

RESILIENCE FOR INNOVATION PROJECTS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to initiate a discussion about the procedures that are increasingly used in calls for innovation projects in the Danish education sector. The ultimate goal is to minimize an identified gap between the calls for projects and the actual practice in education.

A wide range of relevant themes is treated in a concentrated manner through research literature and contemporary project approaches. Qualitative data from a validation of the findings by project experts are added, as well as extracts from the author's comprehensive data collection on project practice.

The paper outlines barriers and some wicked problems in the application processes of innovation projects in the education sector. It identifies a gap between the rationales behind the calls for projects on one side, and applicants for projects on the other. It is described, how policy and strategy can become unintelligible through micromanagement. It also explains the danger of missing innovative project ideas, as well as the danger of using unrealistic evaluation methods for authentic educational results.

It is shown that the calls' steering rationale has won dominance in the gap, and it has become apparent that the unequal balance of power has led to some inappropriate response modes from the applicants, which seems to further reinforce both the gap and the wicked problems.

All this has led to the insight that there is a need for a project didactics that takes regard to the characteristics of the education sector and, in this context, to the driving forces of the teachers, counsellors, trainers, or social workers as the innovators.

As a result, the paper has emphasized possible aspects for a resilience-oriented project didactics, which can focus, for example, on agility and an inclusive participative approach to project members. This approach requires profound trust-building and its consequent practice on an inter-personal level, on a project-organizational level, and even on a cross-organizational level.

1 INTRODUCTION – PROJECTS AS INNOVATION DRIVERS FOR EDUCATION

The paper discusses settings and mechanisms for innovation projects in Denmark, while also incorporating aspects from European projects.

Projects in general are *“temporary initiatives whose goal is to change something for the better”*, according to influential project expert Glowasz [12]. However, *“no project is an island”* and every project is linked to the context, in which it takes place – including history and culture, purposes, barriers, and opportunities [12].

The focus of this paper is on innovation projects in the education sector, which can be powerful spearheads for pedagogical, didactic, and systemic development, regardless of the educational level or vocational field. These projects can innovate teaching, lead to new ways of cooperating, new work processes, or new organizational structures, and they can influence the ordinances or the educational system, such as by translating emerging technologies or commercial state-of-the-art processes to new formal educational settings.

These projects often take place cross-organizationally with several education institutions and possibly other types of partners, to achieve benchmarking, mutual inspiration, or a broader dissemination. In European projects, it is not unusual to have involved partners from four or more countries. The partner organizations are typically practice-based education institutions, such as vocational colleges, other higher and lower secondary schools, and universities, but also municipal departments with their youth centres or more specialized institutions can have crucial roles.

Innovation projects in this sector encompass a wide range of initiatives, and over the last few decades, the significance of these projects has become increasingly apparent, along with the growing complexity and rapid development in society. Projects represent, according to Glowasc, *“the business of change”*,

with project management as an “*essential discipline in today’s age of frequent disruption, turbulence and fast-changing messages*” [13]. The need for innovation through projects becomes especially urgent when vocational colleges, academies and universities educate their students for a labour market, where the future job profiles may not even yet exist or are undergoing massive changes.

The overall focus of innovation projects in the education sector is their intended final impact on learners and, therefore, on the competencies of teachers, trainers, managers, and the supportiveness of the systems around them. This makes a crucial difference from most projects in other sectors. In education and related fields, such as guidance, in-company training or social support, projects are essentially about human development processes – an intangible and turbulent arena to navigate.

Professional project management is influenced by sectors with a traditionally strong use of projects, such as in construction, ICT, military, architecture and design, but also policy and strategy implementation in companies and public bodies. In addition, a certain inflation of the term ‘project’ can be observed, and both dilution and overuse of the term is apparent.

2 METHODOLOGY – REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE

2.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the paper is to initiate a discussion about the appropriateness of the procedures used in many calls for innovation projects in the education sector. These procedures include the application templates, assessments of the applications, the mandatory evaluation methods, and, most importantly, the approach to the applicants. Conversely, the attitudes of applicants are also considered as their different ways of relating to the formalities and the procedures.

The aim is to minimize the gap between the calls for the projects, and the pedagogical, didactic, and educational needs and practice in projects. The discussion could include many other aspects with relevance for a more transparent and promotable interaction. These could include the influence of the systems around, given work conditions, regulations and laws, governmental financial priorities, among others. While these conditions should be acknowledged, there is still a room for decisions and actions. It is this room that is the focus of this paper.

Thus, the paper reflects on the following research questions, offers points and findings for further reflection, and, possibly, action.

- What are the barriers and the rationales in project application processes that cause frustration, wasted project opportunities, and questionable project results?
- Which alternatives can be thought of for more appropriate project application processes, considering present practice and possibly new approaches to projects?

2.2 Theories

The paper aims to open a discussion and covers an intentionally wide range of relevant themes in a concentrated manner, rather than delving deeply into a specific aspect.

The contemporary project approach is briefly summarized with references to literature on project management. Among the notable project researchers and experts are:

- Danish Jan Pries-Heje on project multiplicity and agility from Roskilde University Centre [9, 10],
- Swiss Benno Jenny on projects for the purpose of strategy implementation [3],
- Danish Peter Dahler-Larsen on evaluation of projects [16], as well as Swiss Marcus Glowasz on leading projects with data [13], and finally,
- Austrian Nachgabauer with research on resilient project management [1].

Danish Søren Obed Madsen’s use of translation theory was applied as a lens for understanding different ways of strategy implementation [19].

When resilience was indicated as a critical need to bridge the gap between call owners and applicants, and more fundamentally, for strengthening funded innovation projects in education, Michael Ungar’s Canadian volume on resilience at different levels from different scholars was consulted [14]. Trust-building was considered a closely related and important component for both resilience and well-being.

In this regard, Yann Algan's contribution to the OECD's chapters on well-being could provide perspectives [21].

2.3 Data

The paper uses qualitative data, collected by the author during the daily professional work with educational innovation projects in Denmark and other European countries. The experiences over two decades cover to a minor extent local project management, and to a major extent cross-organizational project management in broad geographic areas, as well as portfolio and program management with dozens of projects simultaneously. The experiences also include forming calls for call owners, assessing applications, and evaluating project reports. Over the decades, hundreds of local project managers have had a decisive influence in these projects, with several thousands of project members enrolled and tens of thousands end-users participating.

Many project-management approaches can lead to the same goal, as project management is a discipline of multiplicity [9]. Thus, the paper does not point specifically at preferred project models or methods, but benefits from insight provided through dialogues with call owners, project assessors, project managers, and practitioners in project-related situations. These dialogues are supplemented with observations and considerations before and during the funded projects.

Lamscheck-Nielsen has been taking notes of quotes, observations, and insights since her master thesis in project management on sustainable project results in 2011 [24]. This comprehensive data collection is thematically organized and contributes in daily practice to exchanges in project-professional settings as well as to the design of programs and projects.

For the purpose of this paper the data collection has been used to elaborate on an illustration of the interaction between call owners and applicants (fig. 1) and draft a categorization of project applicants' reactions to the given procedures in calls for projects (fig. 2).

The interim and final findings have been validated by 5 highly experienced experts, managers, and researchers from different organizations in education and project management during spring 2023. Several of them have been part of some recent challenging large-scale projects, such as a portfolio of projects for the implementation of emerging technologies in education. Their contributions were taken into account by adding aspects and modifying findings. Extracts from the dialogues are added as illustrating quotes.

3 WICKED PROBLEMS

Over the years, certain problem patterns have arisen in the given field. In the following, a few of the well-known frustrations and problems are outlined as possible triggers for the way calls for projects are formed these days.

3.1 Non-sustainability, project industry, inequality, and more

Firstly, a lack of sustainability has been identified, regarding the continued use of project results - despite great results and often high immediate interest. A culture analysis of the education sector [23] showed that Danish teachers, counsellors, social workers, and their middle managers are strongly driven by personal commitment to their target group – the learners and their progression. It seems that this approach demands the urge for personal ownership of innovation, rather than a possibly more efficient transfer of others' innovation. The Danish structures for students' individual learning processes support this approach, while resource cuttings over the last decade (2 pct. per year) and new laws have brought a demand for increased sharing and a higher effectiveness of innovation.

Secondly, in some areas, a 'project industry' seems to have distorted more genuine objectives for improving education and training. The European Erasmus program observes more and more small consultancy firms that deliver highly professional applications for projects in consortia across Europe, but rarely rooted in mainstream education. In Denmark, it is a trend among education institutions to arm their organizations with a department for project management to professionalize their approach to projects and to increase the chances for approval of their applications. As a consequence, the rise of local 'project industries' can be observed, with a risk of overbooking local capacity and the top-performing practitioners in the schools. In these cases, real engagement in projects can only occur with difficulty, and the deliveries can be doubtful or stressful for the allocated project members.

Thirdly it has become clear that project-based development does not necessarily benefit educational institutions equally. Those institutions that have managed to professionalize their project management, have been able to receive more grants, which has further benefited their project practice, brought gainful contacts, and professionalized their project management even more. Typically, smaller colleges or schools are rarely represented among them.

Others could be mentioned, and some should be examined beyond the limitations of this paper.

Thus, it would be very relevant to analyse the yet unclear final impact of innovation projects on educational practice in total. A former manager for a department of international projects at a trade-specific college (2023): *“The real challenge is to align project work with the absolutely necessary renewal of our educational programs.”* The manager assumes *“a certain basic conservatism at most of the educational institutions”*. This reluctance to change educational practice would be worth exploring from, for example, different perspectives on “resistance to change” and “change management” [8], [18].

Neither does the paper relate to the calls for projects as a business field in Denmark and the call owners’ motives behind, although awareness has risen to the growing influence of the major private funds with their immense financial resources.

Instead, the paper has its focus on the present counteraction from the call owners and the project applicants, as well as the schism caused by that.

3.2 Present counteraction

To counteract these issues, public and commercial calls for innovation projects increasingly come with rigid forms that aim to increase professionalism among applicants in areas such as time management, resource allocation, and impact on target groups. These forms seem to have been inspired by project models and project certification concepts that are rooted in the traditional “waterfall model” [4], which operates according to a high degree of predictability and controllability.

Many resources are spent by the call owners on further developing their own procedures. As a result, detailed requirements can be stated, pre-qualification processes with all applicants, or mandatory merges of smaller projects into larger applications. Some concepts involve the demand for specific communication methods, such as ‘idea papers’, ‘elevator speeches’, or ‘one-pagers’. In an attempt to allocate grants to necessary and realistic projects, call owners try to minimize their risk for malinvestment by requiring retrospective ‘evidence’ from applicants, which ideally includes figures that point at a probable future profit.

Meanwhile, new project management insights have come up over the last few decades, taking into account the high complexity and variability of contexts as education and training, as well as cross-organizational and international cooperation. Project research has confirmed that complex projects cannot be completely planned [1]. Nachgabauer refers to a range of researchers, when stressing that planning must be a permanent task and that it offers only preliminary answers that must be specified and adapted during the rollout [ibid].

Accordingly, new project approaches have been conceptualized. Examples of contemporary approaches include agility [10], adaptivity, situational, and systemic project management [5, 15], as well as the inclusive participation of project members and end users [11]. Design Thinking [7] and Scenario Planning [20] offer interesting methods to these approaches from a prospective perspective, to name just a few ones from the many possibilities [3]. However, overall, these concepts or other new approaches do not seem to have achieved decisive influence in calls for projects.

However, the European Erasmus program is interesting with its declared intention of transparency and justice. A more free-setting approach was recently targeted, when implementing the “lump sum” model in 2022 for less detailed steering of expenses. However, the model came with an even more detailed application form that made some highly experienced project managers as well as assessors accentuate the immense extent and confusing sections of the new template.

Evaluators engaged by call owners apply often equally rigid evaluation methods. In Denmark, some dominant methods vary only slightly, titled with similar expressions such as “change theory”, “impact chain”, or “input theory” [own translations]. Conveniently, these methods offer easily understandable quantitative key figures to present to decision-makers. The promoters and providers are major private consultancy agencies and evaluation institutes.

Critical voices point to the unrealistic linear logic behind these methods, with an intended strictly causal progression with expected simultaneous development of the end-users involved. These methods rarely take into account highly diverse learning processes, differentiated teaching methods, individual human development, and, in many cases the need for a long-term perspective.

A middle manager for guidance counselling in a large municipality says: *“For me, it’s plausible that the given challenges for the project and the [evaluation, ed.] methods should match.”* [...] *“NPM [New Public Management, ed.] has led to extremely bad conditions for succeeding with projects for the intended change. Generalists without insight in our field elaborate business and investment cases, which I as a manager must relate to. It is scandalous, how far away these cases are from the real work with citizens.”*

A frequently heard logic over the recent years from call managers and their administrators is, *“Which medicine will you give your students in order to achieve the intended result?”* Results can, for example, mean better reading and writing, less drop-out, or higher motivation for ICT education. This logic may be a tempting way to reduce complexity and require a simple measurement. However, for good reasons, pedagogy and teaching have changed rather radically some decades ago, away from the industrial concept of one-size-fits-all with students as passive receivers of knowledge. The competence-based approach includes self-responsible, reflected, and action-oriented learning (The Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science). For these good reasons, individual learning processes are rather unpredictable, and they do hardly take place simultaneously with others’ individual learning processes.

3.3 Wicked problems

The outlined examples on handling application procedures do not seem to have led to satisfying solutions. In the complexity of the given scenario, both applicants and call owners seem to be caught in a certain wickedness, reinforcing the problems.

With reference to Rittel et al. [6], the Austin Center for Design defines wickedness: *“A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that’s difficult or impossible to solve because of its complex and interconnected nature. Wicked problems lack clarity in both their aims and solutions, and are subject to real-world constraints which hinder risk-free attempts to find a solution.”*

Rittel was one of the first to research wicked problems. He and his fellow researchers concluded that solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but can be better or worse. Rittel also underlined the uniqueness of each problem. The researchers found that there is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem. Instead, they pointed to inquiries of the rationales behind the problems. This approach is taken into account in the following.

4 RATIONALES IN PROJECT APPLICATION PROCESSES

Calls for project proposals are made to implement policy or strategies in practices that are difficult to influence through direct means. These calls come with funding, whether it is public or private, and have become an important source of income for Danish educational institutions that have been financially under pressure for years. Projects are also important for providing a free space for innovation exploration, which typically exceeds the scope for busy daily operations.

However, there are usually more applicants than approvals, and competition can be intensive. As a result, the balance of power between the call owner and the applicant is not equal. Applicants are dependent on positive recognition of their proposal, which can lead to their tolerance and adherence to procedures that match the call owners’ rationale but may not be meaningful or even counterproductive for practice, as outlined in the section “Wicked problems”.

Nevertheless, this schism can be examined from both sides and balanced to the advantage for both parties. Many applicants seem to overlook the fact that their performance can have a major value not only for their end users but also for the call owners. High project performance comes from a professionalism that refines genuine practice, transforms ambitions into action, has the courage to fail, and does not ignore barriers [3], [13]. Both public and private calls depend on good results to showcase to their decision-makers. Therefore, good results usually follow high performance from the applicants, this can be the applicants’ own capital to bring in.

Fig. 1 below aims to illustrate the different rationales behind the outlined schism. Ideally, the figure can prompt reflection on process and procedure improvement on the one hand, such as the application form, mutual dialogues, and evaluations. Simultaneously, the illustration may encourage applicants to communicate and act authentically on their needs, visions, and local potentials.

It is the intention of the paper that the illustration, or other descriptions of the rationales behind application processes, can increase mutual understanding between call owners and applicants.

The transition between the rationales of the parties involved in a project is often unclear and fluid. Both sides require translations.

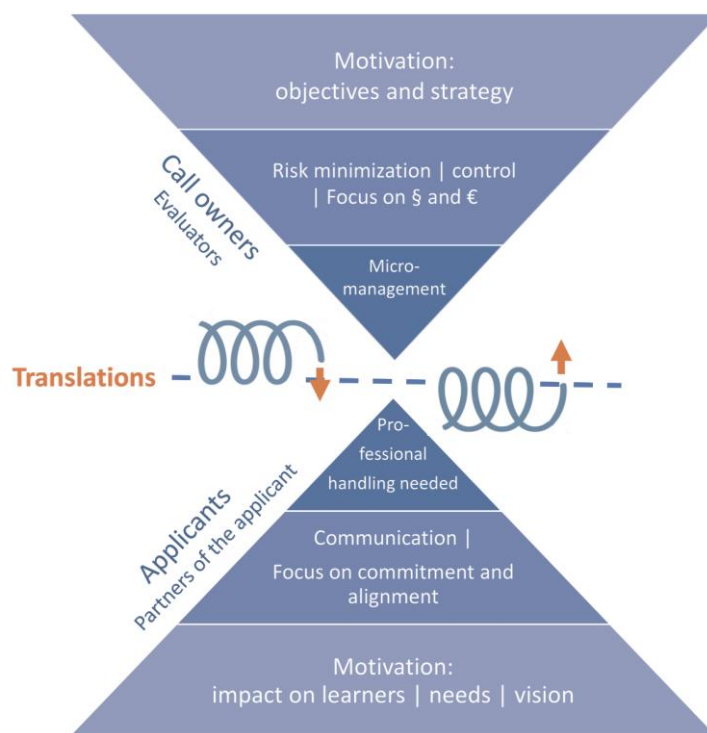


Fig. 1: Rationales in project application processes (Lamscheck-Nielsen, 2023)

Danish ass. prof. Søren Obed Madsen has conducted research on the translation of strategies into practice and the pitfalls that arise in this context [19]. Obed Madsen emphasizes that strategies, in general, are not neutral and will change people and processes. This leads to discussions about, how uniform a strategy should be understood, how static or adaptable a given strategy is, and how strategy can be aligned with daily practice, possibly through mutual influence.

Furthermore, Obed Madsen outlines possible ways to interpret strategies. Firstly, as a plan, secondly as a process, or thirdly as a text. If a strategy is interpreted more as a plan, its implementation fits more hierarchical organizations with a univocal approach, and managers make the decisions. If the strategy is interpreted more as a process, there is an arena for negotiations with a multivocal approach. If the strategy is interpreted more as a text, the translator(s) will have a decisive influence.

In the context of this paper's theme, there seems to be a tendency towards dictating a plan for interpreting the strategy by demanding how to elaborate an application. This has a crucial influence on how a project is realized. Translation of the strategy and the interpretation from the translators can come into play when professional experts get involved to bridge the gap between call and education practice.

The current approach has clear disadvantages, not only for the applicants but also for the call owners themselves, as well as for the final target groups. Most importantly, the most rigid forms and procedures exclude a differentiated work with highly individual and unpredictable complex development processes of learners. Such projects are unlikely to meet the calls' rigid requirements for documentation and predictability. Other projects that hardly can hit the sight disc are explorative projects with their own methods and yet inexplicable results.

The paper at hand cannot offer final solutions, but its framework may promote awareness of the choices made in different calls by the call owners as well as by the applicants. Transparency should be a matter of course for call owners, whose strategies often refer to ethics in many ways, as well as for educational institutions, where reflection on choices and raising critical voices are core business.

5 COUNTERACTION FROM PRACTICE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

In the following, a drafted categorization describes project practitioners' ways of navigating in the wickedness as outlined. Most experienced headmasters, middle managers, and educational consultants are very aware of the gap and unequal power balance. They have found different ways to react and act on the schism they encounter when applying for a project.

The categorization is not based on a representative survey but meant to be indicative. Apart from this, the categorization has been validated by 5 highly experienced different experts and managers in different organizations during the spring of 2023. The categories are explained briefly one by one.



Fig. 2: Reaction modes on application procedures, Lamscheck-Nielsen (2023)

'Giving up': Facing inextricable templates and requirements in calls, or having experienced unconquerable administrative requirements, possible applicants can give up a call beforehand. A local project manager, after the successful, but highly work-intensive and resource-consuming participation in a major European Social Fund project (ended 2022), said: *"We had a great project, a great partnership, and we will keep working with the new approach. But we shall not participate in such a project again. This exceeds our daily operations by far. The time registrations are far too detailed and do not make sense at all, and everything is about mistrust. We are nervous about making mistakes. This overshadows everything. And essentially, we only want to work for the best of our young people."*

'Humble approach' and *'Delivery over all'* are two related ways to manage the schism. In both cases, the applicants try to perform at their best according to the given forms and procedures. But while applicants with a 'humble approach' believe in the call's concept and consider it meaningful, the 'delivery over all' comes from experts in handling this kind of concept. They form a project fully according to the given objectives and the call owner's preferences. Local fundraiser at a medium-sized vocational college (2023): *"We use the right buzzwords and give them strictly what they want to have"*. Evaluations are undertaken loyally due the evaluators' requirements, without questioning meaning or realism.

'Pick & play' and *'Hidden disobedience'* have similarities, too. In both cases, the practitioners act from a more distanced point of view. *'Pick & play'* is a superior, consciously accepting way of target-orientally using specific elements from the application forms or the evaluation methods. Thus, it can perfectly make sense to apply a GANTT plan or to quantify qualitative evaluation results if the methods fit the character of their project.

It is slightly different, when applicants handle their dilemma in a grey zone as a mild version of 'disobedience'. Expressed by a schoolmaster at a vocational college in the periphery of Denmark (2022): *"We need these projects and cannot effort bad will from [...]. So, I tell them what they want to hear, and once we have the approval, we work according to our needs. The evaluation is a farce, only made to please the evaluators and the politicians. We must undertake evaluations ourselves to get usable conclusions and real feedback to our teachers."*

'Open dialogue' between call owner and applicant is practiced rarely, in the sense of a trustful and critical constructive interaction that can lead to insights and adjustments for *both* sides. However, many or most calls offer dialogue with their officials in charge for informative purposes, and especially some of the private funds offer facilitation during the application process and even involvement during a project. Informally, also public call owners can be highly interested in mind-shifting impulses from their applicants.

A percentage distribution among these categories cannot be made, but there seems to be a tendency towards professionalization among applicants with *'Delivery over all'* and *'Pick & play'*. Professional specialists or consultants, whether they are self-dependent or employed at the educational institutions, are increasingly involved in the design of projects and in the writing of applications. Former senior consultant at a small vocational college (2022): *"We simply don't have the resources for elaborating major time-consuming applications, and we do not speak the language [terms and expressions in the application forms, ed.]. We must ally with experts on that."*

6 RESILIENCE AND TRUST

The paper aims to explore ways to align calls for innovation projects with educational practice. This requires openness to new project didactics that may not necessarily match the calls' steering rationale and may demand a new level of project professionalism from educational practitioners.

The different needs to strengthen the entire set-up have led to an examination of resilience as a possible crucial pillar in a new project didactics. In this context, resilience goes beyond the need for classical risk management. According to recent project research [1], risks and uncertainty cannot be managed to foresee and deal with disruptive changes in complex projects.

6.1 Resilience

Resilience needs to be addressed in educational innovation projects, which often consist of cross-organizational consortia, can have a duration of several years, and must navigate in complex societal, political, and commercial environments.

Resilience refers to Latin "resilire", meaning rebound or recoil (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 10th Ed.). Resilience plays a role in many fields, such as in engineering for features of materials, in computer science for networks, and in social sciences for communities. At a global level, 'resilient societies' are supportive of promoting sustainability [26]. In education and counselling, resilience is typically associated with individual characteristics and the ability to recover after having experienced pushback, with recent awareness that individual resilience is influenced by the context and can be enhanced [14].

For the purpose of this paper, resilience is understood as "*the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change [...]*", with reference to Folke, 2016, in Ungar [14].

Project managers, project owners, crucial stakeholders, and call owners should be aware that they *together* form a social system whose joint task is to make projects thrive while realizing strategic goals. This multisystemic approach can result in new 'project didactics'.

The term 'didactics' is usually linked directly to teaching but can be transferred to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning processes in general. As projects certainly can be considered frameworks for learning processes, the education sector can seek inspiration from its own profound and varied expertise in didactics.

The need for project resilience regards several levels. New didactics should be explored relating concretely to

- a) Organizational and cross-organizational level,
- b) Project team level, and
- c) Individual project member level.

On the *organizational level*, a resilience-oriented project didactics can possibly benefit from inspiration of more contemporary project approaches, as briefly mentioned in section 3.2. Resilience-didactic projects can become frameworks for promoting agility, which allows for adaptations to new insights during a project. As indicative of resilience, meaning-making can be strengthened by reinventing administrative procedures to sense-making processes in practice, and self-determining evaluation methods whose results can contribute to local further development.

On the *team level*, user participation can be promoted by involving practitioners in crucial decisions before and during a project. Resilience-supportive field methods for team meetings, idea generation or co-creation should be identified. There is rich material on team communication in agile projects [3] and in learning organizations [17]. Other inspiration can, with a high probability, be found in the institutions' pedagogical practice, where the promotion of mutual trust and team spirit is daily business.

On the individual level, projects can benefit both from practitioners' enthusiasm and their skepticism, as well as from their interaction with the end-users. Their individual needs should be taken into account, as well as their work conditions as a project-limiting or project-promoting framework.

In any case, the call owners should ensure that it can become possible for resilient-didactic project proposals to match the calls for projects.

6.2 Trust

There appears to be a close connection between resilience and trust. Nachgabauer [1] cites Kutsch et al. (2016) in stating that *“the resilience of a project is based on acceptance of risks and uncertainty, and readiness for continuous learning”*. The researcher links uncertainty management to the need for *“for trust building, sense-making, organizational learning, and an appropriate organizational culture”* (with reference to Atkinson et al., 2006).

Trust is identified as an important component of social capital [21], which is broadly defined by the OECD *“as the set of shared norms and values that contribute to well-being”* (2013). As an ultimate consequence, resilience can strengthen well-being, according to McCalman et al, 2021, in Ungar [14] and probably make project members perform and drive change.

Trust is essential in vibrant and often turbulent environments that almost always depend on practitioners' individual performance. Teaching, guidance, and social work rely on personal responsibility from professionals. This requires an organizational social capital with trust in practitioners' own choices [21].

Researchers argue that organizational resilience encompasses trust in a high degree of freedom *“at the shop floor level and at team level”*, allowing for quicker decisions and self-determined choices [1].

In principle, innovation projects in the education sector come with a strong motivation, as the producing practitioners are personally driven by achieving progression for their learners [23]. This motivation can be a valuable performance driver in projects and for dissemination of the results if supported purposeful. If not, it can easily be weakened or destroyed.

Transferred to a resilience-didactics for projects, trust-building should be incorporated and practiced consistently on an inter-personal level, on a project-organizational level, and even on a cross-organizational level. Finally, when trust is given, courage can arise – which actually makes an excellent platform for innovation.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The purpose of the paper was to initiate a discussion about the procedures that are increasingly used in calls for innovation projects in the education sector. The ultimate goal is to minimize the gap between the calls for projects and the actual practice in education.

For the given purpose, a wide range of relevant themes were treated in an intentionally concentrated manner through research literature and contemporary project approaches. Qualitative data from a recent validation of the findings by Danish project experts were added, and extracts from the author's comprehensive project practice have been incorporated from data collected over more than a decade.

The paper has outlined barriers and some wicked problems in the application processes of innovation projects in the education sector. It has identified and illustrated a gap between the rationales behind the calls for projects on one side, and applicants for projects on the other. The paper describes, how policy and strategy can become unintelligible and hardly operationalized through micromanagement. It also explains the danger of missing innovative and important project ideas, as well as the danger of increasing the gap by using unrealistic evaluation methods for authentic educational results.

The paper has shown that the calls' steering rationale has won dominance in the outlined gap, possibly as a way to counteract the wicked problems. It became apparent that the unequal balance of power has led to several inappropriate response modes from the applicants, which seems to further reinforce both the gap and the wicked problems.

Considerations about the response modes have led to the insight that there is a need for a project didactics that takes regard to the characteristics of the education sector and, in this context, to the innovators. Both the driving forces of the teachers, counsellors, trainers, or social workers, and their work conditions should be taken into account.

As a result, the paper has emphasized possible aspects for a resilience-oriented project didactics, which can focus, for example, on a project design with agility to adapt to findings coming up during project work, and an inclusive participative approach to project members. This approach requires profound trust-building and its consequent practice on an inter-personal level, on a project-organizational level, and even on a cross-organizational level. Finally, when trust is given, courage can arise – which actually makes an excellent platform for innovation.

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