role of Team Leaders in organizational change
- Team Leaders' own experiences and observations of personnel experiences in change
- Launching team operations

Conclusions of the interview are collected under the interview themes.

5.1.1 The role of Team Leaders in organizational change

Team Leaders have been able to implement the change in line with the set goals, without experiencing conflicts between the organization's objectives and their own views. They've recognized the opportunity to achieve benefits through the change and have taken steps to move operations in that direction.

The role of the management team is important. The team environment supports questioning, discussion and finding solutions together. Lack of clarity in operational processes has affected Team Leaders' work. On the other hand, there was a wish for more clarity and pre-set procedures and on the other hand the turbulent times are seen as an enabler for the formation of good practices and working culture of the management team. Team Leaders feel that a lot of time has been used in negotiating and clarifying procedures. But the lessons learned during the time of ambiguity and uncertainty are seen useful and supporting the future work.

Team Leaders have played a crucial role in listening to their team members. Some people have had a need to express their emotions and share concerns, even if they don't expect immediate solutions. Management team has found it important to listen, help to articulate individual experiences within the broader context and offer support in reframing perspectives.

5.1.2 Team Leaders' own experiences and observations of personnel experiences in change

Management team has experienced, in practical terms, people's varying attitudes towards change. Some people have experienced many changes in job roles during their career and based on that experience they may approach the transition more calmly, trusting that things will work out. Some people have concerns that the change will lead to downsizing and dismissal of people. And for some people letting go of the old school means letting go of the whole professional identity and it is painful.

According to Team Leaders' experiences the negativity towards the change may originate from the disruption of the familiar routines rather than the new unit itself. For some people, the negative experiences, for example feeling disregarded during the change process, has led to negative feelings. Others welcomed the opportunity to leave old behind and they embrace the new unit. Team Leaders feel, that at end of March 2024, when some time has passed, satisfaction among team members have increased. For some people, the experience of everyday life continuing similarly is reassuring.

5.1.3 Launching team operations

Team practices are forming, and team building is clearly still ongoing. Team Leaders feel that activities and issues of the own team are most important and should be prioritized. Some team members have questioned the need for team meetings, they prioritize other matters, and they are not committed to the team.

Other team members have been active since the beginning, emphasizing the benefits and the opportunities new unit and new team offer.

Team Leaders see that concrete actions and benefits will increase the commitment. The teams have been built of people who are working within the same subjects. The collaboration started immediately by working together. The management team has initiated co-operation by setting specific development targets and offering possibilities find new solutions. Examples mentioned by Team Leaders are planning a totally new course and setting up support workshops for students in a new collaborative way.

Team Leaders also mentioned the role of facilities in the transition and supporting co-operation. Facilities for the team members to work together as well as see each other unofficially are important. Some team members are still using the facilities of their old school. A Team Leader pointed out that in this case these people are not clung to the old, but they are active in new school's teams. Arrangement is seen as supporting the change because it reduces concerns about deteriorating collaboration with the other school.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Results in the Bridges Transition Model

The stages of Bridges Transition Model can be observed in the personnel's attitudes towards the change. The comparison of results to the stages of Bridges Transition Model revealed the ending phase quite clearly. Concerns were raised on the losses but at the same time new opportunities and possibilities were seen.

The first survey in June 2023 resulted in most negative reactions. Some people reacted strongly and emotions that emerged might have been negative, even angry, which reflects the characteristics of the ending phase of the Bridges model (Bridges 2011, 26-27). The need for communication was recognized, and the goals and measures of the change were communicated at faculty level, school level, and personally. Personnel were given time to adapt to the change.

At the second survey point in November 2023, the proportion of respondents with a positive attitude was the highest in this study's surveys. The Head of School had started in her role and initiated internal communication and development of practices within the school. Personnel got to know each other, and their own working space was made available. New opportunities, such as the possibilities for pedagogical development within research groups and new teams, also became more familiar to the personnel. The increase in knowledge and familiarity had a positive impact on the personnel. Getting to know new colleagues, team members, and spaces helped concretize the change and served as tools for recognizing emotional experiences and reducing uncertainty (Uotila 2020, 56). Of course, there were still underlying concerns and uncertainties, as well as fears about poor handling of issues.

At the third survey point March 2024, the number of people with a positive attitude had decreased from the previous survey. This result could indicate that members of the personnel were moving to the neutral zone. At this stage, frustration and nervousness typically increase (Bridges 2011, 40). As the personnel moved into the new school, changes in practical routines affected everyone. Administrative

support functions, which are essential for supporting the core mission, may not necessarily facilitate the implementation of change. There may be delays in their execution, which can frustrate the personnel (Pontevea 2012, 63). Although things and practices were planned and agreed upon as well as possible, deficiencies and ambiguities only became apparent through practice.

Annual work planning for the personnel had been done in the old schools, and after moving to the new school, changes were made to it. For some personnel, changes to the teaching duties or the resources allocated to certain courses caused significant concern and distress. Perceived fairness is important in change, and equitable distribution of resources is one criterion by which individuals assess fairness (Hakonen 2020b, 13). The leaders have had several discussions individually and in team meetings to reassure and calm personnel in trusting fair and open resourcing in the future.

The management team described their feelings of frustration and experience of wasting time, which is typical for the time in the neutral zone (Bridges 2011, 43). However, they saw the uncertainty and the process of agreeing on new ways of working as beneficial in the long term, as a basis for the new beginning.

The new beginning seems to be still ahead for most of the personnel. Some new practices are adopted, and teamwork has shown to be successful. But still, the leaders must remember that we are not there yet. Even though the leaders themselves might have experienced the new beginning already. To finalize the transition process for everyone, leaders should be consistent, ensure and celebrate the success and bring the new identity visible (Bridges 2011, 69-72.)

6.2 Leadership actions

People are different; some are ready to jump into something new quickly and fearlessly, while others need more time to get used to the idea and may require more support and reassurance about the possibility of success (Gardner & Pierce 2016, 32-33). In this case information about the upcoming change was announced before the summer holidays, and during the autumn, the transition to

the new school began gradually. The personnel were still in their old schools, but meetings with the new school's personnel and management were initiated and the leaders started communication within the new school. For some, this worked well, while for others, the period of uncertainty and unclarity may have been too long. During the autumn some employees would have needed more support in letting go of the old school. The Head of the new school was not able to connect with all employees and the Heads of the other schools had their hands full with leading the operations in their schools. This period could have been used better in supporting the personnel starting their individual transition and the ending phase.

Concrete actions and starting new practices quickly have been one way to gain quick success that supports building trust and seeing positive aspects of the new. Involvement (Ponteva 2012) and positive experiences during the change (Rafferty & Minbashian 2019) are important. In the case School of Common Studies concrete actions were taken from the beginning of the autumn and the aim was to emphasize opportunities and create a positive and welcoming atmosphere.

The personnel were invited to join voluntary coffee breaks and the workspaces were available already during the autumn. Only few people had attended the coffee breaks and the workspaces had not been fully utilized. Some employees had been active since the beginning, but there are employees that have not been willing or able to join the activities. The support for team building has not been as effective as it should have been. Part of the personnel would have needed more support in team building.

In addition to sharing information, communication is needed to make sense, share feelings and thoughts, and create opportunities to participate (Helpap & Schinnenburg 2017, 84-85). In this case communication has been done on several occasions and in several channels, and in different levels and by different people. The research indicates that there are positive impacts on the personnel but room for improvement as well. There was positive feedback on the availability and approachability of Head of School and Team Leaders. And their communication style was regarded genuine.

When management team is committed to implementing the change, they can help their team members during the transformation. In this study the Team Leaders moved quickly from the ending to the neutral zone and some even to the new beginning. They saw the future vision as something worth striving for and took an active role in building new. The management team has shared the willingness to involve personnel and the idea of concrete actions bringing people together and adopting the membership of the new unit by working. Fluent communication, team dynamics and sharing the future view are important for leaders themselves (Samuel & Tsapayi 2023, 302). Team Leaders can help personnel to move towards the new beginning by ensuring they have the purpose, a picture, the plan, and a part to play (Bridges 2011, 60). The discussions Team Leaders have had with their team members are supporting the transition.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed at identifying the impact of different leadership actions in a change process and to answer the research question how leaders can support personnel in change. The results showed that leaders have an important role in supporting the personnel in change. The key point is to remember that the transition is always an individual experience. It is important to ensure sufficient time for adaptation, provide clarity and trust in the future. In addition, systematic and diverse communication is an important element of effective leadership. The commitment of the management team is essential, and the key task of the unit head is to support the management team and ensure their endurance and well-being.

One of the main drivers for the change was the goal to increase the number of graduating students. Change in organizational structure is not important for the students, but the improvements in operational actions are. The number of graduating students as well as the first-year continuation rate will be followed in the coming years, and they will be the indicators in impact assessment. The possible changes in overall student satisfaction (AVOP) will be reflected to the organizational change.

At TUAS, how RDI and education should be integrated has been discussed for years and has been successfully achieved in recent years. However, it is difficult for teachers of common studies to integrate the teaching and learning in their courses with field-specific research. A research group focused on pedagogical research and development, on the other hand, offers an opportunity for RDI integration in common studies and student guidance. The majority of the personnel attended the research group presentations, and several expressed the interest in participating in the research group along their teaching duties. This supports the university of applied sciences' goal of increasing the volume of RDI work and positively impact the personnel's sense of job satisfaction. Monitoring will be conducted by following the amount of external RDI funding and the personnel's satisfaction in personnel surveys.

First personnel survey of the School of Common Studies was conducted in February 2024 supporting this study about the importance of the leadership actions and the role of a leader in organizational change. The overall satisfaction measured with PeoplePower® Rating on a scale AAA (excellent) to C (poor) was AA (good) in School of Common Studies. The rating of Faculty of Engineering and Business was A+ (satisfactory) and the norm of universities of applied sciences is A+ (satisfactory) (TUAS 2024). The result indicates that the personnel is satisfied with the School of Common Studies even though the change itself may have been challenging.

Personnel that remained in the other schools experienced changes as well. It might be beneficial to study their experiences on the change. For example, the role of the degree program leader is changing, and practices are evolving as some tasks shift to the new school. The organization has now a new unit and collaboration is needed to ensure the smooth running of teaching and students' daily activities. Special attention should be paid to communication between schools and the creation of a common organizational culture. This includes addressing to the concern of personnel moving to the new school about maintaining connections with other schools. Supporting smooth collaboration is important.

The Heads of the other schools have a crucial role in initiating the change and transition processes as well as leading the change in their own schools. Their perspective on the implementation of organizational change and its outcomes would be an interesting subject to study.

This study indicates that the leadership actions support the change in organizational level and the individual transition the employees go through. New practices have been initiated to support the study success and graduation of students, the satisfaction of the personnel has been increasing and the management team has started their work successfully. There are high expectations that in the coming years the number of graduates will increase, and the well-being of the personnel remains on a good level.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

1 (2)

1. Which team do you consider the most natural fit for you?

- ☐ mathematics, physics, O365
- ☐ language studies
- ☐ project courses, guidance and internship(work placement)
- ☐ research group

2. On which other areas would you be interested in working (in addition to your team choice from the previous question)? Your choices do not commit you to anything! Let's discuss these as well.

- ☐ mathematics, physics
- ☐ O365
- ☐ other digital support or teaching (there is no certainty that this will happen at all)
- ☐ language studies: Finnish
- ☐ language studies: Swedish
- ☐ language studies: English
- ☐ language studies: another language
- ☐ Capstone: coordination
- ☐ Capstone: teaching
- ☐ "new project hatchery": coordination
- ☐ "new project hatchery": teaching
- ☐ "new project hatchery": planning the new course
- ☐ Planning and implementing the project courses (the entity)
- ☐ Guidance (the term coaching has also been used, this must be defined more in detail)
- ☐ internship/workplacement counseling (career counseling)
- ☐ coordinating the co-operation with secondary schools (on Teli-level)
- ☐ pedagogical development (RDI-work)

3. Free comments. What might be missing from the previous list? What thoughts do you have regarding organization and tasks described?

Enter your answer

4. Are you interested in the role of a degree programme leader? In which team?

Enter your answer

5. What else you'd like to comment?

Enter your answer

Appendix 2. Survey

November 2023:

1. June 2023: How did you feel about the organizational change (=launching COS and joining a new team)? *

	Very positive	Quite positive	Neutral	Quite negative	Very negative
My feelings about COS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. November 2023: How do you feel about the organizational change (=launching COS and joining a new team)? *

	Very positive	Quite positive	Neutral	Quite negative	Very negative
My feelings about COS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. If your feelings have changed, what has been the factors that have influenced?
Or any other comments?
Feel free to answer in Finnish or English.

March 2024:

1. March 2024: How do you feel about the organizational change (=launching COS and joining a new team)? *

	Very positive	Quite positive	Neutral	Quite negative	Very negative
My feelings about COS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. If your feelings have changed, what has been the factors that have influenced?
Feel free to answer in Finnish or English.

Enter your answer

3. Any other comments?
Feel free to answer in Finnish or English.

Enter your answer

Appendix 3. Questions of the group interview.

1. The Role of the Team Leader in Organizational Change and Psychological Transition:

- What specific factors have you considered?
- What has been the role of the team leader?
- What has worked well, and what could have been done differently?
- What reactions have you encountered, such as emotional reactions?
- How do you see your role in supporting and enabling the change?

2. How Has the Personnel Reacted at Different Stages?

- What emotional reactions have been observed at different stages?
- How have you experienced the changes as a team leader?
- Team leaders are expected to support other personnel, but it might be overlooked that team leaders are also undergoing change, perhaps even more so than the rest of the personnel. Have you found it difficult to "believe in the change" and advocate for the set goals?

3. How Have Team Activities Been Initiated?

- What concrete actions have been taken?
- How have team members engaged?
- What has the initiation of new team activities been like from the team leader's perspective?
- What are your thoughts on the future?

4. You Have Played a Key Role in Implementing Functional Changes and Creating New Ways of Working and Collaboration Between Schools. What Are Your Experiences?

- Reactions and practices of people from the other schools.