

Institutional elements of success in Tampere3 merger process

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Institutional elements of success in Tampere3 merger process

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Tampere is a city in Finland with three universities, which are thriving for establishing a unique for Finnish higher education system combined university institution. A merger of two different research universities and a university of applied sciences is a compelling topic to inquire for its diverse institutional fabric, intertwined of different organizational cultures, expectations, regulations, and legal statuses. This paper adopts an interesting research perspective of observing the merger in midst of its preparation process. The focus of the research is an inter-organizational, preparatory working group under the organizational umbrella of the merger organization, co-operating in the field of civil engineering discipline between Tampere University of Technology (TUT) and Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK). The data was gathered through interviews with the representatives, the academic staff, students and the merger administration, closely involved in the activities of the focus working group. Institutional theory is employed to analyse the data. Our findings, as institutional elements of the success of this co-operation, are presented and discussed.

Key words: higher education, mergers, case study, institutional theory.

Introduction

University mergers

It has not been even three decades since merger of two separate entities as a concept entered the higher education arena and attracted worldwide attention as a phenomenon. The concept was adopted to higher education from the world of business, meaning the combination of several independent companies into a more organized larger unit (Gaughan, 2010). On the meta-level merger in higher education as a policy issue has received a great deal of scholarly attention, which is a significant reason because of the way national governments have used mergers and other forms of consolidations to initiate a systemic restructuring of higher education (Harman & Lynn Meek, 2002). A variety of examples of such changes (Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Norway, Sweden etc.) suggest that the trend is recognized internationally, however the models and mechanisms

used to achieve restructuring vary from one to another. Nonetheless, there is a consensus on the drivers of these efforts to address the problems of institutional fragmentation, lack of financial and academic viability, and low efficiency and quality. Mergers have also been used by individual institutions to address financial difficulties and external threats, particularly those related to falling student demand and competition (Koontz, 2009).

It has been stated that mergers lead to an improvement in management, organisation, and administration. This particularly pertains to the administration which usually becomes more professional and efficient. The leadership level of the organization entails how much professionalism an organization pursue. When it comes to the evaluation of the Norwegian state college reform, senior faculty and administrators thought that the reform had a significant impact on the achievement of efficiency and professionalism in the administration (Skodvin, O. J., 1999).

Higher education mergers in Finland and their driving forces

What are the current drivers behind university mergers? There is a claim that improved efficiency and accountability have been a major push for mergers (Gaughan, 2010). In education specifically, one reason behind the merger is the nationwide budget cuts on education which leads to the notion of cost sharing. In the case of Finland, the public funding for higher education is about 96.2 % and there are some current budget cuts that have an impact on universities' performance. Concerning university mergers in Finland, there is an assumption that the action of merger is quite expected as a common response to a considerable number of regional universities comparing to the amount of its inhabitants. By 2009, Finland had about 20 universities and 32 polytechnics for a population of around 5.3 million. By 2015, the number of universities have reduced to 14 while the number of polytechnics are 26 (Aarrevaara et al, 2016). Thus, one can claim that another reason influencing Finnish universities to seek merger is the reduction the number of universities in order to guarantee more effective and efficient educational system, although an international evaluation of Finnish HE system in 2015 highlighted the system's wide regional impact (Melin et al, 2015).

One driving force behind university merger in Finland is to improve reputation and to increase the accountability of the universities which would enhance the profile of these universities and boost their worldwide ranking among competitors (Cornelissen and

Thorpe, 2002). In the case of Aalto University, the aim was to build an innovative ‘world-class university’ to compete in the global market. On the other hand, the promotion of Aalto University has been influenced by the benefits of the more integrated outcomes from the joint cross-sectoral work (resulted from the multidisciplinary university merger) for Finnish business and the society (Aula et. al, 2011).

As we can see the importance of reforms and the need for change in curriculum and programme from the following statements mentioned in the report by CEDEFOP in 2012;

“Naturally, curricula change to reflect shifting trends in education, training and the labour market [...]” “[...] that curriculum reform and renewal play an important role in modernising vocational education and training so that it may become more responsive to learners’ employment and personal needs.” (CEDEFOP, 2012).

We can also see this merger process as a reflection to the push from European Union, where working groups indeed aim to produce curricula, which meet the needs of the society (students) and the industry, as well as to create compatible and sustainable curricula which help universities be competitive for the domestic and international demand.

Overall, mergers have many drivers, internal to the system but also regulative and encouraging forces outside the HE system. Next, we present shortly the case of Tampere3 merger process and the point of interest in our research. We are looking into the merger organisation and interested to find out what is successful in it.

Tampere3 merger

The brief history of the Tampere3 merger process starts from a proposal by UTA’s rector Kaija Holli to merge UTA and TUT in September 2013. The proposal further developed into an official matter in October 2014 with a shared decision by UTA, TUT and TAMK to take further the plans of a three-university merger. Both national and local public debate arose on the university democracy and governance processes, leading for example to a historical general meeting of UTA’s student union which was arranged to discuss the merger issues. At the time of the publication of this article in 2017, the merger process has encountered new challenges and the merger organisation has been fully renewed and

Tampere3 university consortium will come fully into force by 1.1.2019. The merger organization in Tampere3 merger process consisted, at the time of implementing the research in 2016, of inter-organizational preparatory working groups:

- a. Scientific profile and research fields
- b. Degree structures and programmes
- c. Support and administrative services
- d. Working group on collaboration with entrepreneurs

These working groups and their various subgroups acted as the operational level of the merger. One of the subgroups under the preparatory, working group B, focusing on building and civil engineering and architecture, is the focus of this case study. In addition to the operational level of the merger, strategic working groups exist on the level of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Tampere3 universities.

Research focus and methodology

Research question

This paper focuses on the Tampere3 merger process and more specifically on one of the inter-organizational working groups of the merger working on the discipline of civil engineering. The merger process consists of three universities forming one university consortium which will shelter a research university and a university of applied sciences. Research universities are traditional universities in Finland while universities of applied sciences are more recent polytechnic HEIs. We must emphasize that when writing the research paper, the merger process is still very much in process, and noting this we acknowledge that there is information which is and has been unavailable for us or does not exist in written form, yet.

We are interested in the success of the working groups and the civil engineering faculties' cooperation activities and the preparation of a joint program between TUT's and TAMK's. We want to analyse what underpins the success of this specific working group's cooperation activities and what lessons can be learnt from it.

To disclose and analyse the case, we asked the following questions: "What regulative, normative, and cognitive institutional elements supporting the success of co-operation

has been experienced in the working group between the civil engineering faculties of TAMK and TUT and the Tampere3 merger process?”, and “What institutional challenges have been met in the process of co-operation?”

After our first interview, we decided to use the information gained through it but we also applied this information to develop our research focus and methodology. We refined our focus to good practices and success of the work group’s activities in an institutional environment set by the merger process.

Methodology

We chose interviews as the basic form of getting subjective experience-based information of the phenomenon of the research focus. The methodological approach to Tampere3 merger was first to interview one contact person who we knew was a student representative in a merger-related work group.

We created loose theme-based questions to find out what was happening in this working group. At this point, our research focus was loosely related to the inter-organizational work groups which were faculty-level cooperatives preparing the merger. We had also planned to use institutional theory as our theoretical framework of analysing the phenomena of merger and faculty level cooperation.

By acknowledging that our research process will be adjusted for more clear focus after the first interview, we could prevent misunderstandings. We modified our interview questions for the next interview with the chair of the work group to better fill in the information gaps noticed after first interview. Keeping the questions in the same themes of merger drivers, work group dynamics and other relevant themes (presented in analysis chapter) we continued to the second interview.

Planning and analysing the interviews included the methodological dilemma of the interviewees being able to be recognized. For both the interviewers and interviewees, it was clear that the research topic being very specific and the interviewed persons in specific roles in the process of civil engineering cooperation and Tampere3 merger, taking part in the interview could expose them as certain individuals. Later, the interviewees are referred to as the Leader, the Professor, and the Student.

In the chapter dealing with case description and data from the interviews, we present the major findings and analyse them through the chosen theoretical framework, namely institutional theory in the discussion part.

Theoretical framework

For analysing and approaching our research focus we chose institutional theory as the framework of the study based on our preliminary findings from the first interview. The chosen framework was then applied in creating the themes and questions for the remaining interviews, and after analysing each interview the chosen framework seemed to fit the purposes of finding the elements of a successful process of inter-organizational co-operation and to better understand what is happening in a big merger process.

Organization as a myth and an institution has been presented by Meyers and Rowan (1977) and it has been developed towards so called the new institutional theory by DiMaggio and Powell in the 80s (1983) and towards more refined contemporary theories, for example institutional logics and institutional agency. We see higher education institutions as complex organizations and systems and that in this institutional fabric there are multiple and diverse institutional elements, logics, and understandings of how and why the institutions work like they do. Many institutional elements restrain or increase agency of the actors in the institution.

Figure 1: Three Pillars of Institutional Theory



To continue, in a case of this massive merger of three universities and their organizational cultures complexity is evident. For this reason, we narrowed our theoretical framework to minimum to gain as clear perspective as possible. For example, in a merger case study of Norgård and Skodvin in Norwegian universities (Norgård & Skodvin, 2002, 76-77), we share the argument that studying change in a complex institutional environment is not sufficient enough with a mere study of formal structure. The use of institutional theory to understand organizational change gives more depth to understanding the reasons of why and how the change happens. As Dacin et al (2002) argue in their article on institutional change: *“Broad environmental changes, including institutional change, create unique challenges for the maintenance of organizational integrity”*, we are interested in these unique institutional settings and institutions’ integrities, seen through the framework of institutional theory.

From the broad field of institutional theories, we are using the category of three different elements (or pillars) of institutional perspective to understanding organization. They are the coercive or regulative element, the normative element and third, the cultural-cognitive element. The first pillar, regulative, focuses on formal rules, enforcements, and sanctions. The second pillar of normative elements is about social agreement and legitimacy and the third pillar refers to institutional actors’ beliefs and values which are embedded in culture, taken-for-granted and more fundamental in nature. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995.) Criticism has been provided in new institutional theories, specifically that the model of pillars is trying to categorize phenomena and elements in tight boxes instead of understanding the complexity of institutions. Scott (2014) has answered that the pillars *“were intended as “analytic”—conceptual tools to enable investigators to identify what ingredients were at work in varying situations while acknowledging that the elements were often combined together—especially in robust institutions.”*

We are looking for shared common understandings and senses (“being in the same boat”), legislative issues related to the process of merging and cooperation (for example governance arrangements and legislation, university administration and rules) and normative and ethical framework of common rules and standards (Dacin et al, 2002). Dacin et al also add an element of technical connection and dependencies on similar types of material resources, but in the context of knowledge-based organizations such as universities we eliminate this element out of our theoretical model in use.

We analyse the information provided as subjective experiences of the three interviewees through this framework. We are using this categorization to group up answers and themes to better understand on how the working group's activities have been successful.

Case description and data

The analysis of the interviews

The study was developed based on three interviews with different stakeholders involved in the work of the working group. The student representative, the academic representative, who is the chair of the working group on Civil Engineering, and Tampere3 merger project leader were interviewed in concession. For simplifying the analysis description, the above-mentioned representatives are addressed as the Student, the Professor, and the Leader. All three interviews shared the following common themes. They are first listed and the analysis of each of the themes is presented in detail afterwards.

- The drivers for this specific merger;
- Organisational structure of the work group;
- The stakeholders involved into the working group and the conflicts;
- Communication within the group and accountability;
- The future organization of the units in terms of administration and faculty;
- Course and common program design;
- Challenges;
- The factors underpinning the success of this particular working group.

The drivers for the merger

The merger was initiated by the universities themselves and was not forced by the government, even though ultimately the process is held accountable to the Ministry of Education. The uniqueness of the merger Tampere3 is in its multi-disciplinarily, not being done in this context before in Finland and the combination of distinct types of universities (Finnish legal entities of research universities: *foundation universities* and *public universities*). *Universities of applied sciences* and *research universities* are steered through different legislation.

As it was an initiative done by the universities, the question on what drove the merger process appeared to be the crucial one to understand the nature of the success of the collaboration of the working groups. The replies to the questions on the rationales behind the merger appeared to be diverse. All interviewees agreed on the major driver, which is to *advance the organisation in terms of research capabilities*, which can have an impact addressing societal challenges. The assumption that the main driver could be the enhancing of the cooperation was not supported by the interviewees, as the cooperation in Civil Engineering had already been on-going for “decades” and was unlikely to be expanded, as communicated by the Professor. However, there is a dispute on the economic reasons for initiating the merger process between the stakeholders. The Leader views the economic prospects of the merger as a subsidiary benefit, while the Professor claims that the fact of reduction of cost and duplication of the programs to save funds is a comprehensive explanation of the on-going merger. Nonetheless, they both agree that the chances to enhance the multidisciplinary research and gain prestige to become competitive, especially on the *international market* of higher education, are the driving forces underlying the entire process.

The common background of TAMK and TUT and the *similarities of the programs* might also be a rationale behind the interest in the merger, according to all participants. All stakeholders bare their expectations regarding this merger process, and they share the belief that this merger will increase the effectiveness in terms of teaching and delivery, will help to attract more international and domestic students and to be competitive in the field.

Organisational structure of the work group and the stakeholders involved

The vice rectors’ work group proposed the idea of subgroups to be organised on the faculty level, however the decision was not influenced by the upper level administration. According to the interviewees, the work group on Civil Engineering was organised on voluntary basis and founded in 2014 for collaboration in Architecture and Design. It was transformed into a new working group dealing with the merging at the faculty level. The co-operation activities merged as of the initiative of the academic staff of Civil Engineering, being an example of bottom-up response to the merger. The stakeholders involved into the group activities comprise the student representatives from TAMK and

TUT, academic representatives from both institutions, the administrative staff representatives, and the industrial linkages.

The conflicts among the stakeholders in the daily cooperation and decision making have not been identified during the interviews, on contrary the interaction among the stakeholders is claimed to be cohesive by the Professor and the Student, and productive by the Leader.

Communication within the Working Group and Accountability

The Professor, as being the group leader, states that the meeting are held on monthly or 2 monthly bases and are based on the agenda proposed and collected by all stakeholders beforehand. The ideas from the stakeholders are documented through working papers. The results of the meetings are not officially posted but communicated to the education group, whom this sub working group is accountable to (preparatory working group B: see previous chapter for detailed description of the merger organization).

According to the interviewees, the communication within the group is *tight and well-developed* due to the long history of cooperation between Civil Engineering faculties of both universities, for example as teacher exchange, but *not explicitly organised*. The hierarchical connection, though, does not seem to be well-organised as well, as the activities and progress of the working groups are not directly coordinated by the upper level administration, as stated by the Leader.

The future organisation of the units in terms of administration and faculty

The questions addressing the future organisational structure of the unit and the faculty remained unanswered due to the lack of awareness of the integration procedures and processes yet by all interviewees. The Leader explained that the administration issues have recently been put on agenda and have not been resolved yet, and they will be under the focus of the preparatory work group on support and administrative services. The subgroup on Civil Engineering is not responsible for discussing the administrative issues, however the Professor sees the unit *not segmented but fully comprehensive*, with common academic staff and administration situated in one campus.

Academic staff *integration of two universities into one is not seen as an obstacle* by the interviewees, as the collaboration and relationships between the staff members of the faculty and professors in both universities has been well established for many years and well-developed.

Course and program design

Co-creation of the common degree program is the main focus of this working group, according to the Professor. The academic staff from both universities designing the common program are engaged into this activity equally. The Student claims that the student body is *fully aware of the process, but is not involved into a detailed development of the curriculum*, in the overall objective settings, ensuring the compatibility and student-oriented approach. The program will be designed to address the needs of both types of universities, offering two tracks with practical and research orientation, with the differentiation in several subjects that could be chosen from the first year of enrolment. As the study program at both universities comprises closely related courses and disciplines and therefore the tension in the program design is not anticipated.

However, this common bachelor's degree program needs to wait for legislative procedures to be in place as now it is impossible to issue the certificates in-between a university of applied sciences and research universities. That does not breed academic resistance to common co-creation as the legislation is expected to be adjusted specifically for this purpose.

Challenges

All stakeholders, interviewed, pointed out the *legislative issues* as the main obstacle for the development of the merger. *Binary system of two university types* in place restricts legal cooperation between the two university types. Nonetheless, it *does not breed the feeling of uncertainty among the stakeholders*, but instead there is a firm belief that the legal status granted to a new emerging university will be able to incorporate all aspects of both types of universities and will not constrain the academic work and student participation of any of the groups. Until the Government sets an eventual law, working groups have found a solution by creating a double-track training to bypass this issue.

On the other hand, administrative issues, directly connected with undecided legal status, have also been raised during the interviews by all participants, including unclear organisational structure and broad understanding of the unit organisation. It is obvious that there is a need for a new IT interface to deal with the registration, day-to-day work, and other administrative issues. The management of the daily processes of the merger between two universities remains undetermined among administrative staff.

Tight scheduling, pointed out by the Leader, presents a challenge. Despite the fact that merger talks started around one and a half year ago, the given time seems very tight for such kind of process to issue. However, the working group have been focusing on what is not affiliated with administrative structural change and therefore it is quite reactive rather than proactive.

The Student sees the *innovativeness* as a challenge, being concerned about applied research orientation of the program. However, other stakeholders do not hold the same view on the innovativeness, saying that the new type of research that will be created will directly contribute to the innovativeness of the new university.

Success

The stakeholders interviewed agree, that the major factors underlying the success of this particular working group and its advanced development at this stage of the merger (ex.: The Leader, the Professor and the Student described this working group as the successful example) are:

- The relationship among the stakeholders (mutual trust and respect, long history of cooperation, open ended communication and feedback, flexibility in terms of program content);
- Bottom up initiative;
- Common field of studies (compatibility of the programs offered by both universities, similarities in content of the programs).

Discussion

Many themes rise from the data of the interviews providing an insight into the institutional environment of the working group. From the point of view of the framework at use, the

themes are discussed and divided in normative, cultural-cognitive, and regulative elements.

Normative pillar

Scott (1995) suggested, that the normative pillar identifies legitimate means which lead to pursuing valued ends. Normative institutional elements, binding expectations and social obligations define the institutional behaviour in resolving internal issues. In the case study of Tampere3 merger, we have highlighted some significant normative aspects that contribute to the success of the merger or act as obstacles on its way to progression.

One of the major tasks of the working group is to develop a more comprehensive study programme which will meet the needs of both students of university of applied sciences and research universities. The working group proposed to develop two different tracks for the two types of students to avoid the legal obstacles caused by the binary system. Nonetheless, both types of students are allowed to study models from either track. Thus, there are some binding expectations from students who belong to both universities towards the establishment and the designing of such study programme to fit their diverse needs.

Concerning the driver behind the creation of the working group itself, the interviews revealed that it was an initiative to forestall the potential challenges of the merger. Acting upon the anticipated complications on volunteer basis, the working group demonstrates the desire to fulfil not only social obligations towards their institution, but also to address the dire needs exceeding this specific case merger. On a larger scale, it is the group's attempt to exercise agency in the contribution to the on-going reforms occurring in the Finnish HE system. Emerging originally as a bottom-up activity, the group illustrates the importance of the involvement of different stakeholders and their interactive agency.

Internal effective communication and cooperation is a major factor behind the working group successful dynamics. However, Scott (1995) explains that roles can also emerge informally as over time through interaction and different expectations can develop to guide the organised behaviour. Thus, it can be recognized that most of the meeting outcomes are not officially communicated or being accountable to the higher-level administration who are directly responsible for the implementation process. This results

in some malfunction procedures that might act as an obstacle for perceiving the consistent objectives of the merger of this study programme in particular. This could refer to a path dependency of institutional actors and a longitudinal research with interviews or questionnaires could reveal more information of the impact of social interaction over time.

Cultural-cognitive pillar

The cultural-cognitive pillar of the institutions, according to Scott (1998), comprises the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made. As Scott suggests, “internal interpretive processes are shaped by “external” cultural frameworks”. One of our findings identified the driver for the merger to be the need to address the future societal challenges. This idea penetrates all levels of engaged stakeholders and can be considered as a cultural identity of the nation to cooperate facing the forthcoming challenges. The working group representatives see this challenge as the main driving force for the merger, feeling individually responsible to actively participate in responding to societal needs and demands of the future society.

To be more effective in program delivery, training and research can also be interpreted as shared understanding between the parties involved, and according to the interviewees the idea is not dictated by the universities or the government, but is a mutual understanding of the merger process. Both universities involved in the merger have shared logics of effectiveness in action, which can be found in the activities of the working group naturally, without explicitly stating it (specifically in mentions referring to the human resources and infrastructural resources). Dependency on resources seems to be a strong belief as all parties are inclined to reduce the transaction costs. At the same time, the belief, that duplication of programme offers (e.g. similar programmes in Civil Engineering present simultaneously in both TAMK and TUT) might have a negative correlation to productivity, has persisted in the academia of TUT from the very beginning of the co-operation practices between these two institutions.

In terms of organisational structure, the long history of cooperation dictates the atmosphere within the working group and the view of the stakeholders of the group at the post-merger organisation of the unit. The physical proximity of two universities, their tight collaboration in research and well-established personal communication underlies the

behaviour of openness and positive communication patterns. The parties take for granted the communication patterns, meaning that the understanding the effects of these communication patterns are quite obscure, resembles orthodox logic, meaning that the things are done because they should be done without questioning them (the stakeholders hold same view on the communication patterns within the group). The cooperation was established at the university level between these two universities “decades ago” (more information: The Professor, the Leader interviews) and is now ingrained into the activities of both universities on the cultural level.

The course design and program development cooperation among stakeholders, especially involving the students into this process, can be seen through cognitive lens as well. The student unions play a very influential role in Finnish higher education development and their participation in decision making is embedded into the cultural perception of the university life. Creating the awareness about the process of common program development among students and actively involve them into this process is not dictated by the government or by the institution itself, more of the shared perception of the student as the core of the university and its activities, therefore can be referred to a mimetic (cognitive) pillar.

Regulative (coercive) pillar

From the perspective of the regulative pillar, we identified 5 different topics named “*international market* (government regulation)”, “*course design* (EU level regulation)”, and ‘*challenges*’ into three sub-categories “*binary system legislation, tight schedule and administration* (government regulation)”.

As Scott stated (1995), “in this conception, regulatory processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect others’ conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions - rewards or punishments - in an attempt to influence future behaviour.” The coercive elements in the institutional environment of our research focus vary and situate on many levels. There does not seem to be any regulative obstacles on the Civil Engineering discipline’s institutional level, and this could be interpreted as one of the factors of success in cooperation and merging. The interviewees tell of a situation “in wait”: they act in the institution to the fullest, agency-wise, and leave regulative elements

to the “upper” organizational and institutional levels, mainly merger organization level, universities’ administration and national level.

According to the legislation of Finland, it is not legally possible to give any (joint) degree from a consortium of a university and a university of applied sciences. The legal obstacles are related to the fact that the degrees and their curricula can comprise only of studies undertaken in the higher education institution which approves the degrees. Tampere3 is aiming to tackle this challenge, yet, the permanent solution depends on the decision of the government. Answering to the debate, the working group has found a solution by creating a double-track training until the government sets an eventual law.

Another way to see coercive elements in the work group’s institutional environment is looking through its formal mission, structure, and rules. The background of creating the work groups to prepare the Tampere3 merger and cooperation between the merging universities are on a loose coercive basis: some of the work groups have self-emerged and some of them are established with top-down principle. Even though the interviews revealed the cooperation in the field of Civil Engineering to have emerged as bottom-up, the work group on Civil Engineering was officially established in the merger process as top-down by the preparatory work group B which again is accountable to a vice rector’s work group. This loosely-coupled system could be stated as typical for Finnish universities (and HEIs) in general and made possible for the Civil Engineering work group to work without institutional constraints from above. This loosely-coupled institutional base for the merger operative level and the work groups was supported by the Leader’s statements.

In a broader view, regulative elements can be seen from as far as EU level trends and agenda of encouraging students and other stakeholders to take part in organizational activities and in this case inter-organizational cooperation between faculties and merger itself. Many coercive elements affect the institutions in the merger, and one could analyse that loose organization level regulations in addition to the international and national recommendations of the participation of students and the staff in organisational cooperation activities have been making the bottom-up initiative and approach a success.

One last remark upon the regulative pillar, that the punishment is indirect in this specific case. Although the process was initiated by the rector of University of Tampere, the deadline and goal for the merger to take place was set by the Government. If the merger were to be successful, Tampere3 is hoping for a strategic fund as a reward, which encourages the stakeholders to meet the expectations within the given time.

Conclusion and recommendations

Closely related disciplines or even the same disciplines in different HEIs should be encouraged for staff exchange in terms of increased involvement of the different academic cultures. In the case of the cooperation of Civil Engineering faculties during the Tampere3 merger, this seems to have been a reliable basis for continuing, bottom-up emerged and goal-aimed new collaborative organization of civil engineering degree program. The cultural similarities, more specifically in the institutional pillars of normative and cultural-cognitive elements, in the faculties of Civil Engineering in TAMK and TUT seem to be strong. A long history in terms of collaboration and the individual-based connections between the faculties have made the merging process faster and smoother. The discipline shares a mutual understanding, goals and duties for a bottom-up approach and initiative to institutional change.

The merger is commanded and scheduled in some issues very strongly by the ministry as the ministry is the source of funding. For example, the tight schedule of creating the legal entity, planned for August 2017, and the time of the actual merging, planned to happen in 1.1.2018, derive from the impact of strategic funding possibility from the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is noteworthy, that at the time of the publication of the article in 2017, the tight schedule set by the Ministry did not take place in expected time span. These regulative institutional elements of a promised or expected reward affected the merger process and decisions taken in it, even if it was not sure if they will happen or not. It would be of continuing interest to study the effect of regulations, rewards, and sanctions on merger processes. The complexity of the legal and administrative constraints to the merger and the uncertainty of their resolution have a deep political and democratic role for the university communities.

A conclusive interpretation of success can be made on the perspective of organizing a merger: discipline level bottom-up initiatives create a healthy environment for

cooperation and development and to boost dynamics of cooperation. From the point of view of administration, institutional agency and trust should be given to the discipline level, and only after the new institutional discourse emerging bottom-up from the discipline (as a solution, proposal, report, opinion, or logics), the administration, self-aware, should and can react. This is supported by the Leader's interview, in which the Leader says that some of the working groups emerged from faculties' initiatives after establishing four exemplary work groups.

In as complex institutional change situations as university mergers, our recommendation is for the merger leaders to spend time understanding the bottom-level social interaction, especially over time. Without studying and learning the differing institutional elements restraining or enabling various parts of the universities or faculties, it is hard to make sense what makes merger processes successful and what causes challenges.

The main limitation of this case study and the findings presented in the paper is the scope of the interviews involved into the analysis. The stakeholder views could have been better analysed and compared if more individual interviews had been held, specifically the ones from the student body of the universities directly involved into the merging process (TUT and TAMK).

The merger of Tampere3 is a complex context of institutional and organizational change. Many different approaches and study perspectives could be used, and many different and unique parts and points of academic interest can be found in the merger process. Decision to frame this institutional context with simplified version of the institutional theory, namely the pillars of institutional elements, revealed information that otherwise could have been missed. It offered a broader view of the Civil Engineering working group success, and provided an analytical tool to study an ongoing university merger process.

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