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Keeping in touch with our hyphenated selves: Comparing the HRD of early career and established HR academics in the UK

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In this working paper, we critically consider the career development of UK HR academics. Key contingencies include changes in the CIPD's curriculum based on its Profession for the Future Project (PFF); REF (Research Excellence Framework), particularly impact cases; and AACSB International accreditation guidelines on categories of faculty. We explore how early career academics from industry and established HR professors balance their attention to scholarship and to engagement with practice over time. How do they sustain 'hyphenated selves' (Fine and Sirin, 2007)? What are the human resource development implications for HR academics within the current impact agenda where public engagement is encouraged (Dallyn et al., 2015)?

This pilot study compares questionnaires and interviews in a sample of 12 academics and secondary data based on the exemplar of Professor Sir Cary Cooper, a veteran and prolific media commentator on HR issues. We present vignettes of individuals at different stages in their academic careers. The analysis applies Clark's (2015) eight lenses on ethical decision making (underpinning the PFF project) and examples of activities used to categorise faculty members into AACSB's four typologies.

The initial findings suggest that rounded HR academics have rich (albeit overwhelming) opportunities to generate synergies between theory, practice and workplace engagement throughout their careers. We recommend greater use of dyads of early, mid and later career HR academics, advisory board partners and dissertation students to ensure HR academics bridge scholarship and practice. This paper contributes to an intergenerational understanding of developing academic careers aligned to changes in professional body strategies.

Key words: HR, academics, careers, development, hybrid, practice

Introduction

While HR academics are clearly charged with research, teaching and corporate engagement about developing others in the workplace, we know little about how HR academics themselves are developed. Various scholars have reflected on academic careers over the life cycle (Frost and Taylor, 1996; Hallgren, 2014), particularly from perspectives of gender, productivity (for example, Long et al., 1993), identity (Knights and Clarke, 2014), nationality (Johansson and Śliwa, 2014), and in certain fields such as economics

(Shulamit, 1993).

We might assume that the professional development of management education and HRD scholars is a case of cobblers' shoes or barbers' haircuts where they neglect their own needs. Robson and Mavin (2014) found that UK universities lack clarity and customisation in evaluating training and development. As a newcomer to the full-time academic role of 'leading' an HR subject group in a UK university, and member of the CIPD's (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) membership and professional development committee where the Institute is consulting on its Profession for the Future Project (PFF), I am interested in the development of HR academics. In particular, how can HR subject group leaders support colleagues to keep in touch with the world of practice? As novice academics who were previously full-time HR professionals gain their doctorates and mature as scholars, how do they balance their hybrid interests in theory and practice? Moreover, how do professors of HR ensure their own thought leadership within the academy is informed by changes in professional practice and vice versa?

The first section of this development paper outlines the professional body, national research policy and accreditation agency contingencies impacting on the careers of HR academics in UK universities. Secondly, we conceptualise the engaged scholar's identity as 'hyphenated' (Fine and Sirin, 2007) and we frame the role in relation to literature on pracademics and public intellectuals (Dallyn et al., 2015). In the third section, the collection and comparative analysis of questionnaire, interview and secondary data are explained. Finally, we discuss the implications of the initial findings for HR faculty members and recommend future research avenues.

Context

The UK government's impact policy agenda is changing academics' behaviours in business schools to engage more with journalists and practitioners in proving the non-academic value of excellent research to society (Lejeune et al., 2015). In turn, this is highlighting the importance of academics developing their temperaments as public intellectuals (Dallyn et al., 2015), a role which some individuals may find uncomfortable and perceive as risky. At the same time as a national obsession with 'REFability', i.e. who should be submitted to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) every six or seven years based on their research in top ranked journals, business school faculty must contend with AACSB International (2016) criteria. This classifies employees into four types: Scholarly Academic (SA); Practice Academic (PA); Scholarly

Practitioner (SP) and Instructional Practitioners (IP) based on currency of activities in scholarship, practice and engagement with organisations. In addition to these boundary conditions, HR academics in the UK who teach programmes approved by the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development), the world's oldest professional body for HR practitioners, are contending with consultations to change the CIPD's curriculum underpinned by university research on ethical decision making in the workplace by Sam Clark (2015), a moral philosopher interested in the self and well-being rather than an HR specialist. In terms of the development of a mid or late career HR academic, therefore, they may be defined ideally as a 'four by four', i.e. someone with four top tier international journal publications and thus neatly defined as a 'Scholarly Academics.' Moreover, business school deans and research directors are anxious to submit impact case studies to the REF. HR scholars like Katie Truss and Simonetta Manfredi, who submitted impact cases for REF 2014 respectively on employee engagement and equality, exemplify ideal models of HR academics in the UK.

In practice, these signals ensure UK faculty members must continually develop their profiles and cannot rely on tenure or past achievements without having to re-invent themselves every five years for (re)accreditations or being subject to interrogation if they fail to fit neatly into the prescribed categories. Indeed, business school deans have been relegated to the role of teaching fellows with the arrival of a new vice-chancellor who refuses to accept 'heavy administrative duties' as an adequate alibi for an academic leader who is no longer publishing. On the other hand academic credentials and abstract publications in highly ranked journals may mean little, if anything, to the typical HR student who is seeking a CIPD qualification as a badge for promotion and wants hand-on advice for immediate problems. In a climate of tough recruitment for professional and part-time postgraduate programmes, there is the strategic choice in universities for these types of students to be taught by adjuncts who understand executive education, leaving professors to the abstractions and idiosyncrasies of a 'publish or perish' culture (De Rond and Miller, 2005). However, in universities where academics' roles remain rounded, i.e. they have not been unbundled by upskilling administrators and deskilling core faculty (Macfarlane, 2011), we argue that staying in touch with professional practice while enhancing one's scholarly profile should be a relevant aspiration for many HR academics. This is especially the case in the UK where there is no tenure system. We suggest, therefore, in the impact policy climate that HR academics with strong practitioner backgrounds and doctorates are well placed to occupy spaces that bridge scholarship, policy, and practice throughout their academic careers. This is provided that they maintain connections in multiple spheres of influence as opportunities to source and disseminate innovative research and teaching that are mutually reinforcing.

While there is a lengthy consultation process on the CIPD's Profession for the Future Project (PFF), there is

no accompanying dialogue on its implications for HR lecturers who are delivering this project in terms of their development. Furthermore, as far as we know, there is no similar research being conducted on how we can support HR faculty members of the future as professionals. There have been new developments with the launch of a CIPD applied research conference in 2015 which brought together academics and practitioners – more of the former than the latter. The PFF exercise has led to research reports commissioned by the CIPD from UK universities. In particular, as a move away from ‘best practice’ HR, CIPD is focusing on professionalism and workplace ethics based on eight lenses: fairness, merit, markets, democracy, well-being, rights and duties, character, handing down (Clark, 2015: 6). We consider these lenses in relation to the careers of HR academics.

Conceptual frameworks

We conceptualise the engaged HR former practitioner scholar’s identity as ‘hyphenated’ (Fine and Sirin, 2007), i.e. living socially and psychologically ‘on a hyphen.’ This can be a destabilising dilemma if the individual is not accepted in either of two communities they occupy. However, an appreciation of dualities and the ability to operate in worlds with different ideologies as a bridge can also be a significant source of competitive advantage. Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013: 372) mapped four hyphen-spaces for researchers to occupy with research respondents that generate possibilities for participants to adopt different identities. In literature on hybrid professionals who occupy roles as technical specialists and managers/leaders, there is evidence that rather than falling between two stools and being rejected by specialists and administrators, such individuals who willingly adopt these jobs can achieve positive integrative outcomes and elite positions (McGivern et al., 2015). Indeed, in a university context rather than viewing hybrid academics as deskilled ‘paracademics’ (MacFarlane, 2011), in other cases serious ‘pracademics’ who span practice and academia are perceived as valuable citizens (Posner, 2009).

In reflecting on literature that explores split personality phenomena in research and in the workplace, we consider Clark’s (2015) work for the CIPD on dilemmas that HR practitioners face in representing their profession and its ethics as well as their duties as employees to their organisations and the bottom line. Clark provides eight lenses through which to view HR issues in the workplace from the perspective of a moral philosopher. These lenses may overlap and be at odds with each other. Table 1 lists these lenses and how they are defined. We add a third column to interpret these perspectives in terms of HR concepts, policies and specific interventions by HR practitioners with a view to reflecting on how they might help us make

sense of the dilemmas HR academics might face in constructing their own careers and developmental opportunities.

LENS	DEFINITION (Clark, 2015: 6)	HR CONCEPTS
(1) Fairness	<i>Everyone in an organisation should be able to agree to it, whatever their place in it.</i>	social contract theory, fair job design, justice
(2) Merit	<i>Jobs and their rewards should track talent and hard work.</i>	talent management, equal opportunity
(3) Markets	<i>Jobs and their rewards should follow from voluntary market exchanges.</i>	business acumen, reward based on current labour market rates and demand
(4) Democracy	<i>No one should be subject to a regime in which they have no say.</i>	employee voice, engagement, consultation, citizenship, dialogue, partnership model
(5) Well-being	<i>Work should be good for us.</i>	health, welfare, autonomy, satisfaction, distributed leadership
(6) Rights and duties	<i>Everyone has rights to do some things and to be free of some things, and everyone has duties not to violate others' rights.</i>	autonomy, dignity, respect, equal pay for equal work, right to join a union
(7) Character	<i>Each of us should work to develop the best ethical character for our roles.</i>	ethical behaviours are deep rooted and core to our identity, sensitivity, deliberative, personal development and growth, emulation, regular practice, resilience
(8) Handing down	<i>We...are...responsible for conserving and maintaining the small part of [the world] over which we currently have stewardship, and for passing it on undamaged to our descendants.</i>	sustainability, corporate social responsibility, philosophically conservative, focus on continuity, community

Table 1. Clark's (2015) eight lenses on ethical workplace decision-making translated into HR concepts

Research design and analysis

The research design entailed two phases of qualitative inquiry. Firstly, 12 HR subject group team members in

one business school were emailed questionnaires about their transitions into academia and continued contacts with practice. The sample comprised permanent lecturers on all academic grades ranging from an individual with three months' experience to one well-established professor on the School's senior management team. This included inductive data coding for themes and cross-coder checking for reliability and validity. The data from the questionnaire provide vignettes of HR academics at different stages of their careers.

Phase two focused on analysis of secondary data from profiles of Cary Cooper available on the internet which were mapped against Clark's (2015) research report for the CIPD on ethical lenses. Cary Cooper was selected as an exemplar of a highly recognised scholar/public intellectual. He is simultaneously President of the CIPD and the British Academy of Management (BAM), a unique duality and particularly interesting as he was BAM's Founding President in 1986. It is interesting that when Cary Cooper returned to Manchester at the age of 75 as a Professor, he declared enthusiastically, 'I love being an academic and love writing. For me it is simply a way of life', adding that "I want to look at what the School can be offering the Government. What, for instance, can it do to help drive the productivity agenda?' (Manchester Business School, 2015).

Summary of findings

Table 2 displays descriptive data from four illustrative responses to the questionnaire survey. Tables 3 presents examples from an initial analysis of Cary Cooper's profile using Clark's (2015) ethical lenses.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>New lecturer, PhD, limited HR experience, CIPD Associate</i></p> <p>I moved into academia for a more intellectually challenging non-routine job. I have limited contact with practitioners except socially but they were part of my doctoral research sample. I don't attend practitioner conferences but I feel the professional is being increasingly remote with centralised, shared and outsourced services. My main involvement with practitioners is in conversations with advisory board members.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Senior lecturer (two years), current doctoral student, CIPD Fellow (Practice)</i></p> <p>It was quite by serendipity that I became interested in HR when I was on a general management graduate scheme placement. I specialised in HR and gained CIPD</p>

qualifications but I had no plans to be an HR director. I was interested in research and took a career break because it was impossible to work in HR and complete a doctorate and I happened to see this job advertised at the university. I miss the camaraderie and 'can do' from being a practitioner but I appreciate having time to think and not have to deal with colleagues' toxic emotions. I enjoy having time to read in academia and to make sense of my experiences. I'm closely involved in the local CIPD branch and use CIPD resources for teaching as well as daily updates. I maintain links with former colleagues and friends in HR and work with part-time lecturers who work in HR. I am interested in developing HR research that impacts on practice.

Principal lecturer (new to role), PhD, CIPD Fellow (Practice)

I completed an MA in Education while I lead a team in an FE college and wanted to be a better manager so moved in an NHS graduate trainee scheme in HR. This was followed by an HR role in higher education where I completed my MBA. I have always had an appetite for studying while working and this was accelerated from working in a top science research environment and on an academic journal ranking guide. I have always been a member of the professional body for HR even when I was in general management and research strategy. It is always good to be a member of a club and I enjoy being in the scholarly community presenting at conferences and finding out about what is really happening on the ground amongst practitioners. In academia I enjoy having time to think and to share ideas with students particularly on their dissertations. Some of the best academics I have worked with go back and forth between policy, research and practice and these synergies can be really powerful, especially where they are multi-disciplinary.

Professor (fairly recent), CIPD Fellow (Academic)

I was an HR practitioner and keen to contribute to new knowledge and gain work-life balance. I don't miss being subservient to short-sighted corporate issues in my former practitioner role. In academia I enjoy managing my own time and being paid for doing research, teaching and working with the community. I carry out field research but don't have much involvement with HR practitioners. I see HR roles becoming more flexible, diverse, globalised and focused on talent. I am very involved in the Academy of Management and European Academy of Management. I am interested in CIPD platforms and running joint sessions with practitioners.

Table 2. Example vignettes of HR academics' responses to email questionnaires

LENS	ACTIVITIES IN THE HR ACADEMIC'S ROLE	CARY COOPER AS AN EXEMPLAR
(1) Fairness	Establishing clear structures, boundaries, guidelines, expectations.	President of Relate, President of the Institute of Welfare.
(2) Merit	Involvement in prize giving, making research grant awards, promoting talent, providing peer review.	University business school dean, Prothen Deputy Vice-Chancellor.
(3) Markets	Being a company director, member of a board, earning from consultancy, grant income capture.	Established own company of well-being specialists, business psychologists.
(4) Democracy	Good organisational citizenship, electing leaders in the academy, engaging with industry, government policy.	Advising on issues related to the public sector.
(5) Well-being	Exemplifying healthy practices, emotions, mental and physical well-being, a climate without fear.	Advocate for workplace well-being.
(6) Rights and duties	Encouraging learners' autonomy, respecting colleagues, being assertive about creating value and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.	Chair of the Academy of Social Sciences.
(7) Character	Mentoring, setting high standards, excellent research and teaching, meeting deadlines, being punctual, strong work ethic, ensuring clarity and boundaries, rewarding exemplary behaviours.	Frequent media commentator.
(8) Handing down	Public relations, founding journals, associations, collaborating and exchanging knowledge, developing future generations, providing a legacy of articles, institutions, good governance.	World Economic Forum speaker. Founding editor of a journal and founding president of an academic society.

Table 3. Clark's (2015) eight lenses on ethical workplace decision-making translated into HR academics' behaviours with examples from Cary Cooper's contributions

Limitations of this initial research study

This study is based mainly on self-report and secondary data analysis. It would benefit from a more sustained investigation of lived experiences of bridging academic and practice and dialogue between academics and practitioners about their development plans and opportunities. We might also explore Wikipedia pages of high profile HR academics, their institutional and other biographical details as well as their daily practices. Being able to bridge theory and practice is one aspect for the capacity building of HR academics. Another question is: just how visible are UK HR academics? One quick measure is outputs on *The Conversation*, an independent, not-for-profit media outlet that publishes content sourced from the academic and research community. It is interesting to note that the top 15 contributors to *The Conversation's* business and economy section at the time of writing comprise academics mainly from the fields of economics, and public policy, with a UK professor of accounting as the highest contributor.

Implications for future practice

Institutional performance indicators bounded by government policy, accreditation and professional body criteria need to be translated into institutional support for mentoring, services to business and profile building and branding of academics and the HR profession. Early career HR academics can support colleagues who have not worked in HR practice full-time for many years with the use of social media and recent practitioner contacts while established professorial faculty members can provide novice academics with mentoring in producing scholarly publications. Our initial findings suggest the importance of encouraging HR academics to partner with members of business school advisory boards, to meet with dissertation students in the students' workplaces, undertake board member and industrial scholar-in-residence opportunities, and to co-write and co-present with practitioners in scholarly and applied research conferences. In raising the profile of HR from a Cinderella function to a core contributory strategic function, we argue for HR academics to engage actively in public debate exemplified by individuals listed in the *HR Most Influential UK Thinkers* index, TEDx talks, the popular press, BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, World Economic Forum, *Huffington Post*, *The Conversation* in addition to local chambers of commerce.

We recommend that future research on the HRD of HR academics might include in-depth interviews over time (including autoethnographies), insights from writers of REF impact case studies in the field, and the evaluation of career planning and interventions with a view to informing universities, HR scholarly and professional body associations.

Conclusion

This pilot study has provided insights into the experiences of HR academics at different stages of their careers in one unit and the activities of a high profile veteran HR professor. It illustrates that while former recent HR practitioners entering academic bring with them strong networks from the profession, this dilutes over time with less evidence of current HR professors who are academic fellows of CIPD being actively engaged in the professional body. Formal mentoring of recently appointed staff is often institutionalised, however, longer serving faculty members rely on updating their practical knowledge through consultancy or teaching alongside adjuncts who are still practitioners. HR professors in HR subject groups appear to be least aware of strategic developments in the professional body and may benefit from reverse mentoring from newcomers. Balancing networks with scholarly and practice communities requires HR academics with an open mindset and paradoxical leadership behaviours (Zhang et al, 2015) who are willing to find resemblances in multiple language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) to enhance their own career development and 'take their own medicine'.

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