

Intrapreneurship in Universities: “The dreamers who do [sustainability]”

Navigating Organisational Transformation for Sustainability at Universities

Background

Universities produce the change agents of tomorrow and as organisations their responsibility to incorporate sustainability into their practices becomes increasingly apparent. However, even though it is acknowledged, sustainability is often not systemically incorporated in higher education institutions.

This undergraduate research is a contribution to a participatory PhD research at the ICIS-Maastricht University and its student-run sustainability department, the Green Office (UMGO).

Objectives

How can universities effectively navigate their organisational transformation towards sustainability?

•How can the Maastricht University Green Office use the lean start-up methodology to optimise its project development in order to induce an organisational transformation at Maastricht University towards embedding sustainability?

Aim: to develop experiential knowledge of how to navigate such transformation at Maastricht University

Methods

Phase 1: Participatory action research methodology

Case Studies: Maastricht University Green Office (UMGO), direct observations at UMGO, facilitation & strategic project support.

Additionally, analysis of interviews and documents from three case studies of pioneering universities: specifically Leuphana University Lüneburg (LU). Team as *co-researchers*.

Phase 2: embedded, insider academic research at the UMGO and application of lean start-up methodology which resulted from Phase 1.

Findings

Organisational transformation at universities requires:

- **Rapid and discontinuous changes**, i.e. reorganisation of structures or presidential succession
 - **Shared ownership** of students and staff
 - **Change agents** that create interdependency between stakeholders
 - **Innovation**
- **The lean start-up methodology** might indeed be a mean for stimulating innovation by accelerating project development processes and mitigating the impact of potential risks for the UMGO.

Limitations

The lean start-up methodology still bears substantial limitations due to

- risk aversion in the UMGO
- a lack of investment, administrative support
- Lacking communication on innovation to stakeholders
- a language of deficit used on the UMGO, rather than a language of possibility

Conclusion

It is recommended to further demarcate UMGO's role as intrapreneurial unit for UM to overcome institutional barriers, allowing room for experimentation in the campus community.

In order to fully perform as internal innovation hub for sustainability, UMGO requires the support from university leadership that allows it the 'mandate to innovate'.

References

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