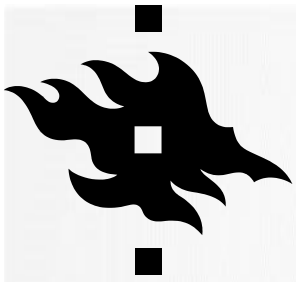# CREATING EXPERIENCES OF HIGH QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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University of Helsinki & University of the Arts Helsinki

BRIEF INTRO TO THE WORKSHOP

What will you get from this workshop?

- Practical advice on effective ways to create experiences of high quality in higher education through learning about…

  - *6 organisational behaviors* in higher education that may be directly targeted in order to create experiences of higher quality

- A case example of how these behaviors can look in practice

- Reflection and discussion on how this could look in your organisation
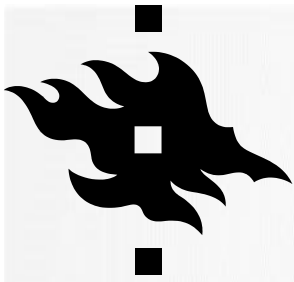
BRIEF INTRO TO THE WORKSHOP

The context of this presentation

- Study psychologist
  – interested in what creates great higher education, and what creates wellbeing

- Based on the research for my Master's thesis:
  "What Is Education For? – Exploring Experienced Quality in Student-Led Education for Sustainable Development at CEMUS" (2016)

  Supervised by professor Matti Laine (Åbo Akademi University) & professor and vice-rector Sari Lindblom-Ylänne (University of Helsinki)
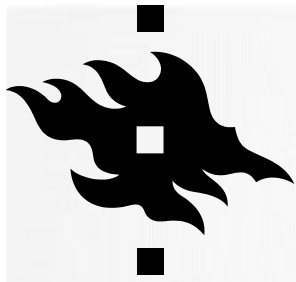
THE THESIS IN A NUTSHELL

- Qualitative case-study about Centrum för Miljö och Utvecklingsstudier (CEMUS) at Uppsala University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

  - Active Student Participation (students lead, administrate and are responsible for coordinating the education in cooperation with work groups)

  - Sustainable Development is a central theme in all education

- I have worked there as a student – got the impression that there was a shared view of CEMUS education being perceived as exceptionally high quality – this was surprising! (high staff turnover, lack of specialist expertise among course coordinators)
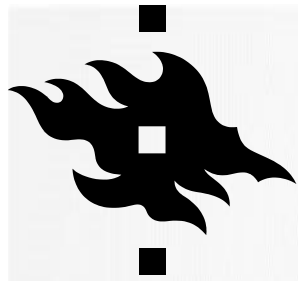
THE THESIS IN A NUTSHELL

- The research questions explored subjective experiences of high quality in CEMUS education.

- By combining these results with a well-research model of organizational flexibility (high levels of which characterizes effective organizations), the purpose was to create a model for creating experiences of high quality in higher education elsewhere.

  - **This resulted in the model of organizational flexibility in higher education**

    - **This model consists of 6 organizational behaviors to target in order to create experiences of high quality in higher education.**

- This was an explorative study, more research is needed.

  - However, there's a lot of research on Active Student Participation etc.
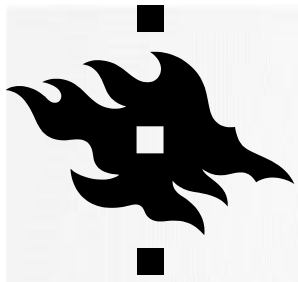
WHAT AFFECTS HIGH QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

- Many factors:

  - **Subjective perceptions** of high quality (Duque, 2014; Tam, 2001).

  - Experiencing **positive emotions** (Oades, Robinson, Green, & Spence, 2011; Rowe, Fitness, & Wood 2015),

  - **Values** (Cook-Sather, Bovill, Felten, & Cook, 2014; Duque 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Herbst & Houmanfar, 2009),

  - **Taking meaningful action** (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Tze, Daniels, & Klassen, 2016),
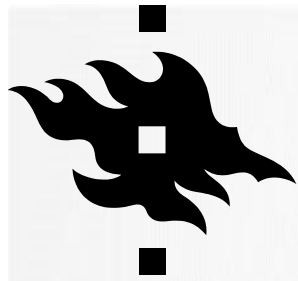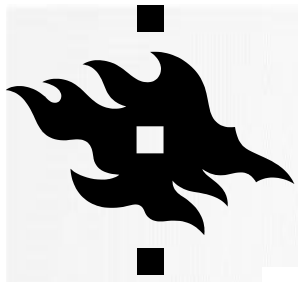
WHAT AFFECTS HIGH QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

- **Motivation** (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Healey et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000),

- **Engagement** (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014),

- **Community** (Healey et al., 2014),

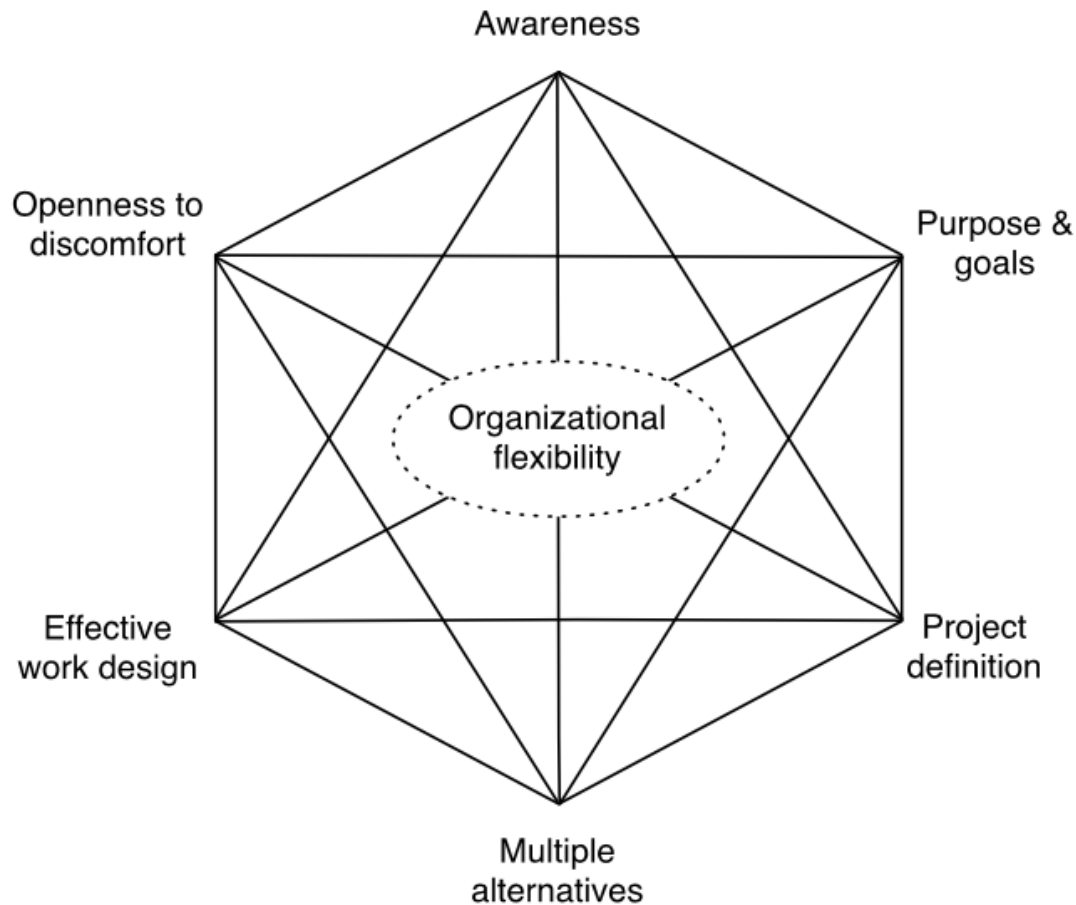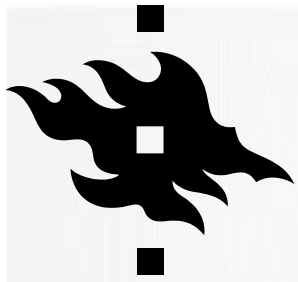- And **organizational structures** (Gärdebo & Wiggberg, 2012)
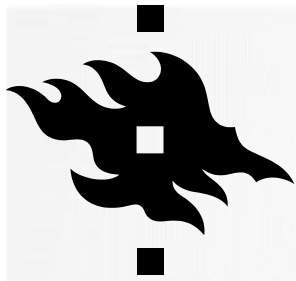
WHICH OF THESE FACTORS CAN WE TARGET DIRECTLY?

- Some organizational factors that are important for experiences of high quality can't be affected/manipulated directly (such as positive emotions or motivation) (Bond et al., 2016; Hayes, 2004)

- Other factors may be affected/manipulated directly

  - **The model for organizational flexibility in higher education** presents these factors and thereby attempts to ensure that time and resources are not wasted on trying to affect factors that can't be changed directly.

  - These factors = organizational behaviors

  - Behaviors include inner behaviors (ways of relating), communication, and outer behaviors

6 BEHAVIORS TO TARGET

Awareness

Openness to discomfort

Purpose & goals

Organizational flexibility

Effective work design

Project definition

Multiple alternatives

# 1/6 PURPOSE & GOAL

- Clarifying the shared values, purpose and overarching goals of the organization

  - (You are never done with acting in line with your values vs. checking of goals that have been achieved)

  - What do we want to stand for as an organization/unit?

  - Optimal situation: Personal values in line with organizational values

- Including Sustainable Development issues in the education
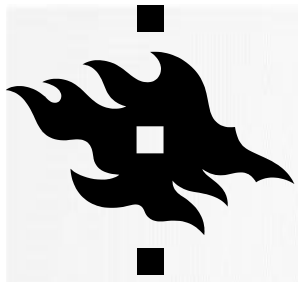
1/6 PURPOSE & GOAL

- **Case Example – CEMUS:** The shared values and goals of CEMUS education

  - The **relevance** of the education experienced as a central value
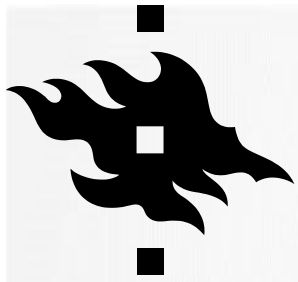
2/6 PROJECT DEFINITION

- Having specific goals in line with the organization's values
- Clarifying the project goals to all parties involved
- Tying the goals to the shared values in the organization
- Clarifying:
    - The definition of the problem
    - Desired results
    - Action plan
    - Timeline for the project
    - Who's responsible for what
   - How the reporting will be done
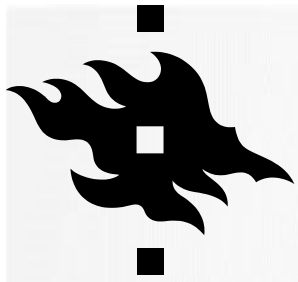
2/6 PROJECT DEFINITION

- **Case Example – CEMUS:** Specific goals for a better world

  - Practical value-guided organizational goals are defined at many levels

    - From small-scale goals like gathering course feedback

    - To large-scale goals like creating new kinds of educational projects (Such as a Massive Open Online Course in Climate Change Leadership)
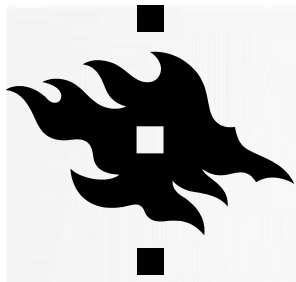
3/6 MULTIPLE ALTERNATIVES

- Flexibility and openness to alternative perspectives in decision making processes tend to lead to better results in the organization.

- Consider in which areas (the planning of study programs, research on the quality of study programs etc.) a more inclusive and open decision making process could be implemented.

- Consider the degree to which multiple perspectives (from students, or non-academic professionals) are desirable (ranging from consultation to partnership approaches.

- Consider the ways in which relevant parties, such as students or non-academic professionals, could be engaged.
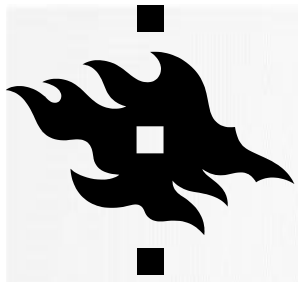
3/6 MULTIPLE ALTERNATIVES

- **Case Example – CEMUS:** Transboundary decision making

  - CEMUS gains access to a multitude of perspectives in organizational decision making through its':

    - ambitious participatory pedagogical approach (Active Student Participation),

    - flat and democratic organizational structure and

    - transboundary educational model

    - with a high degree of organizational renewal
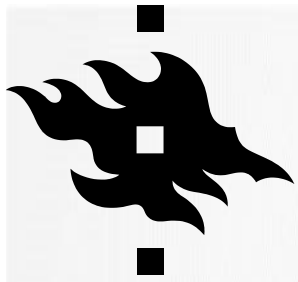
# 4/6 EFFECTIVE WORK DESIGN

- For staff: Increase influence over one's tasks

- For students: Increase student empowerment through Active Student Participation

- These interventions can have many benefits for both staff and students: improved health and engagement in work, increased motivation and the experience of positive emotions – which is beneficial for creating experiences of high quality in itself.
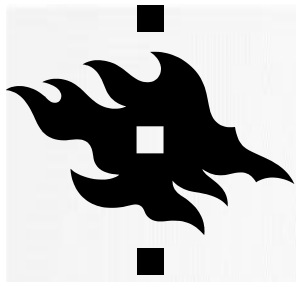
4/6 EFFECTIVE WORK DESIGN

- **Case Example – CEMUS:** Student empowerment & job control
    - At CEMUS the Active Student Participation is seen to have resulted in the experience of relevance
        - CEMUS' students have extensive influence over their education: both content and structure.
    - For staff at CEMUS job characteristics, such as the comprehensive feedback systems in the organization are valuable in terms of experiencing control and empowerment.
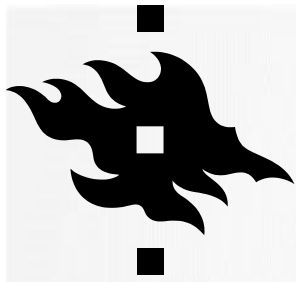
5/6 OPENNESS TO DISCOMFORT

- Practice individual and organizational willingness to experience the emotional discomfort that follows from experiencing destabilization and new ways of thinking

- Opening up to new ways of working, such as Active Student Participation can run counter to one's thoughts about one's professional identity

- In order for the organization (and it's individuals) to develop in a flexible way, there's always a need to be willing to experience discomfort

- Where resistance is strongest, there also lies the greatest potential for transformation.
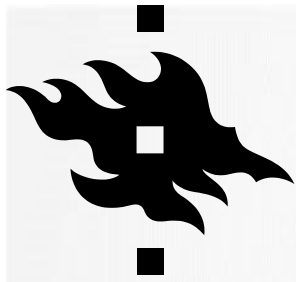
5/6 OPENNESS TO DISCOMFORT

- **Case Example – CEMUS:** Opening up to destabilization

    - Focus on climate change – destabilizing and uncomfortable in itself

    - CEMUS' pedagogy challenges norms and assumptions – asks students and staff to open up to discomfort in pursuit of the values and goals of the organization
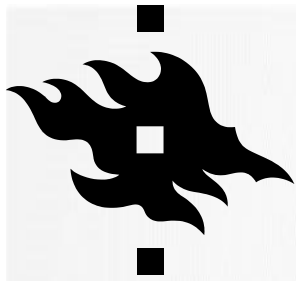
6/6 AWARENESS

- Explore how the common, organizational understanding of the organization's activities and processes is maintained.
How are people kept aware of what is going on in the organization?

  - Transparency

  - Clarity

  - Effective feedback systems

  - Communication

  - How does the organization learn from it's mistakes

- How could this organizational awareness be strengthened?
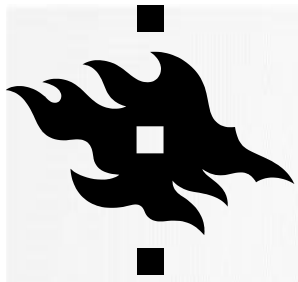
6/6 AWARENESS

- **Case Example – CEMUS:** Transboundary communication and understanding

  - Much importance is placed on:

    - Interaction over boundaries

    - Transparency in the organization

    - Comprehensive feedback systems

CASE EXAMPLE: CEMUS

Awareness
Transboundary
communication and
understanding

Openness to discomfort
Opening up to
destabilization

Purpose & goals
The shared values
and overarching
goals of CEMUS
education

CEMUS
organizational
flexibility

Effective work design
Student empowerment
& job control

Project definition
Specific goals for a
better world

Multiple alternatives
Transboundary
decision making
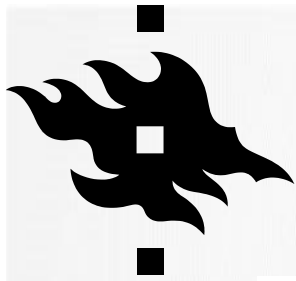
HOW COULD THIS LOOK IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Awareness
Transboundary communication and understanding

Purpose & goals
The shared values and overarching goals of CEMUS education

Openness to discomfort
Opening up to destabilization

CEMUS organizational flexibility

Effective work design
Student empowerment & job control

Project definition
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Multiple alternatives
Transboundary decision making

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HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
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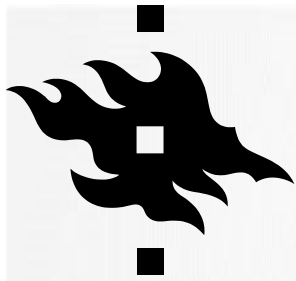
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THANK YOU!
TACK!

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