

**Efficiency, Leadership  
and Governance:**  
Closing the gap between  
strategy and execution

**A USTREAM REPORT**

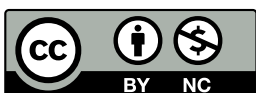
By Thomas Estermann  
and Veronika Kupriyanova

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European University Association asbl

Avenue de l'Yser 24 · 1040 Brussels, Belgium

[info@eua.eu](mailto:info@eua.eu) · [www.eua.eu](http://www.eua.eu) · Tel: +32-2 230 55 44

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Change management: towards efficiency, effectiveness and value for money</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1. Global drivers of change in higher education .....	8
1.1.1. Policy and regulatory changes .....	8
1.1.2. Changing stakeholder expectations .....	9
1.1.3. Digitalisation and new technology .....	10
1.2. The role of leadership, governance and engagement .....	11
<b>2. A framework for leading and managing successful change</b> .....	<b>12</b>
2.1. Common problems and barriers to change in higher education .....	12
2.2. Strategy formulation .....	13
2.3. Strategy implementation .....	13
2.3.1. Defining and making the case for change .....	14
2.3.2. Creating conditions for change .....	15
2.3.3. Responding to change impact .....	16
2.3.4. Empowering a cross section of change leaders .....	17
2.3.5. Embedding the change .....	17
<b>3. A recipe for success: lessons from the workshop</b> .....	<b>19</b>
3.1. Engineering leadership alignment .....	19
3.2. Change leadership and management skills capability and capacity .....	20
3.3. Communications and engagement strategy: planning and delivery .....	22
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix: List of participating institutions</b> .....	<b>26</b>

## Figures

Figure 1. Key change management drivers and targets .....	11
Figure 2. Key actions for a successful strategy implementation .....	14
Figure 3. Creating conditions for implementing the change programme .....	16
Figure 4. The most important qualities for higher education leaders .....	22

## Boxes

Box 1. Policy and regulatory challenges to change management	
Box 2. Responding to policy shocks at the University of Helsinki	
Box 3. The challenges of digitalisation in higher education management	
Box 4. Perceived barriers to change at universities	
Box 5. Factors to consider in making the case for change	
Box 6. Lessons in adaptability	
Box 7. Key lessons learned from IT efficiency projects	
Box 8. Winning hearts and minds at the University of Iceland	
Box 9. Leadership alignment recommendations	
Box 10. Change leadership	
Box 11. Leadership and management capability	
Box 12. Lessons learned at the University of Milano-Bicocca	
Box 13. Building trust between academics and administrators: lessons learned at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Paris Saclay	
Box 14. Sample of a simplified internal change communications strategy	

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**Thomas Estermann**

Director, Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development

# Introduction

This report summarises the input, discussions and findings of the third [USTREAM Peer Learning Seminar: Efficiency, Leadership and Governance: Closing the gap between strategy and execution to achieve sustainable efficiency gains](#), which took place in Brussels on 18 and 19 April 2018. The seminar was organised jointly by the [Heads of University Management and Administration Network in Europe](#) (HUMANE) and the European University Association (EUA) to further explore the role of leadership in planning and implementing efficiency and effectiveness change processes. The event was hosted by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

Many European universities are initiating strategic transformation programmes that either seek a step change in institutional efficiency, respond to drastic shifts in higher education policy and financing, or improve their competitive academic advantage. Despite significant commitment, research evidence from the past twenty years consistently shows that around 70% of all transformation programmes fail to meet their objectives in all sectors.

While this is due to many and varied reasons, the key ingredients for successful strategy implementation at universities include **effective institutional leadership** (governance and management), **coherent operating models and structures and institutional culture**. Leadership provides direction and defines accountability and responsibility for strategic academic outcomes. Operating models and structures provide an institutional platform for effective and efficient delivery, and culture is an all-pervasive feature of academic life that defines the shared institutional beliefs, which shape how the university delivers its academic mission.

The USTREAM seminar in Brussels assembled a diverse and energetic array of Europe's higher education leaders: rectors, heads of administration and other senior staff, to consider the challenges to achieving the sustainable efficiency improvements made possible by change management.

The workshop agenda drew heavily on 'strategic problem statements' supplied by the participants, which sought to summarise specific, strategy implementation challenges faced by their institutions.

This report also tries to do justice to university leaders grappling with the day-to-day challenges of implementing strategies in complex, often under-funded circumstances. Text boxes encapsulate participant insights and observations from the two-day workshop. The report aims to summarise these outputs in a coherent and, above all, practical way so that they can be translated into a variety of institutional contexts.

These insights are also supported by discussions from the [4th EUA Funding Forum](#), which took place in Barcelona on 18 and 19 October 2018. While the topics of efficiency and effectiveness and the respective role of leadership and change management shaped the Forum's discussions, particularly relevant inputs were gained from the Leadership Panel. This panel allowed three higher education leaders from the Czech Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom to share their views on transformational leadership in a turbulent context.

The first section of the report summarises key strategic change drivers and the role of change management in higher education.

The second and third sections draw on workshop participants' insights and consolidate their views on the challenges to strategy implementation and the relevant critical success factors enabling lasting institutional change when implementing an efficiency and effectiveness agenda.

The conclusions assemble the main themes from the workshop and provide suggestions about the successful strategy implementation required to achieve sustainable gains in institutional efficiency for both policy makers and institutional leaders.

# 1. Change management: towards efficiency, effectiveness and value for money

## 1.1. GLOBAL DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The higher education world is now in constant flux, due to evolving funding models, high student expectations, the new opportunities offered by technology, increasing competition between universities and other teaching and research providers, as well as new and emerging forms of collaboration. Universities must answer these challenges and lead change by offering new definitions of teaching and research success, by nurturing new ambitions and new social relevance, and by providing new drive for efficiency and effectiveness.

Universities therefore need to transform their operating models, structures, processes, estates and facilities, and invent new technology solutions, new forms of people management and new partnerships, while retaining their focus on academic excellence.

It is important to record the forces driving university leaders' desire to improve how their institutions are aligned with the demands of the external environment. There are many ways of defining these change drivers, but the following are commonly accepted as some of the most important:

- **Policy and regulatory turbulence** usually resulting from pressure on public higher education funding and increasing demands for efficiency, effectiveness and value for money
- The **globalisation** of higher education, particularly in terms of research talent and international student mobility
- **Digitalisation** and new technology
- Increased government, business and industry expectations that higher education should play a greater role in driving cultural, economic and social growth
- Shifts in student expectations of their higher education experience
- Shifts in the nature of the employment market, which is in turn challenging the nature and contents of university degrees.

### 1.1.1. Policy and regulatory changes

The most common challenge faced by most European higher education systems is policy and regulatory turbulence, which is felt in varying degrees by all public and private, for-profit and not-for-profit institutions. This turbulence is itself often a function of government attempts to harness the benefits and minimise the disadvantages of global forces beyond their direct control. Dealing with policy and regulatory turbulence can be a challenge at both system and institutional level.

Some of the challenges related to policy and regulatory turbulence are set out in Box 1.



## BOX 1. POLICY AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- The gap between high-level government policy goals and the financing and regulatory measures needed to fulfil them can affect institutions' ability to respond.
- Uncertainty can lead to the stalling of strategic planning or its over-complication by multiple scenarios.
- Longer-term goal definition may be fuzzy, and the related objectives may be difficult to articulate and measure.
- If the end is unclear, it can become even more difficult to free up resources.
- The institution can become locked into a cycle of reaction, unable to exercise any meaningful control or create a roadmap for its future.

### 1.1.2. Changing stakeholder expectations

As universities have become more important to national cultural, economic and social life over the past two decades, business, government and industry expectations have increased sharply across Europe.

**Governments** expect universities to demonstrate not only greater accountability and transparency, but also to achieve higher performance at all levels, specifically requiring them to achieve a substantially larger contribution to socioeconomic growth and, more recently to public savings. This is reflected in greater demands for efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.

**Business and industry** stakeholders expect universities to supply new employees with higher, more complex skills that match the swiftly changing needs of innovation and entrepreneurship. They also rely on universities to improve performance and global competitiveness, through collaborative research activities, access to and shared use of infrastructure, human resources and knowledge resources.<sup>1</sup>

Several challenges may need to be overcome to meet these expectations: raising awareness of the added value of university-business partnerships; finding common ground to improve mutual understanding of each other's circumstances, cultures and strategic aspirations; dealing with administrative procedures and agreement negotiations; developing comprehensive collaborative research strategies at institutional level; finding the 'right people' with the skills to sustain links between academics, business and industry and so on.<sup>2</sup>

**Students** expect greater value: in terms of a quality learning experience and employability, and also in terms of better services, for example, more flexible access to university buildings and facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lidia Borrell-Damian, Rita Morais and John H. Smith (2014). University-Business Collaborative Research: Goals, Outcomes and New Assessment Tools. The EUIMA Collaborative Research Project Report. URL: <https://eua.eu/component/attachments/attachments.html?id=417>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## **BOX 2. RESPONDING TO POLICY SHOCKS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI**

Following a new government policy launched in May 2015, the University of Helsinki budget lost €50 million in 2016 and will reduce by €106 million by 2020. Other major changes include the introduction of tuition fees for non-EU students and new administration, co-funding, fundraising and profiling requirements. In response, the University prepared a change programme to cut expenditure by optimising the use of facilities, outsourcing and procurement, and to increase its income from fundraising, international research funding and partnerships. Multiple transformation processes include educational reform, campus reorganisation and the centralisation of professional services. The following lessons were learned from implementing this change programme:

- A clear strategy with coherent goals and proper follow-up are key.
- The plan may need to be adjusted, cancelled or postponed due to overlapping urgency and ongoing transformation.
- Both flexibility and goal orientation are crucial.
- Uniform communication needs to rely on leadership support.
- It is harder to switch from crisis management to future building mode than it seems.
- Impact comes in waves, and backlashes can be felt on various fronts.
- It is important to identify and engage management staff with change skills and to mobilise process reform tools.
- External expert support can be helpful as it provides an independent view.

### **1.1.3. Digitalisation and new technology**

Most higher education institutions see digitalisation as a change driver. But the implementation of change agendas that respond to digitalisation and embrace the opportunities of new technology can face several challenges (shown in Box 3).

## **BOX 3. THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITALISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT**

- Need to enhance understanding and knowledge of the scope and scale of potential impact
- Lack of awareness or appreciation of the benefits when it comes to improving administrative quality and efficiency, education, research and student experience
- Tendency to favour a fragmented investment approach, which results in the dissipation of scarce resources and under-investment
- Underestimation of the extent of opportunities to change and simplify processes
- Need to draw on the experience of other sectors
- Need to create the right incentives for greater academic community engagement and ownership
- Need to improve digital skills in university settings
- Resources need to be freed up to finance a scalable response

## 1.2. THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Change drivers significantly transform the way in which universities organise and structure the delivery of their mission and incentivise efficiency and effectiveness in all settings.

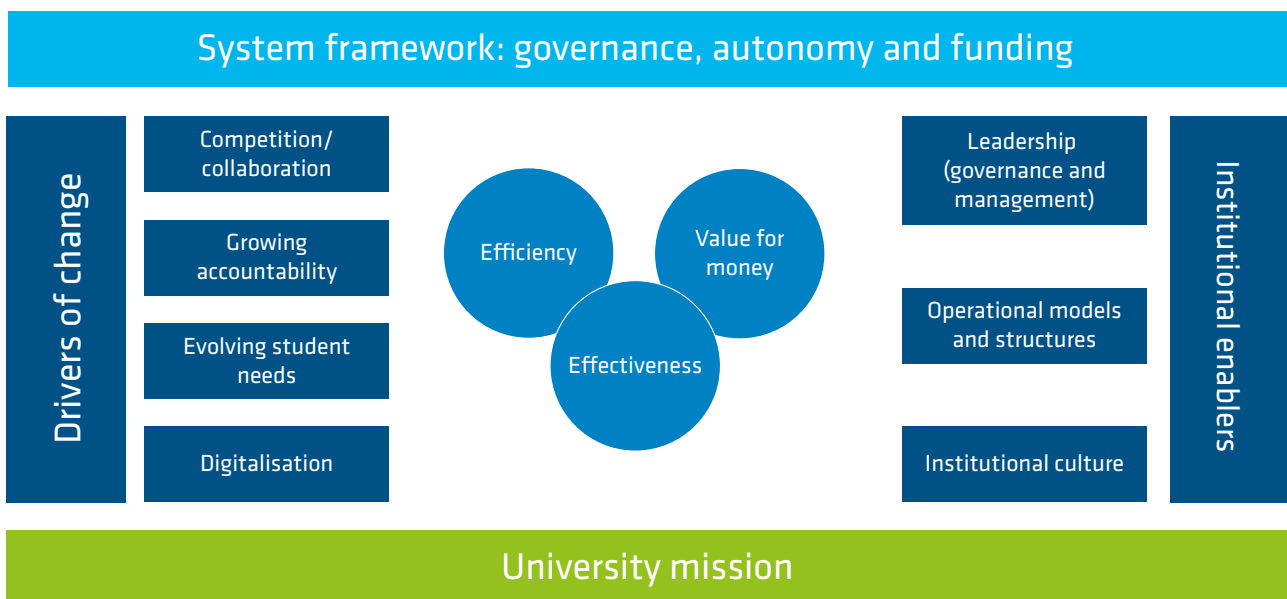
As change in higher education becomes much more complex, fast-paced and fluid, universities have to embrace more agile and flexible approaches. Change management can provide answers.

However, using change management principles to deliver university missions efficiently and effectively is different to implementing these in more usual, particularly business, settings. Although universities continuously ignite change by generating new knowledge, the process of implementing change can be particularly complex due to fundamental characteristics, such as autonomy, academic freedom, collegiality and a horizontal hierarchy.

The major targets of higher education change management (areas which are both instruments of and affected by change) include leadership (governance and management), operating models and structures and institutional culture (engagement). Transforming and optimising these areas can generate sustainable gains in efficiency, effectiveness and value for money for the institutions themselves (Fig. 1).

The following chapters explore the key steps and factors for leading and managing successful change to achieve sustainable efficiency gains.

Figure 1. Key change management drivers and targets



## 2. A framework for leading and managing successful change

### 2.1. COMMON PROBLEMS AND BARRIERS TO CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Many European universities are initiating strategic transformation programmes that either seek a step change in institutional efficiency, respond to drastic shifts in higher education policy and financing, or improve their competitive academic advantage.

Despite significant commitment, research evidence from the past twenty years consistently shows that around 70% of all transformation programmes (in all sectors) fail to meet their objectives. Some of the common challenges and possible reasons for this are:

#### 1. Fragmented goals and poorly defined objectives

A desire to create consensus across competing institutional stakeholders and interest groups often leads to **resistance** to defining clear objectives. But the consensus gained is often short-lived due to an inability to equally or even adequately apply the necessary resources to all objectives.

Another related and common challenge is **lack of prioritisation**. This often results in a strategic plan with unrealistic aspirations, for which the necessary changes cannot be financed or that is not rooted in the actual experience of staff working at the institution.

#### 2. Dispersed capacity and capability

The success of any change programme is heavily reliant on the financial and human resources available, particularly, skilled and experienced change management practitioners at all levels.

Hiring or 'home growing' change management practitioners is exceptionally challenging as, beyond the acquisition of the necessary technical skills, this also involves choosing between external experts who may lack the necessary cultural awareness required to work effectively in an academic setting, and internal staff with existing responsibilities.

#### 3. Change as part of institutional culture

The scale of change is an important factor. Institutions should be able to cruise through a smooth, continuous change process that ensures efficiency and frees up resources for teaching and learning. This requires rethinking the idea of change from a decision-making perspective, embracing change as a new reality and building an institutional culture based on change.

Workshop participants identified a few barriers to change in the university context. These are presented in Box 4.

#### BOX 4. PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO CHANGE AT UNIVERSITIES

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- Lack of engagement, motivation and stimulus
- Resistance to change/reform; the need to change mindsets, change fatigue
- Depth of change management skills and tools at all levels
- Insufficient internal communications capability
- Poor articulation, benefits measurement and specification
- Previous negative experiences
- Lack of sufficient financial resources to fund change programmes properly
- Fear of existing projects being derailed or postponed
- Bias in favour of the 'local' rather than the 'institutional'
- Lack of an overall institutional future investment approach
- Inconsistencies in strategic planning and development
- Lack of trust between academics and administrators
- Resistance to the 'science of implementation', which is often seen as too managerial and out of keeping with an academic ethos
- Risk of reverting to old practices

## 2.2. STRATEGY FORMULATION

Recent management studies show that an unwillingness or inability to choose, over-reliance on strategy templates, and the belief that a positive mental attitude is enough are just some of the recurrent factors that explain why poor strategy is so common.<sup>3</sup>

The strategy process should therefore aim to create a decision framework that provides clear vision and allows the institution to define specific actions and redistribute resources. It should also establish a coherent set of actions – the implementation plan. This brings focus, resources and energy to the process, coordinates a range of activities and displays the characteristics of an integrated system.

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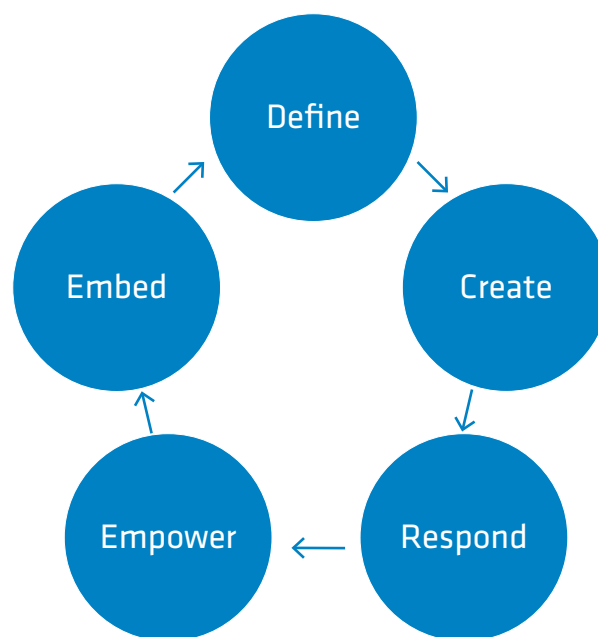
<sup>3</sup> For example, Richard Rumelt. Good Strategy, Bad Strategy.

## 2.3. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

John P. Kotter identifies the key actions needed at various stages to ensure successful institutional transformation.<sup>4</sup> The key elements of his simplified model include:<sup>5</sup>

- Defining and then making the case for change
- Creating the conditions for a change journey by breaking the process up into transition states and getting the sequencing clear
- Being responsive by listening as well as talking, but also making decisions quickly
- Empowering change leaders by giving them access to capability and tools to effect the change

Figure 2. Key actions for a successful strategy



### 2.3.1. Defining and making the case for change

Like most organisations, academic institutions need to be persuaded that change is worth the effort and will result in something better. The process of making a compelling case for change significantly depends on assembling senior leaders around an institutional strategy.

Several key questions may help understand whether the case is strong enough to persuade most of the organisation to change (Box 5):

- Is it built on quality information and data, as well as clear and effective analysis?
- Does it effectively balance aspiration and realism?
- Is it owned by the wider senior team who must lead the change?

<sup>4</sup> John P. Kotter. Why transformation efforts fail (HBR reprints, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Based on the presentation by Paul Woodgates, PA Consulting. URL: [www.eua.eu/component/attachments/attachments.html?task=attachment&id=988](http://www.eua.eu/component/attachments/attachments.html?task=attachment&id=988)

## BOX 5. FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN MAKING THE CASE FOR CHANGE

- What is driving the change, for example, inefficiency, policy changes, technology?
- What type of change is desired? Developmental, transitional or transformational?
- What is the scope of the change?
- Is it really aligned with academic strategy?
- Which stakeholders will be affected and how?
- Who's the sponsor?
- What are the measurable benefits?
- What are the timescales?
- Which resources will support the change? A dedicated project team? Change champions?
- What is the communications plan?
- What are the risks associated with the change as well as the risks of not changing?
- How is the change dependent on other activities/projects?
- How will job roles be affected?
- What are the critical success factors?
- How will you obtain feedback about the change programme?

The case for change will always have to explain why the status quo is no longer feasible or acceptable in the context of the overall mission. The case for change must be visibly owned and defended by the entire senior team. It cannot be 'outsourced' to other less senior members of the institution or consultants, even though both of these groups are crucial to most transformation programmes.

At a more technical level, the case for change must be specific about its complexity and the scale required to achieve the desired strategic outcomes. This is important, as it will define the overall approach for the implementation plan.

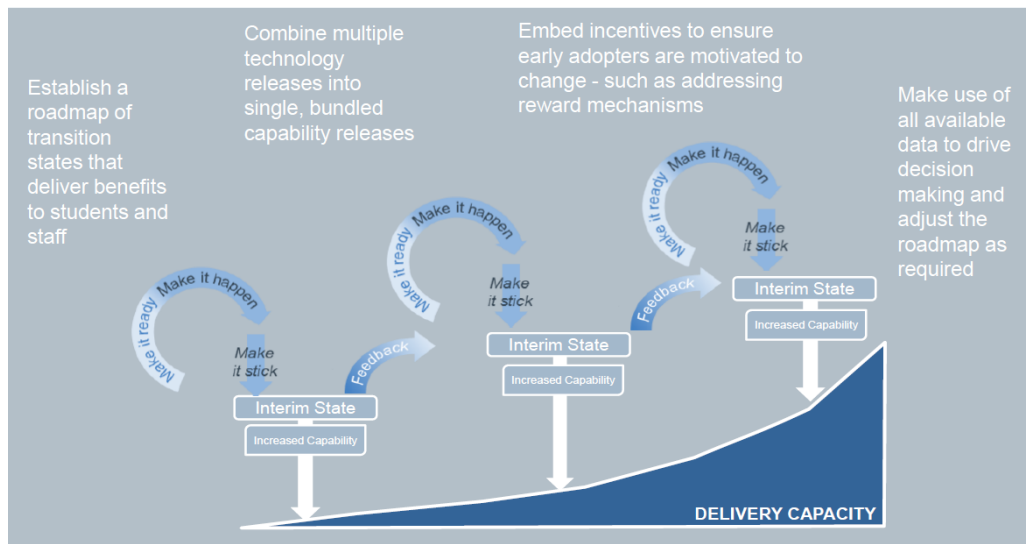
### 2.3.2. Creating conditions for change

The second element of the model involves creating the change-receptive conditions needed to implement the transformation programme. This includes:

- Generating a roadmap of several transition states
- Combining technology projects into a coordinated bundle and (potentially) leveraging individual benefits for multiple purposes
- Introducing incentives for early adoption, which in turn instils greater engagement and motivation across the institution

Targeted and well-coordinated consultation on funding, planning and resourcing is essential to establishing the appropriate conditions.

**Figure 3. Creating conditions for implementing the change programme**



**Source:** Paul Woodgates, PA Consulting

Research evidence and seminar participants’ experiences suggest that commitment to and engagement with change programmes can be maintained more successfully if **visible gains** are regularly delivered. Breaking the transformation journey into milestones or transition states will enable both quick wins and incremental benefits (Fig. 3). Once these interim positions are defined, specific benefits (academic, financial, service, etc.) can be attributed to each and can incentivise future and on-going support.

The perceived value of the change programme should be enhanced as each milestone is reached and the ensuing benefits achieved. It is especially important that the promised benefits of the first transition state be delivered as quickly as practicable to maintain momentum and support for the whole programme. Realistic scoping of this first state is therefore crucial. Interim positions also provide review points that allow the larger plan to be adjusted in line with feedback from the current experience. Review points are particularly helpful when it comes to identifying what worked well and should be repeated; as well as what ‘pain points’ can be learned from, to modify subsequent actions.

### 2.3.3. Responding to change impact

In this third phase, leaders need to respond to the impact of the change programme in a timely and genuine manner. Robust, multi-faceted and tightly managed **feedback mechanisms** (for example, using social media in addition to traditional internal communication channels) need to be in place to allow leaders to consider the implications of the changes and to make quick decisions, to adjust the timing and to modify the general implementation approach.

The response process should be based on demonstrable dialogue, in which contributions are encouraged, positive and negative criticism is invited, and recommendations are acted on, in order to maintain credibility. Leaders should be honest about the fact that they do not have all the answers at this stage, that clarity will develop over time, and that not all views can be accommodated. Importantly, while it may be easier to bend to pressure to review the changes or to allow ‘sit-outs’, there must be a clear message that the consultative debate is currently focused on how to implement the change and that any ultimate decisions remain the responsibility of senior leaders.



## BOX 6. LESSONS IN ADAPTABILITY

The 14 faculties at the University of Porto used to each have their own accounting, procurement and other services as part of a strong culture of faculty autonomy. The plan to create shared university services was met with resistance. After an intense period of dialogue and engagement that resulted in modifications to the original plan, 12 faculties agreed to the implementation. This experience demonstrated the importance of adaptability, of working in line with the institution's culture and the need for leaders to engage meaningfully with the academic community.

**Communications** about the change needs must be clearly presented, frequent, inclusive, relevant, and widespread. It is especially important to engage with detractors and sceptics. By discussing, debating and addressing concerns, and by being seen to engage in dialogue, leaders are more likely to secure the support of a larger group of players.

## BOX 7. KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM IT EFFICIENCY PROJECTS

Some lessons learned from the **Central European University** change programme to increase efficiency through institutional information systems point to the importance of early change adopters, expectation management and staff empowerment and of involving middle managers with the right skills to implement these changes.

At the **University of Bologna**, several innovation projects optimised the use of financial and human resources. A common pattern was that projects led by managers who were also IT providers achieved less success. Leaders' background and experience (including in change management,) was crucial to making the project a success.

### 2.3.4. Empowering a cross section of change leaders

A commitment to empowerment recognises and taps into people's desire to participate and engage thereby contributing to ownership. Change becomes embedded when most of the institution engages with, contributes to and experiences a sense of participation and control over events and planned activities. Higher education leaders who seek out and establish change leaders at all levels, across departments, faculties, schools, administrative operating units and student groups, generally achieve greater success.

Change leaders need to be given access to the capability and tools needed to achieve success. It is also worth noting that the process of **empowerment** is not restricted to effective delegation of authority or encouraging calculated risk-taking. It also involves providing people with the necessary skills and tools to carry out the change process - investing in people is fundamental. Increasingly, change management should be viewed as an essential institutional capability and individual skill at all levels, including senior academic and administrative leaders.

### 2.3.5. Embedding the change

One of the key objectives for institutional transformation is to sustain the change process beyond the 'emergency' phase. Leaders need to come up with a story that motivates people and to offer something to keep the momentum going.

New behavioural norms take root when tangible and visible connections are created between the benefits and successes associated with the change programme and these new behavioural norms. This also involves implementing people development programmes that support these new behaviours and the overall ethos of the change programme. Leadership promotion and appointment processes need to reinforce the change by ensuring that appointees personify the new behavioural norms.

Change implementation can only be considered successful and the effort worthwhile if the implemented change is genuinely integrated throughout an institution and in a sustained fashion. It is therefore important to avoid declaring success too soon.

Finally, while it is tempting to view this change model as a self-contained and unidirectional cycle, the reality of strategy implementation is more fluid.

#### **BOX 8. WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**

It took the University of Iceland over a year to reach consensus, identify the right priorities, and 'win student and staff hearts and minds' as part of the process of implementing a new strategy. One of the lessons learned concerned resistance: it would have been better to include solutions that address resistance in the implementation plan.

Each stage will probably be partially iterative, with various elements re-visited in light of lessons learned and feedback information. Acknowledging this and adjusting the cycle accordingly will result in more potent and systemic integration of the changes. In addition, such iteration will allow the institution to become progressively more comfortable with introducing change, ultimately creating a culture committed to continuous improvement.

## 3. A recipe for success: lessons from the workshop

Among the myriad actions needed to mobilise an institution to embark on a major change journey, the workshop aimed to define a handful of factors that, above all else, allow leaders to drive a change programme forward with confidence and with the support of their community.

The following three elements were identified as the most crucial to enable successful and sustainable change:

- Leadership alignment
- Building change leadership and management skills - capability and capacity
- Building communications capacity, engagement planning and delivery capability

### 3.1. ENGINEERING LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT

When building a case and subsequently creating the conditions for change, the community must perceive that the senior leaders sponsoring the implementation are aligned and working together. This must be shown in how they talk about the need for change, their willingness to sponsor it and their agreement with the implementation approach. There is nothing more corrosive than a senior team member nominally sponsoring and supporting a change programme in senior management meetings, then behaving differently outside the meeting room. This common challenge is experienced at many institutions. Working to overcome it as part of a change programme mobilisation phase will help anticipate the problem and resolve leadership tensions.

#### BOX 9. LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Senior academic and administrative leaders need to be able to work in teams.
2. Senior leaders need to be able to differentiate between **representation** leadership and senior team leadership.
3. Given the variety of senior university leaders' disciplinary and managerial backgrounds, a common language needs to be developed.
4. Leaders need to develop their ability to manage the conflicts that arise from leading large-scale change. Such conflict is often highly personal and can be very aggressive, requiring specific skills.
5. Less senior 'change agents', empowered to take elements of a change initiative forward at local level, need to have a clear knowledge of what they are expected to achieve and the skills to do so.
6. Assessing the senior team's strengths and weaknesses prior to embarking on a transformation initiative will help align team members, as it will help play to individuals' strengths and target areas for development.
7. Investing in properly orchestrated team building exercises will help align senior teams, making it easier for differences to be aired openly, and therefore more difficult for individual members to express opposition in other, more public, contexts.
8. Investing in leadership development for the next generation of leaders will create the conditions for greater unity of purpose in the longer term.

## 3.2. CHANGE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

Irrespective of their size or national system, many universities identify change leadership and management capability and capacity as one of the more serious challenges they are attempting to address.

### Leadership capability and capacity

Very few senior leaders have significant experience of leading or sponsoring large scale, high impact changes. This is also true of academic leaders and managers at faculty and departmental level, many of whom are elected or appointed for a set period.

Investing in leadership development at all levels is challenging, as the individuals themselves do not normally ground their professional identity in being an academic manager and the development programmes available can be expensive or culturally inappropriate, or both. Leadership development must therefore become a priority if institutional change leadership and management are to become more successful. In the short term, appointment or co-option to specific leadership roles as part of a change programme should be done knowingly and carefully.

Some of the recommendations for successful change leadership shared by workshop participants are set out in Box 10.

#### BOX 10. CHANGE LEADERSHIP: SOME SUCCESS FACTORS

- Authentic, trusted leadership is key to obtaining the 'permission' to move forward.
- Successful leadership requires working with academic culture and a cultural understanding of academic ethos, the institution's history and the origin of its challenges.
- Communication and delegation to formal and informal change agents (people with a good understanding of the faculty or community,) are good problem management tools. The establishment of an 'ideas catalogue' for all university staff to consult and to gather feedback is an interesting practice.
- Major long-term goals need to be defined to inspire the community. These must then be followed up with shorter-term objectives to make it real. Board members should be involved as 'critical friends' in change processes. Students can also be very supportive and need to be more actively engaged.
- Effort should be put into building a team, monitoring team dynamics, balancing competence, trust and support and into making selection criteria transparent.
- Delegation and empowerment are key as they help the team commit to the goals. Ownership of the change strategy must be clearly appointed. The Head of Administration must support the community.
- Line managers must be aligned with the project and formal reporting lines unfit for communicating downwards must be challenged.
- Recognising people's work is crucial. For example, students or staff can be praised for their innovation and/or dynamic use of the university website.
- It is important to ensure alignment between administrators and academics, to foster respect on both sides, to increase understanding, to provide a platform for informal communications, and to ensure trust by establishing clear roles. There should be no separation between academics and administrators in change processes or at change events.

## Functional leadership and management – project management and organisational development roles

**Complex project management** and **organisational development** were identified as some of the biggest university skills gaps in managing complex change.

Project management expertise is needed if the engine room of transformation programme management and leadership is to function effectively. Organisational development expertise is equally important for supporting, enabling and developing the wider spectrum of managers and leaders empowered to take specific elements of the programme forward. Having these skills was seen as a necessary (although not in and of themselves sufficient) condition for successful change management.

The challenge is less about obtaining the technical skills required for complex project management and organisational and training development programmes. The real issue is combining these skills with the emotional intelligence required to deploy them successfully at higher education institutions. Leaders need to internalise the nature and purpose of an academic mission before they can be trusted to change how an institution operates.

In broad terms, the challenge can be addressed in two ways: selecting existing talent with the necessary cultural awareness and institutional knowledge and developing their skills; and being much clearer about the best way to test whether technically competent external candidates can adapt their skills to an academic setting. It is important to invest in change management and leadership development in all circumstances.

### BOX 11. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY

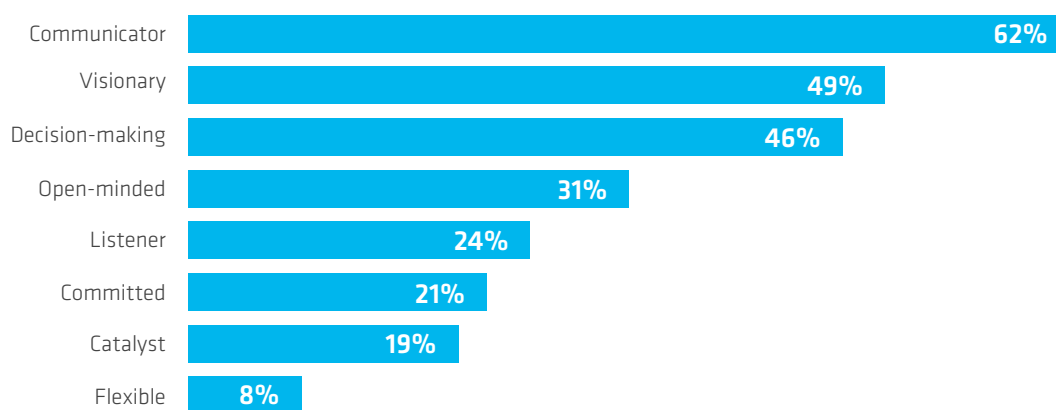
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- Change management
- Change communication
- Diplomacy
- Emotional intelligence
- Knowledge management (HR & financial)
- Engaging, motivating and empowering people
- Process planning and mapping
- Goal orientation
- Fairness and ethical awareness
- Understanding people's needs
- Team-building

The establishment of a skills and capability audit, and formal job descriptions for key roles helps anticipate and resolve many of these skills gaps over time. A formal 'appointment' process for internal candidates not only legitimises specific positions, it also empowers those selected to do the job. A set of key leadership and change management skills and capabilities identified by workshop participants is set out in Box 11.

Figure 4 shows the results of an instant poll on the key qualities for higher education leaders, that sampled the over 230 participants at the 4th EUA Funding Forum, held in Barcelona on 18 and 19 October 2018. In total, 139 participants answered this question. According to the Leadership Panel participants, a university leader's main characteristics should include being open, sharing and having a passion for the institution; surrounding oneself with people who are better than you; understanding and engaging people; and demonstrating patience, integrity, tenacity and empathy (which is important for dealing with a highly intelligent but individualist academic community).

**Figure 4. The most important qualities for higher education leaders**



Communication was considered to be one of the key skills for higher education leaders. A few basic communication strategies and approaches are discussed below.

### **3.3. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY: PLANNING AND DELIVERY**

Workshop participants identified communications strategy, planning and execution, and a professional change communications capability as a core requirement for change programme success. The following key thematic points came out of workshop participants' discussions on communications:

- Effective communications strategies should deliver on-going commitment and support for all aspects of the change process
- This should be achieved by raising awareness, imparting knowledge and understanding of the approach, process and intended outcomes
- Communication is also about listening, about receiving and acting on feedback
- An effective strategy clearly maps all stakeholders, their interests and communications preferences, and above all, is sensitive to language

- A variety of communication tools and channels should be used to deliver the strategy to different audiences. It is impossible to ignore social media, but knowing how to use it effectively and for which purposes needs to be thought through with the advice of communications professionals
- Communications planning – detailed, costed delivery plans are as important as a high-level communications strategy
- Clarify ‘the message’ to make it simple, understandable, repeatable and easy to deliver
- The communications strategy and plan need to equip managers and leaders with practical tools that allow them to argue the case for change – for example, standardised presentations, speaking notes and consistent answers to frequently asked questions
- As such, it needs to help them understand other points of view and to know how to deal with them. The communications plan needs to address engagement and the broadcast communications in equal measure
- External and internal communications must be consistent
- Internal change communications capability needs to be an integral part of the change process, not an afterthought. Communications thinking should help shape the overall implementation approach. The internal communications team needs to forge strong and effective relationships with the senior team sponsoring the overall change programme, with project teams and crucially with the organisation development team.

#### **BOX 12. LESSONS LEARNED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MILANO-BICOCCA**

The 2010 Italian university reform had a big impact on university organisation and administrative matters, and leadership was not fully prepared for such large-scale change. The lessons learned from implementation point to both the critical importance and limitations of delegated decision-making on game-changing issues. Leaders must pay greater attention to internal change communications and engagement to safeguard the success of change programme implementation.

#### **BOX 13. BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN ACADEMICS AND ADMINISTRATORS: LESSONS LEARNED AT VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL AND PARIS SACLAY**

At the **Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB)**, implementation of the “Administration 2020” change project involves building trust between academics and administrators. The team responsible for change reaches out to different faculties to explain the benefits of the planned change and discuss its related needs and the type of help/resources required. Lessons learned at VUB highlight the importance of the change team having the skills required to lead the process, of it being of a sufficient size to coach the change, as well as of securing the right initial momentum, which requires a strong push from senior leadership.

Since 2015, the **University Paris Saclay** has been working on a government-backed project to merge 3 universities, 4 engineering schools and several public research labs into a single entity. While the merger should be completed by early 2020, the major challenge has been to build trust between the academic and non-academic communities. This has been achieved by creating various working groups to discuss the key issues and gain a better understanding of each other’s culture.

Box 14 sets out a guide for a simplified internal communications strategy for change and transformation.

#### BOX 14. SAMPLE SIMPLIFIED INTERNAL CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

N°	Task	Task elements	Action	Primary responsibility
1	Communications objectives	What is the overall objective? What do we want to accomplish? How does it link to current institutional objectives <i>and</i> challenges?		
2	Audiences	Who are the audiences? Be as specific as practicable.		
3	Facts	What do we want each audience (deans, heads of department, etc.) to know and understand?		
4	Feelings	What is the <b>single</b> , compelling idea we want the audience to accept?		
5	Messages	What are the three, short, memorable messages for each audience? These need to match their needs and preferences. Be clear about each audience's specific needs. Do not assume that all audiences have the same needs in all circumstances.		
6	Communications channels and tactics	What is the best way to reach each audience? How and how often are they likely to prefer their information? How should we anticipate known or probable negatives? What do we know about their language preferences?		
7	Measurement	What will success look like? <i>What</i> will be tracked and evaluated? <i>How</i> will we evaluate these?		
8	Timing, resources	What is the communications plan? Be clear on who does what and when. Be clear about any additional direct costs. Be clear about indirect costs: What else gets re-prioritised? Who is going to advise on audience language preferences, for example? Be clear, be detailed.		



# Conclusions

The current multiplicity of change drivers means that all institutions need to be prepared for large-scale transformation processes, in order to answer demands for efficiency and effectiveness and to show that they are providing value for money and value for society.

This means that university leaders and managers need to engage in change processes in addition to their usual responsibilities. Some of the key success factors include:

- Creating enabling conditions for the **implementation of continuous and sustainable change** and ensuring that the promised benefits are actually delivered
- Fully and tightly weaving change management **into the fabric of an institution's leadership, governance and management framework** and its underlying processes
- Aligning the senior leadership team with the change vision, goals, objectives and implementation approach
- Addressing **communications and engagement strategy**, planning for challenges, and bolstering change communications capability and capacity so that communication can play a key role in the change programme
- Addressing change leadership and management gaps, particularly with regard to project management and organisational development **capability and capacity**
- **Professionalising** the process of leading and managing change needs that are properly attuned to academic culture and the nature, purpose and missions of higher education institutions
- Engaging external experts to help bring in new ideas and reach out to a broader community and stakeholders
- Supporting **leadership and change management development** both institutionally, through training and support for younger leaders (for example, mentorship and incentives) and senior managers (top management programmes and access to professional networks), and at system level, through dedicated capacity-building schemes run by funders
- Finding a way of pushing resources in these directions at an early stage of the mobilisation phase.

## Appendix: List of participating institutions

1. Amsterdam University of the Arts, the Netherlands
2. Central European University, Hungary
3. European University Association
4. Heads of University Management and Administration Network in Europe (HUMANE)
5. Irish Universities Association, Ireland
6. Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Lithuania
7. Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia
8. Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, France
9. Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway
10. PA consulting, UK
11. University of Beira Interior, Portugal
12. University of Bologna, Italy
13. University of Helsinki, Finland
14. University of Iceland
15. University of Innsbruck, Austria
16. University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy
17. University of Paris-Saclay, France
18. University of Porto, Portugal
19. University of the Basque Country, Spain
20. Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

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**European University  
Association (EUA)**

Avenue de l'Yser, 24  
1040 Brussels  
Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 230 55 44

Fax: +32 2 230 57 51

Email: [info@eua.eu](mailto:info@eua.eu)

[www.eua.eu](http://www.eua.eu)

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