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Using evaluation to create 'provisional stabilities': bridging innovation in Higher Education change processes

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Abstract

This paper will report on the evaluation experience in two SOCRATES (European Union funding mechanism designed to support innovation in teaching and learning) projects focused on change in Higher Education. The projects were international in scope involving 6 countries and 10 institutions within the last four years. The paper reflects on change in institutions specifically, especially those introduced by the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) and it suggests the hypothesis that in such a phase of transition, new rules are not yet established and a state of anomie can occur at the level of courses, departments and institutions. What happens in educational institutions in which rules and practices are well established and validated and a new event radically changes or challenges the traditional practices? Instead of the psycho-social notion of 'resistance to change', we think that the theory of Durkheim and followers which analyses human responses in times of social change may be of use to interpret situations in which change or the will to change creates conflicting systems of rules and practices. The paper will argue for a crucial role for evaluation in negotiating such periods of change.

Introduction

This paper will draw together the evaluation experience of participating in two SOCRATES projects. The work-packages in each of the projects had a brief to develop thinking about the role evaluation might play in supporting the change process.

This paper synthesises aspects of both these experiences of evaluation development and offers a general role for evaluation that emphasises its potential as a support for positive change. It suggests that evaluations should be 'theory based' in two ways. First, an evaluation can be supported and framed by a theory of change in an organisational setting and second, the change process is shaped by the theories of change implicit in innovation strategies adopted by change agents [in our case, course innovators]. These implicit theories of change are an important focus for evaluation and form the basis of 'grounded theories' that, once made explicit, are useful in making sense of the change process. It is in the contribution to this sense making (see Weick 1995) process that evaluations have their value.

The two projects, which form the basis of this paper, are the LEARN-NETT and RECRE&SUP projects (See Charlier and Peraya 2003). Both had an interest in the role ICTs had in supporting learning and in the change process. LEARN-NETT asked simply 'can learning be improved with use of ICT, and if so how? Its starting points were that the use of ICT is increasingly related to the design of and experimentation with innovative learning environments that support collaborative learning activities. LEARN-NETT was a quasi-experimental project designed to develop a collaborative learning environment in which higher education students in nine institutions in five European countries might

work together on team based academic activities supported by tutors from any of the participating institutions.

Within the LEARN-NETT project, the role of the evaluation work-package was to build evaluation resources for use by the partners in the project and to establish a rationale for evaluation as a tool for innovative change. It is from this project that the idea of evaluation as a 'bridging tool' first emerged (see Bonamy, Charlier and Saunders 2001). The work-package was a free-standing area of research and development within the overall project

The RECRE&SUP project (which means in french "Réseau de Centres de Ressources pour l'Enseignement Supérieur") consisted of ten universities, 5 from the french speaking community of Belgium : the universities of Namur, Louvain, Mons, Liège and Brussels and the EM universitiy of Lyon, Geneva, Madrid and Lancaster. The universities were all different, had their own histories, strategies and structures. This diversity can also be found in each institution, in other words, the universities are heterogenous and loosely coupled (see Weick 1988). That means that the changes envisaged by university policy are likely to produce far more varied responses from the different departments (than in a tightly coupled system) or indeed, in some cases no changes at all and that in this type of organisation the actors conceptions of the organisational context for changes occurs relatively free from organisational determination.

Within RECRE&SUP, the role of the evaluation work-package was centred specifically on 20 innovative courses (two per institution)delivered by the partner institutions. The courses and the circumstances for innovation were all quite different but they all focused on the use of ICTs. The work-package evaluated the change process with particular reference to the way in which these innovations connected to wider institutional change through the perspective of the course innovators. The innovative impetus as understood by the course innovators was the specific focus. [See Bonamy, Charlier and Saunders 2002].

The courses from the RECRE&SUP project form the focus for the rest of this paper and provide the exemplars.

Toward a theory of evaluation as a bridging tool

The evaluation approach we advocate could be understood as an 'evaluation for knowledge' as Eleanor Chelimsky (1997, p100) would have it. This means that the evaluative dimension of the project is built into the design and can be justified as evaluative research in which the evaluation was primarily undertaken to obtain 'a deeper understanding in some specific area or policy field'. This approach can be distinguished from a developmental or accountability imperative. However, it would be wrong to see the evaluation activity as divorced from the development of the two projects; indeed we can see the way the evaluative evidence from the first year of the projects had a direct impact on the manner in which the collaborative activity was supported in the second year.

The evaluation dimension of the two projects was clearly identified as an independent work-package. However, the evaluation was not an evaluation of the project but an exploratory development in which the role of evaluation within a change process was researched and reconfigured. We argue that it is necessary during the evolution of a change, embodied in an innovatory project, to give meaning to the process [evaluation as sense making] as a support for the actors, in the first instance the course innovators. By sharing their questions and observations a common frame of reference is enabled which might guide action in each experimental location while respecting the diversity of each of the participants' contexts for

action. The ultimate aim of evaluative sense making is to help build common knowledge that could be shared by all the actors in a project network. In order to develop an approach, which addressed the issues of diversity, flexibility and complexity, we first developed a clear understanding of the general processes, which characterise a change from the course innovators' points of view.

In endeavouring to accomplish this task, we began to develop ideas on the role of evaluation in changing or transitional environments, which might have wider application. In order to develop these change strategies at the level of the course innovator, we have developed and adapted a 'Theories of Change' approach to our work in analysing the organisational context of change in our case study courses. Essentially it adopts the perspective of evaluation and institutional research in which key participants are asked to consider how the activities they are undertaking will produce intended outcomes. In other words, what theory do the key stakeholders have (often implicit) about the way change can be produced by certain types of action? It might be a learning theory or it might be a theory about how organisations change (e.g. pilots or experiments produce exemplars which are then adopted more widely in an organisation). The important thing is that key 'agents for change' are asked why they are doing what they are doing, on what basis. Initially, the evaluation approach could be identified in the following terms.

- the convergence of research and evaluation;
- an evaluation which distinguished between individual experience and institutional contexts;

An example of theory of change-based evaluation is that used by The Aspen Institute (Connell et al, 1995) in relation to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives. Carol Weiss [95] suggests that all programmes have underlying 'theories of change' that have influenced decisions around programme design. Where programme design is not clearly specified or linked to the ultimate goals of the programme, the evaluators task is to clarify the premises, assumptions, hypotheses or theories that have guided decisions about the overall structure and specific components of the initiative. Once these have been elicited, they can drive the development of an evaluation plan that tests whether the programme theories hold up when the programme is implemented. Testing the programme's 'theories of change' is a means of assessing the progress and impact of a programme. RECRE@SUP falls into this category of change. There was another sense in which theory of change guided our evaluations. This was not quite in the sense offered by Connell or Weiss but in the use of theory to frame, set and orientate the focus of the evaluation. This is closer to the role of theory in evaluation outlined by Shwandt [2003] in which the 'rough ground' of the practical constitutes the proper and effective place for the use of theories of change. In other words, explanatory frameworks that make sense of practices that are changing, are appropriate resources for evaluation. Pawson [2003] makes a similar point in the same volume of Evaluation when he casts an analogous role for theory in evaluation. However, the differences in the evaluation activity reported here are that theory is held in the minds of course innovators and it is that which we are attempting to explore and we are doing it with the aid of 'ways of seeing' the change process that are derived from other more stable theoretical resources.

The meta-theoretical context

Our ideas were influenced by theory, which characterised the contemporary and fast moving environment at institutional (see Coombs 98, Saunders 98 and Fullan 98 and 2002), and

societal levels (see for example Lash 95, Crouch 99 and Rotburg 2001), as complex, rapidly changing and uncertain. Equally, commentators have begun to consider the potential role for evaluation within such complex policy environments (see Sanderson 2000). We have characterised a formative evaluation in these circumstances as a ***'bridging tool'.*** Not only do the use of ICTs for learning involve significant challenges for single institutions, but its use in an international experiment, as in LEARN-NETT, has cross cultural system integration as an additional dimension. The way evaluation processes can aid the journey through this apparently over complex environment suggested to us the metaphor of a 'bridge'. The following discussion attempts to cohere the implications of structural modernist theory of social cohesion with ideas produced by the contemporary profile of society as chronically 'uncertain'. It is to the discussion of these concepts we will now turn.

Fullan's ideas (1999, 2003) on change in complex educational environments suggest the need to accept complexity or diversity as a given in the design of a change process. His work, along with other commentators who have identified the rapidity of change and the creativity required to survive during these periods of chronic uncertainty (see Hann 94 and Hinchcliffe and Woodward 2000 for examples) suggests a move away from scientific-rational approaches toward those which are more sociologically informed. However, we also acknowledge that working effectively in these kinds of environments requires support: technical, social and educational. While we have attempted to demonstrate that to insist on conformity or to develop an over-prescriptive framework, particularly as Spencer-Mathews (2001) suggests in institutions of higher education, is a mistake, we have taken the view that we should look for the maximum opportunity for participating sites to express their own organisational stage of development in their participation in the project. This would however, be accompanied by some strong advice about the 'core' elements required and some tools which will enable progress to be made, including formative evaluations. This does suggest some difficult design challenges (Trowler and knight 2001) from which we can take our thinking a little further. But why are 'bridging tools' derived from evaluation important in the contemporary environment of HE?

We have a concept of the kind of working environment, which will increasingly characterise the futures of the students participating in higher education institutions in Europe (See Saunders and Machell 2000). Along with the profile of contemporary working lives suggested by the writers cited above, characterised by risk, uncertainty and complexity, these requirements have become packaged and to some extent have 'washed back' through policy pronouncements on the nature of the higher education experience. We can adapt and develop what Brennan *et al*. (1996, p8) suggest are pressures for change emerging from the division of labour.

Learners in higher education institutions move across a ***'boundary'*** between the traditional environment of higher education into the post-traditional, and from higher education into the world of work. We see a need for a wide range of bridging tools to help learners and those supporting them to navigate these transitions. We coin the term 'bridging' because we have a concept of a journey and a metaphorical connection between places in two senses: just as a bridge takes an individual or group from one point to another, it also joins one place to another. We have a strong vision of the world our students will move into, and of a learning environment in a period of rapid change. In this sense 'bridging' means:

- enabling students to experience elements of future practice while learning;
- enabling students to move from one kind of learning experience to another.

- enabling the facilitators of student learning to innovate and change

Our understanding of the term 'bridging tool' is guided by a specific learning theory. Involvement in a research or development project, funded or otherwise, produces learning through the development of new communities of practice, either of learners or of workers in the new work order (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Individuals and groups learn through the adoption of new practices and this process is active, situated and context bound, but essentially reflective. How might this learning be made accessible and useful to others and how might learners (as course innovators or students) be enabled to work together in a 'rehearsal' of new working practices?

We argue here that an evaluation approach which provides captured rehearsals, examples, metaphors, typologies, vignettes, cases, accounts and platforms, ways of working, principles of procedures, routines, in other words, *depictions* and can both evoke and enable the experience of boundary crossing and provide ***provisional stability*** for change that is to say, act as bridges. We see our evaluation approach inhabiting this site in the overall process of development by providing precisely these 'bridging resources' for participants and other interested parties.

Examples of metaphors, captures and typologies

In the RECRE&SUP project we have generated a range of grounded categories from the data, which attempt to capture the essence of the change process from the point of view of the course innovator, which we have identified as 'change agents'. It is these models, which will help to understand the change process and provide the provisional stability, to which we refer below, along with an existing theory of change. Thus we engaged in a mixed analytical methodology of established and grounded theory.

Enclaves, bridgeheads and embedded practice

Unlike other research on the process of change and change in HE in particular, we have been interested in exploring the course innovators' conceptions of the change process, how they have 'visioned' change and the organisational context for their course. Therefore the focus for this work has been on the way the process of change is conceptualised, perceived and experienced by this particular group. As we establish above, we can see the way in which the courses are relatively 'loosely coupled' (see Horne 1992) to the host organisation, providing the circumstance in which many conceptions of the organisational context for changes can occur, relatively 'free' from organisational determination. By 'coupling' we mean the extent to which parts of a system or sub system are responsive to changes in other parts of the system. In a tightly coupled system for example, if intended changes at the level of policy were introduced from the centre, we would expect parts of the system to be responsive to these changes and changes might occur of the kind evoked by the policy. In a loosely coupled system, changes envisaged by the centre's policy are likely to produce far more varied responses from the sub parts of the system or, indeed, no changes at all. In the HE cases we studied, it is clear that HE is loosely coupled in terms of curricular innovation based on ICTs. The reports from the course innovators identified several features or prompts for change which supported the perception of HE as heterogeneous and loosely coupled. However, both projects have been able to produce a typology of 'change conceptions' we think might be useful in understanding and planning innovation in this area.

We use the following categories to denote how the case 'connects' to the wider organisational context in which it has been developed and which will embody the positioning of the

proposed innovation in relation to how it might impact on the wider case. We use 'military' metaphors to capture or conceptualise this process. A case might lie on the following continuum (see Saunders 88 for an earlier use of this approach)

Figure 1 Positioning in the organisation

enclave ⟶ **bridgehead**

An enclave is a set of practices which exist in a larger organisational setting but which has characteristics which are distinctive, individuals within it subscribe self consciously to a different culture (or way of doing things) to the organisational norm and there are clear organisational, temporal and sometimes spatial differences which distinguish it from its organisational setting.

As far as change is concerned, we are interested in the extent to which and under what conditions an enclave has an impact on the wider organisation. In other words it begins to challenge wider practices in the organisation and so transforming itself from an enclave to a 'bridgehead' or platform for wider developments. This is important because in the use of evaluation as a bridging tool, we are looking for theories or strategies for the way in which enclaves enable wider change to happen. All the courses in RECRE&SUP began life as an enclave.

Related concepts which help to explain the relationship between an enclave and the wider context are the ideas of 'emergent' culture' within a 'dominant' culture in an organisation (see Williams R 1980). We might say that as long as the new culture remains in an enclave then there is not necessarily any change at wider organisational level. However, once an enclave begins to develop as a bridgehead, then it can emerge as an 'oppositional' culture to the dominant culture and challenge its dominant position in the organisation providing the resources for a 'paradigm shift in practices'.

We were interested to note the way in which and under what circumstances cases designated in the first round of interviews had evolved over time. Thus, we observed changes which remained as an enclave, mainly because they had no theory or strategy for change in the wider context. We observed changes which began to move from enclave to bridgehead by adopting strategies for change and were making a limited impact on the wider context. We were able to identify changes that moved through the enclave stage to developing 'bridgeheading' strategies and on to create changes in embedded or routine practice. Finally, we observed changes which were designed as bridgeheads from the outset as they moved to impact on routine practice. These configurations might be understood as possible 'evolutionary routes' for change.

Figure 2 The evolution of change

1. Enclave ⟶ **remains enclaved** ⟶ **ceases or reconstituted**

2. Enclave ⟶ **bridgehead**

3. Enclave → **bridgehead** → **embedded practice**

4. Bridgehead → **embedded practice**

Broadly speaking, we adopt an approach to the evaluation of change and the positioning of evaluation in the change process that places 'social practice' as central (see Trowler, Saunders and Knight 2003). At its core, changes are concerned with adaptations of routine, day to day, rule governed behaviour or, in other words it is ***practice*** that forms the focus for evaluation (Giddens 1979). Some of this behaviour might be reified in the form of systems and supported by an organisational 'architecture' or structure, but practice is at the heart of our concerns. From an evaluative point of view, we were interested in constructing the ways in which changes in practice were emerging through the 'lens' of the course innovator reflecting these conceptions back and aiding the move from enclave to embedded practice.

Developing the grounded categories and authenticating the analysis

The analysis reported here is based on a series of semi structure interviews with the course innovators of 20 courses in our case study HE institutions. These interviews were analysed using a range of interrogatory concepts the use of which is described below by progressively focusing until we were working with a series of syntheses. We have outlined above the use of established theoretical categories, below we identify the grounded categories in Figure 3.

Figure 3 The seven thematic areas of interest

a) Theories or ideas of the change process in which interviewees are involved
b) Relationship with institution: institutional context/setting
c) Type of innovation: innovation purposes
d) Dissemination strategies
e) The 'Vision Thing' (the vision interviewees identified associated with their courses)
f) Change agent identity
g) Evolution of changes

Underlying the analytical framework was a concern to apply the key concepts to all the cases using a set of themes. In the case of a, d, e and f we have generated a grounded typology. In the case of b, c and g, we have applied the enclave framework outlined in the discussion above to categorise the material. For a, d, e and f, we categorically analysed all the cases and derived 'master types'. We then re-applied these types to all the cases and allocated each to a type, cross checking the authenticity of the categories.

A problem with this analysis is that an example might have traces of more than one type. Because of that, allocation to a type is more a matter of emphasis than exclusivity. Another interesting methodological point is that the course innovators did not necessarily understand the process they were engaged in as a 'change strategy'. The categories that emerged were inferred from the interviews. However, part of the strategy of 'bridging' involved a second phase of interactions with the course innovator in which the expression of the individual cases in terms of the grounded categories and the 'enclave' framework were checked and authenticated. Each

case was re-presented to its course innovator 'owner' and a discussion took place in which the categorization was problematised and debated with them [see below].

All these categories were used to present the cases and configure the change process undergone by the course leaders but in the context of this paper, we will identify just one of the categories as an example of a grounded theory that was re-presented to the course innovators.

Grounded Theories or ideas of change

The type of change theory embodied in the interview account is identified below. Following the procedure we identify above, the following types of change theory can be discerned in the evidence gathered from the course innovators.

Figure 4 Course Innovators' theories of change

Practice based exemplar
Resource driven/dependent
Institutional rhetorical support
Professional imperative (enriching student experience)
Technological Determinism

Practice based exemplar
There were examples where the course innovators discussed ways in which change might be produced by providing examples of how ICTs are used to improve the teaching and learning in a particular environment. The theory in this instance was that 'practical' embodiments of useful, interesting or innovative teaching will produce changes in individuals who are interested in adapting their practice or who feel change is inevitable or have other pressures to change. The idea of 'contagion' or the metaphor of epidemiology is interesting and apt here. The theory of change embedded in this conception is relatively weak in that how and under what conditions an interesting exemplar would create changes within the wider system was not made explicit or remained opaque. This has been known as the epidemiological model of change in that a 'beacon' or enclave becomes a bridgehead by osmosis. Another perspective on this process may be that having a practice based exemplar is a necessary condition for change but is often not sufficient. Resources, political will and other chronic and conjunctural feratures of the environment might also have to be in place in order for change on a wider front to take place. The great challenge without these other factors in place is how to move from interesting but marginal enclave to influential bridgehead

Resource driven/dependent
This category understands change in terms of the resourcing incentive. Change will occur when there is a financial or resource incentive i.e. resources are offered on the basis of specified changes. In addition, change will not occur or at least is dependent on resources being made available to enable change to occur. This is an interesting example of 'categorically driven funding change'. Usually and also in the examples we have in the project, this theory identifies the way a centre forms a policy of development. It establishes criteria against which it invites bids for developmental funding. Only those bids, which display the desired profile of characteristics, receive funds. Resource dependent change might be defined as that which defines adaptation as strategies to reach compliance with external constraints. Change resourcing implies an exchange with the environment to acquire resources, which might, in turn create dependencies (Sporn 1999). This model does imply

relatively tight coupling between University Departments and their Centres. In many cases, change prompted by central rhetoric requires resourcing at the level of the department.

Institutional rhetorical support

This category has a theory of change which is based on the framework provided at the institutional level. It should involve resource allocations as we identify above but at its minimum, it provides for legitimation for the changes which are sanctioned by institutional policy, put another way, it refers to institutional legitimation. That is to say change occurs when there is institutional power behind it. In most of the cases, institutional rhetorical support is not sufficient to produce changes. In that instance it is a partial theory of change. However, in many cases, institutional rhetorical support was present at the same time as practice based exemplars were being developed to embody desired changes. The process of change is interesting here in that many bottom up exemplars run ahead of institutional rhetorical support. At some point though, institutional rhetorical support is required in order to promote wider adoption.

Professional imperative (enriching student experience)

This change theory is based on the idea of teaching professionalism. Because a 'good' teacher will be interested in providing up-to-date, interesting, well supported material and processes which aid and deepen intellectual development, often collaboratively, he/she will be interested in using, experimenting and developing courses which take advantage of possibilities offered by ICTs. Whereas resource dependency relies on the assumption of tight coupling between central resource allocators and those who will implement change 'on the ground' and is based upon the premise of the efficacy of sequential, hierarchical processes of 'top-down' change, other change theories stress the greater effectiveness of bottom-up approaches to the implementation of change. According to critics of top-down change strategies (see for example Hjern & Hull, 1982; Yanow, 1987), top-down models of change rely too heavily on the assumption of power and control exercised by those at the top of systems (such as central government policy-makers) or within organizations (such as university vice-chancellors and senior management teams). In contrast, advocates of a bottom-up approach to change argue that it is vital to take into account the importance of such characteristics of loosely coupled systems as:

> power relations, conflicting interests and value systems between individuals and agencies responsible for making policy and those responsible for taking action (Barrett and Fudge, 1981: 4).

Trowler (1998) also emphasises the necessity of taking into account the far from passive role of those who are required to implement change on a day-to-day basis:

> to fully understand processes of change in any social context, we need an understanding of the nature of the ground-level interpretations of, and response, to policy (p.103).

As loosely coupled organizations, universities are staffed by academics that, for the most part, enjoy high degrees of autonomy within their departments - that is, at ground level. The case studies analysed in this paper illustrate a number of instances of the power of individuals to interpret policies in ways, which were consistent with their own professional values and practices.

Technological Determinism

This category understands change in terms of the imperative embedded in ICTs themselves. There are three variations in this category. First, the technology itself requires students,

teachers and managers and teaching arrangements to change practices because of its nature once introduced. Secondly, the institutions, agencies or centres have an imperative to have ICTs at the core of their activities to gain commercial advantage, to gain access to the global 'learning market' and to deliver curricula and learning opportunities more effectively. Thirdly, there are changes in the expectations of the students in terms of learning support and ICT infrastructure, this imperative has produced or will produce changes in the institutions as they attempt to match these expectations. This imperative becomes more acute in the 'continuing education' environment. The theory here is that educational institutions are learner sensitive, particularly in a global market.

Creating evaluation based bridging tools for provisional stability

The categories presented above were one of a series used by the evaluation team to create provisional stability. Provisional stability is the central term we use to refer to circumstances, or even tools, which allow for a degree of stability necessary in order to move from what Emile Durkheim termed anomic (conditions of normlessness) to a new framework for action (Durkheim 52). Durkheim originally used the concept of anomie or normlessness to describe conditions of normative instability or uncertainty in periods of rapid change in which individuals have lost the taken-for-granted certainty of unacknowledged rules, which shape daily lives. Under these conditions he noted a statistical rise in the rate of suicides. To borrow the thrust of Durkheim's argument and following the theoretical implications of the discussion above, we can denote contemporary circumstances, at all levels in society, as those, which threaten 'chronic anomie'.

However, while it might be the case that we can depict contemporary society in this way, how might these ideas be relevant to change in institutions specifically, especially those introduced by the use of ICT? We suggest the hypothesis that in such a phase of transition or change, new rules are not yet established and a state of institutional anomie can occur. This relative instability is characteristic of *any* change process and is on a continuum from catastrophic uncertainty in which organisational life might be quite intolerable to the much more prosaic circumstances in which course changes or innovations are being attempted which challenge conventional or dominant practices. It is in the second of these circumstances we most often find ourselves and to which our remarks are directed.

What happens in educational institutions in which rules and practices are well established and validated, when a new event changes or challenges the traditional practices? (see Coffey 2001) Instead of the psycho-social notion of 'resistance to change', we think that the theory of Durkheim and followers which analyses human responses in times of social change may be of use to interpret situations in which change or the will to change creates challenges to existing practices (see also Greenwood 98).

We created depictions, vingettes or case studies which are examples of the kinds of resources it is possible to offer course innovators engaged in the change processes studied in this evaluation. They were used in a variety of contexts but each with the aim of increasing understanding of the change process in which they had been a part. Our hypothesis is that in the process of change uncertainties arise (a form of anomie) that can inhibit onward planning and development. By engaging course innovators in these evaluation products (depictions), increased understanding of the change occurs and course leaders have diagnostic resources

[bridging tools] available on which to create adjustments, strategies and future direction. In other words they have the provisional stability with which to plan.

To reiterate, there were several stages in which the depictions were used to create provisional stabilities. We have identified the stage in which initial depictions were discussed with course innovators. Each course innovator was shown the depiction of their course and also the enclave model and the grounded categories derived from the initial analysis. The accuracy, applicability and evocativeness of the framework and the depiction were authenticated with them. Interestingly, the categories had 'values' embedded in them that were unanticipated by the evaluators. For example, there were instances where the designation of 'enclave' was hotly disputed because the course leader imputed a negative rather than descriptive connotation to the term. Once the depictions were stabilised, a discussion began about the implications for the change strategy of the course innovator. Some remained intellectually interested but with no particular intention to act on the implications of their depiction. In some cases this was not a matter of individual decision-making, but there was a sense in which they felt unable to fully respond because of institutional factors such as a lack of resources or political will. Others had their change theory confirmed, others considered a gap between their expectations and the logic of the implicit change theory they were acting upon and considered changes. Others used the depictions in discussions with their course teams.

We have included below three examples of course depictions. They are all different but we have chosen each case on the basis of its relationship to categories in the enclave model [enclave, bridgehead, embedded] and highlighted the grounded 'theory of change' category that most typifies the case.

Case study 1: enclave

For more than ten years, Professor Novo has taught organisational analysis to the second year of his university. Each year he has about 60 students and over the years has tried to keep his subject matter up to date and to encourage his students to actively work in groups in case study analysis.

In 2000, he decided to suggest to the students to carry out their work partly by distance learning using discussion fora. This teaching and learning strategy addresses a double pedagogical concern. On the one hand, it sought primarily to stimulate student activity and to develop at home a capacity for meta-cognitive reflection on the students' exchanges (what are their spontaneous approaches to the case studies, how do they exploit group theory?), on the other hand, it was a response to the realities of life as a mature student, offering them the chance not to attend certain seminars and to carry out their activities at a distance.

This choice reflects the will of an individual even if some of his closest colleagues are sympathetic to it. The perception of change is clearly affirmed: *'It's about improving my method of teaching. About using what technology can bring to meet the specific needs of adult students.'*

The change is perceived, in the first place, as a professional necessity i.e. a good teacher invests himself in the course and seeks to improve it. The dominant change theory for his individual action was **professional imperative**.

The institution allows this professor entrepreneurial freedom, without giving him any particular assistance, but without however, creating any particular obstacles. The teacher on

his part has no particular desire to make his experience known other than informally so he does not have an implicit theory of change with respect to the institution other than a weak form of **practice based exemplar**. It follows, then, that this case study will remain an **enclave** unless his practice is taken up in an unplanned way. The teacher sees himself as a practitioner who likes to experiment, rather than to live according to a routine, he estimates however, that he spends a lot of time setting up his course and that he must tackle numerous technical problems alone. He is not driven by other 'institutional motives'. His reaction to this depiction was intellectual interest and confirming but it did not create provisional stability for onward planning for wider changes.

Case study 2: Bridge-head

Two IT teachers respond to a call for pedagogical initiatives newly launched by the university. This call for projects essentially supports the development of multimedia-type pedagogical products and constitutes a **resource driven** change. They develop a distance learning platform and see this development as a chance to experiment. They understand change as an opportunity to show that using a particular distance education platform to support self-learning is possible so that others might learn from it. In this sense it was a **practice based examplar**. The institution appreciated this development but does not foresee at the start any strategy for dissemination or evaluation. In the course of its first year, this project remained an **enclave**, the teachers seeing themselves as expert experimenters. They would like recognition by the institution and to obtain support for evaluation and experimentation of their product on a larger scale. In the course of the second year, the university management team decided to encourage the development of distance learning practices within the institution and chose to buy the platform and to put in place training of teachers in each faculty; they decide to designate one of the two teachers as responsible for this training. In this way the enclave became a bridgehead **bridgehead.** Using the platform and associated practices begin to develop within the institution. The two teachers confirmed the depiction and discussed further ways of embedding the practices associated with the platform across the institution. They identified **institutional rhetoric** as crucial during the next phase of development.

Case study 3: embedded

A professor of physics (of Polish origin) has worked for several years with his colleague at the Polytechnic Institute of Warsaw. Having recently discovered an interest in the use of ICT in the course of an informal meeting with the director of the resource centre of his University, he decided to try a joint experiment with his colleague and to develop a doctoral distance seminar using videoconferencing and a web site as resources. The object of the change is two-fold: it aimed to experiment with a new practice and to develop a new programme such that it would be recognised at international level. This change was a form of **practice based exemplar** in which the qualities of this approach would become widely apparent .

In the beginning, the teacher "fought his way through the fog alone". He considered himself a reasonable handyman and preferred to learn by himself, even if he recognised that chance and the references supplied by the resource centre had been decisive. During its first two years of existence the project remained an **enclave** and had hardly any effect on the practice of his colleagues and more widely on the institution.

However, after two years, he was taken up by his dean and was named as the person responsible for these kinds of developments in his faculty. He considered that change can be achieved by demonstrating practical realisations such as his **(practice based example)** and

invites certain colleagues who had themselves introduced ICT use into their courses, to come and present their experience at a half-day event. In parallel, he continued to develop tools used for his course and developed, in collaboration with Warsaw, an open-source platform. This platform was adopted by several colleagues and by the resource centre with which he is increasingly co-operating thus forming a **bridgehead**. These initiatives are recognised by the institution and are taken into account for his promotion. A year later, several teachers in the faculty of Sciences are using the tool for their courses; reflective sessions take place at faculty level to review the entire programme from a more active perspective emerging as **embedded practice**. The depictions were discussed with him and he acknowledged that they captured the process of change accurately. He became more aware of the strategic conditions necessary to sustain the embedded changes and to avoid slipping back to an enclave.

The final stage of the creation of provisional stabilities during the RECRE&SUP project was the discussion of all the grounded categories and the enclave framework with participants from all the institutions in the project in a dissemination event. The participants in this event were asked to work in groups to discuss the analyses. The idea was to support reflection on the change process by asking simple focusing questions which generate sensitive rehearsals and problem solving. They in effect created more generic knowledge based provisional stabilities. The questions were consistent with those asked of the individual course innovators, for example:

What do you think of this case? Does it make you think about situations you've already encountered?

What do you think about the roles of each of the actors?: professor, resource centre, institution (dean)?

What implications are there for on-going change strategies in your circumstances?

Feedback from this event suggested these depictions had acted as a resource for understanding the implications for change *on the part of a group of innovators.* It is this group who were particularly receptive to this kind of approach.

Overview

In this paper we have developed the argument that in a situation characterised by transition from one relatively stable environment to another, stakeholders involved in the change respond positively to evaluative tools of reference (bridging tools) that help create a framework for action. These tools are the products of evaluation composed of embodiments of the change process, grounded theories of change or depictions of change. We have termed this kind of resource and the role they might play as the creation of provisional stabilities.

The experience of evaluation in two SOCRATES projects helps to think of some of these tools that might support development. We argue that instead of trying to reduce complexity by searching for common solutions or systematised approaches, with the aim of creating a stable framework that could force change, we prefer a framework that helps participants in a change process to create situated provisional stabilities for change. In this way, the design of evaluation processes and practices will provide resources for 'sense making'.

In summary our argument is as follows. We are working and learning in circumstances that can continually produce periods of 'normlessness' and uncertainty and lead, in some extreme instances to destructive instability but more often discomfort, indecision and insecurity. Under these conditions it can be very difficult to act and plan. Learning changes in HE, often prompted by new ways of learning linked to the introduction of ICTs, can produce such instabilities as a ***transition*** is made across a ***boundary*** from one culture of practice to another and, for learners, from HE into new work practices.

Learners, teachers and course innovators in HE can be supported by constructing ***provisional stabilities*** as they seek creative solutions to problems created by change. These provisional stabilities are created by reflecting on and the understanding of change, enabling choices or decisions for future action. The experience reported here suggests formative evaluations can provide the resources for such reflections and act as a ***bridging tool*** for planning and innovation.

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