

# On the effectiveness of professionals in hybrid organizations

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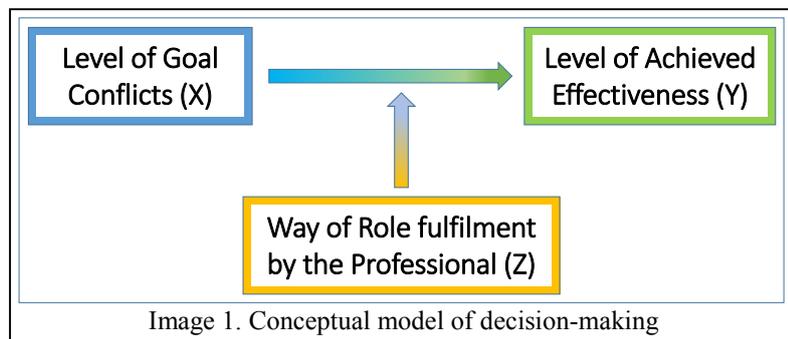
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## Abstract

Day by day, professionals in organizations are dealing with decisions, some of which may lead to conflicts. The role fulfilment of the professional determines the level of conflict and will be a trade off with the effectiveness of the task. Previous research on conflict, role fulfilment and effectiveness focuses on single business sectors. This paper focuses on the effectiveness of professionals within a hybrid organizational structure. Such a structure mixes several sectors the interests of which may be conflicting. Specifically, we consider hybrid organizations equipped with a learning structure exemplified by two case studies: (i) the Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences and (ii) the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands. Here, the professional (lecturer or priest) operates within a triangle spanned by the laymen (students or parishioners), the organization (university or church) and the context (industry or society). In practice, serving the organization as well as paying attention to the context may require the professional to deal with diametrically opposed processes. This paper presents a framework to understand the behavior of the professional in a range of organizational settings. In addition to this, the framework will support professionals in enhancing their employability through effectively fulfilling their role in conflicting goal settings.

**Key words:** Role fulfilment, conflicting goals, task effectiveness, hybridity

**1. Introduction** – This positioning paper is about the level of effectiveness of professionals in hybrid organizations. In particular, we consider two organizations as case studies: (i) Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences (D-UAS) and (ii) Parishes in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC-N) in the Netherlands. In the context of these organizations, one can perceive multiple trends and developments, which force professionals to reconsider their organizational roles. In doing so, they may seek to satisfy various stakeholders whose goals are often conflicting, both mutually as well as with the goal of the professional himself. So, in principle, the professional cannot be fully effective for every stakeholder. This dilemma raises questions like, how to handle conflicting goals, or, how to act when achieving effectiveness in principle is not possible? These questions touch the way of role fulfilment of professionals. It is the way of role fulfilment of the professional, which is indirectly most correlating with his effectiveness. Image 1 shows the conceptual model for this paper. This model distinguishes the following variables: 1) the level of goal conflicts, 2) the level of achieved effectiveness, and 3) the way of role fulfilment by the professional. The role of the professional in the RCC-N has shifted into a more conflicting setting due to secularization<sup>1</sup> and empowerment of the society. The latter has introduced a decline of religious beliefs and practices as well as individual autonomy independent of religious leaders. With respect to the D-UAS, the role of the professional in educational perspective changed due to an integrated research objective. The



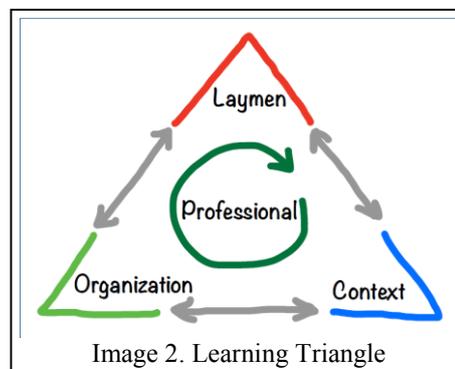
<sup>1</sup> Secularization refers to the historical process in which religion loses social and cultural significance. As a result of secularization the role of religion in modern societies becomes less important [18].

introduction of the professorship in 2001 shifted the task of the (teaching) professional towards an active role in applied research projects/programs [1].

**2. The setting of the research** - To set the scene of the research we hereby introduce the so called *learning triangle*.

In this triangle, illustrated by Image 2, we distinguish four key players who influence the professional:

1. **Context**: the society with its trends and developments
2. **Organization**: the organization in which the professional is working
3. **Laymen**: so called clients who are dependent on the professional
4. **Professional**: the professional himself



**2.1. The D-UAS learning triangle** In a Dutch University of Applied Science (D-UAS) the key players are:

1. Context : industry
2. Organization : D-UAS
3. Laymen : students
4. Professional : lecturer

Within the D-UAS, the lecturer introduces students into the realm of Applied Science. Essential for this task is to keep well connected with the industry, the future work field of the students. The industry maintains its connection with the D-UAS through internships and thesis projects; they are unfamiliar with projects in courses and minors. On the other hand, the D-UAS educational organization heavily uses (research) questions from the industry to define scholarly projects.

In the learning triangle (see Image 2), the lecturer (professional) is the primary contact with the students (laymen), the educational system (organization) and the industry, SME<sup>2</sup>s and governmental institutes (context). Also see the professional as connecting link between organization and context.

The following issues disturb the D-UAS learning triangle:

- The theme of the projects has a tendency to stay the same for several years.
- Education related projects can only start during specific moments in the curriculum, whereas the industry has its question(s) and research topic(s) throughout the year.
- Even though industrial (research) questions are available and preferred by students, few projects are integrated in the educational mainstream.

**2.2. The RCC-N learning triangle** - At a parish in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands (RCC-N) the key players are:

1. Context : society
2. Organization : church
3. Laymen : parishioners
4. Professional : priest

According to Nieuwenhuis [2] a parish is a local church, a particular area of believers with a priest and a church building. The area can be a village, or a region, or a part of a city. A diocese is a collection of parishes, comparable with a district in a country. Within the RCC-N, the priest introduces parishioners into the realm of salvation. The parish and hereby the priest has four fields of policy which have been formulated by the archdiocese of Utrecht to work on the salvation:

- Liturgy: all types of services and rituals in which the parishioners show their faith in God.
- Catechesis: education of parishioners in faith.
- Diaconate: the charity work and solidarity with the most vulnerable in society.

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<sup>2</sup> SME: Small Medium Enterprise

- Community building: promotion of vitality, innovation and openness of communities to each other and to society.

In the learning triangle (see Image 2), the priest (professional) is the primary contact with the parishioners (laymen), the church (organization) and the society (context). Essential for the role fulfilment of the priest is to keep well connected to these three key players. First, the society, which is the context in which parishioners, have to maintain their salvation. The church maintains its connection with the society through diaconate projects and participating in social debates. Second, the church. The priest is part of a diocese and functions directly under the bishop who leads the diocese. Third, the priest has to keep well connected with parishioners. The parishioners maintain their connection with the church through participating in liturgy. On the other hand, the church maintains its connection with the parishioners through the priest, through liturgy, catechesis and community building.

Due to developments as secularization and empowerment of the society, the following issues at the key players disturb the learning triangle:

- Laymen: the relation with the church is less intensive than was common in the past. The distance between the laymen and the church has increased. At the occasions that laymen get in contact with the church - normally at the highlight moments in life which are called sacraments, think of baptism, marriage and funerals - laymen's knowledge about the church and faith have decreased. For that reason, it is difficult to understand and accept why rituals and habits are the way they are. Why can't we play a song of a popular Dutch singer like Andre Hazes at Mommy's funeral?
- Context: the role of the church in public debate has decreased due to societal developments as secularization. For this reason, the church is less visible. At moments that the church does participate in the public debate, conflicts occur because the views and opinions of the church seem mediaeval and not applicable to modern society. Think of the family as the only place for children to grow up, for example. Or the view on gay marriage of the church. The church is against it while Dutch government legalized it 20 years ago.
- Organization: policy decisions, which take place at the level of the diocese, e.g. parish restructuring, can lead to goal conflicts. A priest may prefer a small working area where he can practice a broad palette of duties, but it becomes impossible because he gets responsible for more parishes.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In Section 3 we describe where existing literature lacks answers for these two particular cases. Section 4 introduces a model through which an answer can be found for professionals to fulfil their role and be effective. Section 5 applies the model to the specific organizations of these cases. Finally, in Section 6 we draw our conclusions.

### **3. Literature summary and contribution**

Let us briefly summarize the existing literature and describe our contribution.

**3.1. Literature** - In the past decades, literature has been published on how to handle conflicting goals, as well as on the role fulfilment of the professional, all within a single sector.

**3.1.1. Goal conflict** - When in this paper we consider goal conflict, we use the definition of Segerstrom et al. [3] and Locke et al. [4] of inherent conflict, which states that conflict arises when progress toward one goal implies more difficulty in reaching another goal.

As mentioned earlier it is in the relations within the learning triangle where goal conflicts occur. In particular, we are interested in two types of goal conflicts that frequently occur within hybrid organizations: (i) interpersonal and (ii) intra-individual. Interpersonal goal conflicts are related to the three stakeholders positioned in the vertices of the learning triangle. Intra-individual goal conflicts concern the professional himself.

Cosier et al. [5] consider goal conflict as an interpersonal relationship involving divergent preferences regarding at least one of the decision outcomes. In addition to this, Locke et al. [4] show the effects of intra-individual goal conflict on performance.

In order to determine how professionals can fulfil their roles in an adequate way we need a closer look at what dimensions of goal conflicts may be distinguished. According to Bartos et al. [6] it is possible to subsume all specific reasons of incompatible goals under three main headings:

- Contested resources: When a party wants some of the resources the other party has or when both adversaries want the same unallocated resource.
- Incompatible roles: when two parties play different roles in an institution or an organization.
- Incompatible values: groups that are separated from each other tend to develop different cultures that may advocate incompatible values – that is, the standards of rightness and goodness that hold a culture and society together.

**3.1.2. Role fulfilment** - In this section, let us focus on the role fulfilment of the professional.

As for general references, Higgins et al. [7] focus on the individual and reveal a holistic reference of the role fulfilment that is called to the mind, based on expectations of that individual of that role. Literature on this field characterizes itself by an impressive number of case studies. Let us mention some interesting ones: entrepreneurial passion [8], voluntary members of the Chambers of Commerce [9], frontline bank employees [10], employees in coalmines [11], employees of plantation companies [12], employees of a medium-sized food processing company [13], advanced practice nurses [14].

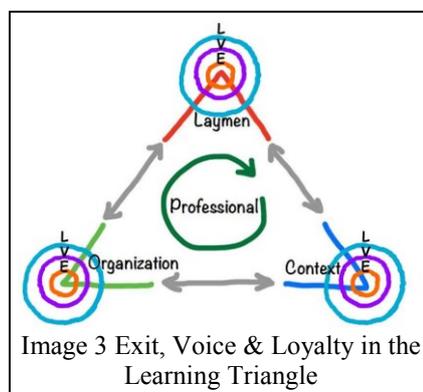
**3.2. Our contribution** The existing literature predominantly focuses on single sectors and therefore does not provide an answer to professionals in hybrid organizations such as the D-UAS and RCC-N.

We aim to contribute to the literature as follows:

- I. We present a taxonomy for handling conflicting goals within hybrid organizations.
- II. We build a model (diagnostic as well as curative) that will help professionals to fulfil their role effectively in a setting of conflicting goals.

**4. Model description** – Hirschman [15] (revisited in [16]) argues that there are two types of response to unsatisfactory situations in one's firm, organization or country. The first is "exit" or leaving without trying to fix things. The second is "voice," that is, speaking up and trying to remedy the defects. Loyalty can modify the response, causing one to stand and fight (voice) rather than cut and run (exit). Inspired by this approach, let us introduce the response wheel illustrated by Image 3. Here, three options to react are portrayed: E (exit), V (voice) and L (loyalty). Assume now that every vertex of our learning triangle is equipped with such a wheel. Thus, our learning triangle transforms into a "skateboard". To illustrate our approach, let us consider a particular vertex, e.g. the industry in the D-UAS learning triangle. Suppose an initiative arises from this vertex, e.g., industry asks the professional for talented students to start internship on a promising innovation as soon as possible. Clearly, this induces conflicts within the D-UAS organization. As for the response wheel around the industry vertex, the professional may consider three choices. 1) E (exit), i.e., consider this industrial initiative as unrealistic and politely refuse. 2) V(voice) speaking up to the industry and trying to remedy the unpleasantness that the industrial initiative causes to the organization. and 3) L(loyalty) the never-say-no-to-the-industry option, i.e., enthusiastically welcoming this new industry initiative and doing all that is needed to push it through the organization.

Let us visualize the three choices as three different diameters of the response wheel ranging from small (E) to large (L). Imagine this wheel has a constant angular velocity. Then reaction E induces the smallest skateboard speed and reaction L the largest. Let us conceive V as a transient state. Then the position of the response wheel will converge to either E or L. If all three wheels are in position L, then the skateboard runs fast and smoothly. Next best is the configuration where two wheels have an L and one wheel has an E. In fact, all other configurations indicate problems so severe that they are hard to overcome. Note that the direction in which our skateboard moves is irrelevant. Crucial is its ability to move swiftly.



The research positioned in this paper aims at developing a unifying model built up out of two components. First, a diagnostic tool to ascertain the level of conflict based on examining the positions of the three response wheels. Second, a curative tool to enable the professional to evolve towards a situation where all vertices have their response wheel in position L. Currently, we are in the process of refining our model based on empirical research. Nevertheless, let us present a rough outline of its intended working in the next section.

## **5. Model application - intended working**

**5.1 Model application at D-UAS** – Suppose that, within the triangle (see Image 3), the professional is supervising a student (layman) during his final thesis project. Usually, this is an assignment at a company (context), executed by the student, within the D-UAS (organization) framework of his final thesis. In case of confidentiality, both student and company will agree to non-publicity of the project report. However, the D-UAS funded by public money [17]), is obliged to publish the project results. Hence, with respect to publication, the professional is confronted with a conflict situation. For the project to continue his response will be “loyalty” to the company and student, and “exit” to the organization making the triangle imbalanced. In practice, the professional will use “voice”, to convince the involved parties, to restrict the publication to at least the management summary, containing still some confidential information. Due to this, all involved parties move towards “loyalty” and the student finalizes the project. Aim of our model is to intervene in a similar way.

**5.2 Model application at RCC-N** – In the Netherlands, since 2002 euthanasia is legally allowed under strict conditions. In practice, within the learning triangle, we have seen examples of parishioners (laymen) who have used this opportunity which legislation (context) offered them, to end their life. Then their family is asking for a funeral in church. The church (organization) is against a funeral in church after euthanasia, because a believer cannot determine his own hour of death. That is the role of God according to Roman Catholic believe. As a professional, the priest is part of the church. Thus, he has to respond “loyalty” to the church and “exit” to the parishioners and to society as well which has made it legal. As a result of secularization and societal empowerment this leads to a conflict. Aim of our model is to offer an itinerary to the priest to arrive at a response of “loyalty” to the different stakeholders.

**6. Conclusions** - The research proposed in this positioning paper focuses on the effectiveness of professionals within a hybrid organizational structure. Specifically, we consider hybrid organizations equipped with a learning structure exemplified by two case studies: (i) the Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences (D-UAS) and (ii) the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands (RCC-N). Here professionals are acting in a triangle spanned by interdependent stakeholders: “Organization”, “Context” and “Laymen”. To make the triangle work properly, the professional is seeking for the right behavior versus these three stakeholders. In case of a forthcoming event, the professional can choose out of three responses to each of the three stakeholders: “exit”, “voice” or “loyalty”. The two case studies discussed show similar processes, asking for a unifying model for professionals in supporting their decision-making processes. We intend to develop such a model built up out of two components: (1) a diagnostic tool to ascertain the level of conflict, and (2) a curative tool to guide the professional towards effective role fulfilment. The next steps in this research are to set up this empirical model and to test it through in depth interviews with professionals in D-UAS and RCC-N.

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