The constriction of identity: the impact of accreditation on academics in an English Business School

Abstract:

The re-professionalisation of those who work in education is a common theme explored in the literature. This paper reports on research undertaken at an English Business School that was concerned with how academics responded to external accreditation and the introduction of five categories that demarcated them according to their academic achievements, professional experience and standing within the sector. In reporting on this way of re-professionalising academics, this research makes a contribution to the discourse on working in Higher Education, and how academics view this process. The research adopted an approach based on interviewing and analysed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The findings suggest that although academics often question the imposition of an artificial identity, they adopt a pragmatic position of compliance.

Keywords

Academic identity; Business School; AACSB accreditation; Identity work; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Introduction:

Billot (2010, 709) posited the question: 'what makes an academic today and how does the academic perceive their working identity? For Billot (2010) the issue of academic identity has arisen from the redefinition of academics' roles and responsibilities. In this respect, change within universities is indicative of a wider transformation of work and professional identity that has taken place elsewhere in the British post-compulsory sector. This transformation of Higher Education (HE) has taken place over decades and continues to evolve as universities search for ways of coming to terms with structural change to the sector through massification, globalised competition, and the pressure to conform with Government policy. In particular, change in HE is evident in the individuation of accountability and the re-professionalisation of academics as a workforce. This paper echoes Billot's interest in the changing nature of academic work and aims to explore how academics view the redefinition of their roles and status by an external organisation separate from the British (HE) sector. For De Vita and Case (2016, 3480), 'there has been insufficient academic discussion of the unique circumstances currently being faced in the UK business school sector'. This study aims to respond to this gap in the literature on academics and their work by focussing upon several inter-related issues relating to being an academic in UK business schools. Much of the research on identity formation and identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Brown, 2004) has focussed on how individuals construct meaning of self and work role from their interaction with others in the

occupation setting, often in very immediate contexts. This paper looks at the impact of designation of academics into one of five occupational groups by the American-based accreditation body, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) at a post-1992 English University. In doing so, the research aims to enable academics to express their self-concept as professionals and elicit their response to an imposed framework that is designed to classify them and their work.

Literature review:

The social construction of identity in universities:

The issue of academic identity is part of the wider cross-disciplinary discourse on professionalism and how it is constructed in contemporary society. Professional identity is a leitmotif of our values, and the way society ascribes roles and status to individuals and groups, such as teachers, social workers and academics. We generally conceive professionals as being part of a distinct social group that possess a set of values, adhere to a code of ethics and behaviours, and who are self-regulating in terms of professional standards. Academic identity has conventionally been associated with the principle of intellectual autonomy, independence of thought and the right to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy. Implicit within such a conception of academic autonomy is a suspicion of an institutional mind-set, and can only be 'understood not as a fixed property, but as part of the lived complexity of a person's project' (Clegg, 2008, 329). In measuring institutional performance at the level of the individual, management practices have redefined conceptions of academic work and its value (Winter and O'Donohue, 2012). Furthermore, the idea of a 'republic of scholars' in which academics worked collectively as equals (Neave, 1988; Cipriano, 2011), appears increasingly moribund as they are assigned into teams that are defined by income streams and research bands. As such, it is possible to interpret changes in managerial practices within Higher Education as changing our understanding of academic work and identity.

For Brown (2004), the issue of professional identity revolved around concerns over whether identities are stable or dynamic, coherent or inconsistent, or indeed authentic and chosen by individuals themselves. Although social psychology, and identity theory in particular, has argued that an individual's self-concept is coherent and relatively stable, postmodernist sociological interpretations have focussed on the apparent contradictions and tensions inherent in the concept of identity. Trede, Macklin and Bridges (2012) trace the differing approaches that have been adopted in understanding the concept, ranging from a 'self-authoring' (Hunter, 2007) stance to one concerned with 'personal epistemologies' (Baxter Magolda, 2004), to one's 'mental models of the world' (Bramming, 2007) and a 'sense of professional agency' (Briggs, 2007). Moreover, it is important to recognise that professional identity should be viewed as only one possible variable within an individual's complex constellation of identities (Churchman, 2006), and that academic identity remains a 'dynamic and slippery construct' (Billot, 2010, 719).

For a number of researchers, academic identity is formed through the interaction between individuals and their social context (Alu-Alruz and Khasawneh, 2013; Arasa and Calvert, 2013; Trede, Macklin and Bridges, 2012). Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) note that there is an inherent tension within individuals as organisational citizens, as they 'want to be part of a collective and be unique', and this is particularly applicable to university academics where they may identify with their university or department but also wish to create a professional reputation. This tension in identity construction underpins a conceptualisation of the process of organisational identity offered by

Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) in which an individual continuously creates a workplace identity. For Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) this process of identity formation involves the accommodation of personal identity motives with wider social forces within an organisation that may challenge their self-concept (organisational sense breaking) and engender re-socialisation (organisational sense giving) that revalidates a legitimated organisational identity through sense making, as described in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

This process is described by Alvesson and Willmott (2002, 626) as 'identity work' and involves continuous 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness'. Importantly, for Ashforth and Schinoff (2016, 128):

> Organizations have a vested interest in this identity construction, and may engage in sense breaking to disabuse individuals of ways of being that are thought to impede adjustment, and in sense giving to influence how individuals come to understand the organization and their place within it.

Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) viewed American business schools as 'identity workspaces' that provide a 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1989) wherein students and academics were able to create their professional identity. For Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010), business schools provided a stable and secure environment within which to fashion a professional identity as they were characterised by effective forms of social defence against external pressure, a clearly defined and coherent sentient community and legitimate rites of passage that reinforced professional identities. This interpretation of social indoctrination within organisations suggests that organisations are potentially powerful engines of cultural reproduction. However, for the purposes of this paper, we should question whether English business schools replicate this model of autonomous identity workspaces?

Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008) identify three meta-theoretical approaches to the study of identity formation within organisations. The functionalist perspective tends to focus on the causal factors that lead to organisational success. The interpretivist perspective considers the influence of social interaction on the process of identity formation. A third approach is aligned to postmodernist thinking and the idea that organisations aim to impose corporate identities and behaviours on their employees and that they are "arenas of struggle"- this is the critical perspective. This literature review primarily focusses on the discourse that relates to the interpretivist-critical debate. Drawing from postmodernist Foucauldian theory, the 'manufacturing of subjectivity' thesis is predicated on the idea of an imposed identity created by 'technologies of control' (Casey, 1999; Du Gay, 1996) and is associated with the ascendancy of New Managerialism that is explored below. This position has been criticised by others (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Musson and Duberley, 2007) who argue that the 'manufacturing of subjectivity' thesis is too deterministic and ignores the potential role for personal agency in organisational life. According to Alvesson and Willmott (2002), despite managerial controls, individuals still possess the potential to fashion some degree of autonomy, and for Thomas (2013, 172) 'attempts to control the identities of employees are, at best, precarious and contested'. This debate is fundamental to this investigation, as it provides the theoretical underpinning to the literature review.

The impact of New Public Management and tensions within new forms of academic identity:

Whitchurch (2008) offers a framework within which to conceptualise academic identity and the issue of 'identity schism' as described by Billot (2010) where one's 'imagined' and 'real' conceptions of identity differ. In part, the origins of such an analysis of an identity schism can be traced to the complexities inherent to individual interpretations of perceived role and status though it is reflection of organisational culture and the coherence of a 'profession'. For Briggs (2007) academic identity is tied to three key issues: professional values, location and role- all implicitly link to the wider concept of belonging. The concept of belonging is central to social identity theory and the view that identity is formed in relation to others' identities. In this sense, identity can be viewed as a relational concept and not a monolithic construct. As a result, we should consider how identity is formed in relation to clearly recognised social groupings within their respective work context. For Billot then (2010, 712):

> One's sense of self is embedded in the way the professional role is enacted and when roles and responsibilities alter in emphasis, so the individual's sense of distinctiveness will also shift. It follows then that professional identity develops where agency and structure … interact.

In order to contextualise the evolving nature of academic identity, it is important that some understanding of the changing nature of work and its wider policy context be established.

According to Winter (2009, 121), 'managerialism, or new public management as it is known in the public sector, has reshaped all aspects of academic work and identity around an idealised image of corporate efficiency, a strong managerial culture, entrepreneurialism, and profit-making ideas'. Contemporary academia has become an exercise in 'identity jujitsu' (Kreiner and Sheep, 2009) wherein academics are expected to engage with the prevailing requirements imposed by a range of

internal and external stakeholders. It is within this ever-changing and volatile environment of 'super complexity of HE' (Barnett, 2000) that academics search for meaning to their work and status. One of the main features of the contemporary HE sector is the prevalence of line management in defining the nature of work expectations for academics and the importation of private sector practices (Deem, Hillyard and Reed, 2007; De Vita and Case, 2016). Although academics enjoy relative freedom in relation to the nature of their research, their degree of autonomy is being constrained increasingly by managerial procedures that set out a regime of accountability and performance evaluation that has led to a 'reformulation of the academic habitus' (Garnett and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2009). This development echoes the rise of New Public Management both as an ideological construct of the 'new now' and a form of control within the working environment. For Collini (2013, 12) 'the true use-value of scholarly labour can be seen to have been squeezed out; only the exchange-value of the commodities produced, as measured by metrics remains'. Davis, van Rensburg and Venter (2016, 1486) report on the proletarianisation of academic labour within a machine bureaucracy wherein behaviours are governed by new set of rules set by 'a command and control organisation'. An audit culture based on the idea of performativity that was imposed on the Sixth Form Colleges and General Further Education Colleges during the 1990s is now being implemented in HE but with a different set of performance indicators that include development of commercial ties, success in obtaining research funding awards and an analysis of student satisfaction scores. As such, this ascendancy of 'new managerialism' poses important questions in relation to the freedoms and expectations traditionally associated with academia. For Ball (2015, 2) this has led to a situation in which:

> Collective interests are replaced by competitive relations, and it becomes increasingly difficult to mobilise workers around issues of general significance, collective professional values are displaced by commercial values. We cease to be a community of scholars and rather we relate to one another in a complex, overlapping set of competitions, often expressed as rankings.

For postmodernist scholars, such as Ball (2015), not only does this managerial regime pervade organisational life, but is through a form of internalised self-governance able to challenge academics' conceptions of self-identity and worth. For Thomas (2013, 171) 'disciplinary technologies work to conjoin an individual's notion of self with the organisation's values and goals such that the individual participates in their own subjugation'. In short, personal conceptions of academic identity have become subsumed into other corporate-based identities, echoing the 'manufacturing of subjectivity' thesis.

The changing nature of work within the British Higher Education system has been commented on by a number of researchers (Anderson and Cohen, 2015; Ball, 2015; Clegg, 2008; Fitzmaurice, 2013; Garnett and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2009; Henkel, 2000). As early as the 1990s, commentators were describing the changing nature of work as an academic (Halsey, 1992; Nixon, 1996), and its concomitant impact on status and identity. Whereas Halsey (1992) referred to the creation of a new proletariat within academia, Nixon (1996, 8) chose to view change as generating a 'plurality of occupational groups', each with a distinct set of terms and working conditions. In particular, the literature on developing work roles within HE has variously identified the middle-manager (Davis et al, 2016), the academic-manager (Winter, 2009) and the manager-academic (Deem, Fulton, Hillyard,

Johnson and Reed, 2003; Bessant and Mavin, 2016) role as an indicator of changing work patterns and new hierarchical and power relationships with universities. For Winter (2009) the emergence of the academic-manager is indicative of a values-based identity schism that places academic-managers in a congruent relationship with that of management, and against the values of their academic colleagues. For Winter (2009, 122),

> Central to the identified identity schism is the notion of values fit and organisational situations in which academics and managers' ideological beliefs and values may not overlap in respect to the roles and obligations of academics and the primary purpose of the institution…. At the heart of the identity schism is the notion of professional identity and the extent to which an academic seeks to separate her/his inner professional self from an outer organisational self that privileges commercial principles and practices.

Bessant and Mavin (2016) report on the complexities and tensions that confront the manager-academic in their hybrid role in post-1992 British Business Schools. Not only is the role often poorly defined, many manager-academics do not receive sufficient training to deal with complex managerial issues and encounter significant levels of stress. In this sense, it could be argued that manager-academics are as engaged in a form of identity formation as they search to create a validated workplace identity.

Changing work relations and new technologies of accountability and control have altered the position of academic vis a vis their employer through new forms of line management. This change in the relative position and status of academics is reflected in cultural change within universities. For De Vita and Case (2016, 349):

> The culture of universities has accommodated these neoliberal transformations eschewing the notion of collective endeavour in favour of a fiercely competitive, dog-eat-dog, worldview. University cultures reflect an overarching homogeneous ideology in which quantitative targets, competition for jobs and places, and league tables are privileged over cooperative inquiry and academic inquisitiveness.

This ideological agenda to transform the work and power relations within universities is also engendering changes in the culture of HE institutions, both in the UK and internationally. Feather and McDermott (2016) argue that this divisive approach to management introduce via New Public Management has eroded collegiality in business schools within post-1992 English universities. This changing culture within HE is mirrored internationally. For example, in their study of universities in South Africa, Davis et al. (2016,1480-1481) report on 'a culture of conformity over collegiality', and whereas in the past management had been left to senior position-holders, it now 'cascades down to its constituent parts: the faculties, departments, schools and research institutes'. This finding is echoed in a study of English post-1992 universities by Feather and McDermott (2016, 4) in which they argue that 'this is far from the yesteryear culture of HE, where autonomy was not only given to, but also expected by academics; where they could undertake research and have freedom of speech without fear of favour'. De Vita and Case (2016, 349) argue that 'a managerialist climate of

increasing bureaucracy, constraints, compliance, and hyper-control in business schools… [indicates] that this culture runs counter to the prescriptions of much contemporary management thinking'.

Although this 'managerialist turn' may conflict with current management science that emphasises empowerment and trust, it appears to be the dominant ideological context within which academics work. In opposition to the 'manufacturing of subjectivity' thesis, a number of researchers have sought to investigate modes of resistance within organisations (Thomas, Mills and Helms-Mills, 2004; Thomas and Davies, 2005). In particular, research has focussed on the idea of dis-identification and the rejection of a uniform corporate identity, often reporting low-level opposition. For Teelken (2012, 278), this crisis in academic identity has led to three typical responses amongst academics. The first response is to accept change passively without protest in a form of 'formal instrumentality'. A second response was described as 'symbolic compliance' where academics are able to retain some form of personal autonomy whilst accepting change. The third response is viewed as being one of 'strategic compliance'. This echoes the research of Gleeson and Shain (2003) that identified 'willing', 'unwilling' and 'strategic' forms of compliance in General Further Education Colleges more than a decade ago. In this respect, the changes that are impacting on HE should be seen as part of a wider process that has been imposed more broadly on professionals within the education system. The issue of how academics respond to the re-definition of their work, status and identity is therefore an important issue to investigate in work studies such as this that focus on notions of professional identity.

The manufacturing of professional identities within academia can be linked to a more pervasive concern within HE as institutions to create a brand image 'as they struggle for legitimacy, students, and financial resources in an increasingly competition-oriented education market' (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009, 460). For De Vita and Case (2016, 352-353), 'business schools- pushed and pulled by the forces of neoliberal capitalism- are invited to reinvent themselves [as the] need for business schools to deliver 'distinctiveness' and 'innovation' is stronger than ever'. In this respect, identity, reputation and branding become part of a commercially oriented rationale that over-ride traditional notions of professional identity. For Davis et al. (2016, 1481), this means that 'managerialism and its profit-driven motives alter the institutional culture and call upon academics to enhance not the discipline but their career paths and the university's own market share. Ultimately, the changes in the institutional culture impact on the professional identities of organisational members'. In short, universities are engaging in redefining professional identity as part of their wider branding exercise. Waeraas and Solbakk (2009, 452) argue that although branding has become increasingly important in HE, relatively little research has been undertaken into the branding of universities and 'is still very much at the pioneer stage', and for Balmer (2001, 248) has been clouded by conceptual 'fog'. However, Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer (2007) contend that the theoretical development of organisational identity formation could be advanced by drawing from the literature related to social, organisational and corporate identity. Ultimately, as Maxwell and Knox (2009, 894) describe, 'managers must therefore understand how employees' values and behaviour can be aligned with a brand's desired values… [and that they] live the brand' (Maxwell and Knox, 2009, 897). Drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), we can see that cultural values and accepted norms promote social cohesion and underpin collective identity (Hatch and Schultz, 1997). However, as Henkel, Tomczak, Heitmann, and Hermann (2007, 320) emphasise such an approach
'is simple to state, but hard to live up to that employees need to live the brand…. It means …

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developing and living up to values that feel authentic'. Again, we return to the core issue within the debate over identity- is it imposed or created through negotiation and internalised.

The accreditation of business schools:

Recognition by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has become an objective for any aspiring Business School that wishes to establish a position in the global HE market. In the United Kingdom, there are 36 Business Schools that have secured AACSB accreditation, 8 of which are attached to universities established following the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, and 14 who are members of the Russell Group (AACSB, 2020). Accreditation provides an external validation of a Business School and its practices (Romero, 2008; Miles, Shepherd, Rose and Dibben, 2015; Smith, Barnes and Vaughan, 2017). The AACSB originated in the Unites States in 1919 and is concerned with the accreditation of business, management and accounting education globally. AACSB is one of three organisations that aim to recognise leading Business Schools across the globe, the other two being the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) and the Association of MBAs (AMBA). Accreditation by all three organisations is regarded as being an indication of international excellence. Figure 2 describes the number of Business Schools that have been awarded accreditation globally by the three bodies.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

AACSB standards as a development of managerialism in business schools:

Accreditation requires that a business school demonstrates compliance with those standards set out by AACSB that relate to the quality of provision. Moreover, the accreditation standards framework is underpinned by a set of core values to which institutions must adhere to. Although Julian and Ofari-Dankwa (2006) have argued that this standards framework has instituted a form of "accreditocracy", which is characterised by increased formalised systems of control, Romero (2008) contends that the framework enables business schools to demonstrate their quality effectively to external stakeholders. The framework has three immediate implications for academic staff according to Miles, Hazeldine and Munilla, (2004). Firstly, the adoption of a stakeholder approach to strategic planning has impacted on the autonomy of academics to control the curriculum. Secondly, the AACSB standards impact on how senior management plan the allocation of staff workload to research, research and teaching. Thirdly, that the focus on the assessment for learning means that academics must focus more explicitly on skills development in order to comply with the accreditation standards framework. Importantly, one of the core values that underpins the current AACSB standards framework is collegiality. However, for Miles, Shepherd, Rose and Dibben (2015, 324):

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> Even though the AACSB is mandating that accredited business schools exhibit a collegial environment there remains a general lack of consensus on what collegiality actually is in a business school and how it can be measured ….. [so that] collegiality, as an organizational level constrict, is fragile and is easily threatened by institutional change.

Ultimately, the AACSB standards framework depends on managers to ensure that it is complied with and this necessitates the imposition of new forms of operating procedures on academics as they undertake their work. If New Public Management can be seen as the foundation of new working practices within universities as argued by Feather and McDermott (2016), then the AACSB standards framework may be viewed as introducing a new level of managerial control over academics in business schools that also challenges established ideas of collegiality. So, although the AACSB standards framework may be presented as advocating a collegial approach to academic work, it appears difficult to conceptualise how best this may be promoted or indeed achieved.

The impact of AACSB standards on job role and identity:

The regulations from AACSB (2016, 40) requires that a Business School meets the standards below:

> AACSB Business Standard 15:
>
> The School maintains and strategically deploys participating and supporting faculty who collectively and individually demonstrate significant academic and professional engagement that sustains the intellectual capital necessary to support high-quality outcomes consistent with the School's Mission and strategies.

Furthermore, according to AACSB (2016, 38):

> Business schools are professional schools in that they exist at the intersection of theory and practice. In this context, it is important for a school to be firmly grounded in both the academic study and the professional practice of business and management. Business schools can achieve effective business education and impactful research by striking different balances between academic study and professional engagement.

The AACSB also establishes minimum standards for the distribution of competencies across a Business School, with at least 90% of staff being located in one of four categories ; at least 60% of staff being defined as 'Scholarly Academics', 'Practice Academics' or 'Scholarly Practitioners'; and at least 40% of staff being classified as 'Scholarly Academics' (see Table 1). Traditionally, business schools had established, until the 2016 revisions by AACSB , two categories of professional standing- 'Academically Qualified (AQ)' or 'Professionally Qualified (PQ)' - that recognised broad professional competencies amongst its lecturers. The revisions of professional standing introduced in 2016 by AACSB obliged the University to change its designations and ask staff to self-classify themselves according to the AACSB rubric. There are also a number of subsidiary activities that may be used to further differentiate between categories, including success in winning research grants, commercial ties and involvement with academic bodies. Not only must these criteria be met, these requirements are to be maintained over a five-year period. If, however, an academic failed to maintain this record of professional achievement, then this would jeopardise their status- and implicitly, their professional identity.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The assertion made by Nixon (1996, 714) that 'HE is facing a professional identity crisis in which it is deemed that the reconfiguration of an individual's professional identity accompanies sector restructuring' appears to be exemplified through the imposition of the AACSB schema on academics. The ideal of a community of equals proffered by Polanyi (1962) appears to be increasingly redundant in an age of globalised competition in the HE market. In their research into pay scales, research outputs and teaching workload in the United States, Hedrick, Henson, Krieg and Wassell (2010) reported that clear disparities existed between those business schools that possessed AACSB accreditation and those that did not. Those institutions with AACSB accreditation offered better salaries, required their academics to teach less and produced more research outputs. This division within American academe is evident in the United Kingdom also. What we now see is a 'mosaic/kaleidoscope' of staff, as described by Whitchurch (2008, 88), in which academics are demarcated in terms of their relative worth. Given the nature of HE as a knowledge industry, and the importance associated with publishing research, this demarcation carries with it an implicit hierarchy of staff, with 'Scholarly Academics' at the top and 'Lecturer Practitioners' at the bottom.

This hierarchy echoes a division between theoretical and applied knowledge, together with a view of their relative contribution to commercial application. Much of the literature hitherto has been concerned with the distinction between imagined and real identity (Billot, 2010); this investigation aims to move the discourse on by exploring the response from academics to a third conception of professional identity- that of an imposed identity.

Research methodology:

This paper is concerned with one principal research aim which is to explore how academics in a Business School interpret their role as an academic and how this may be affected by an external organisation, namely the AACSB. As a consequence, semi-structured in-depth interviewing was chosen as the most suitable research instrument as this was judged to be more likely to generate rich qualitative data that would provide idiographic insights into the views of academics.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is recognised as a highly effective method of eliciting detailed insights from research participants (Ponto, 2006; Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2011). Typically, IPA research prioritises the depth of qualitative data rather than a large sample size as in other approaches. IPA research is concerned with exploring the phenomenon under investigation through a combination of hermeneutic and ideographic foci that enable the respondent to provide a narrative of how it impacts on them. As a consequence, this research exercise was concerned with individual perspective rather than the generalisable, as is the priority in nomothetic research. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012, 364) point out that 'samples in IPA studies are usually small, which enables a detailed and very time-consuming case-by-case analysis'. For Smith (2011), a purposive sample should range in the region of 3 to 8 participants, and that leads to a coherent and plausible analysis with at least two super-ordinate themes. This paper reports on IPA interviews with six academics at various stages in their career (see Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Platt (1981) describes the challenges that attend undertaking research at one's own place of work, and in particular obviating researcher distortion of the data. In order to ensure confidentiality, interviews were arranged with both the interviewer and interviewee being employed at different institutions, and unknown to each other. Interviews were structured through a series of scenarios of work in Higher Education and that the research participant was invited to respond to. Those scenarios that elicited a response served to generate the discussion and highlight those issues deemed important to the respondent. The interviewer adopted the interview technique proposed by Smith et al. (2009), with a range of 'descriptive', 'probe', and 'evaluative' questioning being used to explore responses in greater depth. The questioning sought to explore the relevance of those

issues identified in the Literature Review. In particular, all the interviews elicited respondents' views on what it means to be an academic. This issue is a fundamental concern of this research and was further elaborated upon through exploration of subsidiary issues that are linked to academic identity. Prominent areas for exploration were the impact of performance management and the tensions between job role and the AASCB categorisation regime, an interpretation of what it means to be an academic, and the idea of a community of academics is explored in interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full, with participant validation undertaken to ensure the accuracy of the data. The scenarios are located in Appendix 1.

Findings:

The qualitative data was initially organised into three distinct columns of transcript data, explanatory thoughts and emergent thematization, after Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) and evident in Stoten (2019). IPA analytical approaches are predicated on the Heideggerian principle of focussing on 'objects of concern' and how these relate to the respondent's interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. IPA analysis also acknowledges the role of the researcher in interpreting the data and producing a narrative account of the messages contained within the transcripts. The initial process of identification produced 76 preliminary codes, which were then organised into 52 themes. These themes were then coalesced into five super-ordinate themes that encapsulated the narrative accounts. These super-ordinate themes were then ranked in terms of their frequency as: academic identity and role tension (19 themes); professional responsibilities and work (10); organisational culture (10); management practices (8); student issues (5).

The data generated from interviewing provided rich insights into the respondents' understanding of their professional role and identity in the context of the AACSB categorisation. The issue of being placed into one of the AACSB categories was described in terms of:

> 'It depends very much on who you are and where you see your work being located as to whether you'll be happier called a Scholarly Academic or a Practice Academic and there are people in my subject group on both sides…. The only place where it becomes problematic is where people fall into the other category because they haven't maintained their status'. (Bob)

And,

> 'I hate AASCB accreditations because I'm worthless according to AASCB….
> I'm pretty much an 'other' because I don't have a PhD….
> So I've got 15 years of professional experience and a professional qualification and nearly three years of teaching experience and I'm doing some research now but that counts as one box and you've gotta tick six boxes….
> I don't even like to think about it cos it makes me cross….
> I'm not a Practitioner Academic- I can't remember why but I don't fit easily in any of the boxes because I don't have enough ticks'. (Carol)

> 'I've been categorised as a Scholarly Academic… I think in that certain boxes have been ticked to say I do qualify in that category….' (Nadia)

> ‘I actually wouldn’t be all that uncomfortable with any of the AACSB [categories]’ (Christine)

A second superordinate theme to emerge related to conceptions of professional responsibility, particularly in relation to teaching, which also links to the other superordinate themes generated of organisational culture, management practices and student issues.

> ‘Yes it’s important to publish, yes it’s important to do the conferences and everything else but if you’re not interacting with students because you’re doing your research and the only people you ever talk to about your research are the little cliquey group of academics and you know your conference people and your half a dozen people who read your 4 star peer reviewed publication then actually are you a proper academic if that’s all you do? (Christine)

> ‘As long as colleagues are teaching their students well they are good colleagues in terms of their contributions to the types of conversations and activities you should have in an academic institution then they are performing as an academic it’s where people start to let the students down that I would start thinking along those lines …. now in my career which is well over 20 years here I’ve only once gone through the performance management process with a junior colleague and so I do try to resist this as much as possible erm but you know clearly that’s something which is evident in other institutions and places where people go down that route I wouldn’t want to be in an academic institution which routinely put people down that route’ (Bob)

> ‘There’s a lot of weight on student satisfaction and I think it makes our jobs difficult in a way because erm sometimes people talk about whether you have these teaching awards and stuff like that but sometimes the best teacher is not necessarily the one that you like the most the teacher isn’t just there to be your friend they need to prompt you to learn stuff and that’s not necessarily measured by how well you’re liked by the students’. (Carol)

> ‘The institution has KPIs about having so many people categorised as this and that and I guess there’s a tension there between how I feel personally and what the drivers might be institutionally to address. (Nadia)

> ‘I think universities cut back on the administration not understanding they cannot have the research they wonder why quality research doesn’t happen…why quality enterprise doesn’t happen …. It’s because the staff don’t have the time to go and do it properly erm it’s all about time and I think we lack smart leaders to be able to make that happen who understand the problem you know what I mean?’ (Christine)

These extracts infer some accommodation with the managerial practices in play but are also indicative of a commitment to underpinning professional values, such as a concern for students, the need to support colleagues and individual resilience.

Undertaking an IPA research project is not without its challenges and limitations. For those who see the purpose of research as leading to nomothetic observations that can be generalised elsewhere, IPA is limited as it is concerned with individual insights that are particular to the person.

This ideographic approach provides depth rather than breadth in terms of the data generated, albeit that much of the narrative may resonate with others in differing contexts. Yardley (2000) provides a useful set of quality criteria that may inform an understanding of qualitative research. For Yardley (2000), these criteria are: sensitivity to context; a commitment to rigour; the transparency and coherence of the analysis; and finally, the impact and importance of the research. It is these criteria against which an IPA study should be measured.

Discussion:

This paper reports on the views of academics of being placed into distinct categories of professional status that are not only external to themselves but also their institution. The analysis of data offers inferences of how academics position themselves in the changing work environment that is Higher Education. It also contributes to the discourse on professional identity and the role of personal agency that is outlined by Casey (1999), and Alvesson and Willmott (2002). The data highlights the 'identity jujitsu' described by Kreiner and Sheep (2009) in which professionals are asked to re-evaluate their position within the organisation and, in doing, engage in identity re-construction in response to an imposed set of criteria. Given this context, how can academics establish a 'personal epistemology' (Baxter Magolda, 2004) of themselves and their work as professionals?

Developments over recent decades have witnessed the massification of HE, changing market conditions brought about by increasing marketization of education and different conceptions of academic work. It is within this changing environment that academics are being re-professionalised both in terms of the work that they do and how they are viewed. The introduction of AACSB accreditation has induced further obligations on Business Schools and has contributed to this process of re-professionalisation of academics. Although Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) in a critique of the French HE system five decades ago, had challenged the idea of professions and the way in which their interests were protected, for those involved in HE this redefinition of professional standing has resonance. This reaction is attributable to two concerns. The first relates to the categorisation into four defined clusters, with a fifth being described as 'other'. This segmentation of professionals is viewed as undermining the collegial nature of universities as egalitarian institutions and introducing an implied hierarchy of esteem with the Scholarly Academic as the premier category. It also is perceived as under-valuing teaching and vocational experience in favour of research. The second concern is less pronounced but still relevant, and that is the idea of an external, and indeed foreign, accreditation organisation in setting out these technologies of re-professionalisation (Ball, 2015). This could be viewed as an isomorphic indicator of the changing nature of universities (Cai, 2010; Crittenden and Crittenden, 2016) as they accommodate the exigencies of a globalised HE market.

At the heart of this discussion is the re-professionalisation of academics and a re-categorisation of their work and status. Neary and Winn (2016, 409) argue that 'research into academic work and identity has helped illuminate the crisis at the heart of academic life, yet it does not get beyond a sense of powerlessness and anxiety'. For Neary and Winn (2016, 409) 'the concept of 'academic identity' is not adequate to the critical task for which it is utilised as it fails to deal with the real nature of work in capitalist society'. In this sense, any research into identity is limited to the ideographic context that is explored. In this respect then, there is a possibility that in focussing on

identity we lose sight of the wider structural changes that continue to transform the nature of work in late capital society particularly in the Public Sector and throughout all education sectors. This research serves to add to the corpus of evidence on the impact of New Public Management and the imposition of managerialism within HE. It echoes earlier work that has pointed to the individuation of responsibility and the emphasis placed on performance management systems, as well as the decline of collegiality (Neave, 1988; Cipriano, 2011; Winter and O'Donohue, 2012). Future research could usefully explore how academics respond in a collective way to change and the institutional micro-politics of constructing a future work environment in universities.

In response to this changing context to their work, those academics who contributed to this research appear to have reconciled their own subjective personal epistemology with a realistic conception of working in HE and their limited scope for positioning. Working in an AACSB accredited Business School implies some form of pragmatic acceptance of the classification of academics. The scope for personal and professional agency seems confined to movements between categories with an implied goal to become a Scholarly Academic. The findings from this study suggest that academics adopt a position between passive 'formal instrumentality' and 'symbolic compliance' (Teelken, 2012). In this respect, such re-positioning corresponds to a struggle to obtain a validated identity that carries some meaning within the institution and beyond (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016).

Conclusion:

A preoccupation with identity may, as Neary and Winn (2016) suggest, distract us from recognising wider structural issues that extend beyond an institution or indeed one sector within the education system. Albeit ideographic and limited in its generalisability, research that reports on the experience of those who work in HE is important both in terms of exploring contemporary issues and generating new lines for future research. If we are to influence the future, this can only be based on an informed understanding of the impact of policy on the sector at every level.

This paper has reported on a number of important findings that highlight the changing nature of work and status within HE. It is clear that the imposition of performance management in the form of the Teaching Excellence Framework and the Research Excellence Framework has accelerated those processes of change that have been in play since the adoption of New Public Management some decades ago. The idea of academia as a collegial environment that is characterised by academic autonomy is increasingly moribund. Instead, we need to understand how the prevalence of grant funding and other income streams have separated academics into micro-enterprises that compete with others within HE for resources. Academics may well continue to explore their area of expertise but their work is measured and evaluated and their status and value to the wider university is judged within this context.

In this respect, academics have been subject to macro (the HE system), meso (Business Schools) and micro (institutional) pressures to conform to new forms of identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

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