# *Networked aspects of how school leaders make their organisations ready for applying Artificial Intelligence*

*Jimmy Jaldemark, Department of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Mid Sweden University, jimmy.jaldemark@miun.se*
*Rebecca Marrone, Centre for Change and Complexity in Learning, Adelaide University, rebecca.marrone@adelaide.edu.au*
*Susanne Sahlin, Department of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Mid Sweden University, susanne.sahlin@miun.se*
*Marcus Sundgren, Department of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Mid Sweden University, marcus.sundgren@miun.se*
*Maarten de Laat, Centre for Change and Complexity in Learning, Adelaide University, maartendelaat@adelaide.edu.au*

***Abstract***
*This paper examines how school leaders in Australia and Sweden prepare their organisations to adopt Artificial Intelligence (AI), with a focus on the social configurations through which organisational readiness is developed. Although AI in education research has largely concentrated on teachers' and students' perspectives, less attention has been given to school leaders' perceptions of AI and their role in guiding adoption across schools. The study is theoretically grounded in Weiner's (2009) Organisational Readiness for Change Model, conceptualising readiness through two core dimensions: change commitment (collective willingness to implement AI) and change efficacy (shared confidence in the organisation's ability to do so). To extend this framework, the paper draws on networked learning perspectives, highlighting how readiness is shaped through leaders' engagement in professional networks, collegial dialogue, and staff participation and development. A qualitative cross-national design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with school leaders in Australia (n=6) and Sweden (n=4). Interviews explored leaders' understandings of AI, organisational strategies and visions, perceived enablers and barriers to adoption, and how collaboration with colleagues and external actors supported decision-making. Data were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), combining deductive coding guided by Weiner's model with inductive coding to capture emerging themes related to networked learning. Preliminary findings indicate cautious optimism in both contexts, with AI primarily framed as supporting administrative efficiency and idea generation rather than driving pedagogical transformation. Australian leaders reported a stronger commitment, with explicit school-level strategies legitimising action and reducing perceived risk. Swedish leaders' commitment was often constrained by concerns about academic integrity, data protection, and uneven staff competence, contributing to a "wait-for-policy" orientation and fragmented engagement. Change efficacy was uneven across both settings, frequently depending on individual champions rather than shared routines, although Australian leaders described growing organisational capacity through targeted professional learning and emerging leadership structures. Overall, the findings suggest that more intentional and sustained networked learning infrastructures, alongside clearer system-level guidance, may strengthen organisational readiness and support scalable AI adoption.*

***Keywords***
*AI adoption, networked learning, organisational readiness, professional development, school leaders*

## Research Context

School leaders play a central role in educational organisations, as they are responsible for setting the vision and strategic direction of their schools. Influenced by their attitudes, beliefs, and concerns, school leaders make key decisions about the allocation of resources, including curriculum development and teachers' professional development (Tyson & Sauers, 202). In this way, their perceptions and knowledge significantly shape how



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prepared schools are to engage with and respond to change. In recent years, the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in schools has represented a change process for which school leaders bear responsibility, particularly in ensuring successful and sustainable adoption across the organisation. While a growing body of research has explored students' and teachers' attitudes and beliefs about AI in education, relatively few studies have examined how school leaders perceive AI or how they prepare their schools for its implementation (Marrone et al., 2025). Existing research on AI adoption in schools highlights the importance of cultivating a digital mindset among leaders. Pietsch and Mah (2025) describe this as proactive agility and empathy, emphasising school leaders' capacity to understand, balance, and manage multiple perspectives. Furthermore, previous studies stress the importance of ongoing dialogue with teachers and the establishment of supportive organisational structures to facilitate effective AI adoption (Tyson & Sauers, 2021).

This study is theoretically grounded in Weiner's (2009) Organisational Readiness for Change Model, which provides a robust framework for analysing an organisation's readiness to implement new technologies. The model focuses on two key dimensions: change commitment, defined as the shared willingness within an organisation to embrace change, and change efficacy, which refers to the collective belief in the organisation's capability to implement change successfully. Applying this model enables examination of both school leaders' commitment to AI adoption and their confidence in their ability to integrate AI effectively into their schools. By investigating change commitment and change efficacy, the study explores how school leaders drive organisational and policy development through a range of social activities that support AI adoption in schools. Particular attention is given to how school leaders engage in social interplay, draw on professional contacts, and promote staff participation and development. Participation and development are conceptualised as learning processes that emerge through social interplay and engagement in networked learning activities (NLEC, 2021).

In this study, networked learning is understood as learning that occurs among school leaders who are leading AI adoption, as well as through the actions they initiate or support to facilitate AI use among staff in their schools. These leaders create shared spaces for meaningful activity in which learning is situated and socially constructed. Within these spaces, value is generated by connecting ideas, sharing challenges and insights, and collaboratively developing new knowledge through dialogue (Wenger, Trayner, & De Laat, 2011). Research indicates that networked learning approaches can positively influence organisational change and professional development (Littlejohn et al., 2019). Such approaches foster receptiveness to change (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2021), support a culture of networking as part of professional growth (Evert & Stein, 2022), and contribute to the adoption of new practices and agile responses to organisational change (Boerma, De Laat & Vermeulen, 2024). These networked learning activities take place within various social configurations—ranging from informal networks to formal teams and communities of practice—which shape how learning occurs and how value is created within the organisation (Dron & Anderson, 2008; Wenger et al., 2011).

This short paper aims to provide an early exploration of networked aspects of school leaders' perceptions of organisational readiness to implement Artificial Intelligence. Therefore, this paper explores:

How do school leaders promote and engage in different social configurations to make their organisation ready to adopt Artificial Intelligence?

How do school leaders' orientations towards AI interplay with social configurations to shape organisational readiness for Artificial Intelligence adoption in schools?

# Methodological Framework

This study employs a qualitative, cross-national design to examine how school leaders in Australia and Sweden make their organisations ready for AI. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals in both countries. The interviews focused on participants sharing their experiences of engaging with AI in their roles as school leaders, their perceptions of organisational readiness, and the role of professional networks and infrastructures in supporting change. The interviews followed a shared protocol to ensure comparability while allowing for flexibility in incorporating locally relevant examples. Questions addressed school leaders' personal understandings of AI, their schools' visions and strategies, and how they collaborate with colleagues, municipalities, and external actors. In Sweden, the interview data consisted of four interviews with school leaders. In Australia, interview data comprised 6 interviews with school leaders. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic approach. A hybrid coding process combined deductive attention to Weiner's model (2009) of organisational readiness with inductive coding to capture context-specific and emergent categories informed by networked learning. By integrating data from Sweden and Australia, the study explores both shared themes and contrasting conditions, highlighting how organisational readiness is influenced by cognitive, material, and social

dimensions of networked learning. This cross-national comparison extends the analytical scope beyond individual leadership practices to the broader networks and contexts in which readiness for AI is negotiated.

# Preliminary findings

This section presents findings structured through Weiner's model of organisational readiness—change commitment and change efficacy—extended with a focus on social and networked configurations. Findings from Sweden and Australia are presented comparatively to address how readiness for AI is shaped across contexts.

### Change commitment: cautious optimism with differing institutional support

Across both countries, school leaders expressed cautious optimism towards AI. AI was largely legitimised as a tool for administrative efficiency and idea generation rather than as a driver of pedagogical transformation. Leaders anticipated that time savings could eventually be reinvested in pedagogical leadership and relational work, though this remained aspirational rather than realised.

In Sweden, commitment was tempered by uncertainty and a "wait-for-policy" orientation. Concerns about academic integrity, data protection, and uneven staff competence limited experimentation and contributed to fragmented engagement. In contrast, Australian leaders—particularly in schools with explicit AI strategies—expressed stronger collective commitment. Clear school-level agendas reduced perceived risk and supported more proactive exploration of AI use, suggesting that formal strategic alignment strengthens readiness by legitimising action.

### Change efficacy: uneven leadership capacity and reliance on individual champions

Perceived efficacy to lead AI adoption was uneven in both contexts. Swedish leaders reported low to moderate organisational capacity, constrained by limited AI-specific professional development, variable infrastructure, and divergent staff attitudes. Leadership efforts often depended on early adopters or individual champions rather than shared organisational routines, indicating weak collective efficacy.

Australian leaders reported growing efficacy over time, particularly through the emergence of middle leaders tasked with curriculum and pedagogical development. Targeted professional learning, external expertise, and iterative policy development enhanced leaders' confidence to guide staff. Nevertheless, efficacy remained uneven across schools and continued to rely heavily on individual initiative, especially in the absence of system-level coordination. Organisational and professional cultural tensions were more explicitly articulated in the Swedish context, where they appeared to undermine collective confidence to act, while in Australia, such tensions appeared more muted and were more often addressed through leadership structures, professional learning initiatives, and emerging policy frameworks.

### Social and structural readiness: networked learning as fragile infrastructure

In both countries, networked learning played a central yet largely informal role in shaping organisational readiness. School leaders relied primarily on collegial exchange, peer networks, and emergent online communities to make sense of AI and support staff learning. These social configurations functioned as critical learning infrastructures but were rarely intentionally designed or sustained.

Swedish leaders described limited opportunities for structured collaboration beyond small, local groups, constraining collective sense-making and shared capacity building. Australian leaders engaged in broader and more diverse networks, including cross-school collaborations, professional associations, and formal committees, enabling some leaders to act as network brokers. However, even in Australia, networked learning remained uneven and highly dependent on individual agency. Across contexts, the absence of coordinated policies and sustained network designs limited the scalability of learning and adoption. While networked learning enabled experimentation and local innovation, its informal nature rendered organisational readiness fragile and uneven.

# Conclusions and Further Directions

This study examined how school leaders promote and engage in different social configurations to build organisational readiness for AI adoption, and how leaders' orientations towards AI interplay with these configurations to shape readiness. Across Australia and Sweden, the findings indicate that school leaders play an active role in enabling AI adoption, primarily through relational and networked activity rather than through formalised system-level structures. Leaders relied on collegial exchange, informal peer networks, and emerging

communities to make sense of AI, share experiences, and support staff learning. These configurations operated as key learning infrastructures for readiness, yet they were rarely intentionally designed or sustained, making organisational readiness fragile and uneven across schools.

Leaders in both contexts expressed cautious optimism, most often framing AI as supporting administrative efficiency and idea generation rather than driving pedagogical transformation. This orientation influenced the type and intensity of social configurations mobilised. In Australia, where some schools had explicit strategies and clearer leadership structures, leaders reported stronger commitment and greater confidence to act, supported by wider professional networks and emerging middle leadership roles. In Sweden, uncertainty about regulation, academic integrity, data protection, and uneven staff competence contributed to a "wait-for-policy" stance, limiting experimentation and weakening collective momentum. Despite these differences, change efficacy remained uneven in both countries and frequently depended on individual champions rather than shared organisational routines.

Overall, the study highlights that organisational readiness for AI is shaped not only by individual attitudes or technical capacity, but also by how learning, coordination, and legitimacy are socially organised through networks. Further research should adopt longitudinal designs to explore how readiness develops over time and how networked learning structures can be strengthened to reduce dependence on individual initiative. Additional interviews and complementary survey data will deepen cross-national comparison and clarify scalable conditions for more equitable AI adoption across education systems.

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