

**FORMATION and
COMPETENCE BUILDING
of UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS**



The critical-constructive potential of academic development: A case study

Ester Fremstad, University of Oslo
Kristin Ewins, Örebro University



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



Why this study

Empirical backdrop

Study from 2016 (2019)

New realities

Theoretical backdrop

Research on the role(s) and responsibilities of
academic developers

Empirical material

- Official and unofficial documents related to the process of transforming the ADU under study from the time period 2017-2020/21
- Interviews with the leader of the unit (2016 and 2021)

Two researchers

Insider:

The leader of the unit

Outsider:

Researcher and academic developer from different institutional and national context

(Dwyer and Buckle 2009, Trowler 2011, Hanson 2013)

| From administrative unit (2013) | To university-wide centre (2021) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Peripheral | Central |
| Top-down vertical brokering | Vertical and horizontal brokering |
| Operative | Strategic |
| Reactive | Proactive |
| Specialized | Integrated |
| Admin-focused | Research-based |
| Iterational | Projective |
| Technical | Educational |

Analytical framework

Agency

Emirbayer & Mische 1998

‘a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its **‘iterational’** or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a **‘projective’ capacity** to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a **‘practical-evaluative’ capacity** to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (962)

Practical reasoning

Colby & Sullivan 2008

Three apprenticeships:

1. **Theoretical** reasoning and research-based knowledge
2. ‘The craft **know-how** that marks expert practitioners of the domain’ (409)
3. Considerations of ‘the **ethical** standards, social roles and responsibilities of the profession, grounded in the profession’s fundamental purposes’ (409)

Main findings

Three themes emerge as central for understanding the development of the AD unit at Örebro University:

1. The interrelation between agency and structure

Institutional integration, maturation, investment, legitimacy, and the unit's place within the organisation

2. A collegial orientation and a collective epistemic basis

Shared repertoire: all three apprenticeships

3. A focus on higher education as and for public good

Purpose based projectivity: integrative and driving force

What we see is

- a holistic and integrative approach to academic development
- a unit that displays an agentic position(ing),
- wheeled by *projective* images of potential futures which are
- based on considerations of broader purposes and responsibilities of higher education institutions,
- and on envisioned, research- and experience-based projective images of the contribution and responsibilities of ADs

Discussion

- What kind of responsibility does academic developers have to proactively and projectively contribute to critical-constructive dialogue and deliberation on how higher education may contribute to public good?
- What kind of praxis would that entail?