

# A network approach to developing teaching and learning

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## ***Academic freedom***

in a continuum between loyalty and autonomy

Being loyal towards  
colleagues & institution



Being  
autonomous

(Åkerlind & Kayrooz, 2003)

In a research intensive institution loyalty towards the rules of the research culture is widespread.

These rules can be incorporated into the teaching and learning culture: documentation, collegiality, and peer review. The focus for attention, though, is still controlled by the academics.

## The significance of the back-stage arena

University teachers have small ‘***significant networks***’ where private discussion provided a basis for conceptual development and learning, quite different from the ‘front stage’ of formal, public debate about teaching.

(Roxå and Mårtensson, 2009)



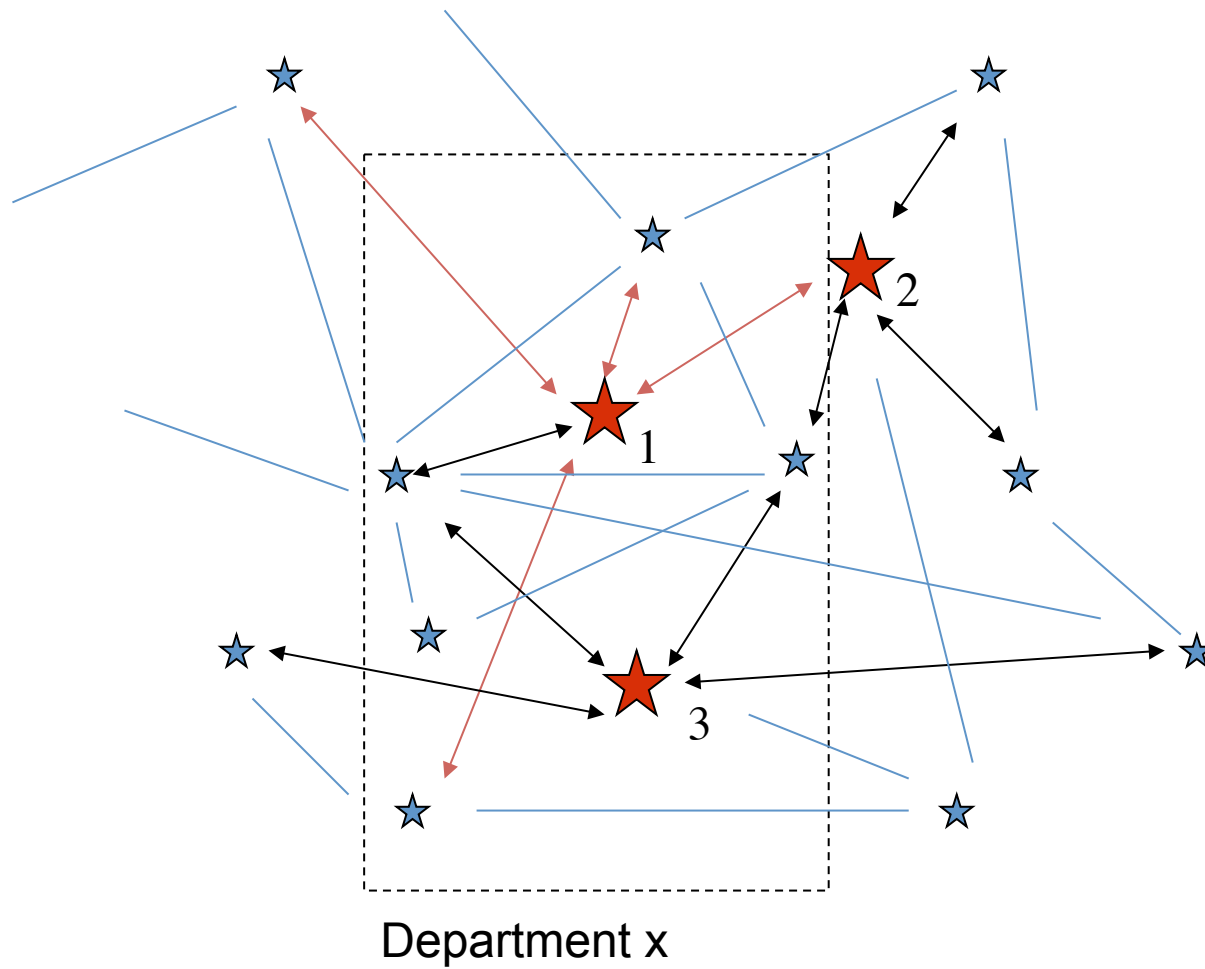
## Number of conversational partners linked to culture

47 respondents – different faculties/schools

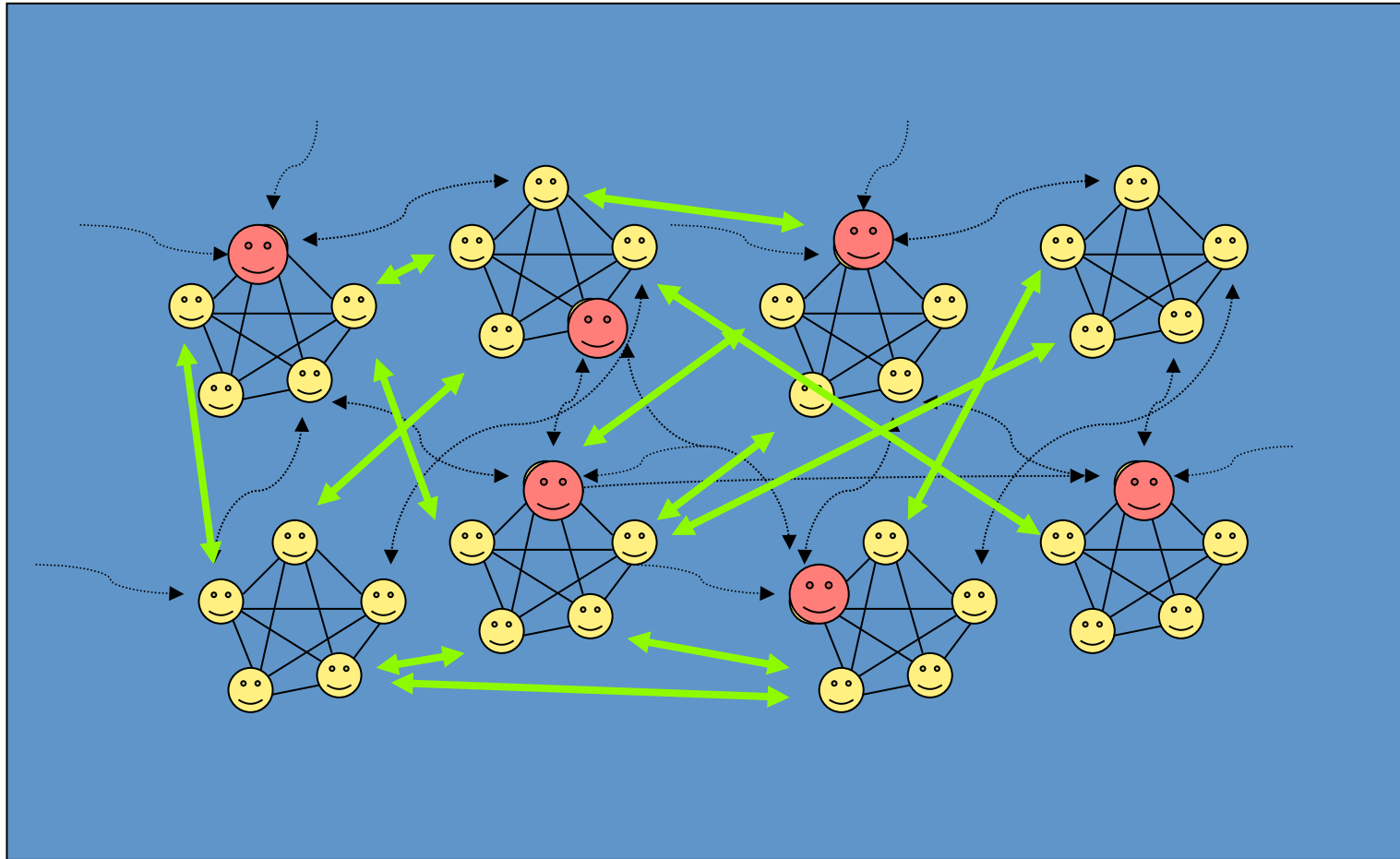
<b>Culture perceived as supportive or non-supportive to discussions about teaching and learning.</b>	<b>Supportive culture</b>	<b>Non-supportive culture</b>
Number of respondents indicating supportive or non - supportive culture	31	16
Total number of conversational partners	231	56
Number of conversational partners per respondent (mean)	7,4	3,5
Number of conversational partners within discipline (tot)	121	33
Number of conversational partners within discipline, per respondent (mean)	3,9	2,1

Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009

# Significant networks:

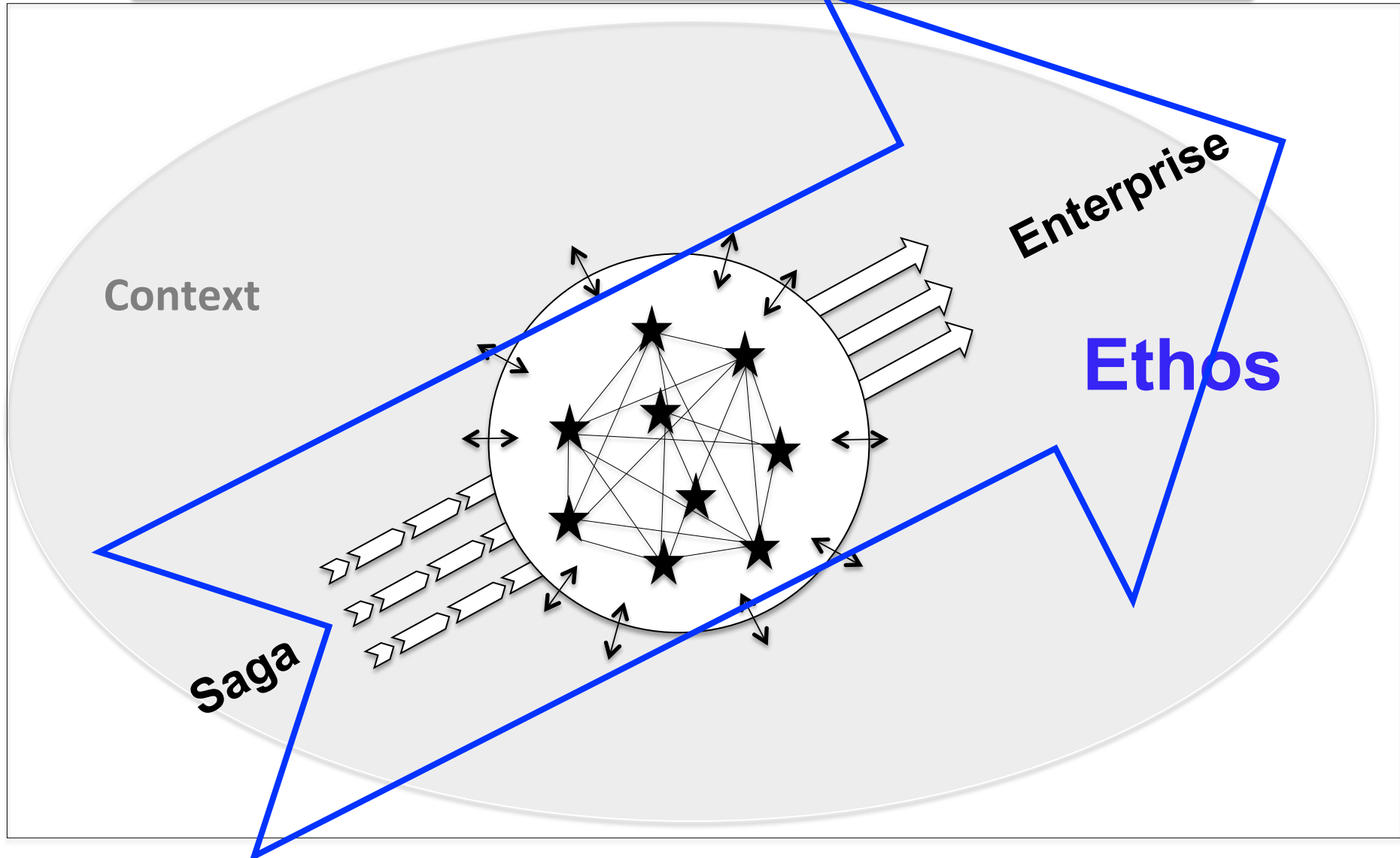


# The strategy – “the strength of weak ties” – inspired by network research



(Granovetter 1973; Barabási 2003; Watts 2003; Hemphälä 2008;  
Roxå, Mårtensson & Alveteg 2011)

# Strong academic microcultures (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011)



(Wenger, 1998; Clark, 1998; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Kezar, 2007)

## Results (features)

- Members of the MC articulate an astonishing level of **trust** in each other and in the enterprise
- MCs orient themselves towards a shared **enterprise**, a compass (future)

The enterprise is about making a difference as a discipline, or as a group

- Members relate to a MC-specific **saga** (past)



# General results (teaching)

Academic leaders had considerable problems in identifying strong microcultures

- Strong engagement for students and their learning
- Students are challenged, supported, and treated as legitimate participants (apprentices)
- Teaching vary in form (traditional lecture-based to constant innovation and change)
- Teaching and research are seen as integrated parts of a coherent professional identity
- Personal mastery in teaching is clearly present but is supported in different ways

(Roxå & Mårtensson, 2013)

# Leadership in strong microcultures

(Roxå & Mårtensson, 2013)

- Strong and active
- Positive to be a leader
- Long-term
- Individual or distributed
- Collegial and hierarchical

**Example:** Enhancing teaching and learning within an educational programme through the use of '*critical friends*' (Handal, 1999)

- 30 teachers; 3-year bachelor-programme
- 1 day off campus to discuss visions & aims
- Group assignments (between subjects): analyse each course in relation to overall programme outcomes. Include student evaluations. Choose critical friends.
- Report in writing to programme leader (PL)
- New groups (within subjects) – formed by PL – new critical friends suggest improvements
- 1 day off campus to discuss results

# Outcomes from strategy

- 350 practice based scholarly reports annually on teaching and learning – artefacts
- Student learning and educational theory increasingly used during the last decade
- Good Teaching as measured by course evaluations (CEQ) improves steadily (engineering)
- SOTL-projects are well integrated in local institutional culture

(Mårtensson & Larsson; Larsson, Olsson, Anderberg, forthcoming)