Scaling up innovation without losing 'the sparkle': a case study of three innovation practices

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Abstract: *Innovations in the workplace typically start with an intricate or urgent question, for which people aim to find new solutions. The process of innovation doesn't unfold along the lines of carefully planned steps. Instead, it resembles a learning process taking place in daily practice, which is therefore rather messy and unpredictable by nature. Progress is made by people conducting small but meaningful experiments or pilot projects that may lead to breakthroughs in one group, team, or department. The present study investigates how innovation practices can surpass this experimental stage and scale up towards more widespread innovation, while at the same time retaining the 'sparkle' that is often felt in the early stages. The method is a case study consisting of three innovation practices. In total, 18 interviews have been done. The analysis shows that innovation initiatives in the scale-up phase can be seen as a 'series of different moves' undertaken by various people to either broaden the movement, deepen the movement or to give direction to the process. The sparkle can be described as something that flows between people, and that presents itself as enthusiasm and personal involvement. On the one hand this sparkle emerges as a result of working on a meaningful bigger goal, and on the other hand the sparkle can be nourished by deliberate moves such as creating a stimulating work atmosphere by showing appreciation for one another, and creating opportunities to learn.*

Keywords: Corporate learning, Creativity, Organizational learning, Workplace learning

Introduction

Innovations that come about at the workplace can deal with various topics. Whether it is about a new way of welcoming and onboarding new employees, or an improved approach that enables healthcare workers to better involve family of clients in the care process, innovation is never a straightforward process that can be planned or controlled (Fuglsang, 2017; Wee & Taylor, 2017). Many innovations start with an intricate question for which the people involved aim to find new ways of working. For instance: how can we onboard new colleagues in such a way that they quickly learn the necessary skills, and at the same time feel welcomed and at ease in our organization? The process of innovation that follows from such a question, can be seen as a learning process. The learning processes that are necessary to realize innovation that takes place in daily practice rather than in a classroom or training setting. The learning process is rather messy (Berends & Lammers, 2010) and benefits from people experimenting and improvising (Kamoche, Cunha & Cunha, 2003). Progress is made via small steps forward, and via breakthroughs that emerge while doing (Edmundson, 2002). The necessary breakthroughs often follow from moments of despair, when people get stuck and do not immediately know what to do next (Verdonschot, 2009). For instance, because an experiment doesn't lead to the desired outcome, or because the initiators don't succeed in getting others to join in.

This bumpy and insecure learning path that people undertake to realize innovation can only be kept up with when the people involved feel a strong personal connection to the subject at hand (Kessels, 2001). This personal involvement helps to stay motivated and to keep going, despite inevitable setbacks and uncertainty. And, interestingly enough, the other way around, this personal connection may also contribute to the 'sparkle' in the early stage of innovation.

The present study investigates how innovation practices can surpass the experimental stage in which one group,

team, or department, is involved, and scale up towards a transformative movement (Johansen & van den Bosch, 2017) in which more people are involved, and more knowledge is developed, while at the same time retaining the 'sparkle'. The research goal is therefore twofold. First, its focus is on the actions that can help innovations after the initial stage to grow and scale-up. Second, it aims to find out whether this can be done without losing the initial engagement of the people involved. An implicit widespread assumption is that the process of scaling up benefits from accurate planning and taking control. As if the phase of improvising and experimenting, that allows people involved to freely develop new ways of working, and that allows for 'stumbling forward', needs to be followed by a more rigid phase. This assumption is reflected by the words people typically use to describe the phase of scaling up, such as securing, anchoring, and rolling out. These words express the desire to hold something in place (securing and anchoring), or to actively disperse something new (rolling out). This reveals a bit of the tendency to diminish the space for individual preferences and personal motivation while being in the scale-up phase of innovation, whereas this personal involvement seems to be indispensable for realizing innovation.

The research questions that are central in the present study are:

1. *What moves contribute to the development of innovations in the scale-up phase?*
2. *What does the sparkle look like with people who are involved in innovations in the scale-up phase?*

Better understanding of the actions, or moves, that help innovations to grow in the scale-up phase, can help initiators to act more effectively. The concrete examples can work as ideas and inspiration for others who work on innovation. Golden-Biddle (2014) suggests that research on change processes often focuses on *what* has changed because of the innovation, and not so often on *how* that change came about. Whereas, in her eyes, a better understanding of the latter, will provide insight in the way collective energy and enthusiasm can be cultivated to create change. Indeed, more knowledge about how innovation practices are being scaled-up, can contribute to more successful and sparkling social innovation initiatives in and among organizations.

Theoretical framework

Innovations in the scale-up phase
It has long been assumed that change in organizations proceeds via the 'unfreeze, move, freeze' model (Lewin, 1947). The idea behind this model is that you first have to get people out of their routines, and, once that is done, a new perspective can be provided that can then be anchored so that it becomes a permanent way of working. The last phase in many innovation models refers to this new 'fixed state' that is aimed for. This phase is called implementation phase, or institutionalization. Somewhat later, a different perspective has emerged, namely, the view of change as a process that goes on continuously; as a continuing stream of small adjustments in work processes and interactions (Weick & Quinn, 1999). In this view, change is not seen as the inevitable outcome of a particular logical and planned process. Instead, change is seen as a process of continuous improvisation by actors making meaning and taking actions (Orlikowski, 1995). This way of looking at it does justice to the nature of innovation in everyday practice where we see that learning is taking place in the day-to-day practice, where people move forward as they go along, dealing with uncertainty and setbacks. In fact, it is a process consisting of small learning cycles that constantly take place throughout different teams and departments of the organization. From this perspective, it remains to be seen whether 'rolling out', 'securing' or 'anchoring' is even possible. We therefore choose a different picture to guide us in this study. Namely that of innovation as a *movement* that keeps growing. We express the growth of the movement in three dimensions. First, the width of the movement; a movement grows bigger as more people get involved. This is to be seen as the contagiousness of the movement (Vermaak, 2017), or as the process of scaling out, and impacting greater numbers (Moore, Riddell & Vocisano, 2015). Second, there is the depth of the movement. A movement can be fueled by knowledge, allowing those involved to act more intelligently. Third, there is the degree of direction that makes it possible to set course, and to see the changes that emerge as a cohesive whole. Or, in the words of Wee and Taylor (2017), to provide for a coherent narrative for the emergent changes that happen in different work-units throughout the organization. The present study refers to the first dimension as to broadening the movement, to the second dimension as to deepening the movement, and to the third dimension as to giving direction (Verdonschot, 2018; 2020).

'Moves' that contribute to the development of innovations
The implication of seeing innovation as a movement, is that its development is created by people involved who are moving the innovation forward. This actor perspective (see for instance Arena et al., 2017; Van den Boom-Muilenburg et al., 2022; Wielinga, & Robijn, 2018) is based on the notion that people, and the connections between people give shape to innovations. Next to the initiator of the innovation, there are also many other people involved who

influence the innovation with their actions, or, as we refer to it in the present study, *moves*. These moves can be seen as small continuous adjustments, created simultaneously by different people, and that have the potential to amplify and accumulate over time to lead to more substantial changes at the organizational level (Wee & Taylor, 2017). Carmeli and Russo (2016) speak of micro-moves, which are small acts or behaviors that can lead to positive changes in the ways people approach, engage and act in a variety of situations. These micro-moves are crucial for positive, or generative moments to emerge (Carlson & Dutton, 2011). Following these sources, we define moves as small actions, taken by people involved in the innovation practice, with a positive intention, that either contribute to the innovation's progression, or that support the initiator of the innovation.

The sparkle

When encountering people who are involved in innovation, their personal involvement is often palpable; a strongly felt desire to change a situation, to solve a problem, or to make something happen. This might not be so remarkable after all, since the insecure path of innovation asks for a personally felt urge to keep on going, despite setbacks and difficulties that are experienced along the way. However, it is not self-evident how this sparkle can be retained, also after a while when the initial energy has subsided, and how it can be shared with others along the way (see also: Verdonschot, 2020). Moore, Riddell and Vocisano (2015) stress that in the scaling up phase of innovations, it is important not only to reach more and more people, but also to change relationships, cultural values, and beliefs. Innovation, according to them, is not only about changing minds, but also about changing hearts.

A recent study by de Jong (2022), on collaborative innovation in schools, concludes that, in order to realize innovation, it is important to have a so-called *spirit* that is felt by teachers and school principals involved, and that supports them in working on innovation. This spirit seems to have similarities to what we call the sparkle. Spirit, according to de Jong (2022), consists of 1) people who interact with each other independent of formal leadership roles, 2) with intrinsic motivation, and 3) who jointly aim for school-wide improvements to education. The three aspects provided by this definition can be applied to our definition of the sparkle. First, the sparkle is something that flourishes between people, rather than a quality of the innovation itself, or of even of one person. Indeed, it might look like enthusiasm or involvement that becomes visible in the so-called micro-moves that were described in the previous section. Second, the sparkle is related to a strong personal motivation that makes them capable of special achievements necessary to bring about breakthroughs in innovation processes. This strong personal involvement is

referred to in literature with with different concepts, such as intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), engagement (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) and passion (Amabile, 2000; Kessels, 2001). Third, the sparkle is related to something people collaboratively strive for. Innovations benefit from both formulating and sharing a joint vision on the intricate questions at hand (KIA, 2022). When people involved in innovation share such an inspirational image of the future, it can enable the movement to develop. It can be the glue that holds them together and accounts for the 'sparkle'.

Research design

Research that focuses on the process that leads to innovations, benefits from qualitative and interpretive research approaches (Sørensen & Lapenta, 2017). In line with this notion, the present study follows a case study approach. The cases consist of three innovation practices: Palliative Care, Resilience, and Motion. The first round of interviews took place with the initiators of the three cases. The second round of interviews was conducted with people who, according to the innovation's initiator, play an important role in the innovation practice. In total, 18 interviews took place.

Selection of cases

All three cases were, at the time of the study, in the scale-up phase. That is, the innovations all started several years ago, and already had gone through various phases of broadening and deepening the movement. We had ascertained the latter from interviews in our previous study in which the initiators of these three cases took part (Verdonschot, 2020). In this previous inquiry we interviewed 29 instigators of innovation. The three initiators of the cases in the present study were selected out of these 29 participants because their innovation appeared to be in the scale-up phase, because they were willing to participate, and because they showed curiosity to learn more about directing their innovation effectively.

- The 'Palliative Care case' is an innovation practice in healthcare education, that aims to implement a palliative care educational framework in which competencies of both palliative care generalists and specialists on all professional/ educational levels are described. With this aim they collaborate with applied universities, universities, and institutions for vocational education. The wish is that these care professionals will acquire up-to-date knowledge and are able to act appropriately, so that the health care recipient receives the best care in the palliative phase. They also built a digital hotspot with information with respect to palliative care, and they aim to connect educators,

researchers, and practitioners in the field of palliative care to discuss latest developments. The organization consists of a small core team. Next to that, in every region in the Netherlands there is an education hub with ambassadors. They organize regular work conferences in which they involve many people who deal with palliative care throughout the country.

- The 'Resilience case' consists of a series of lessons for students in secondary education focused on their social and emotional development. During these lessons, the students reflect upon matters that everybody can encounter in life, guided by a skilled facilitator and by their own mentor. The aim is to contribute to a world in which children feel that they are good enough just as they are, despite all the 'perfect images' that they are confronted with. And to teach youngsters to deal with ups and downs that are part of life. The lessons are created in cooperation with various social organizations. The organization of the innovation practice consists of a small office that is responsible for developing and planning the lessons. Next to that there is a flexible pool of trainers who facilitate the lessons in schools in and around a city in the Netherlands.

- The 'Motion case' develops and supervises exercise programs to realize sports goals and care goals for people who cannot participate in regular sports because a disability or specific behavior limits their possibilities to participate. The aspiration is to get these vulnerable target groups moving again, and, by that, to build a society in which everyone can participate. The underlying idea is that moving contributes to a sense of belonging. One of the concrete innovations is a holiday camp for children with psychiatric disorders, who are otherwise not easily able to join activities with peers. The organization consists of a foundation with 10 project leaders who lead the different projects, such as the abovementioned holiday camps. Via pilots they develop new programs.

Selection of interview respondents
For every case, 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Per case, we first interviewed the initiators in order to learn about the latest developments in their innovation practice. We used these interviews to check whether the innovations were indeed in the scale-up phase. We also used these interviews to select 5 other respondents per case to interview. This was done by asking the initiators: who are the people that are important to you in building your movement in this phase? We explained that they could think of people who are important for the content of the movement, people with whom they reflect on next steps in the process and people who are important

to them as a person because they offer support. In the interviews with the people that were selected in this way, we asked them if they recognized that they played an important role with regard to the innovation. They all answered with 'yes' and were able to explain this. This can be seen as a reinforcement of the initiator's selection and gave the idea that these people could indeed provide a worthwhile perspective during the interviews.

Instruments
The interview guide for the first round of interviews consisted of questions that were meant to get information about current developments in the innovation practice, and questions that helped to select people for the second round of interviews.
The interview guide for the second round of interviews that was used for the 15 people involved in the three cases consisted of several topics, including their role in the innovation practice, their personal involvement, and actions that they undertake to support either the innovation or the innovation's initiator. Examples of questions related to these topics are: How would you describe your role in [name of the innovation practice]? Can you recall a moment on which you realized: *this* is why I am involved? When you encourage [name of the initiator], what do you encourage on?

Procedure
The interviews took place between August and November 2021. Each conversation took 30 up to 60 minutes. For each interview a report was made, which was checked by the interviewees for accuracy. For every case a poster with findings and reflections was made. This poster was presented during an interactive meeting that was organized together with the initiator per case, for which all interviewees of that case were invited.

Data analysis
The interview reports of the conversations that we had with the initiators, were used to select interviewees per case, and to provide context-specific content for the interview guide that was developed for the interviews with people from their network.
The interview reports of the second round of interviews were analyzed by tracking down stories in which the interviewee tells about a *move* that he or she had done. The quotation was then used to make a description of the move. A description of a move always contains information on *who* moved something, on *what* was moved, and, possibly, also about the *effect* of this move. An example of a move that was thus derived from the Palliative Care case: *An educator with palliative care as a focus who works as program advisor of the initiative and as a project leader of*

one of the working groups decides to offer the training for teachers nationwide. She does this together with ambassadors of other palliative care education hubs. This creates more visibility for the education hub.

All moves were labelled as moves that either contribute to the innovation practice, or that help the initiator. The moves that contribute to the innovation practice were then sub-divided into moves that help broaden the movement, moves that help deepen it, and moves that help directing the movement. A second researcher randomly checked the moves, and that assessment gave rise to minor changes.

Next to this, the interview reports were analyzed to find quotes demonstrating the involvement, energy, or enthusiasm that was experienced by the interviewees, while being part of this innovation practice. These quotations were used to learn more about the way the sparkle manifests.

Results

The initiators selected a variety of people in various roles as persons that are important to them in building the innovation in the present phase. In the Palliative Care case, we interviewed a teacher palliative care who also works as a project leader for one of the working groups, the initiator's direct supervisor, an educator who works as a program advisor and project leader, a project management assistant, and an internist specialized in geriatric medicine who takes part in the initiative's think-tank. In the Resilience case interviews were done with the advisor on social policies at the municipality, the initiative's operational manager, an entrepreneur who works in the core team, an independent consultant who is a sparring partner for the initiator and the core team, and the initiator's spouse. In the Motion case the alderman for youth was interviewed, the project leader of the children's camp, a policy adviser for youth and a a policy adviser for sports at the municipality, and the general director of the umbrella body for this initiative. In total, the analysis revealed 76 moves. Table 1 shows examples of moves that contribute to the innovation practice, and table 2 shows examples of moves that support the innovation's initiator. Table 3 shows the amount of moves per case per category. To obtain a visual image of the different moves that were tracked down per case, three maps were drawn. Figures 1, 2, and 3 display these maps that contain the data from the first three rows of table 3.

Table 1.

Examples of moves that contribute to the innovation practice

Move that broadens the innovation	**From the Motion case:** The alderman for youth in the initiative's municipality, who supports the initiative repeatedly, brings the success of the holiday camps to the attention of other administrators. She does that by sharing experiences of parents of the children who joined the holiday camp that she receives via e-mail, by encouraging them to read the booklet containing stories of parents. In that way she manages to create structural funding for the initiative.
Move that deepens the innovation	**From the Resilience case:** The initiative's operational manager, who is responsible for the courses and for the trainers in the trainer pool, develops lessons, monitors lesson development (e.g., if we offer one thing in the first year, we should not do that again in the fourth year) and keeps an eye on what the trainers need to guide the lessons.
Move that directs the innovation	**From the Palliative Care case:** A teacher palliative care who works as a project leader for one of the initiative's working groups, dares to let go of one person on the working group after having discussed that with the initiator.

Table 2.

Examples of moves that help the initiator

From the Palliative Care case: An internist specialized in geriatric medicine in a university hospital, who takes part in the think-tank of this innovation, helps the initiator to give meaning to the initial negative reactions in a personal conversation. She does this by making use of her expertise and her knowledge of the position of these people. By that, she helps the initiator to take a next step.

From the Resilience case: The spouse of the initiator occasionally expresses concern whether his partner is working too hard and then encourages taking breaks.

From the Motion case: The general director of the organization implementing the municipality's sports policy, that also forms the umbrella body for this innovation, encourages the initiator to make choices which pilot projects to continue as a project, and which ones to stop. In order not to linger in the pilot phase with too many projects. He also helps the initiator to connect the new projects to relevant people who can bring it one step further such as administrators, or aldermen.

In all three cases moves were found that contribute to broadening, deepening, and directing the movement, and moves that help the initiator directing the movement. The three maps of moves, show that the proportion of moves differs per case. For instance, in the Motion case there are more moves that contribute to deepening and broadening than in the Palliative Care case and in the Resilience case. And the moves in case Resilience are more often focused on support for the initiator of the innovation practice than the moves in the Palliative Care case and the Motion case.

Table 3.
Moves per case and their division among the categories

Case	Moves that broaden	Moves that deepen	Moves that direct	Moves that help the initiator	Total
Palliative Care	4	6	5	9	24
Resilience	4	4	3	15	26
Motion	5	12	6	3	26
Total	13	22	14	27	76

Figure 1.
Map of moves of the Palliative Care case

Moves that Broaden: \ Moves that Deepen: |
Moves that give Direction: ↺ Moves that help the initiator: *
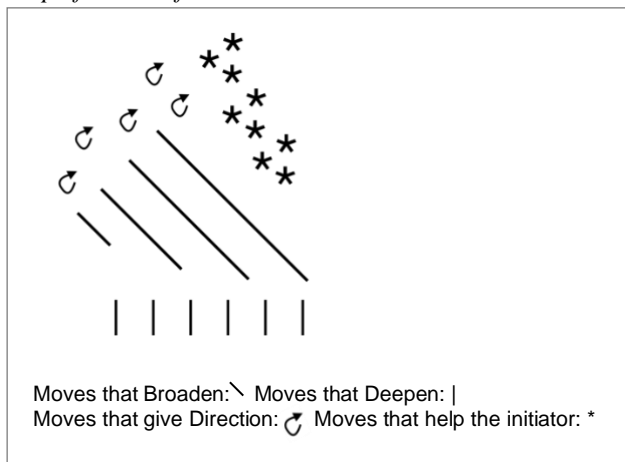
Figure 2.
Map of moves of the Resilience case

Moves that Broaden: \ Moves that Deepen: |
Moves that give Direction: ↺ Moves that help the initiator: *

Figure 3.
Map of moves of the Motion case

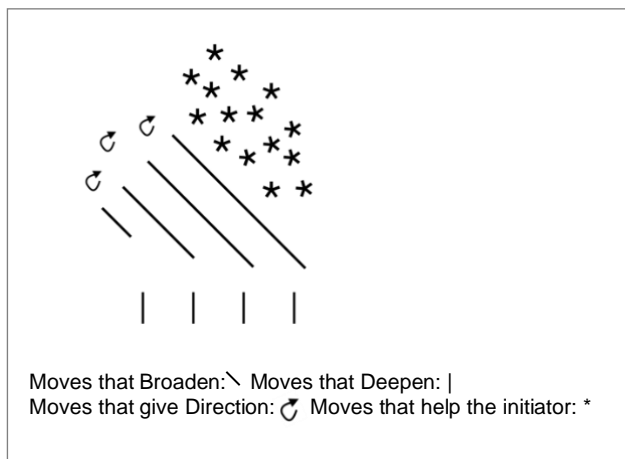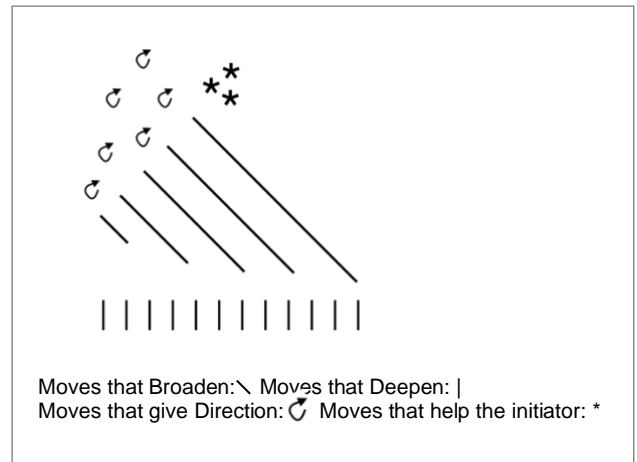Moves that Broaden: \ Moves that Deepen: |
Moves that give Direction: ↺ Moves that help the initiator: *

Moves that help broaden the innovation are for instance about connecting related initiatives (the Palliative Care case), finding new schools to join (the Resilience case), and making the activities accessible in other municipalities (the Motion case).

Moves that help deepen the innovation refer to different kinds of knowledge development. The deepening moves for instance describe how people involved are experimenting with an unconventional approach in a funding application by writing a newspaper article situated in the future (the Palliative Care case); improving the quality of the lesson series (the Resilience case); or developing creative ideas together with experts to address and stimulate effectively the children diagnosed with autism who join the holiday camp (the Motion case).

Moves that are focused on directing the innovation sometimes focus on directing the movement at hand, and at other times on the interviewee's own – and often related – movement. An example of the first situation from the Palliative Care case is a teacher palliative care who works as a project leader for one of the initiative's working groups who dares to let go of one person on the working group after having discussed that with the initiator. An example of the latter from the Palliative Care case is an educator with palliative care as a focus who works as program advisor of the initiative, who uses her knowledge from this initiative to foster a related initiative with respect to spiritual counsellors, where they also aim to develop new educational materials.

Moves that help the initiator can take on different forms. For instance, these moves focus on helping the initiator to make an overview, establishing a connection with specific people, giving solicited and unsolicited advice e.g. on who to involve when, helping to retain personal motivation, thinking along with decisions, and empowering choices.

The results furthermore show that a clear sparkle is perceptible among all interviewees. This sparkle mainly manifests in five ways:

- All 15 interviewees that were selected by the 3 initiators answered promptly to the request for an interview. In almost all cases the researcher received their positive reply on the same day that the invitation was sent. All interviews were scheduled ahead no more than three days after the initial invitation was sent out.
- All interviewees recognize the description of the movement that was given by the initiator and presented to them during the interview. When they were asked to tell something about a movement they are building themselves, almost all of them describe movements that are somehow related to the central topic, or key activity of the innovation practice that the case consists of. For instance, a policy adviser for youth of the municipality in which the Motion case is located, seeks to realize that severe measurements in youth-care such as out-of-home placement will not be necessary anymore. One of her strategies is to fund initiatives like the youth camps from the Motion case, but she also funds other organizations with different initiatives. For instance, one that matches families that could use support with warm and stable families in the same neighborhood.
- The interviewees talked about ways that the innovation relates to their own aspiration by referring to someone in their own personal life who is severely ill (someone in the Palliative Care case), to the future of their own children (someone in the Resilience case), or their own passion for sports (someone in the Motion case).
- When asked for meaningful moments, almost all interviewees share stories about moments in which the target group was involved, that moved them, and that led to visible and worthwhile results. Table 5 shows some examples of quotes.
- Lastly, the enthusiasm of the people involved is felt when they tell how much they enjoy their work. This is mainly sensed with the people who fulfill a role in the core team, and for whom it is part of their salaried work. They describe how the collaboration or the work atmosphere energizes them, or that they love it that they are learning so much from a big project like this. But it is also derived from quotes from other people involved. For instance someone who recounts with visible pleasure how she once answered the phone while being out for a walk, and when visiting a festival when she saw that it was the innovation's initiator who called. It becomes clear that people involved put an effort in creating such an environment. For instance, by showing appreciation to one another, by offering opportunities to learn, and to have fun.

Table 5.

Examples of quotes in which the sparkle manifests

From the Palliative Care case:

"It's important to me to do meaningful work. Last Friday I was teaching and one of the nurses said to me: 'Your teaching made me look differently at the patients. I now know that we really need to talk to people earlier about their wishes [about their last phase in life].' I couldn't have gotten a nicer compliment."

From the Resilience case:

"Being in touch with young people, participating in different educational levels, and working with them on their social emotional resilience, that gives me a lot of energy. (…) During a tailor-made program at one school, a girl said: 'I'm not sure whether I'm a boy or a girl'. She said it just like that. Out in the open. That was a goosebump moment. Then I thought 'look, this is what we are achieving'."

From the Motion case:

"When I am there [at the holiday campsite], I see what this [camp] means for the parents, and for the children. In those moments, I get touched emotionally. I didn't expect that from myself. But to look at children who are often socially excluded, and to meet their parents who care a lot about them... Well, and then to see that the parents suddenly have some free time, and that the children are having fun,…[that truly moves me]."

Conclusions

The present study focuses on innovations in the scale-up phase. Following a case study approach, three innovations were studied to learn more about 'moves' that help the innovation movement to develop, and about the way the 'sparkle', that is often felt in the early stages of innovation, develops. This section answers the two main research questions.

What moves contribute to the development of innovations in the scale-up phase?

The initiators of the Palliative Care case, the Resilience case and the Motion case gather people around them that play an important role in scaling-up the innovation. It can be people with relevant knowledge on the content, processes, or policies such as a teacher, an internist, a personal coach, and policy advisers; colleagues in the innovation's core team such as a project management assistant and an operational manager; and formal superiors from the umbrella bodies or other authority figures such as an alderman. In their interviews, they shared stories that show how they bring the innovation further. Those stories can be captured as 'moves' that bring the innovation further.

In all three cases four different kinds of moves were found: First, moves that broaden the innovation, for instance by

inviting new schools, connecting to other related initiatives, or by expanding to new municipalities. Second, moves that deepen the innovation, for instance by creating new ideas, or new educational materials. Third, moves that provide direction to either the innovation that is central in the case, or to to the participants' own innovation initiative. For instance, linking the innovation initiative to a new and relevant nationwide project, or quit collaboration with someone from the project team. Fourth, moves that help the initiator of the innovation by for instance providing reflection, giving advice, or helping to link strategically relevant persons.

The process of scaling-up looks different in all three cases. The maps that were drawn that reflect these differences (see Figures 1, 2, and 3) can be seen as momentary *snapshots* of how several people contribute to the way the innovation progresses. It seems that innovation in the scale-up phase can indeed be represented as a series of different moves done by different people.

What does the sparkle look like with people who are involved in innovations in the scale-up phase?
In the conceptual framework of this paper the sparkle was depicted as something that flows between people. In the 15 interviews that were conducted with people connected to the initiator this became clearly visible in the way the interviewees described their connection with the innovation's initiator as relevant and meaningful, and in their willingness to immediately schedule the interview. Next to this, in most interviews, at several moments this sparkle was clearly felt while being in the conversation.
Furthermore, the respondents all demonstrated a strong personal connection with the innovation at hand and the way that its bigger picture was connected to their personal lives.
Clearly, the three cases all revolve around a meaningful topic, and that seems to influence the motivation of the interviewees positively. But the people involved also manage to recognize and create opportunities to be in touch with the target group, and, by that, create a clear sense of 'this is why I am involved'. Especially when it gives them the feeling of making one step forward with respect to their aspiration, it seems to lead to bigger involvement.
Although all interviews clearly showed the sparkle that was present, this is not something that is being felt continuously. Interviewees report setbacks, doubts, disagreements, and difficult choices that take away their energy. It might be possible that the personal involvement and aspiration account for the ability to persevere and keep going despite difficult moments along the way.

When reviewing the results of the case study, the image of a hall of mirrors comes to mind. The initiators of the innovation chose people who are meaningful to them to scale-up the innovation at this point in time. At the same time, almost all the people interviewed work on a movement of their own that they try to grow bigger. Quite often, this movement was related in one way or another to the initiative that was central in our case study. For instance, someone who has a different product to work on but focused on the same target group, or someone who works for different target groups and subject matters but who tries to use the same kind of approach as developed in the innovation practice. In fact, some of the interviewees can be seen as the central figure of another innovation practice, which may as well have been a case study in the present research. Hence, the image of mirrors that provide a new reflection again and again. This contributes to a picture of the scale-up phase of innovation as an organic process, in which many different actors are involved, who have their own questions and ambitions, and who are very much involved with the central innovation topic or the innovation process. This genuine interest, combined with the ability to create and contribute to meaningful moments, and the effort that people involved put into creating a pleasant working atmosphere, seems to be important for the sparkle to emerge and to thrive.

Implications for further research and for practice

In the present research we studied innovation by interviewing people that play an important role according to the innovation's initiator. This led to a snapshot of each innovation's scale-up phase in the form of a map of moves. It would be interesting to learn more about the way these snapshots change over time, and, by that, learn more about the way the scale-up phase develops. For instance, at one moment in time there might be more networkers involved to broaden the movement, whereas at another point in time the initiator might explicitly look for people who can offer support to himself or herself in creating direction.
For people involved in innovation practices it could be a meaningful exercise to reflect on the persons that play a meaningful role to them, and to develop their own map of moves as a reflection tool. In addition to this it might be worthwhile to deliberately reflect on moments in which the sparkle is clearly sensible, and what can be done to foster an atmosphere that enables this sparkle to emerge.

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