Reconfiguring Academic Identities: the experience of business facing academics in a UK university

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Abstract

The university sector at the beginning of the 21st Century is shifting in response to national and global changes in the role and purpose of Higher Education. Some universities, including the University of Hertfordshire, have chosen to focus attention on engagement with business and commerce. This practice based research examines the experience of academics in relation to the new challenges posed by this strategic development.

There are three threads of investigation; interviews, examination of key concepts and the practitioner dimension. Drawing on a qualitative and constructivist approach, individual interviews with a range of business facing academics explore their experience of engaging with new activities. My perspective, as a manager of business facing academics, provides an important thread and situates the work firmly in the practice context.

The implicit expectations arising from strategic positioning as a business facing university are examined. A conceptual framework is established with a focus on the nature of business facing activity, including its relationship with traditional forms of teaching and research, learning through work in the Higher Education setting and the idea of an enabling local context.

The research found that amongst those undertaking business facing activity, academic identity is a fluid and multi-faceted construct reconfigured through experience and learning in the workplace; by its nature not easily defined, labelled or bounded. The challenge for universities is to nurture and sustain individuals in the creation and use of academic identities, in order to meet the undoubted challenges to come. This requires a forward looking, inclusive and innovative stance, resisting the temptation to judge current academic identities by the established notions of the past. Management of academics involved in business facing activity requires a more flexible, trusting and individual approach than is traditionally seen in universities.

Table of Contents

Figures and Tables

1. Introduction

A new vision for the University of Hertfordshire, where I am Head of the School of Education, is laid out in the 2007-2012 strategic plan:

> **To be recognised as a new model of a university through far-reaching engagement with business, community and international partners, shaping the future success of our graduates, operating in a global environment, and advancing the prosperity of our region**.
>
> ***University of Hertfordshire strategic plan 2007-12***

The landscape of Higher Education in the UK is changing as a result of national and international influences; there is increased competition as the sector expands, pressure on public funding, digitalisation and the move to distance and blended learning, globalisation with its potential for international expansion and the shift toward a 'knowledge economy'. As a result individual universities need to change, making choices as to where to position themselves in this new landscape and for the university at the centre of this thesis a decision to focus on business facing engagement results in a potential challenge. The strategic plan is premised on new forms of business facing activity; this in turn requires academics to rise to new challenges and flourish in a turbulent and more commercial environment. The university has new expectations and the psychological contract which links the institution with individual academics is changed. Commonly accepted understandings of academic identity fail to account for the complexity of this emerging form of university life.

This thesis argues for a contemporary understanding of academic identities to encompass the varied and necessarily adaptable ways of being an academic in a business facing university in the twenty first century.

1.1. The business facing context: issues in practice

My institution opted for the business facing agenda in a very public way. Other Vice Chancellors and senior management teams were/are also positioning their institutions with respect to business facing activity but perhaps less publically. This early and public commitment to the business facing agenda resulted in all members of the university being involved in, or affected by, a process of significant change in order to align with the university strategy. As early adopters of the business facing agenda one of the challenges was, and remains, to forge new ways of working, thinking and being an academic.

As head of the school of education I experience working and managing in this new business facing environment where strategic directions have been agreed and targets are set for the school. In my experience the process of agreeing the institutional strategy appears largely blind to the change in expectations for individual academics. The skills normally (or previously) required of an academic include research/scholarship, teaching and administration; with the latter becoming significant for some individuals through a shift to leadership and management roles. The demand to integrate learning technology and provide effective teaching for a greater number and diversity of students presents a considerable challenge that, rightly or wrongly, is viewed as a development of existing expectations which academics have no choice but to accept. Developing the new forms of activity required for a business facing strategy however seems to be of a different nature with rather more of an acceptance from heads of school and even amongst more senior university managers that some academics 'can and do', and some 'cannot or will not'.

In leading my school in the business facing environment I made the choice to operate with an inclusive approach, attempting to integrate business facing activity with teaching and research wherever feasible and to involve as many academics as possible in the new agenda. As I engaged with the practice challenges and developed my managerial

approach to the task I began to puzzle over some aspects of what was happening. Initially my main concern was to understand how individuals could be supported to take on new, and often unfamiliar, activities. I was then intrigued to see the success of some individuals and the opportunity this new work appeared to provide for personal and professional growth. Over time research questions were clarified from my practice consideration. My primary concern was with academics taking on new business facing tasks, particularly in terms of being successful and achieving effective outcomes. I also became interested in the impact the engagement with business facing activity had on individuals' relationships with me as the manager and through me with the university. In parallel with my exploration of these issues through data gathering and the work of other researchers I was able to refine my research questions and recognise that academic identity emerged as an important theme.

Throughout the dissertation I use the generic term 'business facing' to indicate the forms of activity that arise from the strategic intent of the university. A fuller discussion of the related issues is provided (2.5) as part of the context for my study.

1.2. Research questions

My research questions have their origins in my practice interest in the experience of individual academics and connect strongly to my management perspective as a head of school, as will be apparent to the reader throughout this dissertation. Provoked initially by trying to understand what I observed in the school of education with respect to the business facing agenda, the questions emerged and developed over time as I synthesised potential avenues of exploration revealed through the study of key areas of literature with the themes emerging from the data collection. In addition, as a practice based researcher, I was of course also influenced by my continuing practice activity.

1. **How do academics develop their practice in response to new (business facing) activities?**

My decision to conceptualise Higher Education as a workplace is an unusual approach to a consideration of academic work and has enabled a fresh and critical examination of the processes by which academics learn to succeed in the new tasks generated by a business facing strategic position. An understanding of how learning through work takes place for professionals at this level would offer a new way of supporting development for the individual.

2. **Is a different understanding of academic identities needed in the contemporary university?**

I consider an opening up of academic identity beyond the traditional elements of teaching and research in order to explore the possibilities of multiple and shifting academic identities. My conclusions suggest that a significant re-conceptualisation is required to look differently at the aspects of academic work required for the changing university sector. New academic identities are less firmly entrenched in the disciplinary epistemology and individual academics are creating meanings for themselves as they integrate new strands of work. My thesis is not about the homogenisation of academic identity, nor about replacing an old identity with a new one, but is attempting to open up the definitions and think differently about their meaning. These considerations of identity can be related also to the changing expectations of academic work and the related psychological contract.

As the work progressed and I established my own position as a researcher who also holds a senior management role in the university I added a third question which has a managerial dimension.

3. **What are the implications for academics, managers, the university and the sector?**

There is a view that identity schisms in academe are gaining more traction today given the clash of values between traditional academic cultures and the modernising corporate cultures of higher education (Winter 2009). My thesis offers a potential approach to understanding and addressing the issues arising from these challenges for the individual, the academic manager, the university and the Higher Education sector with respect to the business facing agenda.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

I document my work in a series of chapters designed to provide an insight into the engagement with the process of research and the outcomes of my enquiry. In broad terms I offer an introduction to the practice context; an outline of my research approach; a response to my first question, with a focus on workplace learning and the local context of the school of education; an expansion of my consideration to provide a response to the second question with a focus on academics across the university and the concept of academic identity; a reflection on the conceptual framework and, in a final chapter, I draw my findings together and consider the third, managerially focused, question.

Chapter 2 sets the scene for the dissertation with a brief consideration of the school of education through two critical points in its development of a successful business facing strategy. I trace the genesis of my research questions through my leadership responsibilities and my intrigue with the ways of working arising from the business facing agenda. The chapter continues with a consideration of the current issues with respect to the business facing agenda in the Higher Education sector and develops a perspective on the changing expectations of academic work and the implications for the relationship between academics and the employer university.

Chapter 3 outlines the research framework through an exploration of my qualitative stance and constructivist approach. These two sections are intended to establish the principles which underpin my work and are then followed by a more detailed consideration of the interview process and methodology adopted. A significant feature of this chapter is an exposition of my particular strategy for data analysis and is intended to reveal my engagement with this process to establish an approach which appropriately reflects my research principles and questions. Finally in this chapter I consider two specific issues arising from the practice based nature of my work.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on my first question looking at the development of practice in the local context of the school of education. An engagement with workplace learning literature is provided in Chapter 4 and, as there is relatively little published which situates workplace learning in a Higher Education context, I have drawn on a range of related material in order to consider the particular issues arising in a university. The work of other writers is used in a parallel exploration with the initial process of data gathering in order to develop my thinking in this area. Analysis and interpretation of the first set of interview data is provided in Chapter 5 which has a local focus on school of education academics learning through work.

Chapter 6 offers an engagement with the work of other writers to consider academic identity and themes from this chapter are used to inform the data analysis provided in Chapter 7, where the focus is a university wide engagement with academics identified as working within the business facing agenda.

Chapter 8 draws together the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of the study and in the final Chapter I consider the findings in relation to my questions and articulate the contribution to knowledge/practice that constitutes the thesis.

2. Setting the scene

2.1. Introduction

This chapter sets the scene for my study, providing a frame of reference for the reader and positioning the work in the particular context of my practice as head of the school of education in a post-92 university. The chapter begins with a brief exploration of two critical incidents in the life of the school of education in order to give a sense of the practice setting in the five year period 2003 – 2008, when there were interesting developments that sparked my enquiry. The school of education and my role as the head of school combine to form a strong underpinning thread throughout my work; specifically I examine the leadership challenge arising from the new scenario created by the shift to a business facing strategic direction. I observed school of education academics developing their practice to engage with new forms of activity; I became intrigued by the changes I noted in colleagues and wanted to be able to understand and articulate what was happening. Seeking to articulate my practice led me to examine more carefully the Higher Education sector and the emergence of the business facing agenda; I offer an overview of this exploration in order to situate my work within aspects of the broader national and international perspective. Finally in this chapter I consider the implications of the business facing strategy in terms of the significant shift in expectations and the potential impact for individual academics.

Thus I offer the reader a consideration of the school of education, the practice setting for my work and the site of the leadership challenge that led over time to my research questions. I provide a context for the business facing dimension through a consideration of Higher Education and begin to open up ideas around the expectations and implications for the individual academic.

2.2. The school of education: five dynamic years

A new campus, a shift of corporate strategy and an emphasis on business facing activity resulted in new demands I review two key events in order to give a sense of the school in this period.

2.2.1. Relocation: summer 2003

In the summer of 2003 the school of education and the school of humanities moved from our remote site twelve miles away to a purpose built campus. We swapped a grand old mansion, with its respectable history as a teacher training college and a traffic snarled car journey to the main campus, for state of the art facilities and walking distance to the rest of the university. The business school, similarly moving in from another remote site, shared the new campus. Our stylish buildings, particularly the significant financial investment required to achieve them, attracted a lot of media attention and important visitors from the Higher Education (HE) sector.

At the time of the move I had been head of the school of education for two years following ten years in various roles working for my two predecessors. The two year period was taken up with preparations for the move; ensuring a voice in the campus development process, disposing of fifty years of teacher training detritus and preparing staff and students for the significant change. The school senior management team, in consultation with academic and professional staff, established a clear aim; an accessible campus with the opportunities provided by modern teaching facilities should underpin a shift to a more outward facing, forward looking school. In part we saw this as the chance to prove, to a university we perceived to be largely indifferent to our existence, that we had a real contribution to make. We decided to focus on reputation building, both internally and externally.

September 2003 also saw a newly appointed vice-chancellor proactively shifting the university to a new position in the HE sector. The corporate strategy developed over the following two years to the point of a public

declaration of being a different type of university, nailing our colours firmly to the business facing mast and embarking on a radical process of change. The expectation was that all schools would seek new funding streams and engage more proactively with partners in the business and commercial sectors; public sector activities and professional engagement were recognised as being more relevant for some disciplines so were added at a later date and there was ongoing debate about the desirable balance between income generation and community facing contribution within our 'business facing' agenda.

Building on teacher training, continuing professional development for teachers and an existing engagement with local authorities and the TTA/TDA (the teacher training funding body which changed its name from Teacher Training Agency to Training and Development Agency for schools), the school of education responded to the strategic challenge and established new areas of work with partners in the public sector. In 2005 several visits to Malaysia and the submission of a complex bid secured an international project worth two million pounds over a four year period. This raised the profile of the school within the university, enabled us to make new appointments and resulted in a significant number of the school's academics spending short periods in the Far East working with our international partners and seeking opportunities for further developments.

Individual academics in the school of education rose to the challenge, taking on new forms of work, negotiating with external clients, travelling overseas to work with international partners, developing new programmes, teaching different learners on campus and elsewhere. Over a five year period the school developed a wide range of business facing activities and I began to think differently about the structures we needed to support this new way of working. As the manager it was difficult to keep track of all the new activities, as is revealed in a journal I was keeping at the time.

So much going on it's hard to capture. Other people are developing quickly. Feels like the tipping point, a chance to re-think and reorganise. Do we want to make radical change? Need attention and vigilance on business facing. (Personal Journal February 08)

It was a period of great excitement and potential with an increase in the number of academic and professional staff to manage the new activities.

2.2.2. Recognition: summer 2008

In the summer of 2008 the University Strategic Business Unit of the Year title was inaugurated and awarded to the school of education. The citation is clear evidence of approval from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for the school's achievement against the university business facing strategy.

The School of Education has broken the mould of a traditional 'School of Education'.

It has embarked on new and innovative approaches to employer engagement, including Foundation degrees, workplace training, distance learning, short courses, CPD, the professional doctorate, and has become a recognised source of expertise in professional and work-based learning. In addition, the School provides teacher education for undergraduates and post-graduates, making a significant contribution to the needs of schools in the county and beyond for highly qualified, highly motivated, professional teachers.

The School has worked in the international market in a different way, entering into a multi-million pound arrangement with the Malaysian government to support the development of teacher training in Malaysia. They are currently brokering a deal with the Egyptian government for the provision of postgraduate education.

The School enjoys excellent leadership through its Head of School, Mary Read, Associate Heads and the School's 'Strategy Group'. This has served to ensure everyone in the School is fully engaged in realising the strategic plan, that they take authentic responsibility for their activities and are equipped to think creatively and dynamically about the future development of the School and their contribution to that development.

> *In the rapidly changing context of national, local and regional education policy and strategy, the School of Education has demonstrated its agility, creativity, and commitment to engaging with that changing environment. It has diversified its activities, managed its resources extremely effectively and enjoys a national and international reputation for the quality of its work.*
> *(Strategic Business Unit of the Year citation July 2008)*

The school's profile against measures of finance, recruitment, retention, student satisfaction and quality indicators demonstrates an ability to deliver to the required standards across a wide range of activity. In the ever present raft of league tables the school is at least equal to the university position and frequently better placed. A low staff turnover and a clean sheet in terms of disciplinary or complaints procedures are additional data sources which support the notion of a successful school working effectively and achieving recognisable outcomes that reflect university strategic intentions. In a performative environment the school performs; meeting and exceeding expected outcomes consistently over time.

The university award for my school was, as the Vice Chancellor noted in his blog, a surprise to me. I knew my school performed well but assumed others did better; I knew we were achieving good results against a number of measures but was aware of more to do and areas still to tackle. I had worked hard with academic and professional staff to understand the business facing notion as it applied to the school of education and to move us firmly in that direction. I hoped for an honourable mention and was amazed to win. I was delighted with the recognition for my school and for the staff who had worked so hard to develop our new profile.

In setting the scene my intention is to provide for the reader an informative glimpse of the school of education in order to enable an appreciation of this important element in my work; it is the origin of my

research interest, a site for my data gathering activity and the backcloth for my thinking and engagement. The combination of a new campus and the shift in strategic direction for the university provided a unique opportunity for the school of education, with the corollary of new opportunities for individuals that they were both willing and able to address. The challenge for me as the head of school was to think differently about how to manage in this shifting circumstance and I turn my attention now to the leadership challenge that occupied my attention.

2.3. The leadership challenge

The leadership challenge was, and remains, to ensure all the normal activities of the first and second missions of the university sector – namely teaching and research – continue at a level of quality and success, alongside a strong focus on third mission, or third stream, activity - the engagement with the business sector and other external partners in order to generate a 'third stream' of income. The Higher Education context for this funding issue will be examined later (2.5) but in the practice immediacy the sense was of a task to be added to the list; the underpinning rationale and potential consequences were not of pressing concern. The impact was a process of working out how additional activity could be fitted in, how academics could be given time and support to obtain and deliver funded work. There were different forms of work to be carried out at home and overseas, new and unknown responsibilities to be managed, a need to branch out from the clearly defined regulations of teacher training and the well understood tasks of campus based programme delivery and management. Deciding on responsibilities for novel areas of work, how to manage unfamiliar activities and, most importantly, which academics would be able to cope with new tasks, moved to the top of my management agenda.

My head of school role increasingly seemed to need the skills of crystal ball gazing and rune reading. Unpredictability became the norm and working with staff to decide where to invest time and energy, how we

might earn income or other benefits from particular activities and who could be given time to develop new work became the focus of my attention. The new types of activity were/are speculative, sometimes high risk, involving innovative ventures which had/have the potential for great success, for moderate achievement, for withering quietly away or occasionally for spectacular and public failure. Given my inclusive stance it was/is important that all academic and professional staff feel engaged in the business facing strategy, even when not directly involved in commercially funded activity. From my perspective the aim is to ensure that all see a role for themselves and are not assuming that others will tackle new and challenging work allowing them to remain in the comfort zone of known activity. The challenge is to involve a range of academics in unfamiliar activities, selecting the individuals likely to succeed and providing appropriate support in an uncertain or unknown environment. As successes are achieved and acknowledged publically my aim is to achieve a momentum which draws individuals in and encourages them to try new areas of work or to develop innovative approaches with potential partners and customers.

I worried about the impact of the changing nature of our work on staff in the school. I was concerned that where we were bidding for projects individuals would be disappointed that their hard work did not always lead to a positive outcome; our successful first bid for a large international consultancy could easily give a false notion of guaranteed achievement. As the school established a portfolio of business facing activity my main concern was for the capable individuals who bore the brunt of our success in their commitment of time and energy. This led me to look more closely not only at the individuals themselves but at the way in which they engaged with new roles and activities.

Over time I became intrigued by the way in which academics were both able and willing to take on new tasks and were then successful in delivering appropriate outcomes. What was it that I could see in

individuals that led to me having faith in them to do what was required? How was I identifying the people who would thrive and enjoy a new activity whether in terms of formal job roles or more informal engagement? More importantly, once identified what were the successful individuals doing in order to manage the new tasks effectively?

In order to identify an individual academic from amongst the staff team for a particular activity I use two main strategies. Firstly for significant or named roles there is the formal internal application and interview process. Job description, person specification, job evaluation, target setting, action plan – all terms which are common parlance in selecting and organising staff to take on specific tasks. Some roles are easily defined, part of the university structure of posts – programme leaders, year tutors, subject leads - with an established framework and a shared understanding of the nature of the activity involved. These are relatively easily captured in a brief job description and opened up to an internal application process. New roles were sometimes of this type – the project leader, the link tutor - and the standard processes were followed.

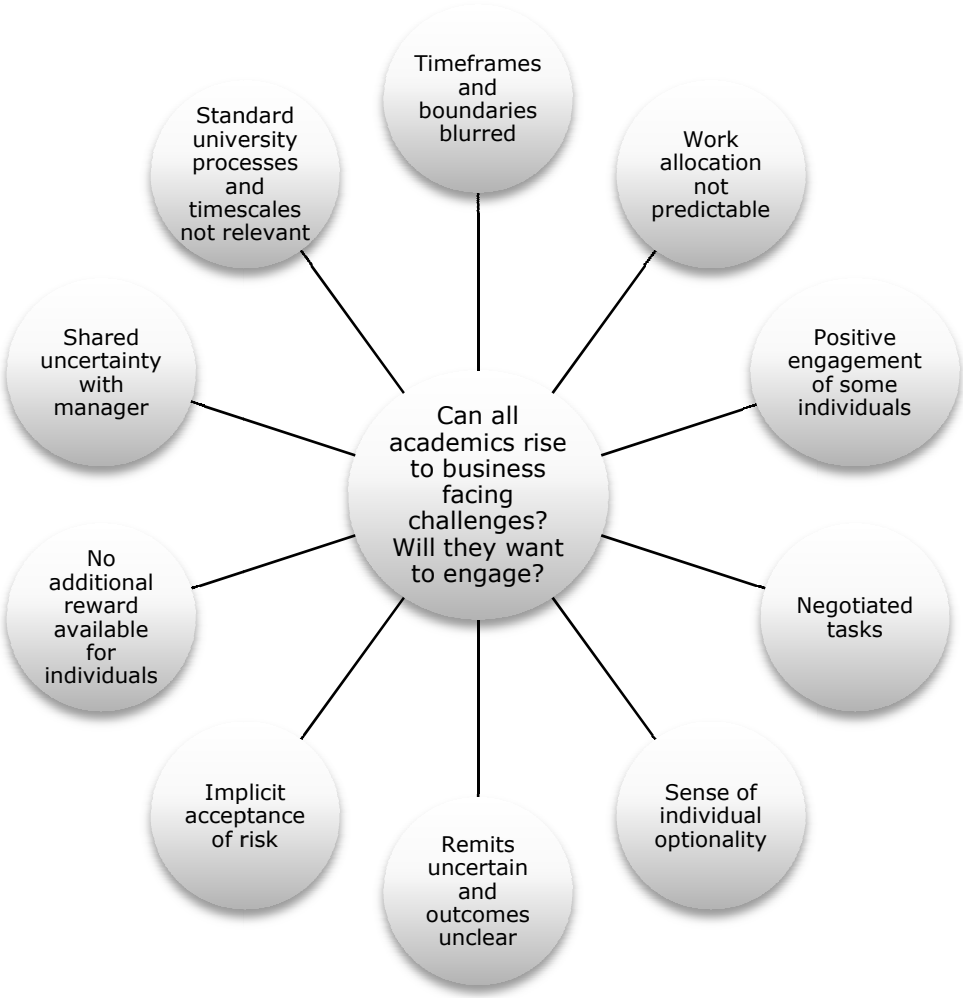
Secondly there is the more informal allocation of tasks. My conversations are more open, negotiating with individuals their possible role in an activity but not tying them formally to a particular job description. A fictional dialogue reveals an acceptance of risk and a level of trust by both parties. A time allocation is agreed on an apparently casual 'try and see' basis and collaboration with others is assumed. The academic is content to take on new challenges on the basis of interest as there is no mention of reward other than a minor reallocation of teaching load. The task is negotiated in an ongoing manner because neither of us knows what will actually be involved and how much time and effort this new task might take. An implicit acceptance that as the manager I am in a position of making a 'best guess' and that others may be better informed about the project detail underpins the conversation.

Manager/ me (M)	*Right so this is a new project. Very important for the department and one that we need someone to take forward strongly. I wondered whether you might be interested in taking a lead. I understand from X that you were showing some interest in it and I know it relates a bit to some of the other work you're doing. You did say a while ago that you'd like a new challenge!*
Academic (A)	*Well I know a bit about it because I've talked to X who was involved in some of the early discussions.*
M	*Yes well X might have been interested in leading on it but has too much on her plate at the moment so we are looking for someone else. She'll be around to give advice of course.*
A	*Well in general terms I'm quite interested, very exciting to be involved but I don't know much about the area*
M	*No well none of us do – it's a new venture for the department to be working in this field*
A	*I am a bit worried about how I'll fit this in with everything else I'm doing – not that that means I'm not interested.*
M	*Oh well obviously we'll have to cut down some of the other stuff you're doing. I am sure Y could take on some of your teaching on the undergraduate programme, if not we'll have to look at some part time hours for someone.*
A	*Have you any idea how much time this will take up?*
M	*Not really. We haven't done anything like this before. I think we'll have to say one day per week in the first instance and then you come back to me if that doesn't seem right.*
A	*Ok, that seems fair. What do I need to do first?*
M	*Well I suggest you go back and talk in more detail to X. She's better informed than I am about the project. She may be able to give you some other names of people that might be helpful.*
A	*Ok I'll do that then. Shall I come back and see you when I've got a bit more idea?*
M	*Yes. Shall we say in a week's time? We need to get on with this. I think this is going to be a pretty busy period while we find out how to get it all set up*

Checking this fictional dialogue with colleagues brought instant recognition and stories of 'do you remember when we started...' so I am confident that it represents the activity with some accuracy.

The dependence on me as the manager to ensure projects were led effectively by suitable individuals was significant. Where the task is unclear, the remit uncertain, the boundaries and timeframes blurred, the process is more dependent on the skill of the manager to match individuals and tasks. In the majority of cases where individuals took on new tasks there was no salary increase or promotion and roles were established and then modified or abandoned as we learned how to manage and organise new activities.

Figure 1 Business facing activity: the leadership challenge



My initial position in considering what was occurring is summarised in Figure 1. The sense during this period was of exploration, implicit acceptance of risk, individual academics learning how to do unfamiliar

tasks and groups working collaboratively to find solutions and deliver on new projects. Individuals were apparently able to engage with and master new tasks and activities even where there were no obvious sources of advice or support.

2.4. Seeking articulate explanation

Talking with other heads of school as they engaged with similar challenges and faced the same dilemmas was an interesting, and often frustrating, personal experience. My practice knowledge, although sufficient for daily action, was insufficient to explain and articulate to others. In particular the speculative element in identifying academics with the potential to succeed in new activities and my attempts to involve a broad range of staff in the business facing agenda were very difficult to verbalise. With increasing dissatisfaction I listened to ideas for tick lists of attributes to identify individuals for business facing work and suggestions of centrally provided training for academics often viewed by a manager as incompetent or entrenched. The idea circulating amongst heads of school that only a few academics were capable of taking on third stream activity, particularly if it had an international dimension, worried me. Some heads of school were talking about creating specific third stream teams, leaving other (did they mean less capable?) academics to get on with the more usual work of teaching and research. My inability to make a good case and convince other heads of school that there are many ways to involve individuals in new activities was a source of frustration. Certain that suggestions being made were not the best or only way forward resulted in an acute awareness that I did not know enough about what was happening in my own school and needed to investigate further.

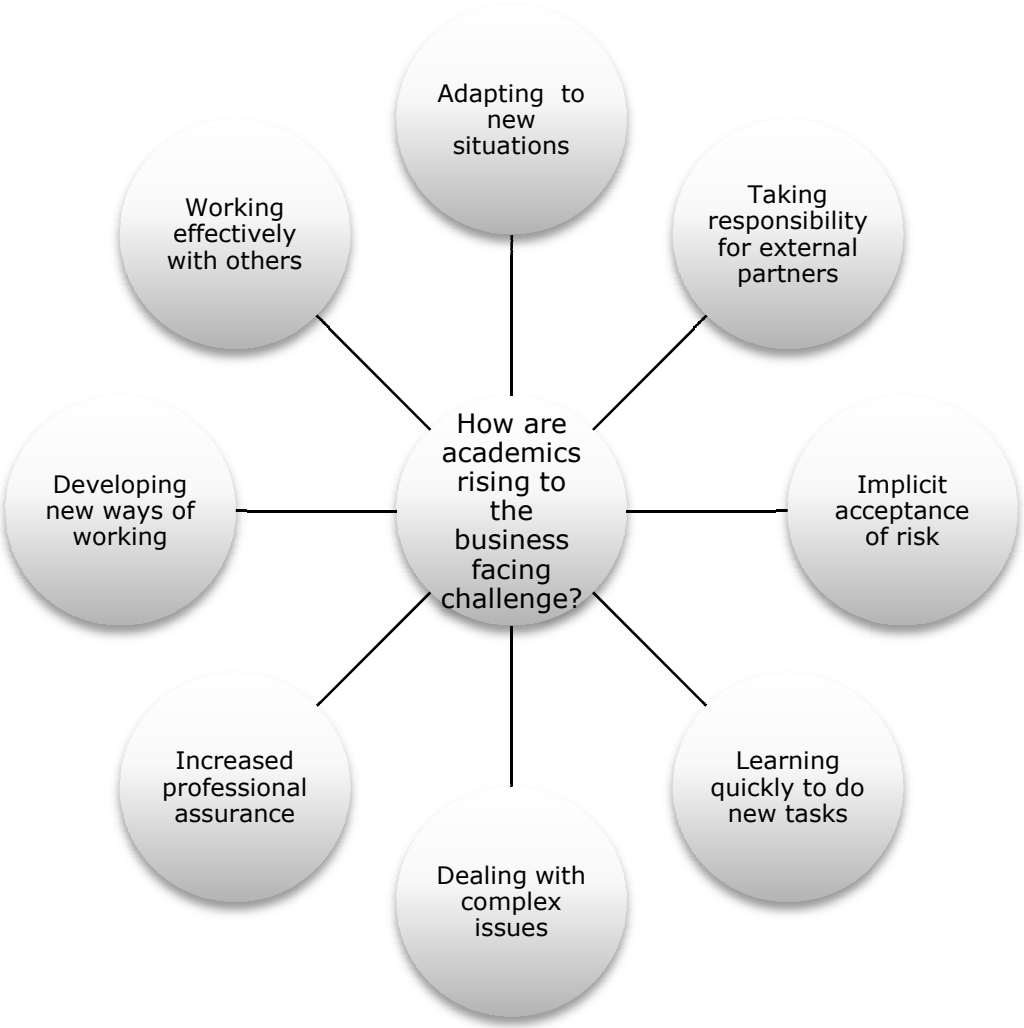
As I considered the academics I observed in the school and attempted to identify the features that enabled success it became obvious that one commonality was the ability to adapt quickly to new situations. In our new areas of work there was no time for the slow development and consideration we were familiar with in the validation of degree

programmes, rather we had to predict what might work and go with it immediately, adjusting and tuning along the way. The most obvious example was our international project in Malaysia where having been personally instrumental in gaining the contract – and learning a great deal myself in the process – I needed to delegate responsibility to others, some of whom had not been involved in the original negotiations. At first I monitored carefully, talked often to those involved, worried about our ability to make a success of such an unfamiliar and enormous venture on the other side of the world. Within months it became clear that my input was no longer necessary, was in fact uninformed and superfluous, because the academics involved leapt ahead in informed knowledge about the context, understanding what needed to be done and establishing relationships with the key individuals at both local and national level. This might in part be explained by the time they spent in the country and in working on the project, but there seemed to be more than this. I was intrigued by the change in the individuals; they appeared increasingly confident and assured in dealing with complex matters, made appropriate judgements, trained colleagues to work with them and managed the cross cultural issues with sensitivity and professional dexterity. How were they learning to do this? Were they merely applying skills in a new context? Or was something more profound occurring?

The detail of our international project is provided to give a flavour of the school of education projects and activity. The changes I observed were not confined to those involved in the international work so it was not merely the different culture and the confidence of travel which moved individual academics forward, although this was clearly a contributing factor. Academics were creating new home programmes, negotiating contracts with local authority colleagues, contacting national figures in their field, involving themselves more strongly in faculty and university developments. Significant numbers of academics appeared to be making a shift in their ways of working, particularly in their approach to new and

innovative activities; I provide a summary of individual responses in Figure 2. This was an unexpected and unplanned consequence of our business facing approach. If I could understand what was happening I could ensure these opportunities were built in more widely and articulate a rationale for our way of working.

Figure 2 Individual responses to business facing challenges.



One of the portfolio developments was a new EdD programme and, driven in part at least by a desire to give public support to another innovative venture within my school, I applied to join the first cohort with the intention of researching 'colleagues rising to new challenges and the consequent development of abilities and skills' (EdD application March 2005).

2.5. The Higher Education sector and third stream activity

Having considered the business facing activity within my practice environment and the changes I saw in individuals and groups within the school of education it became important to situate this knowledge within the broader context of Higher Education. In particular the third stream funding agenda that underpins the university's move to a business facing strategy is a complex financial and political issue that requires some unpicking.

The relationship between universities and the state; the purpose of higher education and its function in society; and the nature of the knowledge essential to the concept of the graduate are long term areas of interest for those concerned with the philosophy and history of higher education. Barnett for example lays out the broad sweep of conceptual debate around what he describes as 'the epistemological and sociological undermining of higher education' (Barnett 1990:15) and more recently is concerned with

> *... massive changes in higher education worldwide - the neo-liberal turn and the marketization of higher education and the repositioning of higher education for the learning economy. (Barnett 2007:9)*

McCaffery focuses on the 'university identity crisis' and suggests that universities today lack the unifying vision which has been evident in the past (2004:25); Whitchurch (2007) suggests

> *... new discourses are not only challenging assumptions, but are redefining the components of the higher education enterprise in ways that extend and redraw existing categories and classifications. (Whitchurch 2007: 407)*

Watson (2008) in a briefing paper published by the QAA looks at the question 'Who owns the university?' and, following an interesting comparison of the public/private dimensions of universities with other large organisations, reaches the conclusion that

> *... nobody owns the university for ever and everybody can own the university from time to time. (Watson 2008:5)*

This gives a sense of the issues which occupy the thinking of those concerned with the Higher Education sector and the perception of significant and fundamental change. Detailed consideration is for other researchers and policy makers, for my thesis suffice it to say that the UK higher education sector in the first decade of the twenty first century is a demanding environment; the political focus on education in all its forms, the constant press for improvement, the demands of society for both excellence and value for money ensure a continuing challenge. Against this backdrop of uncertainty and questioning on the political, ideological and economic fronts universities need to continue to manage the daily work of addressing the parallel strands of activity traditionally part of the university concern:

i. providing quality teaching for a broad range of client groups;
ii. maintaining academic standing and rigour through research;

in addition to the more recent requirement for

iii. actively engaging with third leg funding (generating funding from non-treasury sources).

This challenge is not unique to the UK but is also evident in Europe and the USA;

> *In broad terms, most European higher education institutions now receive their income via three main routes:*
>
> - *regular core income from government for teaching and (in most countries) research;*
> - *additional research funds mainly from government that are earned, at least in part, competitively;*
> - *'third stream' or 'third mission' income earned on a quasi-commercial basis for contract research and teaching and use of university facilities by outsiders. (Williams 2009:10)*

Teaching and research are extensively documented components of the higher education landscape with a vocabulary which, at least at the level of generality, is well understood if not agreed across the sector. Third stream activity however is not an unproblematic concept as the definition of what should be included is complicated and open to question. The use of the term third stream emerged in the mid 1990s and is frequently used interchangeably with third leg and third mission, however specific definition of what might be included is difficult to pinpoint. In addition the notion of social responsibility or regional engagement is part of the third stream debate so that mere financial clarification is insufficient. A paper 'written as a think piece based on literature review complemented by interviews with 25 national and international key informants' looking at possible strategies for funding third stream activity, states that 'part of the complexity arises from the fact that it is not easy to define third stream activities' (Hatakenaka 2005:7) and offers statements of aspiration rather than specific guidance. Similarly the HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006-11 in a section entitled 'Enhancing the contribution of HE to the economy and society' provides an explanation which has aspirational focus on potential rather than definitive delineation of what is, or is not, third stream activity (HEFCE 2006:26).This lack of certainty persists; an unambiguous clarity in respect of third stream activity has not emerged, rather the definition has expanded to include a wide range of activities, some of which have considerable overlap with the traditional first and second funding streams.

In essence it is for each university to determine for itself the nature of the third stream activity that will be part of its portfolio. Where one university may adopt a strongly research focused definition another may see its third stream element in widening participation activity or specific consultancy units. Williams (2009) uses the data from the EUEREK project, which included case studies from twenty seven universities across Europe, to suggest that there is a strong sense that third stream funding

is necessary as mainstream funding decreases in real terms; institutional viability is in many instances linked strongly to the ability to generate additional income. Williams identifies features which lead to entrepreneurialism in universities, proposing that strict itemised budgets with strong accountability result in higher education institutions that are not able to take the entrepreneurial approach as the funding and scrutiny frameworks are too rigid. Conversely generous state funding with limited accountability results in an HE sector with no need to look elsewhere for funds. His proposition is that the entrepreneurial university, actively looking for third stream funding, arises when state funding is not generous and any additional income is retained by the institution, thus providing an incentive toward entrepreneurialism and selling services to the wider society (Williams 2009:11). There is also a view that this type of activity has always been part of the HE landscape and has merely been relabelled as entrepreneurial or third stream; however Williams notes that even if this is notionally true there has been a significant expansion of activity in this area over the last ten years.

Bond and Paterson (2005) present a historical review of the position and are clear that entrepreneurial activity is not a new phenomenon. A number of universities were originally established to accomplish economic functions for the professions so the current engagement with regional employers is replicating an historical role. Shattock (2006) takes this further in his consideration of policy drivers for HE over the last fifty years where he claims that there has been a significant change in the balance of power between private and public policy making in the UK and that third stream funding is

> *...another example of the phenomenon of the state taking over an insider led policy, designed for a particular purpose to deal with a particular set of circumstances, and making it a permanent overarching instrument of policy. (Shattock 2006:138)*

The additional challenge in trying to gain an overview of the position is that it is easy to refer to the university as a single entity when in reality higher education institutions are complex environments of independent agents tied together by tradition, approximating more to Wenger's (1988 cited White and Weatherby 2005) notion of a community of practice. Here people are informally bound by what they do together in joint enterprise and thus are not easily represented by a single position or view. The loosely coupled nature of academia makes it difficult to define in a highly specified way what third stream means or what counts as an entrepreneurial university; even where the university policy or public commitment embraces a particular position, the nature of the institution means that ideas may be held more or less strongly by particular departments, units or individuals.

As this engagement with third stream activity plays out in the sector it results in targets and expectations being cascaded to university departments as a consequence of the choices strategic leaders are making about their preferred focus and response to the third stream agenda. The EUEREK project and the conclusions drawn by Williams (2009) offer an explanation of the position in the UK where governing bodies and vice chancellors are faced with the decreasing unit of resource and rising expectation of both individuals and the state. One obvious way to bridge the gap is through a range of successful third stream activities which have income generation as the significant driver. Deem et al explore these developments against a background concept of managerialism to suggest a significant shift at the beginning of the twenty first century and use the term 'academic knowledge work' (Deem et al 2007:30) to capture the extension of academic activity from teaching and research to include other elements such as consultancy and entrepreneurial endeavour. They suggest that, although this shift was hastened by the incorporation of the post 1992 universities and the move from an elite to a mass higher education system, it is based on gradual

changes to the relationship between state and higher education over the previous two decades in terms of the introduction of private sector, for-profit mechanisms, with a focus on cost reduction and value for money, into the previously more autonomous HE sector.

Clark (1998) on the other hand takes a more positive view of this gradual change by looking at European examples where entrepreneurial universities are successful and tracking what has enabled achievement. The notion here is that true transformation is about collegiality, shared ownership and partnerships with the outside world. He suggests that with these things in place there is nothing for the academic community to fear but that rather it will gain strength and cohesion in facing up to the challenge.

> *Effective collective entrepreneurship does not carry a university beyond the boundaries of academic legitimacy, setting off a down-market cycle of reputation, resources and development. Rather, it can provide resources and infrastructures that build capability beyond what a university would otherwise have, thereby allowing it to subsidize and enact an up-market climb in quality and reputation. (Clark 1998:5)*

He explores the issue of choices to be made at the departmental level and is clear that establishing focus is part of the challenge; it must be borne in mind however that Clark was considering the position a decade ago and the pace of change has increased substantially in the intervening period. Clark's translation of the reality of third stream activity into a consideration of the implications for university departments moves the debate to focus on the activities of individual lecturers. In a report on presentations given at the 2006 Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) conference, Whitchurch notes

> *... at institutional and sub-institutional levels, individuals are continually redefining what they do, how they might describe this, and how it might be articulated and explained to an ever-widening audience...*
>
> *(Whitchurch 2007:407)*

However, it is clear that the need for individual academics to redefine their role is not a new issue. Ten years earlier Trowler, in an article subtitled 'quiet flows the don', argued the case for emphasising the role of the academic as an important actor in the study of policy implementation in higher education. He unpicks negative notions of passive academics, feeling bitter and miserable but not acting to make policy change, through a single site case study of NewU. Trowler makes a clear case for developing more theories about the contexts in which academics work and the potential constraints on individual actors (Trowler 1997:312); this theme is also taken up by Bond and Paterson (2005) who found a match between what academics said in principle ought to happen and their practice, leading to high levels of engagement with governmental bodies, professionals and the media. Academics were seeing engagement as part of their duty and already carry out a good deal of work of direct or indirect benefit to the community and to society more widely. Interestingly lecturers are often not encouraged in this work, feeling that it is done in 'less than propitious circumstances' (Bond and Paterson 2005:340) rather than with the encouragement and support one might anticipate. Similarly Williams (2009) questions whether entrepreneurial practice depends on individual behaviour, and suggests that academics are not as motivated by economic factors as is widely believed.

According to White and Weatherby (2005) this lack of institutional encouragement may in part be explained by the fact that universities, whilst espousing notions of collaborative learning, largely expect academics to work in a competitive, and often solo, environment. They suggest

> *Rather than operating as a community of scholars, most universities operate as bureaucracies where social learning is an espoused ideal rather than actual practice. (White and Weatherby 2005:293)*

To return to the EUEREK project Temple (2009) makes a helpful comparison in suggesting that as the link between teaching and research

is still being disputed and difficult to prove empirically, so, especially given the lack of research in this area, the relationship between teaching and entrepreneurial activity is largely speculative.

As a practising academic manager it is no surprise to read

> *It is noticeable (even if it is no longer remarkable) that few, if any, participants in our cases seem to regard themselves as operating in a steady-state environment, reliant on guaranteed public funding: change is part of their existence.* *(Temple 2009:61)*

The challenge is to consider how to go forward in a manner which meets the sector's deeply held notions of ethical and academic integrity even when there is no single agreement about the best course of action. Perhaps the only option is to echo the aspirational statements made for third stream funding by the policy makers and suggest

> *We believe that in order to be authentic we have an obligation to practice what we preach, to work toward our ideal and take the higher ground.*
> *(White and Weatherby 2005:295)*

My consideration of the sector's response to the challenge of third stream activity reveals diversity and multiplicity at the level of universities, in turn reflected in the variety of expectations and assumptions made about the engagement of individual academics. The formal relationship between the university as an employer and its academic employees is captured in contracts, national agreements and human resource policies and procedures; these will have a similar format and impact across the sector. My concern however is not with this formal agreement between academic and employing university, but with the lived experience of individuals now working in a university that has publically espoused the business facing agenda and thus changed its expectations of academic activity.

2.6. Expectations and implications

The new scenario created by the business facing agenda brings with it changing expectations of what will be included in academic employment;

the need to engage with tasks and activities required by the business facing strategy is inevitably shifting the perceptions of managers and individual academics in terms of the requirements of daily work .

> *Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor, in short for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.*
>
> *(Studs Terkel (1972) cited Cooper 1999:118)*

My focus extends beyond the 'daily bread', the payment for labour, to consideration of the 'daily meaning', the lived experience of academics working in this new environment. The changes resulting from business facing activity are not captured in formal documentation; academic job descriptions have largely not been revised, individual employment contracts are not re-negotiated. It is rather the case that the phenomenon of interest is that of individuals gradually engaging, adding new activities to their work without a formal or explicit consideration of the potential implications. This implicit, undeclared, informal shift led me to begin the process of unpicking this issue with the metaphor of the psychological contract, drawn largely from the field of organisational behaviour. The research approach common in this field is that of the large scale questionnaire survey with a focus on a single issue; whilst this differs in methodological terms from the qualitative, interview based approach of this study the conclusions drawn and the issues pursued can usefully be explored.

> *Of particular significance is the concept of the "psychological contract". The basic premiss underpinning the "psychological contract" concept is that the employment relationship encompasses both economic and psychological dimensions and the latter refers to the holding of a set of implicit beliefs by both employees and employers about what they expect from each other in the workplace and sometimes beyond.*
>
> *(Garavan et al 2000:65)*

The psychological contract is not an unproblematic concept as definitions and understandings are redefined or applied in particular ways by individual researchers and a conceptual framework is emergent (Guest 1998, 2004). The contractual metaphor can be seen to break down in terms of reciprocal obligations between two parties when – as in this case – the power relationship is not an equal one. However, the generally accepted notion that the psychological contract captures the relationship between individual and organisation, that it is unstated, implicit and yet important to both parties, offers a helpful opening up of the area of interest.

From the late 1980s Rousseau is acknowledged as making a key contribution to the understanding of the psychological contract and her empirical work is recognised consistently by other writers as being of pivotal importance.

> *It has only been in the last few years that it has become the focus of theoretical and empirical research. Perhaps the name most commonly identified with its recent vogue status is that of Rousseau. In a number of influential publications she has refined the concept and carried out empirical research to clarify its nature. (McDonald and Makin 2000:84)*

Rousseau (1989) expounded the notion of two distinct forms of psychological contract between employer and employee. The transactional contract is defined as economic; resulting in a willingness to work overtime for reward and producing a high level of performance if pay recognises the employee effort. She proposes that this results in no loyalty to the organisation from the individual and industries in which there are high competitive wage rates and an absence of long term commitment. In contrast the relational contract is characterised by employees who perceive obligations to their employer, have a level of loyalty, and see their employer as providing job security. In this scenario employees wish to build a long term relationship with their employer and

at its most developed there are reciprocal expectations and obligations (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni 1995, Rousseau 1998a, Rousseau 1998b, Rousseau and Tijoriwala 1998).

In the 1990s the move to outsourcing, temporary contracts and increasing managerialism appear to have resulted in a rather negative outlook for a number of writers. Cooper (1999) for example provides a very bleak assessment of changing work patterns with an emphasis on low employee satisfaction and presenteeism. He examines the impact of technological changes in the work environment in Europe and the creation of virtual organizations and considers the effect of job insecurity on work performance. He makes some very critical comments about the long hours culture, year-on-year redundancies, technological overload and the requirement for individuals to re-engineer themselves to be more flexible and adaptive. He questions the position of employers when they are demanding a level of commitment from employees which is not matched by their commitment to the workforce. With respect to Higher Education Bathmaker argues that there is

> *a need to focus on, and have insight into, the nature of the psychological contract, or employment bargain, existing between senior managers and lecturers within the turbulent environment of a new university in 1990s, and concludes that effective management ... must take account of the need for reciprocation and fit between perceptions of the work agenda.*
>
> *(Bathmaker 1999 Abstract)*

A doctoral thesis written during this period (Benmore 2001) sums up the prevailing mood of the time with an ethnographic study carried out in 1999 at the University of Sheffield. A paper arising from the study focuses on the changing nature of the employment relationship for academics.

> *...the subjects of my study perceive the changing nature of their academic work with a particular focus upon management of the employment relationship. Since reform of the public sector became a major priority for successive Conservative governments in the 1980s and 90s management practice within it has changed significantly.*
> *(Benmore 2001 author abstract)*

By the turn of the century writers reflect the changing pattern of work with a focus on the impact of temporary working and short term contracts on the psychological contract. McDonald and Makin (2000) test the proposal made by Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1995) that temporary staff have a different, and by implication weaker, psychological contracts with the organisation than their permanent counterparts. Interestingly their findings contradict this idea, certainly in the holiday sector which was the site of their research activity. They found no difference in the overall psychological contract between permanent and temporary staff and that in fact temporary staff had a higher level of organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Their purpose in this piece of research is similar in nature to mine in that it is to

> *...examine the concept of the psychological contract and its usefulness in understanding the changing nature of employment relationships...*
> *(McDonald and Makin 2000:84)*

They also challenge Rousseau's notion of the psychological contract being either relational or transactional and suggest rather a continuum of description which tries to capture the balance between the two elements represented by the individual at any given point in time.

In the same year Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) published the outcomes from a large public sector organisational survey which focuses strongly on contract breach. Not only do they gain a perspective from employees they also provide the view of 'managers' who in this situation are taken to represent the employer. The managers support the view that the organisation is not fulfilling obligations to employees as a result of

external pressures in the fields the authority is responsible for; rather depressingly the authors suggest that employees are reducing their commitment to work as a result. The authors recognise that this may be a particular feature of the public sector with its tightening of finance, exposure to market forces, use of performance monitoring, measures and targets that result in changes in the features of public sector employment.

> *Old certainties such as job security, pay levels based on 'fair' comparisons, pay increases maintaining living standards, career opportunities founded on clear and stable paths have all been threatened. Moreover, the protective supports of the employment relationship have crumbled; these same pressures have forced a tightening of work practices and a general intensification of work. In combination these changes have challenged the basis of the exchange relationship.* *(Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000: 904)*

Ideas put forward by Rousseau with respect to the idiosyncratic elements to the psychological contract, are developed around the complexity of employer/employee relations where the employer is not a single entity but rather a large organisation, such as those found in the corporate and public sectors.

> *The conceptualization and operationalization of the employer has been treated as unambiguous and unproblematic in the literature to date. As such, employees' interpretation of who is the employer has not been an issue. The position may be appropriate if the organization is a simple single entity. However in large complex organizations, the issue of the employer may not be so clear cut in the eyes of employees.*
>
> *(Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000:907)*

The suggestion that employees may differentiate between the employer as an organisation in its totality and the section or sub-organisation that they experience through direct line management has obvious resonance with the structure of a university with its sub-division into faculties, schools, departments and units. Guest (2004) develops this idea to

explore notions of 'standard deals' – those applying more generally – and 'idiosyncratic deals' – negotiated on an individual basis – suggesting that the idiosyncratic deal is more likely to be made with the 'immediate boss and others with whom there is frequent contact once working within the organisation' (Guest 2004:548). This is reflected in a university context where the meaningful engagement for the individual academic is likely to be with department or subject leader, rather than with the Vice Chancellor's office, or even with the formal representation of the employer through the human resources/personnel function.

Van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) take a different starting point in looking at the relationship between the organisation and the individual on the basis of an exploration of commitment. They draw the conclusion that identification with the organisation reflects psychological oneness; commitment to the organisation reflects a relationship between two separate psychological entities. The three components of commitment - affective, continuance, normative - link closely with ideas of psychological contract; notions of continuance, where the employee remains in the job from necessity, and normative commitment, where the individual stays from obligation, reflect the transactional psychological contract where the relationship is largely economic. Affective commitment is the identification with and involvement in the organization related to attitudes and behaviours and, like the ideas of the relational psychological contract, is very much concerned with reciprocity between worker and employer.

> *The most important determinant of affective commitment is the extent to which the expectations the individual has of the organisation are met. In other words, the psychological contract. If organisations wish to encourage such commitment to the organisation, they will need to engender a relational contract with their employees.*
> *(McDonald and Makin 2000:87)*

Commenting on the development of the psychological contract, DelCampo suggests a broadening of ideas over time from an examination of the

relationship between employer and employee to 'a well-developed, emerging and dynamic area ripe for further research' (DelCampo 2007: 439) and linking more strongly to practice in the sense of employers taking specific account of the knowledge now available in order to actively consider how this plays out in the workplace.

As new tasks and opportunities arise and the university's expectation of academics shifts to include business facing activities, the psychological contract is in a process of renegotiation. The transactional, economically focused psychological contract is part of the picture, particularly in a time of intensification of work, and will be variably important for individual academics. More challenging is an explicit consideration of the relational contract looking at the match between the expectations of the university and those of the academics engaging with the new forms of work resulting from a changed strategic environment. In a complex university setting individual academics have relationships with their employer in many forms and are differently committed to their work and to the organisation. In psychological contract terms, should the university fail to meet its organisational obligations, then a possible outcome is that individual academics reduce their commitment to the organisation, and thus are reluctant to tackle business facing activities. The reciprocal nature of the engagement between employer/university and employee/academic is an essential consideration if the strategic goals are to be achieved.

From the perspective of the individual academic their position on the continuum of transactional/relational psychological contract will be dependent on a number of factors and is likely to be variable over time and context. The nature of academic work offers potential for significant levels of affective commitment, either to the organisation or to a department or discipline, leading to a strong relational contract. This notion of commitment, particularly to the discipline area, is also connected to ideas of academic identity discussed later (chapter 6).

However a relational contract cannot merely be assumed; the personal circumstances of the individual or their perception of the university and its provision of reciprocal benefits may position any individual more firmly within a transactional contract. My contention is that it is only those academics with a well established relational contract who will engage willingly with the demands of the business facing agenda.

2.7. Discussion and conclusions

In this Chapter I consider three related areas that provide the framework for my study; first the practice setting of the school of education, secondly the Higher Education context for the university's shift to a business facing strategy and finally the consequent expectations and related implications for the relationship between academic and employer.

With regard to the practice setting I establish the position of the school of education as a successful school, recognised within the university as addressing the business facing agenda effectively. I explore the management challenges arising from new ways of working and outline my concern to be able to offer an articulate explanation of the approaches taken within my school. As part of this discussion I reveal the genesis of the research questions in seeking an explanation of the development of practice I observed. I offer two summaries of my initial position with respect to understanding business facing activity (Figure 1) and individual responses to business facing challenges (Figure 2). I determine that my enquiry is firmly founded in the practice setting, within the context of a university strategic focus on business facing activity.

Having developed my initial position, it became important to situate the consideration in an understanding of the HE sector. The decreasing unit of resource, the increasing expectations of both state and individuals, the ability of UK universities to retain and use additional income and the political aspirations for third stream activity provide an explanation for the decision of the university to move in the business facing direction. A

comparison with European universities (Williams 2009) reveals a common need to engage with the matter of funding, but offers different solutions dependent on the relationship between HE and the state. A historical consideration suggests that entrepreneurial activity is not in itself a new feature for universities; however, the role of academics needs further investigation, particularly in the light of the loosely coupled nature of universities, with the potential for sub-sections and individuals to maintain independent views within an espoused strategic commitment.

This understanding of the HE sector provides a context within which to address my interest in exploring the implications for individual academics, leading me to examine the changing expectations arising from the business facing agenda. Examined through the lens of the relational contract, particularly the notion of affective commitment, an individual's ability to address the business facing challenge and meet the new expectations of the university is a complex interaction between employer and employee. More specifically, the potential importance of relationships at the local level, with the possibility of idiosyncratic contracts, was revealed. The achievement of strategic goals requires academics to work in new ways, take on new activities and operate differently; these changing expectations are not well recognised or documented by employer or employees.

Having established this initial understanding of the area of research interest my intention became to seek contemporary data from individuals working within this changing environment. I developed a research framework to allow me to engage with this activity and this is presented in Chapter 3.

3. Establishing the research framework

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents my research approach and underlying philosophy in terms of two fundamental dimensions; firstly I consider the reasons for a qualitative stance and secondly explore the constructivist approach I have taken to my work. The research framework is particular to this investigation rather than replicating an identified model and is overlaid with an 'educational mindset that sets out to focus on successes rather than identifying and solving problems' (Marks-Maran and Fergy 2006:3).

I then provide an account of the data gathering methods used and the approach to analysis and interpretation. An initial use of semi structured interviews with six individuals is opened out to a series of conversational interviews with a further nine participants and the inclusion of the voice of the researcher. The resulting primary data is analysed through a process of in depth reading in order to represent individual experience and perspective; this approach to data analysis was constructed to enable an emerging interview strategy.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of conducting practice based research within my employing institution in respect of the insider/outsider researcher debate and a short consideration of my personal perspective.

An essential thread underpinning my engagement with the research framework is

> *...learning to trust the research paradigm itself, to accept that it is worthy and respectable, and learning to trust oneself as a flexible instrument.* *(Ely et al 1991:32)*

3.2. A qualitative stance

Reasons for choosing qualitative study relate to the type of question, and whether the topic needs to be explored or is attempting to present a

detailed view of the subject in a natural setting (Creswell 1998:17). The need to answer my research questions through a detailed exploration in the workplace is the substantive feature which results in a qualitative stance. My interest lies in understanding the experience of academics and being able to get closer to the reality of working in a specific university setting at a particular time.

> *Qualitative research ... generally examines people's words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants. (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:2)*

It is the 'situation as experienced by the participants' that interests me and means that a qualitative approach is required. Blaxter et al provide some assistance suggesting that qualitative research

> *... tends to focus on exploring, in as much detail as possible, smaller numbers of instances or examples which are seen as being interesting or illuminating, and aims to achieve 'depth' rather than 'breadth'.*
>
> *(Blaxter et al 2001:64)*

The purpose of my research is to gain a detailed and in depth understanding of the experience of the participants with respect to their experience of working in a business facing university; the specific questions emerged in a parallel process as I began the engagement with participants. With a qualitative approach the exploratory nature of the enquiry allows the discovery of new knowledge; working without a predefined demarcation of what is there to be found opens up the research process. I am not testing a hypothesis where a survey or questionnaire process might have been a more appropriate investigative strategy; my intention is the understanding of individual perceptions. More traditional, particularly quantitative, research results in a clearly defined outcome following a narrowly focused enquiry, whereas the qualitative researcher has an open ended task, where new issues and perspectives may emerge along the way. As a practice based researcher the questions themselves have been part of the process of exploration

and thinking, reflecting increasing understanding and emerging recognition of the relative importance and relevance of particular lines of enquiry. My aim of achieving understanding results in a need for tolerance of ambiguity as during the research process conflicting ideas emerge; an ability to live with this tension until resolved through further investigation and consideration is important.

> *Perhaps a more important quality in a qualitative researcher is tolerance of ambiguity - the ability to hold two or more different interpretations of an event, activity or person in mind, while waiting to see which interpretation is merited by the data which you are in the process of collecting.* *(Maykut and Morehouse 1994:35)*

The notion of discovery, of being able to integrate unexpected factors offers both freedom and challenge; the freedom to follow new lines of enquiry and the challenge to retain focus and direction. In my exploration it has not been possible to follow every tangential line of interest, to include every new aspect which emerged and so decisions have been made throughout to retain a focus and ensure rigour of the research process. These features of emerging tensions, tolerance of ambiguity and strategies to ensure focus have a particular impact on the data analysis and are discussed further in section 3.6.

The qualitative process is not a finding or counting that enables a steadily emerging picture in the way of a jigsaw with pieces pre-cut and fitting together and a search for the missing piece. Rather it reflects the postmodern sense that everything can, and does, shift and individuals are not possessed of a single clarity and comprehension of their actions and interactions. An important task for a qualitative researcher is allowing the data to speak, the challenge is that the data speaks with many voices and says contradictory things so that meaning emerges in parallel with the process of data collection and analysis. Being able to capture the multi-faceted nature of individual experience arising from the shifting, unstable and incoherent nature of the world is important in the context of my

research in a turbulent HE environment. Significantly, the qualitative stance is able to encompass the possibility of partial knowing; an acceptance that truth is temporary and will suffice for the moment is paralleled by the notion of the local nature of understanding (Richardson 1994, Bridges 1999, MacNaughton et al 2001). I have found Richardson's work on writing as a form of research very helpful in this regard and recognise that the task is

> *... to write material in a variety of ways; to tell and retell. There is no such thing as "getting it right", only "getting it" differently contoured and nuanced.* *(Richardson 1994: 521)*

This nuanced meaning draws on the fact that the researcher, the participants and their relationship in a social context offer a unique combination 'so that another researcher will unfold a different story' (Finlay 2003:5). The notion that research will 'unfold' suggests gaining an ever more simple shape, as if unfolding a piece of paper, and simultaneously the idea of a flower unfolding offers emergence into a whole with the full story seen only at the end of the process. This appeals because the story I am trying to tell is at once simple and complex, obvious and hidden, present and future. Rather than coming to conclusions which are judged on the basis of correctness the onus is that of ensuring that outcomes are properly founded in the research activity. It also helps to 'de-privilege the research class' (Steier 1991:8) by making the researcher only one element of the process. This enables the research to grow beyond my initial conceptions and allow the real experiences of others to influence what is said as an outcome. The responsibility as the researcher is significant in representing as truthfully as possible the views and understanding of the participants. However, even though this appears onerous, it is not sufficient. The research I am engaged in is not merely asking individuals for their views but providing them with an opportunity to construct a view and share both the process of construction and the view established with me as researcher. This is

part of functional reflexivity where the voices of participants are encouraged in a democratic enquiry, even so it is virtually impossible to escape the inequality in the relationship and in the end the

> *… researcher should take responsibility for intelligible interpretations rather than exclusively concentrating on participant's accounts …But research involvement should be examined critically, reflexively, so that analysis is not overdetermined.* *(Gough 2003:31)*

The story that will unfold has to be one that I take responsibility for, it is not acceptable merely to be the conduit for the voices of others; the contribution I make needs to add a dimension not previously present. My contribution is the meaning making, 'trying to make sense of what it is to be human and to be situated as we are' (Steedman 1991:58) and exploring the difference between knowing about and knowing as human process.

3.3. Using a constructivist approach

Rather than a specific model or label, constructivism is more accurately thought of as a movement where a number of individuals have come to a particular view (von Glasersfeld 1991:13) allowing the individual researcher to work in ways which are appropriate for the research project rather than conforming to a specific set of rules or requiring particular methods. Unlike the supposed qualitative/quantitative divide where the two approaches can in fact be used together (Crotty 1998:14) it is the establishing of a constructivist epistemology which is significant and delineates the limits of the research approach.

At a fundamental level a constructivist approach to the enquiry arises from my interest in understanding the individual experience of academics and an acceptance that different people construe meaning in disparate ways. Working within the constructivist frame is important in its recognition that the participants in the research do not hold the answer I am seeking, merely providing it for me when asked the relevant question. Rather they are part of the process of discovery; as participants work

with me to establish their thinking enhancing their voices enables me to find greater, and more worthwhile, understanding. My intention is to increase the range of understandings available through talking to participants and drawing together the information to form concepts. There is no sense that concepts exist out there waiting to be discovered, rather each is created from a 'collection of conjectural models based on one's own interpretation of what one sees, hears and 'understands'' (von Glasersfeld 1991:23). Layers of understanding are built up over time with a range of sources of information, expanding insight, reflexive engagement and elaboration to enable new understandings refracted through the views of others.

This layering of understanding fits appropriately with the qualitative model in allowing openness to new ideas and a strategy for the inclusion of emerging issues. The tolerance of ambiguity discussed previously is reflected in the constructive stance and involves acceptance of an emerging set of concepts, ideas and questions being worked out in parallel with the primary data gathering, rather than a route map of expected outcomes being available at the starting point. Gergen and Gergen's notion of launching oneself - in the sense of an energetic and directional start but somewhat of a lack of control over the landing place - is a vivid metaphor.

> *... the attempt is to launch oneself into discourse around a given set of events and to expand continuously on its meaning through dialogic procedures... (Gergen and Gergen 1991: 88)*

Processes of continuous reflexivity, with each layer of meaning testing those already established, have enabled me to adjust my thinking, develop new lines of enquiry and incorporate the different ideas arising from participants. Data from the interview participants is not considered in isolation but used alongside my own experience and understanding in a meaning making process. The engagement then becomes 'not a self-

centred product, but a reciprocal process. The voices of those with whom we interact ...are enhanced rather than lessened' (Steier 1991:7).

Guba and Lincoln's exposition of the aim of inquiry in relation to a constructivist paradigm resonates strongly when they state

> *The aim of the inquiry is the understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve. … The inquirer is cast in the role of participant and facilitator in this process, a position that some critics have faulted on the grounds that it expands the inquirer's role beyond reasonable expectations of expertise and competence.*
>
> *(Guba and Lincoln in Denzin and Lincoln 1998:211)*

The challenge then is to develop sufficient expertise and the competence to carry out the enquiry in a rigorous and truthful manner, accepting that new interpretations and understandings will emerge throughout the process.

3.4. Data gathering methods

Positioning myself within a qualitative stance and constructivist approach is not limiting in terms of the potential methods of data gathering, so having established this standpoint a number of options are available. Hearing the voices of the participants in such a way as to gain the best possible insight into their experience was the overriding factor in determining my data gathering methods. Questionnaires, whilst giving an advantage in terms of an easier access to greater numbers of people, are less likely to reveal personal and specific perceptions and do not allow for further discussion or probing of answers. In contrast focus groups provide for discussion and a collaborative construction of meaning but may not establish the specific views of individuals. In particular I wanted to gather data with an open agenda, genuinely seeking the views of participants rather than testing out preconceived notions. Although others might argue a different case, for me this is a central definition of the kind of

research that I wish to do and leads naturally to using exploratory interviews with individuals to gather data. I am not interested in testing a pre-thought solution to a particular problem with others but rather need the views and perceptions of others to inform what I wish to find out; 'it is only by their hearing me and answering me that a 'me' can emerge as an I who does research' (Steier 1991:165). I rejected formal, highly structured interviewing with set questions on the basis that this would not allow me to follow up areas of experience that were pertinent to my inquiry. The group of interview strategies which might be termed of a narrative type were also put aside on the basis that I was not seeking personal stories with the requisite beginning, middle and end as, although this would provide interesting and relevant data, it would lead to a focus on the processes involved in constructing and telling the stores rather than providing the data I was seeking in terms of individual experience.

The intention for my first set of interviews carried out with participants from the school of education was to draw out themes and ideas for further enquiry thus requiring some structure to the questions; simultaneously it was important to allow the participants to say what they wanted and not feel overly constrained by the question framework. Finding an appropriate type of interview to enable a positive experience for myself and participants and deliver the outcomes I envisaged led to a consideration of a range of approaches. I contemplated closed and open, structured, semi-structured, unstructured, fixed choice or open ended (Silverman 2006), reflexive interviewing (Etherington 2004), narrative interviewing, oral history interviews (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), interviews as conversation, responsive interviewing (Rubin and Rubin 2005) – a bewildering plethora of options. The task became that of identifying a form of interview which would enable an understanding of experience and make use of my practice skills in terms of a conversational and collaborative approach to problem solving. The semi-structured approach seemed to both meet the needs of the enquiry and

fit appropriately with my personal style. Within this general category Silverman's (2006) descriptor of the open ended interview provides a good match with my intention in offering the potential for rich data. He draws on Fontana and Frey (2000) to suggest that open ended interviewing requires flexibility, the establishing of a rapport with interviewees and active listening on the part of the interviewer. 'Good interviews, then, allow a dialogic, reflective journey to take place between interviewer and interviewee' and are 'dependent on the rapport building capacity of the researcher' (Cousin 2009:74/76). I wanted to establish a series of good interviews and had faith in my ability to build an appropriate rapport with my participants as this related so strongly to my practice approach to professional conversations.

This is not to suggest entering the interview process with an empty mind and awaiting ideas from the participants. Steedman reminds us that we cannot come to something blank or neutral but rather have a mind crammed with ideas and information. He suggests

> *… we need to know what sort of thing we are looking for before we find anything to which one could give a name. (Steedman 1991:54)*

The need to step away from my more usual manager identity in the workplace and take on my researcher role in order to gain a clearer picture was an important task. This distancing process revealed both similarity and difference between management and research perspectives, an understanding of both how I am in the world and how I am as a researcher. These two things are overlapping but not identical – the researcher aspect is a more considered, intellectually examined notion perhaps built on the instinctive and automatic practice behaviour. My managing role requires a predictive approach, knowing the 'sort of thing' which constitutes an acceptable outcome; in research similarly I need to know the sort of thing I am looking for. However these two sorts of things are rather different; the manager's perspective leads to predicting specific behaviours or deliverables, the researcher's perspective needs to predict

the nature of what one is seeking without pre-empting the potential content. I came to an understanding that

> *It is this very notion of pursuing important or salient early discoveries that undergirds qualitative approaches to inquiry. … Important leads are identified in the early phases of data analysis and pursued by asking new questions, observing new situations or previous situations with a slightly different lens… (Maykut and Morehouse 1994: 44)*

The knowledge being sought was that of an increased understanding of the experience of academics, particularly in the light of engagement with new and challenging tasks in the business facing environment. The possibility that analysis of responses would open up new avenues of enquiry in the early stages was positively welcomed, and did indeed turn out to be the case.

The challenge with semi-structured interviewing is that the burden of validity falls upon the interviewer and is highly dependent on their skill in asking questions. To gain valid material it is crucial to obtain authentic accounts of how people think and behave, accepting that their responses are their own interpretation and underpinned by their values-led choices (Arksey and Knight 1999). It is not possible, or desirable, for me to take an objective stance, but rather to be aware and make use of the fact that I am engaging with interviewees and what they tell me through the lens of my own experience. An interpretivist perspective suggests that the researcher, and indeed the participants in the research,

> *... have their own understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations; they, too, are members of particular culture at a specific historical moment. Also they will be undeniably affected by what they hear and observe in the field, often in unnoticed ways. (Miles and Huberman 1994:8)*

Membership of the culture was an asset in the sense that I shared with my participants an experience of working the same university and thus was able to give appropriate meaning to descriptions of experience. As a

corollary the challenge was to avoid unwarranted assumptions about similarity of interpretation, particularly in the light of the difference in position and power between myself and some of the participants. Steier suggests that

> *As we reflexively understand our research to be about ourselves, we open up greater (rather than fewer) degrees of freedom for the voices of others.* *(Steier 1991:177)*

This leads to more complex questions regarding how I will use the material and the value I give to participants. The role of the researcher is that of testing the reality already established with the new layer of meaning derived from the dialogue; this closely parallels my practice activity of seeking ideas and then testing my conclusions with groups and individuals. The approach is that of combining, synthesising and opening up new vistas of understanding, continually expanding and enriching the meaning (Gergen and Gergen 1991:88). My rationale is in part a rejection of the scientific models where

> *Subjects serve as reactive pawns for manipulation, control or observation. They are not encouraged to reflect on their situations within the study, nor to offer their interpretations of events. They are simply used as vehicles to enhance the power of the investigator's voice.*
> *(Gergen and Gergen 1991: 86)*

This rejection leads to a model where there is sharing of power between researchers and subjects in order to construct meaning. 'Subjects' become 'participants' and the number of interpretations (or theoretical possibilities) generated by the research is expanded rather than frozen (Gergen and Gergen 1991:86). It is in the juxtaposition of the self as practitioner, self as researcher and the outcomes from inquiry that a worthwhile, and potentially original, contribution emerges.

3.5. Interviews

Two phases of interviewing were carried out involving a total of fifteen academics.

- Phase 1. Six academics in the school of education with an interview focus on how academics develop their practice in response to new challenges.
- Phase 2. Nine academics across the university with an interview focus on how academics develop their practice in response to business facing activity.

Table 1 Interview participant summary

	Phase 1	**Phase 2**	**Total**
Gender	Male 2 Female 4	Male 6 Female 3	Male 8 Female 7
Discipline	Education 6	STEM 3 (Science , Technology, Engineering, Maths) Business 4 Health 2	15 individuals 3 grouped as STEM to maintain anonymity
Job level	Senior Lecturer 4 Principal Lecturer 2	Senior Lecturer 4 Principal Lecturer 3 Academic Manager 2	Senior Lecturer 8 Principal Lecturer 5 Academic Manager 2
Ethnic background	White British 4 White European 1 Ethnic minority 1	White British 7 White European 2 Ethnic minority 0	White British 11 White European 3 Ethnic minority 1

3.5.1. Phase one: interviews in the school of education

The sample for my initial series of data gathering interviews was selected with a single criterion of being an academic working in the school of education. An invitation to volunteer was sent to all academics in the school with an explanatory note making clear that the purpose of the interviews was to collect data with the theme of individuals rising to

challenge as part of my study, and importantly the separation from appraisal and other management engagement (see Appendix A). Pre-labelled envelopes for return so as to eliminate handwriting recognition, collected by the school secretary so that I was not involved in accepting responses from individuals, ensured the initial anonymity of the total set of volunteers. The request was sent out to forty academic staff in the school and fourteen were returned. Six envelopes were chosen at random, opened and interviews set up. This resulted in interviews with two men and four women with employment in the school from less than one year to over twenty. Approximately two thirds of the school of education academic staff are female so this provided a reasonably representative gender sample, although this had not been an explicit intention of the selection process. Once interviews were completed the remaining eight envelopes were destroyed and a thank you and explanation sent to all forty academics, not only to those who were known to have responded.

At the planning stage the intention was for a thematic consideration of the data rather than a discourse or response analysis. This meant that a precise set of questions to be used identically with each individual was not required for my purposes so I created a series of broad questions with subsidiary prompts and follow-ups. Maykut and Morehouse use Patton's (1990) question typology to provide a list of six types of questions which might be asked in interview:

> *Experience/behaviour questions* *Opinion/value questions*
> *Feeling questions* *Knowledge questions*
> *Sensory questions* *Background/demographic questions*
> *(Maykut and Morehouse 1994:90)*

They suggest starting the interview with non controversial questions focusing on experience, and paying careful attention to the order of the question order to structure a productive interview. The interview

schedule provided below broadly reflects this model. The intention at the commencement of this phase of interviewing was to explore with the participants the experiences in their working lives that had enabled them to engage with new activities. The questions arose from my practice observations.

Interview questions for School of Education participants to explore experience and engagement with new activities.

1. Could you give me a very brief outline of how you have arrived at this point in your career?
   - 1.1. Were there any significant decision points that led you to your present post?
   - 1.2. Can you identify times in your working life when you have felt you achieved something worthwhile/important?
   - 1.3. Are there particular people or events that you remember because they have had an impact on your approach to work?
   - 1.4. *Prompts*: key colleagues, why did you, who helped, what made it seem worthwhile
2. In terms of job satisfaction what are the key elements of work for you?
   - 2.1. What do/have you put the most energy into?
   - 2.2. Where do you think you are particularly successful/ have particular skills?
   - 2.3. When do you go home feeling good about the day's achievements?
   - 2.4. *Prompts*: how do you feel, the 'aha' moment, appreciation
3. Are there areas of your work currently where you feel you take a lead role?
   - 3.1. Can you remember when you first thought about …..?
   - 3.2. What led you to becoming involved in …..?
   - 3.3. In taking this forward what has been going on around you that has encouraged or discouraged you?
   - 3.4. *Prompts*: making a shift, taking responsibility/ risk, leading peers, moving forward
4. What do you gain from your work in this area?
   - 4.1. What is it you enjoy?
   - 4.2. What is important to you about it?
   - 4.3. *Prompts*: personal satisfaction, reward, promotion, engagement
5. Have there been activities/areas of work you would have liked to explore and haven't? Do you know why?
   - 5.1. Anything you have regretted not being involved with?
   - 5.2. Anything you feel you could have done a good job with but for whatever reason didn't take on?
   - 5.3. Have you been asked to do things and said 'no'? Why?
   - 5.4. *Prompts* : personal/work pressures, skill level, opportunity, confidence

A range of verbal probes such as 'so can you give an example of what they would look like' (interview E1) and 'are there other things ...'

(interview E3) were used extensively to elicit additional comments and to manage the interviews.

The one hour timeframe agreed with participants allowed for four or five main questions with relevant subsidiaries. I considered whether to allow, or indeed encourage, narrative responses; encouraging this type of response from participants might appear intrusive, particularly taking into account the line management role relationship with the participants. I left this open by allowing time for individuals to tell stories if they wished but not wording questions in such a way that this was a requirement.

Interviews were scheduled around the availability of the participants, ensuring time for further explanation of the nature of my research and reassurance that the process was separate from my managerial role. Interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participants, and listened to as soon as possible after the completion of the interview. Initially my intention was to make notes during the interview process but after one experience I felt that this was a barrier to active listening and did not pursue this option. I listened to the recordings on several occasions and had them professionally transcribed at a later date.

3.5.2. Phase two: interviews in the university

A second phase of data gathering interviews was implemented following consideration of the issues arising from the first phase; in particular the period between the two phases of interviewing was a period of development of understanding and refinement of the research questions. The focus shifted more specifically to business facing activity rather than the generic idea of new or challenging work. This occurred in response to my increased practice grasp of the shift in university strategic thinking, in parallel with the research process of considering the themes as they emerged and capturing this deeper understanding through increasingly focused research questions. A purposive sample was used with two criteria i) engagement in business facing activity and ii) being employed in university schools other than education. Individuals were identified

through requests to other heads of school to suggest potential interviewees on the basis of involvement with business facing activity. I considered carefully the ethical issues here of asking other managers to identify possible participants. This consideration influenced my criteria in the sense that I opted for a factual criterion of engagement with business facing activity rather than use a more subjective notion such as that of being entrepreneurial. I also made no further distinction in terms of what I was prepared to count as business facing activity and left it to the individual manager to make this decision on their own terms. The key ethical question here is that of choice; managers made a choice about staff to suggest but this is part of their normal working practice, suggesting staff for particular tasks. There was no compunction to be involved and any manager feeling this might compromise their own position or that of their staff need not engage. Similarly individuals were approached by email (see Appendix A) and had the possibility of saying no or indeed of merely ignoring the email as I had no intention of repeating the request.

I was given names, approached twelve people for an interview and all agreed without hesitation. I was not successful in scheduling three individuals for reasons of timing, departure from the university and illness. This resulted in a sample of six men and three women, no ethnic minority representation, one second language English speaker and a preponderance of males in the more senior roles. The nine participants included long serving and relatively recent colleagues in a variety of disciplines, some individuals earned significant external income and some were involved in activities with more modest financial outcomes - but these features were not specifically explored and were not deciding factors in making the selection, rather watched for to ensure a reasonable balance. Seven of the participants did not know me; two had met me in the pursuit of normal university business. I was surprised that all agreed so readily to be interviewed and found time in busy schedules to meet

with me. In hindsight I suspect this may have a link to their interest in talking about what they do and why they do it but unfortunately I missed the opportunity to ask specifically about this during the interview so can make no proper comment about their motivation to engage with the interview.

Building on the experience from phase one, the intervening period of analysis and reflection and my increasing confidence as a researcher, the format for the phase two interviews was a looser, more conversational approach, within the open ended interview structure. This allowed me to pursue areas of interest in some detail and draw on the responses to develop threads of conversation during the interview process.

Interview outline for business facing participants

- Can you tell me what you do that means people might describe you as a business facing or third stream academic?

Prompts: Who are the customers? How did you start? What do you actually do?

- How did you become involved in this type of work?

Prompts: Background/previous work? Is this part of formal role? Personal/professional engagement?

- What support do you get in doing this work?

Prompts: Who from? Other academics? Manager? Barriers?

These interviews were a conversation with peers, allowing greater freedom than in the phase one round where I had a clear management responsibility for the individuals concerned. My relationship to this group of participants was different as, although they were aware of my role as

head of school, I had no managerial responsibility or connection for any of them.

Interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participants, and listened to as soon as possible after the completion of the interview. Recordings were professionally transcribed immediately to provide the script of the conversation.

3.6. Approach to analysis

My approach to data analysis was strongly influenced by the rationale discussed earlier in this chapter with respect to seeking an understanding of individuals. This may seem an obvious statement but I feel there is a point to be made here about the way in which data is considered. My focus is on understanding individuals, the diversity and singularity of their engagement; each participant has a story to tell about their experience and has been willing to share this with me. Conversely as a practice based researcher I need to engage with the data as a whole in a sense making activity which offers meaning and insight rather than just a summary of the views of my participants. In establishing my strategy for analysis my aim was to create a balance which preserves a sense of the individual contributions and at the same time offers a meaningful insight which might have a broader application. Additionally maintaining anonymity for the participants was important and in some instances I have surrendered specificity in order to ensure that individuals, already known to be within one institution, are not identifiable.

A further lens through which to consider the approach to analysis is the power interplay between researcher and participants; the questions asked, the people studied or ignored, the problem chosen, the data highlighted and the style of writing are all affected by the power position of the researcher and I recognise the aim to try and produce 'less distorted' accounts and to think about challenging the 'power' of the researcher (Finlay 2003:5). I have consistently aspired to represent the participants' voices in a true and complete manner. This underpins my

decision to use conversational interviews and to create versions of the participants' stories in their entirety as part of the analysis process. I provide an outline of my strategy for analysis below but need to make clear to the reader that this is a strategy which emerged in parallel with data collection and my developing understanding of the issues. This creates tension around managing interviews over a period of time when ideas are continuing to emerge through a parallel process of data analysis. My experience of practice based research is that the 'data collection, hypothesis construction and theory building are not three separate things but are interwoven with one another ' (Silverman 2006:46).

Table 2 Summary of analysis strategy

Activity **Not chronological, an iterative process**	**Phase one** **6 interviews**	**Phase two** **9 interviews**
Listening to tapes and reading transcripts	√	√
Annotating transcripts with questions, comments, potential themes arising from data, from secondary data/literature and from practice	√	√
Writing short prose summary with focus on capturing essence of interview	√	x
Reading transcripts to write short prose summary of the individual and salient features of their role, preserving anonymity	√	√
Coding individual transcripts using themes arising from the data	√	partial
Coding individual transcripts using themes from literature	√	partial
Coding every line of transcript in grounded theory approach	One transcript	x

Reading across coded data from more than one interview to look for shared themes	√	x
Activity **Not chronological, an iterative process**	**Phase one** **6 interviews**	**Phase two** **9 interviews**
Creating individual account of experience in the form of continuous text story. Editing out interviewer and speech mannerisms etc but retaining verbatim text. Example provided in Appendix B	√	√
Constructing a commentary on individual interview	√	√
Reading across individual accounts to look for similarities in position or way of working	√	√
Grouping data under overarching themes identified through literature, data analysis and practice knowledge	√	√
Extracting my interjections/questions and comments from interview transcripts and coding using themes arising from the data	x	√
Re reading transcripts to select relevant items to illustrate individual experience and unique personal projects	√	√

Initially, using a variety of categories and separating units of text in different ways I coded the interview transcripts; themes were drawn from the interviews, looking for commonalties and repeated occurrences. Arriving at several different coded versions I felt that the process was mechanical and not immediately assisting with meaning making. I was not convinced that the themes identified actually stood 'for something about the way the minds of the interviewees are organised' (Gomm 2004:196) and began to question whether the themes were anything more than convenient headings. My initial assumption was that of needing to use the thematic approach in a more rigorous manner and I

turned to other writers for advice. I considered and experimented with a range of strategies to delineate units of meaning (Blaxter et al 2001), produce consistent and refined definitions (Rubin and Rubin 2005), organise and inspect the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). These approaches although intended to increase rigour ran counter to my commitment to preserve individuality and I felt were not helping me to move forward in seeking answers to my research questions. Accepting that 'analysis is a cyclical process and reflectivity activity' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 10) I became familiar with the transcripts as I coded and re-coded using different types of themes and presenting the outcomes in tables and lists. I separated the coding and analysis processes on the basis that the two are not synonymous and experimented with using a grounded theory approach to coding every line of text in a single interview. This approach led to large numbers of codes and snippets of text detached from their meaningful place in the interview giving a particularly uncomfortable sense of becoming distanced from the participant's views and diluting the potential meaning making process.

Standing back from the analysis process to take stock I realised that method had become the dominant feature and the purpose of the analysis in relation to my research questions had been obscured. It was important to allow other aspects to contribute to the analytic process including the role of intuition and creative insight, allowing time for incubation and reconstruction (Marshall and Rossman 1995:19). My intuitive sense that finely coded data led to a misrepresentation of the experiences of my participants needed further exploration; consideration of this issue led me to the understanding that my overarching concern with the individual nature of academic experience would not be represented appropriately if I used an approach to data which rendered the person invisible. This was not merely a question of preference but relates strongly to my moral and ethical standpoint and the need to seek a truthful outcome to the data analysis process. A realisation that it is not necessarily desirable to reduce

to hygienic, clean data and the single issue (Law 2003) and that balance is important led me to think differently about what I was trying to achieve.

> *Tightly structured, highly organized data gathering and analysing schemes, however, often filter out the unusual, the serendipitous - the puzzle that if attended to and pursued would provide a recasting of the entire research endeavor. Thus a balance must be struck between efficiency considerations and design flexibility.*
>
> *(Marshall and Rossman 1995:111)*

My interest in the individual, the distinctive and determination not to dismiss or ignore data which did not fit with preconceived ideas meant that 'tightly structured' data gathering and analysis was not the most appropriate approach; my concern to respect the totality of meaning from the interviews led me to experiment with narrative style presentation of data and I edited transcripts to a piece of a continuous prose (example provided in Appendix B). This was extremely useful in seeing the totality of the individual's views but provided a challenge in how to manage a text of several pages as a single item of data. These stories were not a narrative text in a formal sense because beginning, middle and end were not apparent; more importantly my approach to the research did not address the key features of temporality and connects with change consistent with a narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). The continuous prose transcripts were more satisfying in terms of meeting my aspiration for maintaining an individual voice and represented the participant's perspective more strongly.

The combination of detailed coding and thematic analysis of individual interviews, reading across interviews to look for shared themes and the continuous prose transcripts enabled me to embark on the sense making process. Rather than trying to give a named label to my approach I content myself with the description of analysing through a process of in-depth reading and treating each transcript as unique (Clegg 2008:333).

My aim is to provide the reader with a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973 cited Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Fanghanel 2007, Cousin 2009 among others). Although I am not an ethnographer this term captures the task which 'is not that of observation and description but the inscription or thick description of these meanings of human action' (Schwandt 1998:232).

I think it is important to remind myself and the reader that my data analysis and interpretation process is not the seeking of definitive answers. Rather it is the exploration of 'subtleties, nuances, uniqueness and singularity alongside possible generalities and commonalities' (Cousin 2009:77) accepting that this will always be incomplete and partial because data is not an 'imperfect representation of an independent social reality that is itself perfectly coherent and integrated' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:15). The nature of my research in seeking a response from a range of individuals means that the themes that emerge are not common categories so much as areas of shared interest and the spaces in which individual projects appeared to be being framed (Clegg 2008:333).

Law's evocative description of the challenge of research offers a helpful perspective.

> *Maybe we were dealing with a slippery phenomenon, one that changed its shape, and was fuzzy around the edges. Maybe we were dealing with something that wasn't definite. That didn't have a single form. A fluid object. Or even one that was ephemeral in any given form, flipping from one configuration to another, dancing like a flame. (Law 2003:5)*

Accepting the slipperiness and fuzzy nature of the interview outcomes allowed emerging tensions and the tolerance of ambiguity to be part of the approach to analysis, welcomed as an indicator of truthful and scrupulous engagement with the data.

3.7. Considering practice based research

This practice based enquiry arises directly from issues in the setting and can only be explored through a process of research within the institution. This uncontroversial statement could be sufficient to justify the use of practice based research but there are other dimensions which I think are both relevant and interesting to explore briefly; firstly the notion of an insider/outsider researcher continuum and secondly the manager practitioner dimension.

3.7.1. The insider/outsider research continuum

Moving away from the oversimplified idea of an insider/outsider researcher dichotomy as there is 'not one continuum but a multiple series of parallel ones' (Hellawell 2006:490) offers a helpful structure for considering my position. I recognise the benefits of insider research and do not accept the argument that it merely raises a set of problems to be overcome or difficulties to watch for. The insider researcher possessing 'a priori intimate knowledge of the community and its members' (Merton 1972 cited Hellawell 2006:484) is able to offer insights and understanding not available to the external researcher. Empathy with interviewees and my ability to draw on my own work experiences to understand participants' views gives a different perspective to the research than would be offered by an outsider asking questions in a more distanced manner. In fact the same research can slide along a continuum because of shifts in research focus, differing perspectives at particular stages of the journey and specific elements of the research activity. The more commonly used dimensions of insider/outsider researcher position such as gender, age, ethnicity are all applicable in this case but more importantly perhaps are paralleled by others such as knowledge of strategy, experience of business facing activity, institutional knowledge. Merely indicating a position against each of these in terms of being a complete insider or complete outsider offers little in the way of insight as frequently I am positioned in the middle of the continuum. Rather I choose just one dimension to examine to give a sense of the movement along the continuum at different stages of the research. The continuum of

business facing activity is an obvious example to demonstrate the shifts in my position. With respect to the type of business facing activity which takes place in my own school I am very much at the insider end of the spectrum, knowing both what is happening and how individuals are working with the challenges. However outside my own school and working across the university in the phase two interviews this position changed as I became very much an outsider in exploring with individual participants their engagement in industrial or commercial activity where I have no experience. This can be clearly seen in the interview transcripts; as I move toward the outsider end of the spectrum there are more questions about how things work, what happens in particular cases, what it is that the individual is actually doing. My relationship with the participants in not static but fluctuates along a continuum of possibilities (Mercer 2007) as I move through the various stages and elements of the research activity.

There is a link from the insider/outsider dimension to the power and ethics issues which are undoubtedly present. My formal role as a senior manager in the university puts me in a more powerful position than some, although not all, of the participants. I am aware that there is a potential issue for participants and 'the quality of data they feel able to reveal without, in their eyes, harming themselves within the micro-political processes of their organisation' (Busher 2002:82). There are two facets to this issue; the quality of data is one and appropriate recognition of the individual position is the other. There is no test to guarantee the quality of the data and it is possible that individuals did not mention something because of their perception of my role. However the nature of the interviews in terms of length, openness, my interaction and the conversational approach to questioning was devised to minimise this difficulty. In terms of individual experience of the interview process I was careful to position myself as seeking genuine contribution and took care

that my participants were comfortable with the interview and had access to the recordings and transcripts.

> *In the end researchers have to take decisions about how to carry out research that make the process as ethical as possible within the frameworks of the project.* *(Busher 2002:86)*

Although comfortable with my approach it was a consideration of these aspects that in part led to my decision to move from interviewing individuals within my management span to engaging with academics elsewhere in the university. In the set of interviews carried out within the school of education there was no indication that individuals were being anything other than honest and open in their discussion. However one participant gave me some feedback after the interview and transcription process where she warned that, although she trusted me implicitly as both colleague and manager, she could see some inherent dangers for me in being unable to 'unknow' the information provided in the interview and potentially finding it difficult to disregard this in a management engagement. This reflects the discussion provided in 3.4 with respect to membership of the culture and the resulting possibility for individuals to feel restricted in their responses or for me to entangle the research with practice issues. Having been alerted to the potential danger I made the decision to move away from an approach that might place participants or me in a difficult position.

Participants from other areas of the university may couch their answers in terms which they feel appropriate in speaking to an identified head of school but were all clear that I had no influence in their immediate sphere of work. The interview transcripts give no indication of individuals censoring what they said in response to a perception of me as a university manager. My status as an insider, sharing some of their frustrations and challenges, comes through strongly and the challenge for me is to match this empathy with the making strange which provides useful insights.

3.7.2. The practitioner dimension

A claim which is important to the practice based researcher is that the strength of work is founded on its location in practice and it is therefore not credible or truthful to select only those parts of practice which are easy to incorporate. In this instance my role as head of a university school of study is one feature which needs to be given due cognisance even though I made a decision not to enquire into managerial practice directly. Beyond this a simple biography reveals some eight years in the current role and a variety of leadership and management roles in both the schools and HE sector over a period of some fifteen years prior. This factual summary underpins the reality which is that of <u>being</u> a manager for the majority of my working life, measured not by numbers of subordinates, budget or formal title but rather by notions of accountability, leadership, strategic decision making and problem solving which have become an ingrained part of my persona.

As I discussed earlier (3.2) there have been challenges in dealing with the conflicting ideas arising from the process of practice based, qualitative research and in ensuring a sharp focus on the key aspects of my enquiry. It is within the practitioner dimension that I have experienced both of these challenges most acutely. The ongoing interrelated nature of practice and research activity required clarity of thinking when faced with potential lines of enquiry which might have solved a practice-based problem but were not germane to the research. Similarly there were overlaps between my personal experience as a manager, with the normal processes of self development and examination which underpin management development, and the discussion with academics about the context of their work. Where these overlaps and potential diversions from the research focus occurred it was important to stand back, either independently or with the assistance of my supervisory team, to look critically at the research questions and direction and make clear decisions about the lines of enquiry to follow.

The use of my practice to make meaning within the research activity results in a particular insight and thus a potentially unique research outcome and contribution to practice. As a practitioner I know what it is like to engage in difficult or new activities in the direct personal sense of taking on tasks where my knowledge base was thin and my understanding of the activity limited. Beyond a personal engagement I have supported a range of individuals as they have struggled to manage innovation, worked through the difficulties of entrepreneurial activity and forged new paths. My practice in education has developed over time to managing as a way of being and is related to notions of wisdom-in-practice. Feldman (1997:770) comments that it is the wisdom-in-practice which is most difficult for others to understand and research; in my experience wisdom-in-practice is also difficult to understand for oneself. The challenge to appreciate where meaning comes from and how it is synthesised from practice is significant. The constant questioning of assumptions about the participants, their attitudes, their experience of working in the university and their understanding of their role in third stream activity is connected to my management practice. These experiences underpin my values and result in a way of knowing and being that cannot be ignored, or sacrificed for expediency.

A concern with the knower and the knowing is important in articulating the position of the teller in presenting the story of the participants. Richardson recognises the complexity of positioning the self.

> *Chief among these are questions of how the author positions the Self as a knower and teller. For the experiential writer, these lead to the intertwined problems of subjectivity/ authority/authorship/reflexivity, on the one hand, and representational form, on the other.*
>
> *(Richardson 1994: 520)*

If one accepts that 'all texts are personal statements' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:578) then the question becomes that of how the self will be positioned to enhance the quality and validity of the research and engage

the reader with the text. The potential for the research activity to be overwhelmed by a concern with reflexivity and self examination which obscures the focus and becomes the dominating feature needs to be avoided. In my case I made the decision not to include detail of my transformation from non-researcher to researcher which paralleled the enquiry and was reflected upon and written about at various stages. This personal journey, although important to my development and understanding, had the potential to divert attention from the enquiry and for this reason was accepted as part of the process but not specifically written into the thesis. My own voice takes many forms - the personal, professional, academic, woman of a certain age, mother, grandmother, wife, and storyteller and adds to the work because I am 'interested in researching the richness and complexity of being human' (Etherington 2004:26). An unexpected discovery is that my research is a political, and possibly even a subversive, activity in the sense of outcomes resulting in a challenge to the status quo in my institution. Having not identified myself as a political researcher it took time to recognise this but I now understand that a quest for self and voice plays a central role in transforming my ways of thinking and in addition that this may have a gendered dimension (Belenky et al 1986:133).

Etherington, in an honest disclosure of her own lack of engagement with traditional academic research, provides a summary of my early career experience of research.

> *This 'God's eye view of the world' can seem unchallengeable, expert, hard to connect with, and sometimes for me uninteresting to read. Without sight of the person at the heart of the work I feel no relationship with the writer, even if I am interested in the topic.*
>
> *(Etherington 2004:25)*

Having found this distanced type of work to be personally unhelpful my intention is to provide 'sight of the person at the heart of the work' whilst simultaneously ensuring that it is the voice of the participants that speaks

through the data. 'The stories we tell, like the questions we ask, are all finally about value' (Cronon 1992:1376) and in presenting my questions and the data from the participants my intention is to reveal both their values and my own. The moral and ethical stance, the position of participants in the work and the notion of an acceptable outcome must be congruent with my position both as practitioner and researcher if the research is to be credible, authentic and truthful. Savin-Baden's comparison of the formal aspects of research connected with protocols and academic requirements with the process of research that we actually experience leads to her view about disclosing values. She says

> *For me reflexivity is about disclosing my value-base to those who participate in research. It is about working with people doing research that is collaborative and sharing perceptions in the process of doing research. Yet it is also being cynical about what is possible in terms of this kind of research.* *(Savin-Baden 2004:366)*

I would go further to suggest that not only am I attempting to share my value-base with my participants but also openly with those who read my work. Coming to this understanding allows me to move forward as a practice based researcher with a clear grasp of what might be achieved through this form of investigation as well as a realistic knowledge of the limits of working in this way.

3.8. Discussion and conclusions

Chapter 3 establishes the practice-based research framework, using a qualitative stance and a constructivist approach alongside the development of a specific data analysis strategy for this enquiry. This framework enables an open agenda, accepting the gradual, sometimes contradictory, emergence of ideas and processes of expanding insight. Tolerance of ambiguity became an important feature in two ways; firstly it allows the difference and singularity of voices in terms of the participants and secondly it is important in living with my emergent ideas over time as the story unfolds.

The outline of my two phases of primary data collection offers the reader an understanding of the development of the enquiry over time, beginning with academics within the school of education and moving on to engage with a broader group of participants across the university. The focus of both sets of interviews is an understanding of how individual academics develop their practice, with particular reference to new activities; in the later set of interviews the focus is sharpened to a specific concern with response to business facing activity.

My strategy for data analysis similarly emerged over time, in part through a process of trialling different approaches to determine an appropriate strategy able to deliver the outcomes I am seeking; a summary of this process is provided as Table 2. My gradual understanding of the sense making process and my desire to encompass a strong representation of the voices of the individuals, disclose my own values and accept the 'fuzzy' nature of research (Law 2003) results in a data analysis approach that is designed specifically for this enquiry.

The benefit of insider research, in particular the contextual empathy with participants, is considered alongside the possible challenges of 'unknowing'. The practitioner dimension, including wisdom-in-practice (Feldman 1997), is explored to establish the particular insight offered, and the nuanced understanding of meaning this offers within the analysis process.

4. Workplace learning in a university context

4.1. Introduction

This chapter documents my engagement with the ideas of workplace learning and how these might be applied in a university context. My view of a university school as a workplace, and further as a workplace where learning may take place, is not a common conception in the work of Higher Education researchers or those concerned with workplace learning.

> *By casting universities as workplaces we are able to bring ... research and scholarship to bear which are not normally associated with research into higher education: ... Universities are rarely viewed as workplaces; it is, therefore, not surprising that they have not featured in the literature...* *(Lea and Stierer 2009:419)*

This perspective results in a need to draw from research based in other contexts and apply relevant ideas to the area of concern rather than anticipating a direct reference to the university setting and the experience of academics. My engagement with this literature, and its application to the university as a workplace, has been a significant feature in my understanding of the issues; this reconceptualising of university work may be fruitful for further enquiry beyond my current study.

Initially I establish the boundaries of my interest within the field in recognition of the need for a selective approach to ensure relevance to my enquiry. Specifically, I propose that the concern with predefined learning outcomes strongly evident in the literature, is not where my area of interest lies; rather my research intention, to understand more about academics developing their practice in response to new challenges, leads to a consideration of learning through work where the learning is an additional and unanticipated outcome. Having established the frame of my interest I consider two key themes that emerge from my discussions – the individual and what they bring to the learning and the importance of the context.

4.2. Workplace learning: establishing boundaries

The field of workplace learning encompasses a number of strands of research and potentially links to a broader range of current concerns in organisations; it is therefore important to establish the particular elements relevant to my enquiry. As I discussed in 3.2 the challenge of retaining focus is an ongoing task in qualitative work and establishing some boundaries for my consideration of workplace learning is a specific example of determining limits to ensure relevance and significance. I therefore explore concepts and ideas that offer a connection to my enquiry.

A common device in considering workplace learning is that of using the categories of formal and informal learning, although I will return to this notion and challenge the divide as being overly simplistic, this dichotomy enables me to set out some initial boundaries. Formal opportunities for learning have a considerable profile in the university, with individual academics undertaking programmes for accredited qualifications that may be related to the workplace, include assignments based on workplace activity and have a feedback loop which impacts on practice. Similarly practice based research with strong links to individual practice, firm roots in workplace activity and the potential to feedback important understandings (as I hope my own work will) into the setting is a significant feature in the school of education and in the university more widely. I intend to put these formal workplace learning modes aside because individuals are embarking knowingly and specifically on a process of learning with predefined and anticipated outcomes; this does not further my understanding of academics developing their practice in response to new work activities. In addition the participants in my enquiry, by the nature of their chosen career as academics, have largely reached the pinnacle of their intended engagement with formal, certificated learning in terms of already having a doctoral qualification or

making the decision to complete their academic study at the Master's level.

A further substantial strand of workplace learning is usually labelled informal, owing to its situation outside an educational establishment, but has predefined outcomes and thus shares many of the characteristics of formal learning. Typically this is concerned with learning designed to take place in the workplace setting but with many of the features of that delivered in a learning institution; people apply to be included, understand that they are part of a learning activity and are in some way monitored in terms of engagement or progress. For example a detailed analysis of learning in the workplace arising from a DfEE project is approached from a specific perspective in order to 'explore how 'informal learning' in the workplace contributes to individual employability' (Dale and Bell 1999:1). The implication here is of actively seeking to engage workers in a learning opportunity through a managed and monitored process, often with some form of accreditation or certification such as a Foundation Degree. This does not illumine my focus on experienced professionals learning from experience without any formal structure or recognition, being more suited to consideration of workers with proscribed tasks and activities, and the concerns are those of specific, predetermined skills development to meet the needs of the task, individual, employer or sector. In a related manner a significant vocational theme of workplace learning leads to a focus on initial proficiency, acculturation into working practices or developing a current skill set in order to improve promotion prospects. In the formal category one might find induction into a work role or training for a profession, informal examples include the ways in which novices are integrated in the workplace (Billett 1995) or student teachers helped in developing confidence (Norman and Hyland 2003). The academics interviewed in both phases of my study are not novice workers, nor are they seeking explicitly to improve specific or predetermined skill sets for

promotion aspirations and so this vocational theme does not enhance my understanding of the issues.

I return to look more closely at the notion of the formal/informal divide. Although, as I have demonstrated, this allows a crude disaggregation of workplace learning into labelled categories it is not a helpful structure to pursue further. Having identified that formal workplace learning is not my area of interest I need to unpick the 'informal' descriptor that is germane to my research interest. There is a danger here of characterising informal learning in the workplace only by the features of formal education and training that are not apparent, thus suggesting by inference an ineffectual or weak procedure. Billett (2004) argues strongly that the absence of structure for the learning and no recognisable match with the usual requirements of learning and teaching does not equal a weak or ad hoc process. Whilst accepting that there are problematic issues such as the development of transferable knowledge he suggests that these same difficulties arise in formal educational settings. Essentially he proposes a move away from seeing workplace learning through the deficit lens implied by terms such as formal and informal and toward looking for 'more effective and precise terms to elucidate the process of learning through work' (Billett 2004:314). A search for more precise terms led me to an alternative approach using two conceptual frameworks offered by Felstead et al (2005) who suggest 'learning as acquisition', corresponding quite closely with formal learning, and 'learning as participation' (acknowledging both phrases to be originally coined by Sfard 1998). Learning as participation is characterised as learners improving work performance through interaction with 'people, tools, material and ways of thinking' (Felstead et al 2005:362) and encompasses notions of action in learning, the importance of context and the need for interaction with the world. Felstead et al's prime concern is with measuring learning and their focus is on capturing these more nuanced understandings of workplace learning through the Learning at Work Survey (LAWS) carried out

nationally in February 2004 (ibid:366). From my perspective the notion of learning as participation, highlighting the importance of interaction with the world and individual engagement has an unmistakable correspondence with the development of practice in response to the new tasks and activities undertaken by academics. More recently Marsick (2009) suggests a unifying framework for informal learning that moves away from definitions set out in terms of contrast to formal learning, offering a series of descriptors in order to move to the more integrated understanding she believes to be necessary for a postmodern world. She highlights the value of qualitative research 'because of the rich, contextual information it generates' (Marsick 2009:267) and, whilst accepting the limitations in extrapolating findings to generate theory, proposes that her framework might enable theorists to compare across different settings. Selected descriptors from Marsick's framework focusing on what individuals bring to the task, the importance of the context and the organisational factors that influence learning offer assistance in considering the issues.

The phenomenon under consideration is that of experienced professionals engaging voluntarily with new activities and developing their practice through a process of learning through the work itself. This fits with the notions of informal learning identified by Eraut in being 'implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured' (Eraut 2004:250). In Billett's terms 'learning through work' is a more helpful descriptor as it captures the sense that the new activities have been the driving force, not any intention for specific learning by individuals or groups. Additionally I note Eraut's suggestion that the deeper problem is that of the 'dominant policy discourse in both government and work organisations' (2004:271) where he believes there is failure to recognise the complex and uncertain nature of problems, preferring to assume a well defined and readily soluble model which lends itself to standardised training. An enhanced, more inclusive understanding of how learning takes place, and can be

supported, would enable a new way of considering development for the individual and the possibilities this creates for effective academic engagement in new activities.

> *Until we understand more about how people learn (or fail to learn) from experience we will have little guidance to offer teachers or managers on how to pursue excellence in their work...*
>
> *(Eraut 1993, republished 1997:39)*

A focus on workplace learning as a significant feature of how academics develop their practice provided an initial purchase on the issues. Importantly the defining interest is that learning occurs in the workplace as an additional outcome from activity designed with other purposes in mind; individuals are not set tasks with the specific intention of learning but are actively going about their daily work. I am interested in those who develop their practice without specifically recognising or naming the activity as learning, nor recording it as such. My increasing understanding of the different forms of workplace learning assisted in defining more precisely my area of interest. I therefore take forward the concept of 'learning through work' as offering a conceptual label that matches my research concern in an appropriate manner and enables a consideration of the issues. Within this overarching naming of my interest as learning through work I focus on two themes, firstly considering the individual and what they bring with them to the learning and secondly the importance of context.

4.3. Individuals learning through work

My concern is to understand how individuals develop their practice in response to new and challenging activities. Daily engagement with work in Higher Education has an expectation of learning new skills, accumulating knowledge and developing a portfolio of working strategies to manage the demands of the changing environment discussed in 2.5. My interest is in those individuals who have been able to make a stepwise change to engage in new and innovative forms of activity; innovation is

dependent on individuals, on them having ideas, thinking that these ideas are relevant and purposefully acting upon them. With respect to the participants in both phases of my enquiry the individuals demonstrating the potential for innovation are experienced workers. For example academics in the school of education almost universally join the university from a successful career in school teaching, many of them also having experience in local authority advisory work or other forms of teacher support; academics in other disciplines join the university following a professional or business career or enter through a more traditional research based route. My focus is thus with academics at a mid-career stage who have already mastered the essential skills of working, in the general sense of being employed, and are also likely to have established the particular ways of working required for the Higher Education sector. There is a correlation here with Billett's (2004) contention that engaging in the tasks of daily work is likely to reinforce or develop what is already known; experienced staff use previously established cognitive perspectives to carry out routine activity with the minimum of conscious thought. This then permits these experienced individuals to free up cognitive space which can be more selectively focused, allowing concentration on more challenging or complex aspects of their work. It is too simplistic to suggest that experienced individuals merely have unused cognitive space and use this to develop practice in response to new activities; similarly it would be naive to suggest that experienced academics are in the position of having nothing further to learn. It may however be the case that the 'potential of work-related, if not always work based, mid-career professional education is underestimated' (Eraut 1994:13) in that for the individual this learning is tacit.

Mid-career learning takes place within a situation based on the reciprocal expectation between academic and university of personal agency, resulting in a level of individual decisions and choices with respect to engagement in new tasks and thus the potential for learning through

work. This shared understanding and enactment is unspoken and perhaps needs to be given greater prominence as part of the way in which work allows and encourages learning.

> *... much of our learning takes place silently, simmering away as a sort of subversive process that we only know about when we are suddenly surprised by our knowledge and skills due to a new unexpected event, like a challenge, an accident or a crisis of some sort.(Franklin 2007:52)*

Potentially mid-career academics are in Franklin's terms 'surprised' by the knowledge and skills that emerge when challenged by the innovative activities or it may be that there is a predisposition to this type of learning with a natural ability to make connections and discern possibilities. The individual nature of experience and the differences presented in terms of learning opportunities underpin the development of a particular disposition toward learning through work. However these differences also stem from the fact that individuals see facets of their work in different ways related to their biography (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2004); individual learning through work is dependent on attitudes of individuals to the learning itself, to the work, to the context. In the particular practice that is the centre of my interest the individual's attitude to the new strategic direction and to the requirement for innovation and business facing activity may also have an impact on their disposition to learn.

Fenwick (2003) proposes a key feature of innovation as being future oriented, rather than drawing exclusively on repertoires of past experience, and the importance of the 'go-for-it orientation' which enables the individual to persist.

> *...the importance of "gut instinct", the ability to trust one's own intuition in early phases of innovation while accepting ideas and critique from external sources. (Fenwick 2003:131)*

Claxton's substantial body of work about intuition has much to say on the ways in which we generate ideas and work with them intuitively.

> *... the truth is that our ideas, and often our best, most ingenious ideas, do not arrive as the result of faultless chains of reasoning. They 'occur to us'. They 'pop into our heads'. They come out of the blue. When we are relaxed we operate very largely by intuition.*
>
> *(Claxton 1998: 49)*

Claxton's exposition of the different ways of knowing (2000:40) suggests that intuition is largely about drawing on tacit knowledge of experience rather than rational deduction. Do the rational, positivistic, planned and managed approaches to university strategy and management restrict the possibilities of intuition and the innovative activities which might follow for experienced academics? Fenwick uses the term 'innovative learning' and defines this as

> *...involving a mix of rational, intuitive, emotional and social processes all embedded in activities of a particular community of practice.*
>
> *(Fenwick 2003:124)*

Fenwick suggests that innovation requires the opportunity for spontaneous conversation and 'generating multiple ideas, scanning and optimizing idea potential, and continuous problem-solving' (Fenwick 2003:128); opportunities that are only available within a social context.

Drawing conclusions with respect to the individual and what they bring with them to learning through work suggests that the profile of a mid career stage, experienced academic is a relevant factor, possibly because it enables the cognitive space posited by Billett and thus allows an engagement with new activities. This engagement resonates with the ideas of learning as participation (Felstead et al 2005) and with Eraut's suggestion that learning at the mid-career stage is not well understood or exploited, in part at least because of its tacit nature. Similarly the disposition to learn, particularly with respect to innovative and

challenging activities, is not an explicit feature of academic life. Exploring ideas of intuition (Claxton) and innovation (Fenwick) suggest that the social context may be important to the individual academic's disposition and spontaneous engagement with challenging activities and I move now to consider my second theme - the importance of context for learning through work.

4.4. The importance of context in enabling learning through work

Establishing learning through work as the focus of interest leads to a consideration of the key features of the working experience for lecturers; the need for current and substantial knowledge or expertise, the social nature of work and, in the case of the practice setting of a university, some degree of choice in engagement with particular activities. Billett (2004) explores what he terms 'workplace participatory practices' looking at how workplaces, whilst imposing certain interests and norms, allow employees to choose to act in certain ways. He suggests that

> *… the kinds of opportunities the workplace affords individuals in terms of the activities they engage in and interactions with others, and how individuals elect to engage are salient to their learning through participation in the workplace.* *Billett (2004:312)*

His contention is that a re-conceptualisation of the workplace as a learning environment needs to focus on what the workplace setting itself provides and the human agency of individuals who work within it. Rather than a passive allowing of workers to learn if they can, Billett's ideas suggest viewing the workplace through a different lens, actively seeking the learning opportunities for individuals.

Reconceptualising the workplace requires an understanding of its complexity, in turn dependent on revealing the nature of the environment.

> *However, 'the salient features of a situation do not jump to the eye ready labelled for easy identification' (Pendelbury 1995:60); they must (be) picked out from among the blooming, buzzing confusion of details that comprise the situation (and person) that is the focus of our attention. Thus, practical knowledge requires a particular kind of lucidity; an ability to discern the relevant features of a case at hand, often spoken of as normative attention or situational appreciation.*
>
> *(Schwandt 2005:324)*

The unearthing of the salient features presents a significant challenge particularly given my 'situational appreciation' as a member of the community I am revealing. The tacit nature of practice means that a particular workplace can easily be described by surface features but less readily captured in terms of the reality of the experience of the individuals. For example the surface features of the school of education include facts such as fifty academics, preponderance of women, aging staff profile, established head of school and a strong basis in teacher education. This list however says little about how this particular school may be similar or dissimilar in terms of the experience of the academics working within it to the hundred plus schools of education in the UK, some of which have a comparable factual profile. The unstated or unknown features which encourage or allow individuals to develop practice in response to challenge are of greater interest and relevance, yet are much more difficult and complex to discern.

As a practice based researcher the challenge of standing back from the daily workplace is significant, particularly so where as head of the school I must take responsibility for the environment that I create and support.

The school of education has over five years been a fertile context for new developments and for engaging with challenging shifts in the role of the academic.

> *Argyris (1985, 1987) has argued that personal development in the workplace is dependent on a certain richness of environmental context that allows people to take risks, experiment and feel safe enough to display their authentic self.* *(Harris 2004:392)*

The concept of 'richness' of the environment is one I am drawn to; it conjures a sense of variety, of colour and pattern, of difference and diversity which appeals to my professional persona. It allows too for the 'messiness' of education which I have experienced all my working life and for the feelings and emotions which accompany a commitment to the fascinating tapestry of educational engagement. It may also be the case that in part it is my personal agency which, as the senior manager, is responsible for the complexity and richness of the school; decisions made, paths taken or not taken, risks embraced or shunned, ventures embarked upon or avoided are all part of the complex network of engagement which makes up the school's context. Within this culture individuals make choices, are actively encouraged or become discouraged in terms of their personal engagement, perceive opportunities for agentic action or barriers to involvement. As the school is active in generating its richness, creating its own complexity through the introduction of new activities and challenges, it therefore has responsibility for developing in academics the qualities needed to cope with its complexity (Barnett 2000:79). I find Schwandt's framework for thinking about practice particularly Model $_2$ helpful here in thinking about the conditions of richness that might encourage innovation.

> *In Model$_2$, the ambiguity, difference, diversity of views and disorder characteristic of everyday practice are not seen as contradictions necessarily in need of eradication. They may actually be normatively desirable, in that they are the preconditions for creativity, innovation, and growth of the practice (Abma and Noordegraaf, 2003). Arguably, it is through the process whereby practitioners discuss, argue and learn about*

> *cases demanding judgement that the practice continually realizes and redefines its internal aim and practitioners share and reshape their habits or disposition. (Schwandt 2005:326)*

The practitioner behaviours described are frequently seen in the school of education as academics test ideas through discussion with colleagues; ask for opinions and advice, offer assistance and provide moral support. The notion that contradictions are not a problem to be resolved but rather a part of the richness that enables innovation and creativity enables a different perspective; the task is not to decide how to support learning on an individual basis but rather to find ways to enhance the learning context so that individuals feel confident to take risks. Rather than an active management of innovation it is enabling the conditions in which innovative activity thrives and learning through work is encouraged that may more readily provide the circumstances for sustainable engagement with challenge (McElroy 2001).

An alternative model suggests that it is the confirmation of intuitive action which leads to confidence in judgment and that this is affected by the nurturing environment (Atkinson 2000:55/57). Atkinson's 'nurturing' environment needs to include three elements; structure, where value is given to intuitive responses, direction, where individuals are encouraged to trust their own judgements, and support focused on acts that comply with the structure. Within such an environment it feels possible to take risks, to be intuitive, to innovate without anxiety, to act with confidence. Similarly Eraut links notions of challenge, confidence and the support from the environment.

> *… confidence arose from successfully meeting challenges in one's work, while the confidence to take on such challenges depended on the extent to which learners felt supported in that endeavour. (Eraut 2004:269)*

The common workplace concept of support is that of a more knowledgeable or senior individual providing advice – mentoring or coaching – however in a practice context of innovation and new activity

there is less likelihood of a more experienced or more knowledgeable academic to turn to; rather individuals and groups are creating knowledge as they work in novel scenarios. A more subtle interpretation might suggest a strong relational contract where individuals gain support through working within an established reciprocal relationship with the university. A nurturing environment may be one of the enabling features in academics moving beyond the transactional contract in order to access the 'daily meaning' embedded in a relational contract. Seen through an interpretive lens the purpose is to discover meanings and meaning structures that are negotiated among organisational members where actors are improvising and constantly defining roles and interactions (Whetten and Godfrey 1998). This continuously renegotiated set of meanings about individual position and what is encompassed in working activity is overlaid with a shifting myriad of psychological contracts between academics and the employer. The question of whether individuals are learning through work may be related to the current psychological contract and whether the relational aspects are sufficiently robust to support the additional, discretionary effort required in developing practice and addressing new challenges.

4.5. Discussion and conclusions

My engagement with the field of workplace learning enables a particular approach to my consideration of Higher Education, establishing important lines of enquiry for the primary data collection and analysis process. A more precise focus on 'learning through work', where the learning is an additional and unanticipated outcome, sharpens my enquiry and is a key element in my thesis.

My first theme is that of individuals learning through work; I explore mid-career learning for experienced workers and the potential for these individuals to create and use cognitive space to engage with the learning needed to succeed in new tasks (Eraut 1994; Billett 2004). The tacit nature of learning, and the fact that the Higher Education setting offers a

level of individual choice to academics, led to a consideration of disposition (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2004); this reveals the potential impact of biography and individual attitude, not only to work itself but to the particular features of work in the specific academic setting. Ideas of future orientation and innovative learning (Fenwick 2003) offer potential explanations for engagement with business facing activity and will be returned to in my consideration of the primary data (Chapters 5 and 7). My consideration of this theme led to the conclusion that the emphasis is on the individual to find their own learning, in order to develop practice and contribute to their process of becoming an academic. This theme of individual engagement will be further explored in Chapter 6 where I consider the concept of academic identity.

Opening up the workplace as a learning environment to consider whether it is, or might be, a factor in enabling learning through work is presented as a second theme. This is a key strand in the management dimension of this study and will be considered further in Chapter 8. Ideas of complexity relate to my earlier discussion of the Higher Education context (2.5) and the resulting expectations and implications for academics (2.6), as the implicit beliefs that form the relational contract are established, confirmed or challenged by the continuous negotiation of meaning. An overarching concept of 'richness' of environment leads to an acceptance that it may be contradiction, difference, diversity and disorder (Schwandt 2005) that are required to enable innovation – a challenging position in the university context, where order and systematic processes are frequently viewed as the most desirable option. My conclusion with respect to the context theme is that, rather than active management of individual engagement, it may be the creation and maintenance of the appropriate environment to support learning through work that offers greater potential.

This chapter is a pivotal point in my enquiry as it connects topics discussed previously – my initial observations of academics developing

practice in response to new challenges, my concern to articulate successful business facing strategies, the turbulent nature of Higher Education, changing expectations for academics – with the primary data analysis which is to follow in Chapters 5 and 7.

In conclusion I take forward the key concept of learning through work, where the learning is an additional and unanticipated outcome, as a potential explanation for the situations I observed of academics developing their practice. Within this overarching concept I have established two themes; the first of these is a focus on the individual, in terms of what they bring with them to learning through work, and the second is the potential importance of the local environment in supporting such learning.

5. School of education academics

5.1. Introduction

This chapter considers the primary data gained from interviews with six academics, two male and four female, from the school of education (see 3.6 for approach to analysis). I know these people well and need to be careful in presenting the data that I am not overstepping my position as a researcher and using the experience I have of managing these individuals at the time of the interviews and subsequently. It is the latter which I find to be the greater challenge; I am aware of events, engagement and activities which have taken place in the time frame since the interview for these individuals. I have therefore taken care to focus only on what was said in the interviews and not stray into other material.

With respect to confidentiality and anonymity I have chosen to number these interviews from E1 to E6. The reader will see later (chapter 7) that I have made a strong case for using fictitious names for participants but, although this would be my preference here too, I have made a deliberate decision not to do this as I may reveal identities inadvertently through the names I choose. I have also taken care to amalgamate views and use quoted material judiciously so that individuals are not recognisable. I have usually indicated the gender of the participant but again have not done so where I think this may lead to personal identification.

The primary data from the six interviews has been considered through a process of repeated reading of transcripts and an intention to maintain the unique voice of each participant. The findings from the interviews are considered in relation to the discussion provided in chapters 2 and 4 but there is no attempt to match the themes directly as I draw interpretation from the primary data rather than using established topics as a template. In effect the themes already discussed form an overlay which in some places matches precisely with the analysis but in other instances there are diversions where data offers something not considered or where my

considerations to date suggest something which does not appear directly in the data analysis.

5.2. Career pattern and working in HE

The school of education academic participants have a varied length of service with the university ranging from less than one year to over twenty at the time of interview. Typically individuals join the school of education team between the age of thirty five and fifty five as one of the recruitment criteria is at least five years successful teaching experience, in addition a number of individuals move from school teaching to teacher training as a final career stage. This means that even new recruits are mid-career individuals with a wide ranging background in schools and other educational institutions. The six participants (E1 – E6) demonstrate some of this variety with backgrounds in primary and secondary schools, work for local authority advisory services, in FE colleges and other universities. Of the six participants two, stereotypically women, have had an interrupted career pattern including part time and short term working around family commitments and a return to full time work at a later point. In each case the period of employment variety has been used as part of the experience to enable appointment to the university and is drawn upon in current working. Two participants, one male and one female, have unbroken career patterns with a very strong commitment to their subject specialism that has been the driving force in terms of career moves. The remaining two individuals exemplify mature entry to the teaching profession and periods out of education in other working environments.

The individuals' backgrounds have a number of similarities in that they had each seen themselves as taking on challenging or demanding tasks in the past. Typically they had taken responsibility early in their career, on reflection commenting on their own confidence at the time as being somewhat surprising but in all cases seeing their first foray into responsibility as just a job needing doing. Three participants spoke of late

development of a career, or career aspirations, despite noting for themselves that in various job moves they had always added responsibilities or taken on something new.

With respect to formal learning five of the participants have studied part time whilst working, either during their employment at the university, or in prior posts, to gain a Master's degree and in some cases to continue to doctoral study. As discussed in chapter 4 these qualifications have been connected strongly to the workplace and in some instances required research within the practice setting. For two individuals the achievement of formal qualifications resulted in a change of employment. The direct relationship between formal qualification and the current post in the university is variable; one participant felt that the current role was the first time that learning from previous qualifications, having undertaken significant study at the level of personal interest in prior employment, had become relevant and useful. Gaining qualifications on an in-service basis is a common pattern for teachers and where this was discussed participants accepted the demands of accredited study in addition to daily work as a normal feature.

The shift from work in other teaching and education roles to employment in the university was commented upon by some participants and reveals a range of motivations including subject specialism opportunity and a long held desire to be a teacher educator.

> *... of the three jobs that I applied for this wasn't the one I most wanted but I think it was the one I was most suited to and I was interested in the fact that that was what you saw as well. [E4]*

> *... but again really wanted to come here to work. So I applied several times ...You won't remember that, to jobs that I knew I wouldn't…you know I had no right to have really, didn't get them and finally bullied them really into taking me. So I don't know…and I don't know what it is that made me know that I wanted to get into teacher education, I've tried to analyse it but ...[E5]*

So this job came along and by the time I'd got into this job I'd actually been there long enough and I should be moving along the ladder somewhere and I always wanted to stay with the subject. I just didn't want to get into the bureaucracy of running and managing departments. .. When this job came up it looked at least 9 or 10 hours of teaching my subject a week at a different level and that was attractive. The idea was pushed so I said fine. I applied as a shift and I knew if I stayed with the subject I'd move sideways. [E6]

E1 has a reflective view on the process for herself and others and ruminates on the difference between teaching in the school sector and the need to 'shift beyond that' to teaching in Higher Education

I have ended up in a different place to where I thought I would be and how my thinking has moved on about that and I also feel that it's been quite an interesting experience because it seems to me that each person's experience in the School of Education is very different you know none of us come in and are doing the same thing and our jobs are all very different ...I must say development as an academic has been completely different from what I expected because I think after a year what became clear to me was that being a good classroom practitioner wasn't all that was needed for being a teacher in higher education and an academic as well... because when I came I thought I was bringing my expertise from the classroom and I had found out that that isn't what it is …when I think of lots of friends that I have who are very good classroom practitioners I don't think many of them would make effective academics or would actually enjoy this. [E1]

She suggests that the role of the academic is something beyond the initial role of teaching in the university. In discussing her move from school teaching to teacher education she speaks of another member of the academic staff helping her to understand the role and encouraging her to find a focus that in turn led to a higher degree and research activity.

Having suggested in Chapter 4 that academics in the school of education were not novices and therefore the notion of learning specific skills was largely irrelevant, the data reveals that this is not precisely the position. Although none of the six participants were novices in the sense of working for the first time, for those who have moved into HE more recently there is a reflection on the process of change and learning to be an academic

which suggests a return to a more novice-like position. The time taken for the move to occur is seen to be variable and the process is potentially difficult.

> *Depending on where you are it seems to me that there is a danger that you might come in, that some people might come in as teachers and be a teacher and take a long time to shift beyond that and some other people I think let that go quite quickly and become academics and I think that took me quite a long time [E1]*

> *I think that this actually quite difficult task of creating the job I've got now appeals to me quite a lot. The problems that I have with it is that I sometimes get lonely and I sometimes feel that I'm tracking through uncharted waste ... that is one of the things that I found difficult but that's really the path I've taken to get to here [E4]*

Although somewhat outside the scope of this enquiry this suggests that more support is needed for individuals at the point of transition from other working environments to the university.

Views of research as an element of being an academic also came through the data with participants offering different views. One (E2) claims not to be interested in 'cold' research but in fact in a previous role challenged their employer on the basis of research outcomes and moved to a new career path. E4 talks openly of the relief of research becoming an acknowledged part of the workload and E5 explains how others are drawn into the research activity.

> *I then discovered well actually to go out and research what other schools were doing and I actually found there wasn't much going on at all. So what I then decided was to pilot actually again which was based on the research …the Masters was based on that ... I could not for example I could not do research for research sake. I find that quite cold, dispassionate, it would bore me senseless [E2]*

> *You know I'm not a first class mind but I can access what he was doing and my position is between the first class mind and the getting done and I think there's*

a role for people like me you know I can do research I'm not necessarily out there on the cutting edge of it but there's a place for everyone isn't there and finding the place in that spectrum is…I think it's quite useful to be somebody who can take that thought and interpret it into something that people can use and that's the way that I see myself [E4]

But I suppose if you think about the ... research why did I start that? It sounds…it does sound very patronising. Part of it is I was aware of three different people working and advisors and different things and aware that actually they didn't get a lot of encouragement, not encouragement but support or collaborative working in their own institution and I thought oh you know they're all nice people and they'd all enjoy that. Sounds awful doesn't it? [E5]

The interesting feature here is that none of the six participants saw research as a personal career decision or the lack of it as potential barrier to future promotion. Rather their views relate strongly to perceived needs of themselves or others in terms of knowing about real issues and applying research in the workplace.

With respect to teaching, as one might expect in a school of education, there is a professional commitment to teaching itself and to the student body. Concern with student learning/experience was an aspect which came over strongly from all the participants. Their commitment to particular tasks or activities was usually based on a perception of the needs of the learners they were engaged with. Comments about becoming 'impassioned about children's learning' (E4) in a previous post, the 'major thing is the student experience' (E3), 'it's the individuals and the process of learning that attracts me' (E5) were typical.

The fact that I work with different students, different groups of students …I love that bit [E2]

I'm very interested in the student experience I'd like to be very involved in that, really get a grip of how we support students, how we get them to become independent and take responsibility because I think at the moment I, along with probably most other people here, kind of support students at every single level

in a very hands on way because we like it and actually I think the big challenge is working out how we use the systems to support and let go at the right time [E3]

…you know the thing about students now it's the individual student and their development that gives me a buzz. That's what I enjoy about it so presumably that's what motivates me. Well for me it's relatively easy. ... Yes, it does come easily because if you're…thinking about students …I want them to get what they want and I want them to develop to the best of their ability within what we do and if that's kind of inherent in what I want for them then it's quite easy for me to put them first. So if they say I'm having a really hard time …you know I'd really like to come and see you at eight o'clock at night or something then it's not a hardship or it's not difficult for me to say yes come whereas other people might find it easier to say no come another day. Do you see what I mean? There's something in me. It's not that I'm particularly a nice person for doing it. [E5]

I really enjoy giving a good lecture, getting the feedback and just feeling suddenly the penny has dropped and you can see a lot of people say "oh yes". [E6]

There is a clear view that teaching is a 'given' and a continuation of a career strand where although skills are confident and competent there is ongoing development in ways which are appropriate to new activities and different student groups. E3 is suggesting that academics may need to 'let go' in order to increase student independence but find this difficult as they have a 'hands on' approach to teaching.

The idea of 'being' an academic is strong for several participants; this does not merely reflect a single shift from one career or role to another but is in fact about the process of becoming an academic as a project over time. Rather than paraphrase their views I include a long extract from the transcript for E1 which shows a sophisticated level of thinking and understanding about the process of developing a personal academic role.

I do think that being an academic requires a certain amount of openness and willingness to change but that's how it seems to me but certainly within the school of education because I think it's so very different from being a teacher in a school …certainly when I came, very much good classroom practice was the starting point and it's interesting sort of talk…the discussions that we've been having lately have been sort of shifting away from that a bit more. There are good classroom practitioners who would not be effective academics and that's not all there is to it which I wasn't aware about or wasn't aware of that at the time. Although there are not enough hours in the day to do what you need to do and you are continuously challenged but you do know the limits of your role to a certain extent [in a school] whereas in HE the ground is constantly shifting it seems to me and so you need to be open and adaptable to a certain extent to those changes and certainly from my experience it hasn't ever become routine and standard and comfortable and predictable it's never been that that's why I'm still here. This is the longest I've ever been in any job whereas when I was in school or other jobs I've had in the past it's been…I've reached a stage where I've become a bit too comfortable that's when I know that I need to change I think [E1]

Although others are less deliberative about their academic role many of the same ideas are present. The sense of continuous challenge being desirable, the not wishing to be comfortable and the need for openness are all reflected by other participants. These features do not of course lead of necessity to engagement with business facing activity but rather indicate the attitude and disposition of individuals to both engage with challenging activities and to challenge themselves within more familiar areas of work. The clear notion is of an ongoing project of becoming an academic, a process which has dimensions of time and opportunity and is situated within a particular environment.

5.3. Challenge and learning

Challenge was taken up and debated within the interviews with the participants (E1, E2, E3, E4) referring to the need for challenge to keep them interested. Some openly reflect on the fear factor and the need to persist in spite of this.

I do a lot of things that scare me you know I'm probably scared every day that I'm here but I know that I grow through being scared ... I realise that that never stops me from doing things but when I get through and things are successful, that increases my confidence and so I'm not scared of being scared basically but it's part of taking on things. [E1]

It's how you learn. The way I read things unless you're challenged you don't really progress across a whole range of dimensions and I'd say here you are challenged... I'm still prepared to take on new ideas. I'm not frightened of challenge I have to say that really, and I quite welcome it, 'bring it on' almost to be quite honest [E2]

I like that because I like handling difficult situations. I like seeing what happens when something has gone wrong and what you can do to try and get it right. [E4]

Individuals expected to be challenged in their work; indeed felt it was a necessary part of their engagement and enjoyment. Acknowledging that it is possible to create a 'cosy comfortable little world '(E1) but choosing not to, they are clear that it is the challenge and diversity of the work which keeps them involved and enables them to remain employed at the university over the long term. The notion of things going wrong and sorting out the solutions is seen as an achievement. Two individuals (E1 and E2) mention being scared or frightened but go on to say that this is an important experience in terms of developing their confidence.

A link between challenge and learning, particularly in respect of new activities, came through strongly with individuals suggesting a clear grasp of their own levels of competence and being able in some instances to risk going beyond this to make mistakes, feeling that this would not be an irretrievable situation.

I don't mind kind of thrashing around and making a few mistakes to find something out because I feel sufficiently confident that I won't look completely incompetent if I make a mistake. [E3]

So I realised that I actually need quite a lot of edge to be able to engage in something on the level that I want to do it and I realise that's why I rev myself up [E4]

Part of it is feeling well I could do some of that within my ability and I wouldn't just fall flat on my face. [E5]

Part of this is an internal understanding of the self and knowing capabilities, but in other instances there is a positive welcoming of learning to do new things.

Well I believe that we all have limitless potential and if we're open to it we can continue to keep on learning and developing and growing and I do think it's important…I mean I do think reflection is important and that is something that is very much part of my personality but to pay attention to what is going on around us and not to think that I know it all you know once I gain some confidence in a particular area to know that there's always something more that I can learn [E1]

I suppose I'm trying things out all the time and over the course of the years trying out different models. Its basic ideas stay the same but it is evolving ... the change of location, the change of practice... in terms of how I'm developing, in terms of working those groups I'd even say I feel a lot more confident than I did initially. When you first came in it was like standing in front of the class. It's an ongoing learning experience all the time. [E2]

I like working out different ways of doing things because what I think my [subject] background brings is there might be several solutions to something, there's very rarely one solution. There might be something to learn, a technique to learn …which is quite specific but generally there's more than one way of doing something and I think that's probably true of most things ... which is the point of it because I've had to learn things that I don't know how to do. So I've had to learn beyond the bits of the job that I already knew, because I knew things at programme level but I didn't know really what happened beyond [E3]

It was very important for me to actually learn that you do things the way they're supposed to be done in order to protect yourself professionally and to get the best results and what I've learnt because I'm that kind of person is there's

always an agenda and while on the one hand you're doing things the way they should be done and going through the steps that need to be taken you can also be looking at more creative ways of finding solutions [E4]

I used materials that I'd collected the year before ... so I took new stuff and I used it to illustrate a point ... which is taking my learning forward all the time. I tell the students and I apply it to myself [E6]

I have quoted extensively from the interview data here as this is a key point of my enquiry. The participants are themselves clear that they are learning through work, they mention it without prompting and are able to explain in some ways what this is like for them as an individual. It appears that they learn new things because they see the need in the work or because of how they 'are' as an individual. From my perspective there are tasks and activities that staff are required to do, but beyond this is a range of activity which goes to make up each individual's portfolio of work much of which is not specifically directed. The choices made and the learning-in-action here is palpable and is clearly an integrated part of the individuals' way of working; it is impossible to determine from this data whether this attitude to learning is specific to the particular school of education, to teacher educators or is an individual characteristic.

5.4. Working with others

Working with others was mentioned by all participants, largely in the sense of enjoying meeting a challenge within a team. Drawing on my experience of the school of education I am able to recognise features that reflect my management position in terms of the expectation to work with others. My views are well known and thus may have led to participants feeling this area would be of interest to me.

One respondent (E5) expressed a very clear view about the positive attractor of working with certain individuals, even if the task itself was not of particular interest.

Feedback clearly plays an important role and is commented on from both the giver and receiver perspective. The notion of responsibility for giving others a sense of their contribution comes through in several interviews, with academics seeing this engagement with colleagues as a key feature of their work.

> *I mean you've got to have somebody saying oh you're doing really well there ... I see the necessity of it because other people have done it to me and I know how it can kind of help to give you confidence ... I was thinking the others day about that I must take X along to one of those things... you've got to make it work for other people...[E5]*

The comments reveal an ability to make a judgement about their own position in terms of their abilities and the impact this has on their work. Similarly others mention the engagement with key figures; this included encouragement from leading academics in the field at conferences (E6), being personally challenged by a local authority manager expecting success in difficult activities (E4) and choosing to work with particular individuals either to enjoy collaborative activity or because they offer particular challenge (E5).

It became clear that working with others was an important feature of their daily experience; more than one individual gave detailed examples of where they had opted to join a particular venture not because of the activity itself but because of a preference for working with a particular team or individual. This collaboration took a number of forms - working as equal members of a team, seeking advice and greater experience, or providing mentoring. Individuals saw collaborative work as a way to achieve better outcomes.

> *Standing up and talking in front of large groups of adults does not come easily for me and I think when I first came here and was shown the lecture theatre I thought I won't think about that for now and X had me up giving a lecture when I'd been here for six weeks in fact we shared a lecture I did the first half and she did the second half and I was absolutely terrified but it went well [E1]*

So the big question would be where can we place people so that they can work most effectively and when they feel… the best they can feel in our circumstances then they will work most effectively, that's the big question. So the detail would be what could be the things we could think about in order to put them in that position [E3]

I have this idea that you create things through talking to people. You have an idea, they have an idea, you put it together ... I suppose what I do is a bit like a hermit crab building a shell. I pick up all sorts of bits and pieces from all over the place and gum them together and see if anything can be done with it and then in practice the thing gets smoothed out and turned into something that you can actually use...[E4]

Part of what I choose to do is the people I'll be working with [E5]

Participants were not only looking to work with others to develop their own performance but also saw the importance of helping colleagues and working in a mentoring role. E4 makes some particular pertinent comments about the need to work with others in a supportive manner.

Mostly it's about kind of listening to what peoples' problems with it are and once you've listened three times round they then start creating their own solutions - I like that. ... it's so exciting to do something you always suspected that you could do but you didn't quite know how to get started on it and it's exciting for me to see other people doing that. So I'm not getting the kind of feedback yet that helps me keep going and I have had moments where I thought oh! I don't mind working on my own but this is more on my own than I really want to be. I haven't found who I can lead yet if you see what I mean... [E4]

The comment that 'I haven't found who I can lead yet' (E4) is an interesting one suggesting that individual academics have an influence on this rather than the more common notion of teams being allocated; this indicates a proactive approach to finding a team for a new area of work.

5.5. Attitude to work

The participants universally gave the impression of enjoying their work. Although it might be the case that in talking to their manager they felt obliged to be positive I did not limit their responses to consideration of successes. The vocabulary used throughout the interviews indicates a strong engagement and a sense of achievement and 'passion' for what they do. I am of the view that individuals could not have kept up this attitude for almost an hour if it was merely put on for my benefit. Speaking of work as 'a real high' (E4), 'a huge buzz' (E5) and of 'loving' your work indicates a significant emotional engagement.

> *I've got to say in terms of the Malaysian project I've loved that I mean that's been quite a challenge ... [E2].*

> *I think about work a lot. I think about the [subject] a lot because I like it. It's also…it's not a hobby but it's a big part of my life so a lot of it doesn't feel like work so thinking about it doesn't feel like work [E3]*

> *It's just what I do but once I'd got going then I loved it and that enabled me to train in the way I wanted to which was very interactive*
> *Interviewer: And that gives you, presumably if you've had a day of doing that kind of thing, that gives you...?*
> *A real high [E4]*

> *A huge buzz. We had a writing day before Christmas and everybody wrote something and that was a huge…that was the best thing for a long time. I thought we've done this. [E5]*

Billett's notion of cognitive space was not a specific element in the questioning but surfaced powerfully for two participants (E3 and E5) in their discussion of the parts of their work they find easy.

> *I think I've always found the subject part of my job quite easy and therefore I think I perhaps haven't had huge amounts of learning to do because I think I pick that up quite quickly ... I quite like to add to that things that are harder for*

me but definitely not things that I don't like. .... Once I've worked out how to do a job I then do that job to a large extent on automatic pilot and once I've got to that stage I'm looking round for something else and I prefer to take on something that has some responsibility rather than do lots of little things. ...I don't want to be conceited but feeling that I don't need to keep analysing the teaching that I do, I use very, very little energy doing that, just use minimal time and energy I'm ashamed to say but that is the truth. [E3]

I think there is something with me and boredom not wanting to do the same thing again ... I'm always looking to the next thing. I found it very challenging this and I didn't know the answer really but then I look at some people and think they're doing the same things or doing the same seminar again and again and I could never do that. [E5]

There is no feeling of exaggeration in these comments but rather of mid-career professionals who are at ease with the main elements of their work, leaving space for new activities to be considered. Interestingly there is no stated intention to leave behind existing activities and replace with new ventures but rather a sense of complementarity which leads to a more fulfilling professional life.

The notion of business facing although very much in the institutional narrative of the time was not a specific question but arose in the comments of two individuals (E3 and E4) clearly aware of the university direction and how it may impact on their work and function

People may have chosen university careers, research careers because they didn't particularly want to be out there doing and that's valid you know that's a life choice and people are entitled to have made that but equally the overall function of the school or the department now is becoming more sort of outward facing and we need to hold both of those [E3]

... we're looking at the possibility that the thinking, conceptualising and ideas that people are having in the university have got a function in the outside world and they're wanted and needed and that's brilliant [E4]

Both appear positive, but a tension is noted between the traditional academic career and the more outward facing activity which is currently being promoted.

5.6. Phase one data: discussion and conclusions

The fact that the participants, and the researcher, in this phase of data collection share the experience of working in the school of education, results in conversations set very firmly within the local practice context. The insider researcher dimension discussed earlier (3.7.1) is apparent in the collective assumptions and knowledge; individuals offer a commentary on their work with some confidence that the interviewer understands the setting. For example, more than one individual refers obliquely to the process of their appointment, or to elements of their current role, with an assumption that I will understand the reference. A shared value base is a tacit underpinning to the interviews, confirming the potential for insider research to offer benefits in gaining access to the views of the participants and insights based on an intimate knowledge of the setting (Hellawell 2006). Given the shared context it is unsurprising that there are common themes in the participants' perceptions of their work; a commitment to teaching and to the student experience is to be expected in a group of educationists and is important for all participants. Research is a more muted theme with individuals not seeing this as a career enhancing activity; this may be a particular feature of the school of education where the research emphasis is weakened by the dominant presence of TDA demands. It is noticeable that all six participants maintained an optimistic stance and in telling their stories revealed positive values about themselves, the university, the students and their colleagues; whilst accepting that, as participants were talking to their manager, there might be some sense of providing the answer they thought I would expect, the sustained nature of an hour-long interview gives some confidence to accept this positioning.

My focus on the 'daily meaning' for academics functioning in the new business facing environment (2.6) underpins the data collection.

> *What workers in higher education do has changed and continues to change rapidly; consequently there have been many changes in the workforce, both in terms of the participation by different groups and in terms of differentiation of roles and functions. It would be unwise to assume that what work means to the people who do it has not changed too.* *(Cuthbert 1996:7)*

Drawing on the ideas established in Chapter 4 to consider the primary data it is clear that learning through work is an important concept; the unintended and tacit features are apparent as participants explain how new skills are developed through current work or past activities. Learning is named explicitly in response to the needs of the various tasks and activities, with a focus on learning to do new things (5.3), rather than specifically recognised as a practice development opportunity. My focus on the individual is visible as participants reveal engagement with challenge, an ability to accept risk and a commitment to working with others. The notion of mid-career learning (Eraut 1994) seems particularly relevant to this group of individuals who have significant experience of work in other organisations prior to their employment at the university. Interestingly, although participants are not novice workers, they speak of significant change at the time of transfer to the university and of the need to learn new skills and conceive their work activities differently. The idea of cognitive space (Billett 2004) also resonates, for example one participant (E3) speaks confidently of being able to carry out the main teaching tasks of her academic portfolio easily and thus having time and energy for new work. A question arising then is whether there is a connection between these two elements – is it the experience of the mid-career academic and thus the mastery of routine tasks that enables the

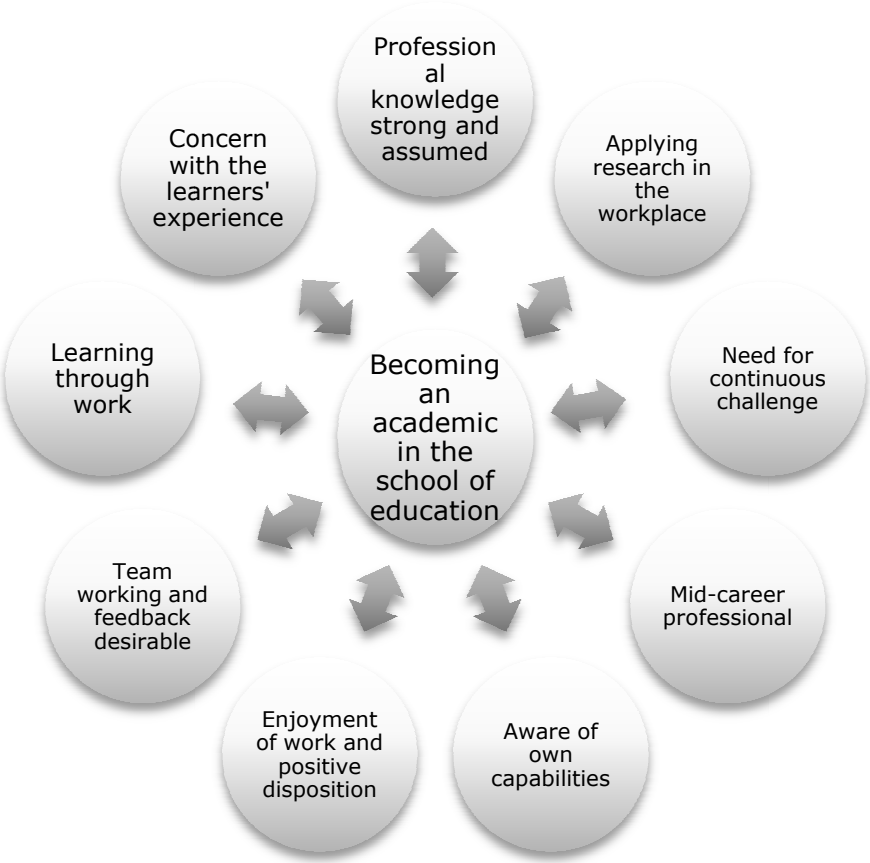
freeing up of potential cognitive space? It is tempting to assume a simple solution; individuals are more efficient in routine tasks through practice over time and therefore have capacity for new activity. However, participants' explanations of the process of shifting between earlier career experiences and the current academic tasks, considered in 5.2, suggest a more subtle, complex experience. The data confirms that learning through work has an individual dimension with biography and disposition being crucial influencers.

The working environment theme established in Chapter 4 is clearly an important feature, experienced by individuals in terms of support from particular colleagues or preferences for working with certain groups and with respect to the affordances which enable them to develop areas of interest.

However, the new dimension established through the data collection and analysis, is that learning through work is not an end in itself but is rather is part of the process of becoming an academic; assuming a professional and intellectual identity which will enable individuals to function effectively in the university context. An insight into the processes and attitudes of becoming an academic in the school of education is drawn from the data and provided in summary form as Figure 3.

It is clear that academics learn through work, with challenge playing an important part in building skills, maintaining engagement and providing personal satisfaction. The nature of mid-career professionals is such that challenge is seen as a normal part of working life, having been accepted from earlier career stages as being a component of professional activity.

Figure 3 Becoming an academic in the school of education



Disposition and personal biography are tacit features that impact strongly; the way of being an academic is built gradually over time as individuals understand more of what is required and involved. The working environment is clearly an important feature and is experienced by individuals in terms of support from particular colleagues or preferences for working with certain groups and with respect to the affordances which enable them to develop areas of interest. As might be expected teaching activity is a very important part of the work and identity of individuals and there is a strong commitment to the student body. The strongest theme from the data is that of individual academic

identity as a multifaceted process of becoming that is experienced over time and is a unique construction shaped by the individuals in the context of their experience of the institution. There is no sense of a shared or homogenous route to their current position as academics but rather a dynamic engagement with opportunities and experience, with colleagues and with the expectations of the environment which have led to a particular position and which will continue to inform development. This individual project of becoming is presented universally as an ongoing process rather than a completed activity with individual growth occurring in a number of ways in order to encompass new activities and tasks. In parallel the sense of striving to improve is largely tacit but present with individuals seeing the need to develop skills and abilities still further in order to be a 'better' academic. This future orientation with a focus on improvement links to the issues discussed in 4.5, in terms of engagement with business facing activities providing specific opportunities for individuals to develop new skills, and is explored more directly in discussion in Chapter 7.

The individual project of becoming an academic is the central thread which runs through the data analysis and in order to consider this further I use the following chapter to explore the concept of academic identity.

6. Academic identity

6.1. Introduction

The changing nature of Higher Education and the shift in universities in terms of their public role in society and espoused strategic position have an impact on the creation and maintenance of academic identities. My concern is not to make a judgement about the shifting and evolving positioning of UK universities - a different question at the political and policy level in the Higher Education sector - but to investigate the impact and meaning for individual academics and for their managers. Through the discussion of the data in Chapter 5 I established that becoming an academic – which is an identity issue – is a central concern for the participants; this became an important theme and led to my second phase of primary data gathering and to the development of my second research question with academics outside the school of education.

> *Identity is arguably more fundamental to the conception of humanity than any other notion. That is a strong statement, but consider some of the key questions that we might use to assess the reach of the concept: What other issue is quite so important than answering the nebulous question, Who am I? What other concern is quite so captivating than dealing with the ongoing, lifelong project of assessing identity and figuring out how one relates to others and the surrounding world? What other question so influences understanding and action so heavily (if perhaps out of conscious awareness)? I can think of no other concept that is so central to the human experience, or one that infuses so many interpretations and actions, than the notion of identity. (Gioia 1998:17)*

Gioia's exposition reveals the importance of this consideration in underpinning my understanding of academics functioning in the workplace.

The 20thCentury assumption of a relatively stable and legitimated academic identity has to be called into question and examined in the light of the current turbulence in the sector; Henkel (2005) traces the debate

over more than fifty years to identify key ideas which influence thinking, suggesting that in the main these are differences of emphasis rather than separate theories. Academic identity is not an isolated construct but is rather a dynamic interaction; the nature of this interaction, and in particular the features which have greater or lesser impact, is an ongoing consideration. My intention is to open up definitions and think about their meaning, accepting that there is no longer a homogenisation of academic identity (Clegg 2008) and that there may be a disjuncture between 'the rhetoric and experiences of academic life'(Churchman 2006:8) to be considered. The interactions between the institution, the discipline and the individual are seen to be crucial (Henkel 2005a:164) and I consider these three elements separately before drawing some conclusions about academic identity as it relates to my investigation.

6.2. Academic identity in the institutional context

For some writers (Barnett and Di Napoli 2007, Deem et al 2007, Archer 2008) the sense is of individual academics, departments and disciplines struggling to maintain an acceptable academic identity against a tide of managerialism and the financial imperatives perceived to be driving the higher education sector. Although this is may be a well-established view of the sector, universities are responding to national and international pressures in different ways, so from the point of view of the individual academic the experience is substantively local and specific to the institution where they are employed.

> *... it can be argued that the Higher Education institution plays a major role in defining and organising the behaviour and work values of its academic staff. Many factors can be distinguished that contribute to the impact of an individual university or college, for example, its mission and purpose, history, size, age, location, complexity, and financial situation.*
>
> *(Maasen and Stensaker 2005:216)*

The nature of the institution – whether specifically named or implicitly assumed as research intensive, elite, teaching led, corporate or post-92 –

appears to be reflected in a significant correspondence between the views established through research and the particular experience of both writer and any respondents. For example Archer's (2008) work considering younger academics developing their identity has a strong underlying focus on publication and the particular challenges of moving from 'researcher' status to that of an established academic; this reflects the experience of those in research intensive institutions far more closely than that of academics in a teaching led institution. With respect to ethnographic and other empirical studies it seems that much of the work to date has focused on the work of well established disciplines in elite institutions, with applied disciplines receiving less attention (Macfarlane 1998).

The model of a research led university where lecturers are in the main recruited from PhD students who have been socialised into 'a convergent academic community' (Macfarlane 1998:5) is not necessarily replicated in teaching led institutions, or in applied disciplines where individuals are recruited externally and come to university lecturing as a second career. This latter may result in research, and more particularly publication, being seen as a 'developmental or aspirational part of their working life rather than key to their identity' (Macfarlane 2009:8) and, even within a research intensive university, the nature and requirements of the research activity can vary substantially from the notion of world class research to institutions or disciplines where 'the establishment of identity may be a matter of making a recognisable rather than independent contribution' (Henkel 2005b:150). This dominant representation of elite institutions is further complicated by the myths and discourses which may no longer reflect the reality of academic life, if they ever did, and certainly do not represent the life experienced by those in other strata of Higher Education. This rather distorted historical legacy is not confined to the UK but is clearly in evidence elsewhere, for example in Australia where

Churchman suggests

> *These shifting roles exist in an environment still rich in fantasies of academia, entrenched in history and great institutions, as a profession of rapier discourse and significant discoveries which is uncomfortably sited in the corporate university.* *(Churchman 2006:5)*

Winter, again working in Australia, takes this further by suggesting a 'clash' of values

> *... identity schisms in academe are gaining more traction today given the clash of values between traditional academic cultures and the modernising corporate cultures of higher education. (Winter 2009:127)*

This line of argument seems to suggest that it is the business facing universities which are by their nature provoking the greatest shift in academic identity and that this change to the sector may render some of the accepted ideas about how identity is formed and sustained questionable. In the 1980s for example the work of Burton Clark and others proposed a triangle of parameters controlling Higher Education - the state, the market and the academic oligarchy- where universities in Britain were

> *...located very near the centre of the triangle, seemingly protected from state influence, relatively remote from the market node, leaning slightly towards the 'academic oligarchy' node. Today, Britain's position would certainly have shifted away from the grip of professorial power and towards those of the state and the market. (Fanghanel 2007:191)*

The increased influence of the state and the market results in both institution and individuals having to 'engage with competing rights and accept more obligations' (Henkel 2005a:170). At the extremes this is viewed as a destructive and deleterious process by which traditional academic values are 'squeezed out and marginalised' (Winter 2009:123) or conversely may be seen as an opportunity, often presented somewhat cynically, for academics to align with processes of organisational change in order to gain career enhancement or financial advantage; it is of course

possible for the two extremes to be present in the same institution or simultaneously occurring for an individual academic. The sometimes emotive argument at the extremes can result in assumptions of good versus bad, not helpful in understanding academic identity as it is experienced by academics across the sector. In order to make a contribution through my research I have moved away from this contentious position taking to look at the lived reality of academic life.

> *Overall the idea that there are clear and externally recognized boundaries within which academics or academic institutions are sovereign is no longer tenable. Boundaries have become fuzzy, movable and permeable.*
> *(Henkel 2007:93)*

This notion of 'fuzzy' boundaries is a more helpful one in a scenario where both within and across universities a more disparate range of activities are included within the academic remit; a process of ongoing change and development impacts on the experience of academic staff; definitions of success at both individual and institutional level are open to debate; universities are working with a wide range of partners and customers and the resulting engagement challenges the definition of academic work and identity.

Fanghanel takes a different approach through a small scale enquiry seeking the positioning of academics in response to a university policy text about teaching and learning. Her findings similarly rebut the notion of a single academic identity, focusing on agentic action and its potential impact on the institution.

> *The non-unitary positionings identified in this study signal the importance of agency in determining respondents' positions. The role of agency might also explain why I did not find any significant pattern that could relate to the characteristics of the sample. (Fanghanel 2007:201)*
> *It clearly shows that academic identities are not as polarised as they are often portrayed. On the contrary, they are fluid and not of one piece.*
> *(Fanghanel 2007:203)*

She uses this outcome to warn policy makers that individual filtering may interfere with the intentions of policy, but equally her work confirms the notion of diversity in academic identity. Winter (2009) similarly has concerns for the manager's role in this environment.

> *By virtue of their positions they can encourage innovation and commercial activity (managerial values) while maintaining the importance of academic autonomy, professionalism and collegial relations (normative values). Walking this tightrope may minimise values incongruence provided that heads of department can manage the stress and strain of trying to be an effective administrator while protecting the academic autonomy and independence of academic staff and duties.* *(Winter 2009:128)*

This mirrors my concern that in my own institution the shift to a business facing strategy involves cascading strategic planning and engaging all university staff in consideration of mission, but there has been no public debate about the resulting change for individual academics and their identity; nor has there been an engagement of managers in considering the implications of these changes. Requirements for teaching and research continue to increase and there is an underlying implication that academics not able to cope with these demands and simultaneously engage in business facing activity are in some way inadequate. There has also been an institutional notion that teaching can be handed to others in order to free key individuals to take on commercial work, often at short notice. Pressure on managers to ensure that all this can be achieved potentially leads to a disregard for the wellbeing – both physically and mentally – of academics struggling to come to terms with new ways of working. It is not sufficient to assume that business facing activity can merely be added to the academic load but rather needs some careful thinking about the impact on particular academics and teams and on the academic identity perceived and experienced by individuals in the university.

A parallel issue is that of recruitment to academic posts where the traditional notions of teaching and research are built in assumptions, with advertisements and job descriptions still predicated on earlier models of academic identity. This has two potential outcomes; firstly the feature identified by Sparkes where academics are disappointed.

> *In recent years, according to Ronald Pelias (2004), a crisis of faith has appeared in academic circles as a growing number of faculty members have discovered that the university life they chose was not what they expected or bargained for: (Sparkes 2007:1)*

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it may result in the university not attracting the people with potential to take on these new academic identities, because they are unable to recognise a role for themselves in the recruitment literature provided. Lacking a contemporary understanding of academic identity internally, it seems probable that an inaccurate, or outdated, descriptor may be presented to the world outside.

Having considered the issue raised by different types of university and their position within the sector I look at the academic discipline structure and the part it plays in the development of academic identity.

6.3. Academic identity related to discipline

The discipline basis for academic identity is explored in depth in the well-established text by Becher and Trowler (2001) where the central contention is that

> *...the ways in which particular groups of academics organize their professional lives are related in important ways to the intellectual tasks on which they are engaged. ... Both disciplinary epistemology, understood as the 'actual' form and focus of knowledge within a discipline, and the phenomenology of that knowledge, the ideas and understandings that practitioners have about their discipline (and others) are important here. (Becher and Trowler 2001:23)*

Although this has been an important perspective and is used as a basis of work by other writers, there are contradictory views about the importance of academic discipline, some of which appear to be argued from a basis of personal experience to provide polemic statements rather than empirical investigation. In considering this issue I am operating from what is almost universally seen as a low status discipline because '...the field of education does not enjoy a high status as an academic tribe within many institutional environments' (Macfarlane 2009:7) and teacher educators frequently feel, and are seen as, 'uneasy residents in academe' (Ducharme 1996, cited Sikes 2006:558). Rather than a concern to improve disciplinary status this positioning of education tends, in my experience, to result in academics rather unconcerned by the disciplinary boundaries; similarly Macfarlane suggests education academics are able to view the teaching and research roles, which to a large extent represent the visible outcome of the disciplinary position, as an integrated whole.

> *... the research-teaching divide is not helpful for academic practice because it encourages staff to identify either as teachers, who do little or no research, or as disciplinary researchers who teach. Academic identity is complex and is dependent on many factors such as discipline and institutional status (Becher and Trowler, 2001) but we suggest than in disciplines apart from education itself academics tend to perceive the teaching and research roles to be competing for their time rather than complementary. (Macfarlane 2009:10)*

Clegg (2008) suggests that traditional assumptions are breaking down in some areas and new disciplinary identities are forming; it is also possible that new academic identities are less firmly entrenched in the disciplinary epistemology and that academics are creating new meanings for themselves as they integrate different strands of work. In relation to the discussion of institutional impact it may also be the case the post-92 universities have a weaker disciplinary element to organisational identity; for example, Sikes and Clegg researching in post-92 universities, suggest that subject discipline is not a key feature.

> *Discipline certainly was not foundational to the academic identities of most of the New University staff I spoke with. (Sikes 2006:558)*
> *None of my respondents identified in any simple way with discipline; (Clegg 2008:340)*

In contrast disciplinary identity comes to the fore in institutions where research selectivity is fundamental to organisational position and financial sustainability, remaining both 'a powerful influence in reward systems and in the creation and maintenance of academic agendas' and 'a strong source of academic identity, in terms of what is important and what gives meaning and self-esteem' (Henkel 2005a:173). Archer's empirical work with younger academics in a research led institution about how they withstand the various pressures of academic life, including management demands, research selectivity and performativity, focuses on the capacity to be an authentic successful academic whilst being constrained by the need to produce the 'right goods' i.e. publications in appropriate status journals.

> *Being academic was constructed in terms of embodied qualities and practices of being intellectual, critical and knowledgeable and committed to scholarship. It also involved being ethical, professional and respectful and being collaborative, collegiate and part of a wider academic community. (Archer 2008:397)*

This 'academic community' is specified as the one of people who write and review papers and go to conferences. These different perspectives result in a position where 'discipline rather than being static emerged as a site of contestation' (Clegg 2008:338) and means that simple assumptions about disciplinary loyalties and behaviours across institutions, within departments, or for individual academics are not universally valid.

> *We cannot assume from descriptions of a territory how any one individual academic will view their disciplinary location. Anthropological disciplinary metaphors tend to take an outside perspective focusing on analyses of complex sets of factors. Accounts of academics' disciplinary experiences are few. Where they do exist, discipline is assumed and the academic may be asked about their experience of the discipline*
>
> *(Brew 2008:426)*

Considering the teaching and research normally seen as the essential components of discipline is another way into considering the impact of the discipline on academic identity. There is an ongoing debate about the link, or otherwise, between teaching and research and it is not my intention to engage directly in this discussion but rather to make the connections between the different positioning and identity. At a simple level it is the combination of teaching and research that provides the label 'academic'.

> *For years, an academic was a lecturer who conducted research. Those academics who were categorised as "teaching and research" comprised the single biggest academic grouping. They still do. Just over half (51 per cent) of UK academics did both teaching and research in 2005-06, according to analysis of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency*
>
> *(Oxford 2008:30)*
>
> *Some 40 percent of academics were not submitted to the 2001 RAE. For many academics this amounted to being given research-inactive status.*
>
> *(Oxford 2008:32)*

Has the definition of the 'academic' shifted so that one can still be named as such without the 'active research' label provided through the current research selectivity exercise? Or is there a recognition that the various research selectivity exercises capture only a partial picture of research and that other forms, notably the less easily monitored scholarship, are the defining features of being an academic? A further complicating feature is that of the applied disciplines where knowledge may come from professional and practice sources as well as from the more traditional research findings.

> *What constitutes discipline, or subject, or ways of thinking and practising, in relation to teaching and research, was experienced as problematic by some respondents. Interviewees from industry, or local authority, or from the caring professions before entering the university environment felt that some of the knowledge that was being created in teaching and research was outdated or lacked authenticity.*
>
> *(Clegg 2008:338)*

The concern about knowledge that 'lacked authenticity' needing an input from the applied world to keep up to date has a corollary in that of research 'drifting from the teaching environ towards the marketplace' (Robertson and Bond 2005b:511) and the potential for this to be damaging in terms of the synergy of teaching and research. Concerns are raised about how 'the persistent demarcation between research and teaching in HE has encouraged academic staff to identity primarily with one or the other ' (Macfarlane 2009:12) rather than seek the synergy and integration which may offer a better position in the contemporary environment.

> *Teaching excellence needs to be seen as a part of a whole: excellence involves integrating different aspects of our academic practice so that they are mutually reinforcing.* *(Skelton 2009:110)*

The notion of mutually reinforcing aspects of the academic life resonates strongly with the view of the participants and takes academic identity to a different positioning. Rather than teacher or researcher we need to have the academic who offers excellence in some combination of teaching, research, commercial activity and possibly in other aspects of academic work such as leadership and innovation. The difficulty is that currently this type of academic, although no doubt existing and functioning effectively in many universities, has no status or name to compete with the *researcher* and *teacher* definitions which are so embedded in the HE culture. Churchman (2006) raises an issue about academic language more generally which relates to the notion of identity. She suggests that the use of 'teaching' as a shared concept and a well understood activity is

losing relevance. Teaching in the modern university covers a huge range of genre; face to face work on campus, creating distance learning materials, delivering short blocks of courses in international venues. One could make a similar case for research, perhaps particularly in a post 92 university, where this can encompass a breadth of activity in terms of size, type, funding and publication.

> *It is through a reflexive understanding of one's own positioning that knowledge of the disciplinary relationships in one's personal experience is developed.* *(Brew 2008:436)*

Many disciplinary assumptions are made by and for academics, providing a background to the development of a reflexive understanding and a personal academic identity. The institution and the discipline thus provide the context within which individuals are creating an academic identity, and with this in mind it is relevant to look at the individual position in terms of agency within the process.

6.4. Academic identity as individual construction

As I have already established, the Higher Education sector, the universities and the academic disciplines provide a complex and contested context and it is accepted that individuals may 'be pulled simultaneously in different directions by contradictory identities' (Henkel 2005:158). However Clegg found that her 'respondents in all roles were able to maintain highly distinctive, strongly framed academic projects of the self' and in contrast to other writers did not find a reference to an elitist past but rather emerging identities were based on 'different epistemological assumptions derived from other professional and practice based loyalties' (Clegg 2008:340). Much of the literature ignores the voice of the individual, making generic assumptions about the nature and structure of universities and the impact of the changing context without a consideration of the careers and lives of individual academics (Duberley et al 2007). Churchman, writing about the issues in Australian education, was also prompted to research by the absence of the individual in the

literature and her sense that 'the notion of a single ''academic identity'' may be obsolete in an environment in which the academic role is becoming increasingly diverse' (Churchman 2006:3). The challenge is to move away from looking at the single fixed identity encompassing the range of activities and engagement of any one academic, and rather focus on developing an understanding of how 'this multiple and shifting term exists alongside other aspects of how people understand their personhood and ways of being in the world' (Clegg 2008:329).

In considering the individual construction of academic identity, I separate elements in order to enable greater clarity of understanding but it is important that these are understood to be interrelated and overlapping. Overall my contention is of a shifting and contested space within which individuals are creating and re-creating their identity through a personal process of meaning making.

> *I take the view that personal identities are not unitary, fixed or stable, 'never gained and maintained once and for all' (Sikes et al 1985, p.155) but rather are formed and informed, 'forged rehearsed and remade' (Lee and Boud, 2003, p.188) through discursive practice and social interactions... (Sikes 2006:562)*

The polarisation of academic identities, in order to ascribe particular labels such as teacher or researcher, is less appropriate in the current university landscape leading 'to the idea of identity development as a more individual project' (Henkel 2005b:154) where fluidity and change are part of the ongoing picture. Accepting the notion of academic identity operating 'as part of the lived complexity of a person's project and their ways of being' (Clegg 2008:329) opens up increased possibilities and opportunities for the individual. For some individuals this will result in conflict and resistance to change, as it does in other professions and occupations, for others there will be 'exciting chances to develop new courses, curricula, and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment' (Sikes 2006:561) which in turn may result in a significant shift in

academic identity. Whether one sees this as a matter of regret, a positive opportunity or a situation requiring pragmatic acceptance is likely to correlate with personal perspectives on life and work rather than a specific outcome of a particular activity.

The idea of invention and re-invention as an academic is a powerful one, allowing individuals the chance to move in different career and personal directions. This notion is perhaps less threatening to those academics, such as myself and the school of education academics discussed in Chapter 5, for whom academia is a second or third career but there may be some resistance from those who view their academic career in more traditional terms. It seems unreasonable to expect that those employed in Higher Education should be protected from the reality of the 21st Century as it applies to other sectors of employment where change, shifting career trajectories, fragility of employment and a more personally demanding engagement are becoming the norm.

> *In post-industrial times, however, there are far fewer identity givens, more identity options, more tolerance of identity diversity, and more frequent identity changes over the life course (Gergen, 1991). In such a world there is a need not just for self-discovery but self-invention, and possibly reinvention.* *(Albert et al 2000:14)*

It appears that strength and confidence in the identity enables individuals 'to reconfigure their identities and to accommodate new agendas into their overriding academic goal and plans' (Henkel 2005b:160); this would suggest the need for individuals to be supported in the process of establishing and maintaining a fluid identity and thus be well positioned to make these accommodations without trauma.

> *This may in part be at the heart of the seeming paradox of a literature which bemoans the present condition of the university, and the apparent reality that as organisations they still function. As personal identities are reaffirmed and remade it appeared that, despite the managerial context, most of the people I interviewed continued to act in accordance with their*

> *own values. This does not mean there is not pain and regret, but that one of the peculiarities of academic work does seem to be that very high levels of reflexivity combined with sufficient spaces for autonomous action allow the balance between personal projects and institutional strategy to continue, if not necessarily in harmony, then at least without a major rupture. (Clegg 2008:340)*

It may also be that the construction and operation of a fluid identity provides a protection and space within the performative and turbulent environment of a university, where a 'person's identity may be the last refuge of the qualitative in a world of invading armies wielding rulers and compasses' (Whetten and Godfrey 1998:3), allowing the individual to maintain a sense of control and of private engagement with the issues in the work environment.

The proliferation of academic identities might be cause for celebration of the resilience of academics and their ability to incorporate new ideas and roles; if this expansion is to be sustained it requires an acknowledgement and support of difference rather than a retreat to former historical positions. However, celebration of difference through the opening up of discussions across institutions and disciplines, has an intrinsic challenge in that personal understanding of academic identity is of a tacit nature, not well understood even by ourselves and lacking the language and dialogue to explore with others.

> *... it is sometimes inaccessible; yet some knowledge of identity resides close enough to the surface that it can be accessed, if called upon. The need for access comes when identity is challenged or questioned - which is why we discover that identity surfaces or is most clearly articulated by organization members under crisis.*
> *(Whetten and Godfrey 1998:282)*

The processes experienced in establishing personal academic identities are, in my experience, not part of the daily conversation of academics in any coherent or explicit manner. Yet it is clear that many individuals have

a reflexive and thoughtful engagement with their commitment to academic life and its particular nature; the resulting 'identities are not taken off and put back on again in some superficial way but are lived as deeply committed personal projects' (Clegg 2008:336). In his consideration of the theme of excellence as a dynamic which should drive universities Skelton makes an impassioned plea for a change to a more informed and proactive way of being.

> *Beck's notion of 'reflexive modernity' (Beck 1992) also suggests that more than at any other time in history we now have to consciously take up for ourselves a way of being and acting in the world. We can no longer rely on tradition, particular disciplinary foundations or local knowledge since, within an increasingly globalised world, we are aware that there are many competing and diffuse knowledge claims. In such a world we have to 'insert ourselves into history' to become informed and to develop a personal standpoint in the knowledge and with the reflexive awareness that our positioning will inevitably be partial and subject to change.*
>
> *(Skelton 2009:108/109)*

It is clear that 'developing a personal standpoint' while desirable is not an easy task and in some ways is militated against by the operational and systemic processes of UK universities. The individual able to move through a number of academic identities may for example be disadvantaged in research terms for the lack of focus in a particular field; the individual who moves between management and teaching roles may find it difficult to claim or be rewarded for successes in either. Even in business facing universities the systems for promotion and recognition are unlikely to give equal credence to those who have a more contemporary form of academic career, perhaps including professional elements or periods outside academia, instead reverting to the easier recognition of a traditional academic trajectory. Individuals live with the ambiguity of the sector and the contradictory nature of its requirements and may move beyond accepting these features as necessary and inevitable to using and enjoying the potential freedoms offered.

> *Maintaining a certain optimal amount of ambiguity in defining myself grants me some latitude over time and context to harbor a wide range of opinions, beliefs and values; to engage in many varied actions; and to see myself as an adaptive individual.* *(Gioia 1998:20)*

Others may find the conditions more difficult to navigate as they struggle to understand what is required of them. As with other professional organisations, universities may 'carry simultaneous pressures to innovate and take risks while performing with excellence, mastery and no error' (Fenwick 2008:8), a particularly challenging position for those working in the business facing university environment, where the engagement with innovative and unknown activity may involve substantial risk to personal standing and self belief, alongside the more usually recognised financial and reputational risks for the institution. From my perspective as a manager the challenge is to provide for myself and for individual academics the space to fail, to rethink and adjust; the focus cannot always be on getting results or achieving specified aims as this leads to attempting only safe activities and thus the loss of potential, possibly more interesting or commercially viable, opportunities.

6.5. Academic identities: conclusions

My consideration of institutional, disciplinary and personal elements of academic identity leads me to the conclusion that 'multiple identities should be the norm in pluralistic organizations that exist in rapidly changing environments'(Pratt and Foreman 2000:141) and to identify that a significant issue is around whether this dimension of academic life is recognised and supported. The implications of this position are significant, impacting on the recruitment, career management, deployment and engagement of academics, requiring a significant re-conceptualisation to accept the notion that any one individual may have a number of identities as a series of incarnations over time. This builds on the discussion developed in Chapter 5, particularly as presented in figure 3, that becoming an academic is a dynamic and ongoing process leading to a number of potential identities.

> *Permeating our findings is a strong sense that as a result of institutional changes, the nature of what it means to be an academic is being reconfigured. However, while this was widely recognised at the level of the individual, there was a shared view amongst our interviewees that university managers and policy makers have thus far failed to acknowledge this transformation. (Duberley et al 2007:495)*

Attempts to achieve homogeneity and unity are unlikely to succeed, rather to take the sector forward there is a need for 'dialogue that enables the productive co-existence of different ways of being' (Robertson and Bond 2005a:91). In future will individuals be asking specifically what opportunities there will be for developing an appropriate set of academic identities? Or, and perhaps more importantly, will an engagement with the personal project of academic identities be a normal part of the dialogue with managers, a focus for development activity and a significant feature of individual understanding of the academic role and tasks? Developing a personal standpoint, based on reflexive awareness (Skelton 2009) and working through the individual issues to establish new meanings, may become a more important facet of academic engagement.

The next chapter explores the concept of academic identity with academics from across the university, engaging with individuals in a process of surfacing and articulating ideas (Whetten and Godfrey 1998). My understanding of the academic identity concept was emerging in parallel with, and was informed by, the data collection process. The interview data is centred on the question of how academics develop their practice in response to business facing activity, which I now appreciate more fully to be a component of the process of becoming an academic, and thus the development of academic identities.

7. Successful business facing academics

7.1. Introduction

The nine participants, proposed by their manager on the basis of a successful engagement with business facing activity, were interviewed for a maximum of one hour, using a conversational approach and allowing individuals to speak freely. The result is a close up and personal engagement with these academics enabling an analysis of the detail rather than generality. My own voice as I questioned them will also be examined as a part of the analysis; my intention, and I think achievement, was to ensure that the respondent's voice was the major contributor to the interview in terms of time and that my interventions were of a prompting and encouraging nature. I shared with the participants my own understanding and engagement with the issues through affirmative comments and recognition of institutional knowledge. The intention is for the reader to have a sense of these individuals, the reality of their experience as they perceive it as it is captured in the interview tapes and transcripts. If I am successful in my representation of the data it should be possible to hear both the solo pieces and the combined choir of voices.

I have chosen to give my participants a name rather than a number although of course the name is not their own. This is a change from the procedure used for the school of education academics where the use of numbers seemed to give a more appropriate distance for those directly within my orbit. This more broadly spread group of participants have personalities, individual voices, are people and fellow academics – a name seems a more appropriate manner by which to refer to them. I have edited the information and quotations to maintain the anonymity of individuals already known to be in a single organisation and hope I have achieved this sufficiently to preserve their privacy, whilst at the same time retaining their identity as individual and unique academics.

7.1.1. My response to the participants

I liked this group of participants as people and colleagues; they were believable, professionally credible, interested and interesting. I enjoyed the experience of talking to them and learned new things from them about the university where we are all employed, found out about different aspects of business facing activity, gained understandings of how others managed the demands that I face in my own professional life. I warmed to their interpretation of what they were doing and why. I worried, and worry still, about representing them fairly and accurately. I spoke with participants I have had a passing acquaintance with for years in a new way, listening properly to their stories, finding out about them and their work things that I did not know, had never asked. I interviewed colleagues I have never met before, or indeed since, people who work alongside me in the institution but are invisible to me, never known or seen and found that they do exciting things, have interesting academic lives, puzzle as I do about work, about the institution, about our colleagues, about business facing activity. Just briefly I entered into the working lives of colleagues who would not under normal circumstances reveal so much to me about what they do and why they do it. The things they told me resonated with my daily work and yet surprised me; were familiar and yet unfamiliar; were trivial and at the same time important; were amusing and informative; were stories I have heard or told and yet were new. My task is to capture this kaleidoscope in a way which enlightens the reader, bringing these voices together to create a multi faceted voice, a new eloquence, constructed from the separate meanings to make a worthwhile and relevant contribution.

My task is in part to illuminate, to cast light on some of the strands of meaning and reveal their significance. This is not however enough as my task is also to *make* meaning, to weave together the brief glimpses of individual academic lives into something which has both value and authenticity. In searching for a metaphor for this process many have been discarded. The patchwork leaves the individual pieces unchanged

and sitting separately next to one another even though part of a whole; this does not recognise the interleaving and overlapping nature of the different voices. The reality television show where individuals begin as separate entities and are woven into one story was considered, but the notion of a single winner grates and thus this too had to be discarded. The most lucid representation is that of the choir where voices unite to form one sound, greater than the individual singer but containing all the individual notes and unique to that set of voices in a given moment, yet still with the facility to highlight an individual voice or to draw attention to a particular tune. With this image in mind I will attempt to provide the chorus of the choir, the contributing sound of particular sections and the bright solo of the individual voice.

7.2. Introducing the participants

The career academics

Richard and John are both career academics in the STEM subjects with a long term employment in the HE sector, including other institutions where an engagement with short course provision began with small scale activities. Each currently leads a small commercial unit and teaches on the short courses provided as single and multiple day options on campus for a range of client groups; the units offer a planned programme in response to issues in two very different sectors, alongside bespoke provision for companies and individuals. Similarly both continue to teach on standard undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and to research and publish. In addition both men negotiate small scale consultancy opportunities with commercial companies and are the main point of contact for external enquiries in their field.

Richard has a strong positive commitment to leading the short course unit within his department alongside significant demands of postgraduate teaching and book editing. He enjoys teaching short courses himself, is somewhat at a loss to understand the reluctance of colleagues to engage

with this work and takes on the management and leadership of the unit with a pragmatic willingness. He is frustrated by the lack of responsiveness in systems to help him market and develop the unit. His own approach is a market aware, forward looking commitment to short courses as a business enterprise.

> *So it's interesting the perception of what business is in the university and what short courses are. I think that's changing actually. I don't know how long it's going to be before people do really realise that this is a way forward. It's just as much a part of the core business as teaching undergraduates or postgraduates are. The day they're knocking on my door to say ... can I run twenty short course that'll be great when that happens! [Richard]*

John appears modest about his achievements, assuming that he is being left alone to get on because he is not making a mess of the job. He has an enthusiastic commitment to working with external clients, a strong focus on customer service and makes clear that the consultancy aspect of his work is more interesting than the service teaching he does for a range of degree programmes. He has a strong personal commitment to being an academic and to the university.

> *All the people including myself have got other responsibilities here at the university, at home, and one of the reasons why we are working in a university is that we are not involved in all the cut and thrust, people who enjoy the urgency and desperation of business life, would not be working here in the first place. I have seen people who are like that come into university and they have not enjoyed that ... if you get a buzz out of that then alright, but I don't think university is the right place for you. [John]*

The health professionals

Jill and **Hazel** are experienced health professionals involved through two separate streams of activity in delivering short courses off site to a range of clients. To some extent both feel detached from the main task of the

university and suggest that their work is less valued by the institution than teaching on campus based programmes.

Jill moved from standard teaching on nursing programmes to a much more varied role delivering single day funded courses to a wide range of health and social care clients, including service users. She enjoys the work whilst at the same time recognising its difference, particularly the lack of a formal academic structure. Her enthusiasm for the client groups she works with, and for the service being offered, is infectious. She is fully aware that this work may be seen as being of lesser status, and understands the personal and logistical challenges involved, yet champions the need for the activity and for its future development. She has a clearly expressed personal commitment that sustains her engagement with difficult and frustrating work.

> *The other day the energy had gone down a lot and people came back after lunch and they were just sitting there and you could feel them thinking "and we've got another two and a half hours to go". I had some balloons and I blew them up and was just doing something with these balloons and somebody said "I knew there'd be something happen" and you could just see that expectation that there would be. It was a bit of "oh God" but people were laughing, so the energy's up again and got them back and I love that challenge of keeping that whole group engaged throughout the day. [Jill]*

Hazel is nearing retirement after a long career in a range of care related roles. She was employed as part of a collaborative venture between the university and the public sector some years ago, subsequently developing a range of single day short courses which she teaches off campus. She does not see herself as strongly connected to the university and is very clear that her loyalties are with her profession rather than academia.

> *Initially I came from social services background and I could not think beyond social services and health. I thought that was all there was in the world, and then that got expanded so in each trust I would have like*

a little committee who would get together and talk about what they wanted me to put on and there was a lot of, "we must get some training for the police because they are awful". So there was a lot of training, they didn't come along funnily enough, or some training where there was a lot of sitting like this (demonstrates with arms folded). [Hazel]

The business people

Mike and **Deborah** were recommended to me by two different heads of school as possible participants because of their involvement in Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) work. They do not know one another but offer similar experiences and concerns in managing the KTP activity. Both have had significant experience in industry, including work as a consultant, which provides a strong underpinning to their academic work.

Mike has experience in business, including being an independent consultant, had a short period at another university and has been in post for four years. He is ambitious in terms of his career with a strong focus on the need to establish his research credentials. His main business facing activity to date has been KTP and he is now looking to build on this to develop a stronger publication record. He is aware that his career plan has changed and that he is now more firmly implementing a deliberate decision to focus on a more innovative research area which might enable him and his colleague to build a reputation in the field. He makes a very strong link between his definitions of an academic and a practitioner.

... you have got academics that teach but they can't really do what they teach ... I think that is a very bad thing ... one of my ways of thinking is really an academic should also be a practitioner to some extent because at the end of the day you have got to be able to do what you are teaching ... If you don't really keep a hand in the action I think there is a serious danger that what you teach becomes obsolete ... I think universities have got a function to create knowledge as well as impart it.[Mike]

Deborah has had a range of jobs in stereotypically male manufacturing industries and in demanding commercial settings. She has had some experience as a consultant and joined the university three years before the interview as her first step into the academic world with a clear view of the university offering a business facing opportunity for her to use her skills. She combines KTP with some small scale consultancy and significant teaching and management responsibilities for undergraduate programmes. Deborah is a dynamic, straight talking, enthusiast who approaches work with a total commitment and an impatience to shift university systems and processes. Her approach is a can do, fast paced engagement with a wide range of activities and she describes herself as a company girl.

> *When you go out with the KTPs they escort you there. I think they're scared to let you out alone because I suppose everybody's got different skill levels and different personalities and you can imagine some academics being quite reticent. Then you also got that bit from the employers; "here comes an academic. He can tell you the square root of a jar of marmalade but he can't open it and spread it." I know all these comments; when working in business there is that sense of nothing practical can come out of contact with a university... It's more about empathising with the realities of their day to day life... [Deborah]*

The senior academics

Tom and **David** occupy senior roles with a public commitment to the business facing agenda. Each has a responsibility for meeting commercial income targets and is expected to involve others in business facing activity. Their named commitment to business facing activity is matched as one might expect with a clear perspective on strategy and its implication and these two participants provided the most detailed critique of the university position.

Tom is a career academic, without business experience, working in education for over thirty years and now with a senior role in research which has been extended to include commercial activity. Early in his career he was employed in the further education sector and he has only worked in this one HE institution. He used the time with me to speculate and verbalise his thinking about the direction for third stream activity. He revealed his current deliberations about the university and business facing development, explaining that he had arrived at a point where he felt previous separation needs to be unpicked to encourage teaching, research and commercial activity to be drawn more closely together. Tom explained his own role in terms of seeing an opportunity to forge closer links between research and commercial work.

> *When I think of the work we have won ... we have not had to go into competitive tender for, I actually think that that probably is the way that other universities who are successful, get work. People do win bids but the conclusion that I have come to is that it is a relationship business. It is not about finding the right formula and then going for 1 million pound bids. You don't get 1 million pound bids if you have not got the track record of little stuff ... people need to know that they know you, they have met you before, they have talked to you, they have seen your work, because there is a huge trust thing involved in the delivery of massive projects. [Tom]*

David is an experienced academic who has spent nearly twenty years at the university following a successful business career. In recent years he has gained promotion to a senior position and is well known for his commitment to business facing activity. He is very aware of the opportunities that come with commercial earnings but suggests that the university has a rather ambivalent attitude toward those who earn money.

> *I am passionate because I can only view things from my position and I have been lucky to have all of these experiences and it came from lecturing and I have done a bit and done a bit and done a bit more, and*

then been able to buy myself out … I have been committed to making the opportunity available to other people in the hope that they will take it and they will see that it is not that difficult. It isn't impossible to go out do some consultancy, record it, transcribe it and write it up as a case study, get it published … I didn't just go out and think I will go and talk to ten companies out there and do this, it came out of the experience of doing it and thinking I will write that up. [David]

The specialist

Bill is unique amongst the participants in that he was brought into the University specifically to set up and lead a new venture focusing on research and commercialisation. He has a substantial track record in both business and research and is clearly aware that his task is to use this expertise to create a team able to carry out the commercial work. A central plank of the unit is a long standing project emanating in part from his own PhD some twenty years ago. Bill is clearly committed to bringing on his team who are younger, less experienced academics without his background in business.

You build up this network where you can ask a senior person in a bank to ring somebody up … and it is that network which becomes increasingly valuable and it also requires a huge amount of effort to keep that network alive, working, supported. The commercial income is considerably important to ... keeping that alive and strengthening it and also strengthening the way in which intellectually you can support it. [Bill]

The interviewer

I joined the university as a lecturer two decades ago following a successful career as a school teacher and local authority advisor. During my time at the university I have worked as a consultant for the local authority and taught short courses. My current focus is managing the

broad range of commercial activities in my school and I have some direct involvement in the early stages of client negotiations.

> *I do agree, ... because if you were talking to somebody about some of the things that we do and the person starts to ask questions, actually they expect someone who knows stuff not someone who keeps telling them how much it will cost them and how many weeks it will take, they actually want to speak to somebody to explore whether or not that product or whatever is really what they want. [MR in interview with Tom]*

The academics told their stories with little prompting from the interviewer. Having been identified as people who were involved in income generation activity conversation was not strictly restricted to the topic and they were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences and feelings. They offered a commentary with respect to their experiences of teaching, research and commercial activity – all components of the academic identity concept discussed in chapter 6. Having analysed the interview data I am able to offer a synthesis of the views of these selected third stream academics and, through my interrogation of the data, explore the common threads and themes to provide insight into the experience of engaging in third stream or, as they more commonly refer to it, commercial activity.

7.3. Teaching, Research and Commercial activity

Permeating the data is a strong sense of integration of the traditional duties of the academic - teaching and research - with an engagement in commercial activity. The participants show a lack of concern about delineating boundaries and categorising the diverse tasks, rather offering an integrated picture of their working life where differently labelled activities merge seamlessly and feed from one another. Although there is some demand led activity, the commercial work they speak about largely derives from teaching or research activity and there is a sense of synergistic use of intellectual energy and time. The use of the funding

streams can be a helpful metaphor in seeing a confluence, a merging of the first two streams of teaching and research with the third stream of commercial activity. Once merged it is not possible to separate the streams or to determine which drives the current.

Tom and I shared our sense that many successful enterprises come about serendipitously, a process not reflected in the university systems.

> *I felt I could see turf wars over say one bid is it consultancy, or is it research, who claims it, whose target etc, and there was an artificial line between those two and they should be working more closely together. I think that there's a continuum, you have got pure research academic over here and then you have applied research and then you have got consultancy. Sometimes consultancy becomes short courses and sometimes short courses get accredited and accredited things merge into the core business of teaching ... and we should look towards merging them. [Tom]*

A point made about how work is categorised was a telling one and we agreed that in essence it came down to which form was used to record the income and in many instances the artificial massaging of this in order to meet the required targets. Tom expanded on the stance he feels needs to be taken; rather than competition between the different aspects of academic work it is about encouraging staff to develop a wide range of skills.

> *It is about generally encouraging development of a commercialised research environment and in a much more grounded way, it is about encouraging people, helping them to get to that point where they can contribute effectively and can go for grants, can run research projects effectively and so on [Tom]*

7.4. Teaching and third stream activity

Enthusiasm for teaching is a strong theme in the data. The oft peddled staffroom view that academics look to third stream activity as a way of escaping from regular teaching is notable by its absence. Interestingly the

two most senior academics (David and Tom) express the desire to have a greater involvement in teaching next year, an intention I share and agreed with in the interview. As senior members of the university we mutually noted the pressure to manage and the dangers of moving too far away from the real world of teaching. In part at least this was a sense of need to understand the challenges and demands faced by colleagues but there was also an undertone of loss. Both Tom and David had evidence of being good teachers in the past and, although very busy with other responsibilities, missed this driving force of teaching which is what brought them into academic life. The ease with which teaching commitments can be passed to another lecturer because of the contained nature of the activity, had been a tempting path to follow but now there was a need to re-establish a teaching identity in order to regain the part of the academic self which is dependent on a proper teaching engagement with students.

> *I have been teaching since 1976, 33 years, this is the first year that I have not done any teaching. And it is partly because it the easiest thing to off load because it is tangible and quantifiable. Someone else can fill in and do it but I think I am now convinced it is wrong. I think you lose something as individuals as well not teaching, because that is why I went in for it. [Tom]*

More personally Tom talks about his own workload and the fact that teaching has disappeared from his activities in the current year. He has a clear view that he will move back into teaching. The notion that teaching is easy to offload is a prevalent one and the underlying sense is that Tom has been seduced by this in terms of freeing time to manage a significant portfolio of activity but, as someone who has taught throughout his long career, he now regrets the loss.

Without exception the participants speak positively about their own teaching and are able to articulate the way they work both with the external clients and with standard undergraduates.

The data reveals the synergy and developmental possibility offered by extending the range of teaching activity to include commercial and workplace teaching. Individual academics are honing their skills in one situation and using them in another context; training skills developed and used in commercial teaching are improving the quality of campus teaching, one-to-one skills used in workplace teaching are similar to those needed to engage with a research student. For the successful business facing academic this is not a compartmentalised process but rather an overarching development of the teaching skill repertoire, whether tacitly or explicitly, where individuals are both learning and applying new teaching skills in every aspect of their academic work. The engagement in teaching beyond the standard practices accepted as norms might be categorised as:-

- Commercial teaching: delivering short courses of all kinds where the programme has been designed generically with the needs of commercial customers in mind, or specifically in consultation with an individual client.

- Workplace teaching: working with individuals or small groups in workplace settings to facilitate and promote their learning. The work of KTP tutors, and others working in this area of support for individuals in a commercial workplace, has strong similarities with professional schools where placement support of various kinds is part of the normal work pattern.

- Business informed teaching; using live projects, case studies, data and anecdotes from real experience in the commercial or business setting to engage and motivate students and to ensure up to date knowledge. A further extension of this approach is that of building business based projects into assessment opportunities and supporting individual students to engage in placements or internships.

A corollary to this change in the nature of university teaching is the skill set and knowledge base needed by the individual academic to underpin a quality experience for all learners. In order to reflect on this in more detail I consider each of the three complementary elements separately.

7.4.1. Commercial teaching

Short course activity leads to demanding teaching circumstances for some participants; remote sites, unknown students, participants with variable subject knowledge and emotive or technically difficult topics. However there is a real sense that this challenge is a matter of relish rather than concern with a general expression of preference for working in this arena. Anecdotes reveal a good humoured ability to deal with whatever challenges arise. Tales of managing individuals who have arrived on the wrong course, equipment not working, the anxiety of learners and the need to 'go with' the mood of the moment are common.

> *There is an element of risk in it as well...you have to be somebody who doesn't need to control it all. You have to let the day move and be flexible enough to pick up if something happens. It rarely does, it's usually ok...You have to be able to respond to and roll with whatever is going on. I just think well actually the world's not going to end; nobody's going to die so people might have to go home early today because I forgot my laptop. So that's a skill about not panicking. [Jill]*

In the recounting of these stories the participants unintentionally reveal the quality of their teaching skills and their capacity to handle the unexpected. Their ability to manage a diverse group of learners and to make difficult material interesting and relevant is something they take for granted, assuming that everyone can do this and that it is merely a matter of inclination. As Jill reveals there is an element of risk, of being personally responsible if everything goes wrong, but those working in the short course arena accept this as a hazard of the job and seem to spend little time fretting about it.

Enjoyment of short course teaching is mentioned in some way by all those involved (Richard, John, Jill, Hazel) and probing this enjoyment reveals that the satisfaction in teaching those who want to learn is strong. This relates to the maturity of the course participants, their positive motivation to learn because of the work orientation, the two way nature of the teaching where there is an exchange of knowledge and understanding about the discipline and its current application in commerce. The corollary to this for some participants is disappointment with the experience of teaching undergraduates, who must attend particular modules and have no direct interest in the subject. Interestingly there is no sense that individuals are thus trying to escape from undergraduate teaching; it is quite clear that they put a great deal of effort in trying to invigorate reluctant students. It is rather the case that teaching at the more sophisticated and engaging level on short courses provides increased personal and professional satisfaction.

> *...when I am teaching a bunch of first year students... you can use examples until you are blue in the face and if they don't want to know, they don't want to know. Our short course delegates are much more rewarding teaching because they are coming in and they do want to know ... typically they are people who are there because I need to do this in my job but I can't, can you help me. They are desperate to understand. It is a different dynamic. People who come on the course are more mature, so they are happier to chat to someone they have never seen before and they are genuinely interested in getting solutions to their problems whereas some of the students ultimately coming along today is to pass the module. [John]*

Like John, Richard speaks of the challenges with respect to short course teaching as an interesting and 'nice' activity, revealing his confidence both in terms of his subject knowledge and his ability as a teacher to engage a varied range of learners.

> *It's nice to teach people that want to be taught. They are a totally mixed bag but the guys who come on the course are fixed on what they want to*

know and they're asking relevant questions from their company's perspective. It's a totally different group of students that you get … the biggest problem is trying to gauge where to teach, what level to teach at. It's very difficult though. I think the challenge of teaching a mixed group is quite appealing. [Richard]

He sees working with a broad range of people as an opportunity rather than a difficulty and has developed his teaching repertoire to include for example strategies for dealing with questions raised by short course participants that are outside his own field.

Commercial teaching is in many instances more of a training event than one might expect with university teaching and it is clear that the participants have learned how to be effective in this role. Jill refers to her previous work as an undergraduate lecturer, describing a particular experience as 'grim' and muses that should she return to campus teaching she will take with her ways to motivate and engage students, developed through her training work as a short course provider; she clarifies this to mean an engagement with individuals on a personal level and using what they bring to the session to facilitate the learning. She has clearly thought about the differences and raises the notion of the 'one chance' to engage, which she both accepts as being the case and, perhaps counter-intuitively, realises that these short encounters can result in 'knowing' the group of participants better than in a longer term engagement in the normal university student pattern.

You only have one chance; people are coming for one day. When I've taught on modules if you have a day where it hasn't gone well you've got next week to do something and you get to know the group differently, but we have this one opportunity.
When I was teaching ... I did have a sense of it being very, very serious business. Just thinking back to that and it was one of those awful afternoons in the winter the whole thing is fairly grim and it was fine but dull. I don't think the people found it dull, I mean the feedback was

excellent but I didn't get to know people in the same way, even though we only have them for the day. [Jill].

7.4.2. Workplace teaching

Mike and Deborah have an ongoing commitment to KTP and talk specifically about the work involved. Others mention this activity in passing with the suggestion that if one were to come up in their area they would be happy to take it on, and indeed have been involved in the past. Working with KTP involves the academic in mentoring a new graduate in a first post. The employing company identifies a project and receives a subsidy toward the cost of a graduate associate who will carry out the work. The projects have the potential for great success in terms of delivering what the company wants, in addition providing a recent graduate with a valuable skill set and first step on the employment ladder. There is also the potential for conflict and misunderstanding, if the academic is not skilled in mediating between the company and the graduate to ensure that all runs smoothly and both parties are satisfied. Systems of training and monitoring are in place but in reality the responsibility falls largely to the allocated academic to manage the process and ensure appropriate outcomes.

Deborah uses the comparison between her KTP work and undergraduate teaching to understand the learning as she works to master these two parallel elements. It is clear that the learning curve in terms of processes and procedures has been steep and frustrating. She had to be proactive in seeking out the relevant information and wasted time doing things which were not needed.

The first KTP project I sat up till one in the morning getting this application ready and the first thing an associate does is write a new one. Drives you nuts but now I know what I have to do. It's the overview not the detail, taking a step back. [Deborah]

She speaks confidently about the side of the role which involves talking with colleagues in industry, explaining how she overcomes their inherent suspicion of academics. There is a real sense of teaching within the KTP engagement and the need to become a different kind of university teacher in order to be successful. Deborah maintains simultaneously that she has added skills and always had them; my interpretation of her remarks is that the added skills are those of working with students, whereas the known skills are those of creating a genuine engagement with industry.

> *I've definitely added skills through this work, like realising I don't have ownership for each of my students submitting something. I have to let go and let them do it, whereas at first I was saying "if you do it this way". I've certainly learnt that you go in with advice and help but you can't do it for them. I can't finish it for them. I've had to let it go. I've had to say what I'm expecting to be done and what we've both agreed together and then take a step back to make sure I'm seeing the whole picture to give the right advice and not getting embroiled in the nitty gritty. It's definitely about persuasion. Teenagers respond to persuasion better than telling and so do most men that are involved in the manufacturing industry. I'm quite confident to go out and talk knowledgeably but the skills have always been with me, that's the way I've always been. I've only developed by different experiences. [Deborah]*

Interestingly, Deborah presents throughout the interview this theme of 'letting go' and is clear that this is a particular challenge in terms of allowing students to have control, developing her own role as a facilitator and persuader rather than the more didactic stance of an expert. Whereas Deborah is looking to the KTP experience in terms of learning to be an academic, Mike is using his KTP platform to secure career development.

Other members of staff...look at KTP something disjointed, whereas I wrote a case study which has been used for teaching. The course has got 300 students and it was part of the assessment. [Mike]

He suggests that colleagues have missed the potential of KTP which he is exploiting to open doors for consultancy and research. He is aware that his career plan has changed recently to a deliberate decision to focus on a more innovative research area, potentially enabling him and his colleague to build a reputation in the field.

I think all of us have different reasons but my motivation is definitely research ... I used to get them (KTPs) for pleasure but now ... I actually turn them down unless they are about my research. I see it as an integrated project that gives you research opportunities and obviously keeping abreast of what is going on. [Mike]

Where Mike sees a lost opportunity for his colleagues Deborah is clearly doubtful about the notional ability of all academics to be involved in KTP activity and knows that when things go wrong she is quite likely to be brought in to rescue the situation. She suggests that she can predict when this will happen.

It does worry me when you hear that a colleague has gone out and you think 'oh am I going to get that one?' And I'm usually right - especially with the finicky worriers who see all the black side and tell the employer. [Deborah]

One can quite easily imagine the 'finicky worrier' but it is more difficult to define positively the qualities required to ensure success of these KTP projects.

7.4.3. Business informed teaching

The concern that campus based students on standard undergraduate programmes should have access to the most up to date and relevant material, founded on an engagement with the world outside the university, sings through the data. The view expressed is that reading articles and books cannot replace a deep rooted understanding of the

relevant industry or the practice application of knowledge. Jill for example recognises that her engagement with commercial activity has a benefit of keeping her up to date with her own professional discipline; she makes a gentle criticism of the notion of being able to stay out of the field but keep up to date through reading.

> *You have to keep in touch with people. One of the dangers with this kind of work is that we're out of the field now and many of us have been out of the field for some time so it's all well and good to read a few books and keep up to date with the articles but what does that mean? How does this translate to what's really going on? That's why I think it's really beneficial to ... keep in touch with what's going on and to engage with people and value their input. If what I'm saying because it's been written somewhere and is up to date really is not hitting the spot then let's look at why and try to really translate the information that's out in the big wide world into practice. [Jill]*

Participants comment that campus based teaching can become dated, obsolete or irrelevant if academics are not engaged with real individuals and situations to inform their thinking. Mike's description of one of his colleagues being 'far from the action' gives a striking representation of this view. His sense of action is about real problems in business; the decisions and challenges faced by industry and commerce and he gives examples from his specialism where outdated methods are still being taught in university courses, where lecturers are not comfortable and competent with the current industry technology. He sees this as a failure to teach properly and something which needs to be addressed. There is a sense that the academic argument, the scholarly understanding of the discipline, the traditional knowledge base for university teaching is insufficient in the modern world. It would be easy to dismiss this as a concern only for those who are providing vocationally oriented education but my data shows this to be a shared view across the discipline range. The argument for teaching being informed by real world experience is also used with respect to higher level work at Master's and Doctoral level;

the difference here is that there is a greater focus on ensuring credibility with the paying customers and with professional bodies.

This begins to challenge the traditional view of an academic with privileged knowledge and a distance from reality. Whereas few would hold to the ivory tower perception of the academic, certainly within the context of a post-92 university, this goes further in providing critique of those not engaged in practice or in touch with the real world issues relating to their discipline, participants believe others should become involved in commercial activity for this reason. The critical tone when speaking about colleagues relates to the negative impact of their non-engagement on currency of teaching, rather than any sense of lack of commitment to earning income. The use of external experience to keep up to date is clearly important, highly valued by all the participants and, for those with teaching commitments, is an integrated part of why they engage - in order to be more effective teachers. Jill's reference to the 'danger' of being out of the field for some time is more than a passing notion of academics needing updating' suggesting a more significant issue for maintaining academic status in a world where commercial and professional knowledge is increasingly prized.

The strong linkage to campus based work takes a number of forms; it is about academics being better informed in order to provide quality teaching and enabling the practical engagement of students with the commercial world through live projects. The use of case study material, data sets, examples and experiences from commercial activity to inform and enhance teaching, particularly for undergraduate students, is referred to in ways which suggest that for these academics they are commonplace, a well established strategy for effective teaching. The practice story of what they do and how they integrate external experience with teaching is a recurrent theme. Some have thought further about what this might be like in the future; Mike puts forward an interesting

notion of the way in which the university could construct teaching differently.

> *I think more should be done in terms of getting BA students working with clients but I think there should be this approach of a little bit like a teaching hospital ... where you get students working on real cases. [Mike]*

In many ways this epitomises his own approach in integrating commercial activity, teaching and research and his attempt to extract the maximum value from investment in the commercial engagement.

Although Tom's main concern centres on research he is also firmly committed to teaching. One interest is the creation of new programmes, using the information and expertise gathered through research and commercial activity. He provided in some detail the genesis of a new degree which has arisen from funded commercial research, noting the effort required to defend this from other academics who wanted something which fitted more easily into the usual discipline categories.

> *We created a degree that was completely informed ... by applied commercial research that we were paid for but it was done with a robust methodology that could only have been done with a group of people who had done research ... that was a great example of bringing things together, but increasingly I am really convinced that we absolutely need to bring teaching and learning, research and commercial activity far closer together [Tom]*

A final element in the overlap of commercial work with student experience is that of preparing graduates to find employment, a point put forward particularly strongly by David and alluded to by others. The networking, through which academics enable students to experience the workplace, is a strong motivator for those who work with undergraduate students. These individuals appear to accept the need for the Higher Education sector to have a commitment to preparing individuals for a working role in society. It is of course impossible to say whether this acceptance is

based on their own perceptions and philosophy or is a response to the pressure on HE in recent years to improve the employment skills of graduates. However, one might reasonably speculate that academics going regularly into workplaces, involved with business managers and industrialists will be in a better position than most to have a view about this matter. If they saw no need for undergraduates to have these experiences, they would keep their two worlds separate and teach without reference the commercial activity. This leads to the conclusion that those best placed to see the experience of graduates in the workplace do accept the need for higher education to take a greater role in preparing individuals for the real world.

> *When I see the students on their final year project who have done industrial placement you do see the difference amazingly. [Deborah]*
> *One of the things that I am going to start trying to do is push that idea that the direction that we are going in is the wrong one and really need to pulling things back together... and that commercial activity is not a new bolt on alien thing but it is a logical way of taking forward what we are good at and what is unique about it. [Tom]*

7.5. Research and third stream activity

As with teaching, so with research that from the perspective of a post-92 business facing university, has become broader in scope' to include funded projects that may include commercial teaching, pilot programmes and evaluations for a range of public sector bodies, in addition to traditional investigations and generation of new understandings. The substantial range of activity revealed by the investigation encompassed pure research funded by a large commercial organisation, smaller scale projects for SMEs and ambitious aims for a national resource to be used by blue chip companies which would simultaneously province a research resource for a wide range of scholars. The common feature across these diverse projects was that they were not seen as separate or higher status activities, but were rather integrated fully into other aspects of work and

identity. Although in part a pragmatic approach to managing demanding workloads and fitting in personal research ambitions, there was a strong underpinning of seeing research as providing the credibility to support commercial activity and seeing business engagement as a way to ensure relevance and applicability of research activity. This synergistic approach benefitted all aspects of the work, with individuals moving skilfully between teaching and research within a single activity and exploiting funding opportunities which allowed both activities to occur.

The research element of academic work features significantly in the data with a clear sense of integration with the third-stream activity. The web of integration is not a simple model of academics carrying out blue skies research which is then found to have a commercial value to be exploited. The picture is of an ongoing, symbiotic relationship, whereby academics use data gained from companies and external enterprises to inform research and publish in academic journals; in turn these become one of the credibility indicators to allow greater engagement with external businesses, or with more prestigious partners, and increase the likelihood of funding for future research. Those with previous business experience (David, Bill, Mike, Deborah) use their contacts and knowledge of their sector to gain entry to commercial enterprises, their knowledge of the behavioural norms and ability to converse as equals is a distinct advantage. However, a lack of previous business experience has not prevented other participants (Richard, John, Tom) from finding a way in to external organisations through short courses and consultancy. Somewhat differently Jill and Hazel move easily in their professional world between their employment as academics and the practice setting of their clients, but it is clear that in their view credibility rests mainly with their professional history. A common sense explanation - those with commercial or professional history use it and those without have to develop a way to engage - would be an inaccurate representation of the data. Business credibility based on previous employment has a limited

life, with Mike and Bill making clear that their position now is tenable only because of their academic status. Bill is also confident that others can be initiated into the customs of a business environment and commercial organisations, even blue chip companies, can accept the different behavioural patterns of academe.

> *They understand that this is an arrangement and settlement between themselves and a group of academics and that is a settlement which may not require formal dress codes all of the time. [It is brokered by me], but eventually you have got to let it go because you can't do everything. There are individuals within the group now who are doing their own brokering and you know as long as we all talk about it and help each other out that is not an issue. [Bill]*

Mike is very honest in his analysis of the position, stating with absolute conviction that it is university credibility which enables him to access the commercial world for his research. John similarly is convinced that it is his academic credibility which leads to paid work.

> *I had a track record but now it has expired and I am trying to do something different ... in that I am not really credible without the university behind, so the university is definitely essential. [Mike]*
> *There is a paper that I have just had accepted which is based on methods that we were developing ... so it does work that way and vice versa. I can say that I have got a paper published there and therefore the consultancy people think these people know what they are talking about. [John]*

David and Bill work with a wide range of organisations in a variety of ways; some of the work they do is labelled consultancy although is not paid for by the host company, other activities involve researchers and students taking on research projects of various kinds in the commercial world. This integrated approach works for them in terms of enabling research to be an ongoing engagement with commercial partners and sites. Bill's small team are working on a long term project which might

have significant commercial value in the future but in order to develop a saleable product they need the cooperation of large companies and senior individuals through the development phase. The two drivers of credible academic research and viable commercial income result in a synergistic engagement with the external world. Senior figures in blue chip companies are accessed through networking in order to provide research data and at the same time are discussing potential business needs; individual academics are building a research profile alongside a commercial reputation; data gathering interviews are used to prompt small scale commercial projects; scanning for opportunities is used to generate interest in the projects and the potential commercial application; engagement in national events raises profile, enables access to senior figures and ensures a link with cutting edge business concerns. Within this range of activity it is clear that Bill's team are introducing their ideas to potential clients, gradually creating a demand for their eventual product and an engagement which will allow them to provide a bespoke solution for individual companies.

> *You don't go in with a commercially driven contract, you get access and then on the basis of that access and the trust that you build up over a number of years and the client is prepared to share with you what they would like to see, how they would like to see it changed and then we incorporate that knowledge and understanding into our work, so that we are reacting to them. Eventually it becomes a greater commercial significance because a) that client has worked with it to improve it and b) it could be offered to all sorts of similar clients. [Bill]*

This is a sophisticated and time consuming approach, masterminded by Bill but implemented by other, more junior, academics. These junior academics gain research access at the highest levels, present findings at national profile events and are able to build a research career as a result. In parallel the collaborative efforts of the team are working towards the long term goals set out by Bill for the unit.

Whilst the whole of this process might be labelled research activity, its complexity and subtle reliance on third stream income are hidden. Some of this activity is high profile and Bill is aware that this process requires him to let go of projects and trust his junior colleagues to deliver effectively.

> *[It is quite scary] for them and for me, but you have got to be there to support it and let it go. [Bill]*

In research terms Tom considers there is a similar danger that bidding for what others define will not succeed, rather his view is that of starting from where the university is and trying to build a commercialised research profile. His notion of 'trying to pretend' is an interesting one with the sense of the university hiding its intellectual position, in a mistaken belief that this is what is needed to be successful in the commercial environment.

> *What we really need is to get people who are good at what they are doing and find ways of commercialising that and find ways of applying it and selling it ... rather than starting with well there is a consultancy project, let us go for it. Why don't we build outwards from the research that we do and say how can we best commercialise this research ... we are not building from what we are good at and what is unique about a university. People have said... we were looking for something a bit more academic and you think, we could have done that ... we were trying to pretend to be less academic and more practical, so I think it is about recognising the value of those traditional strengths and saying actually they are highly commercialisable. [Tom]*

A strong thread through Tom's reflections is that of manageable activities with steady income rather than spectacular, large bids. There are two reasons for his position on this: firstly a practical one in that a stronger track record is needed before any real opportunity of gaining large bids, secondly that academics do not want to be tied down long term to delivering repeat training courses. He also raised the point that, although

bids are nominally open and competitive, one can often predict the successful bidders and in part this is to do with being known and trusted.

7.6. Moving between the commercial world and the university

This sense of moving between commerce and academia, assuming different roles is an important feature of the conversations. Participants with previous business experience express no hankering for their previous identity, even where this may appear to be more important, powerful or financially superior to their role as an academic. Individuals made a conscious decision to enter education and they have not regretted this nor look enviously at former peers when they are working in commercial settings. The view of career academics is obviously different but again perhaps not the expected outlook; they are not venturing into the commercial world in order to eventually escape the confines of the academic life or pay structure. Tom admits to a vague hankering to prove that he could have run a business but John has a very clear perspective that academic life is his definite choice. He deals with consultancy clients who sometimes pressure his team for fast results; his response reveals his position.

> *I absolutely don't want to get that idea that the customers are always right ... We are an academic institution and we have other projects ... so if somebody says can you do this work and we need it in two weeks time, the answer is no, it can't be done, we have got other things we are doing, we haven't got the personnel sitting around twiddling their thumbs, we are not going move mountains in order to satisfy what you need, that is not how we are able to work. If you want that kind of service there are plenty of big consultancy companies out there that can provide it, you will pay for it but you will get the service that you need... I am not going to try and persuade people to work through the night to get things done. I don't have to be doing this stuff... ultimately I enjoy doing it in its current way but that is one of the reasons I am in the university because I am not up for the cut and thrust of business. [John]*

John works with some high profile national clients and says that they are keen to use the university name as a guarantee of their standing in the industry. This differentiates the unit from competitors in the commercial sector and allows selectivity in the work they accept.

> *One of the strengths that the university has is that we are independent. We are not just a consultancy company that is reliant on money from elsewhere to exist. People have got some trust in what we are doing and that has set us well in quite a few circumstances. [John]*

John is specific in his view that the unit is not pretending to compete on a direct commercial footing; he and his colleagues have made a deliberate choice to work in academia and do not want the working environment of the consultancy firm. His use of the word 'desperation' to describe business life gives an insight into his view; his satisfaction is driven by the variety of work, the sense of a managed work life balance and a clear rejection of the 'thrill seeking' of a more frenetic business environment.

> *I mean the money is nice obviously no-one complains about that. But the people I have got are not driven by the excitement of their deadlines... If somebody came and said right, a consultancy unit it should be run that way, fine find somebody else to do it, I have got a contract as a lecturer thank you very much. [John]*

Deborah's personal focus has a strong business facing component as she is firmly convinced of the need to keep in touch with her professional/business background; she uses her previous experience in a deliberate strategy of making links through shared experiences to gain trust and enable communication. Her empathy is a genuine recognition of the problems faced by businesses and their reluctance to see university lecturers as a source of solutions. She reveals a depth of experience and understanding that provides an authentic underpinning to her valuable skills and ability to analyse and respond to particular situations.

The dual purposes of achieving the goals for this set of activities but also keeping herself up-to-date with her professional business field are clearly

interwoven in how Deborah approaches her role. She sees mutual benefit for herself, the students/graduates and the companies she works with. This provides a motivating feature in what she is doing. She is very conscious of her own development and the growth of her skill set to meet the demands of this aspect of her work.

> *What I do on the business side is always about keeping in touch with employers. I really like working with the companies. I like to see the successes of the projects and the potential that some of them have and it's my chance to keep in with the terminology, with the manufacturing. It's like lecturing I do think you get the confidence of talking to groups of people, and maybe the fear that they know more than you, but you get over that... [Deborah]*

Deborah has a well developed awareness of her role in facilitating learning in the workplace and a strong sense of learning with the students. There is possibly some loss at no longer having the opportunity to engage with the 'nitty gritty' and needing to overcome the temptation to revert to the former business role. She is clearly shifting from her previous hands on business role to expertise in supporting students through placement, understanding the specific role for the lecturer, working with and between students and business.

Bill and Mike are very clear that their credibility in the business environment is based on a mix of their previous experience in business and their current standing as an academic. Working at different levels in the commercial world they identify similar issues, whether speaking with senior directors of blue chip companies or staff in SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) the role is to combine the research activity and potential income generation projects. More particularly, Bill is training junior members of the university team to manage this duality of role.

Tom has spent time working with the university's business facing commercial arm but uses the word 'baffled' more than once to describe how colleagues there feel about working with the university. Their

expectation is of fixed products which can be sold in a traditional manner to customers, but very little of what the university offers takes this form. Tom defines three ways of working of which this formal seller/buyer relationship is one, the external enquiry, through the university office with responsibility for external contacts is another, and the third is the bespoke activity gained through networking.

> *When I talk to the people [in the commercial arm] they are baffled ... what they have got is sales force and a traditional sales force doesn't work because our products are too bespoke ... whenever anyone says 'I am going to go off out into business and knock on doors with my bag full of your products, what are your products?' and it is not as simple as that, they find it very frustrating... I work closely with [the commercial arm], but there is this continual bafflement because it is a different organisation and we have got these three different ways of working ... they can be a sales force for a far more definable product and then we have got these enquiries coming in saying can you do this, and then there is people going out with all their knowledge and talking to people, networking and so on and people saying 'oh you do that do you, that is very interesting' and bringing business in. [Tom]*

The third option, networking and talking to potential customers to bring in business, poses difficulties for some academic staff and Tom is aware that this is a skill he has had to develop in the course of his own work, speaking of pushing himself to do this. He is aware that some colleagues find this particularly challenging.

> *I know other people who actively who work the room ... you do have to develop a bit of 'who do I need to talk to at this event' rather than just being carried along on the tide of whatever is happening but at the same time ... a soft sell is probably not a bad thing ... whatever we do it really needs to be backed up by deep professional knowledge ... there is more scope for taking those of us who are already in the system and who have got some inclination in that direction and training us up rather than bringing other people in ... I think you hit that barrier very quickly in the*

conversation. If you don't appear to be talking knowledgeably about the subject then it is difficult to build up that trust that is going to enable someone to say 'oh alright then we will have that' ... having been around for a long time is quite important, because try as we might to cut corners and short circuit things by having these centralised data bases and information at the end of the day I can go to a meeting with somebody externally and they can come up with something and it might not be my area but I will know that somebody's name will fall into the frame ... you do have to have been around for a bit and absorbed that kind of local knowledge ... you can never, no matter how ever hard you try, because it is very dynamic, capture that and freeze that and say to everybody 'ok when you go out these are all these things that we can do' because they are changing all the time and the only way of knowing is being embedded in it and involved and going to people's seminars and knowing what articles they are writing [Tom]

Tom has a slight defensiveness about being employed in the university for a long time in parallel making a good case for the fact that this is how he knows what is going on and can point potential customers in the right direction, even if they are not likely to work directly with him. His summary of what this entails is both easy, in that it is what most academics do, and difficult, in that it is something which can only be achieved over considerable time.

7.7. Working within the university

Richard's description of his task as more akin to that of managing a small company shows his understanding of the activity.

I've had no management training in running what literally is a small company. I've been on various financial short courses and that kind of thing that the university run and those have been quite useful ... One or two problems crop up now and again. They're not necessarily large overall problems. They're normally to do with day to day management of people and their workload versus whether they can run a short course and that's tied up with other resources which I'm not really involved with. [Richard]

Whilst his enthusiasm for short course activity is clear, one senses Richard's frustration and dismay with regard to the processes and mechanisms needed to ensure that courses are publicised and numbers are increased. He has a well developed view that university systems are not joined up to support the activity. His own awareness of what is needed to create success is appropriate and well thought through but he is hampered by a lack of engagement with key elements of the university central services.

> *The biggest challenge really is in the marketing … the raw stuff is really getting people in the door and we're fighting a battle against declining numbers... organising and running the short courses is really secondary to getting the numbers, getting the information out there, getting the web right and ... it's running the front end of things that's the hard part. Sometimes we're going round in circles trying to get something done so that's the major frustration [Richard]*

He is drawing strongly on his skills as an expert in his field to make judgments about what might be saleable in terms of up-to-date techniques and developments; this combination of subject specific knowledge and an ability to see how this might be applied in a commercial situation enables Richard to lead his unit successfully despite the fact that this is not an easy task and is one he finds frustrating on a number of levels. Similarly John's major frustration is his lack of control over the facilities needed to ensure effective provision. He offers a detailed insight into the difficulties of booking appropriate rooms with the required computer facilities, arranging for lunches, ensuring that participants have a good service during their engagement with the university. His very professional approach to overcoming barriers is admirable; he speaks calmly about the problems, but there is an underlying sense of frustration that this is out of his control. He is matter of fact about the lack of power and the resulting position of having to give way to other university demands. Bespoke courses delivered on the

client's premises are easier for John to organise because he is not competing for space and facilities on campus.

> *The system they are setting up where the delegate has to ... go online and put their details in and from my point of view, it is like hang on a moment ... will I be able to know how many delegates I have got signed up for my course without emailing someone and waiting a few days ... At the moment I have got a file that I can open and there it is ... I can't be going backwards and forwards ... but there are other things about the way we treat our short course delegates. ... I know that the university has to collect their data, but that is where the conflict with the business facing and the university's regulations ... we know that they will be paying, we treat them as though they are on the course and no mucking around. [John]*

John combines high level customer care with a desire for simplicity of organisation and this is working well for him currently. He understands the need for the university to make changes, but hopes it will not impact on his role and suggests that too great a move toward a bureaucratised process will result in him abandoning the work. This has important implications for a managerialist approach which may have unanticipated consequences, either through individuals opting out of roles seen as untenable or creating barriers which prevent innovative activity.

> *We were successful...people were asking us how do you run your short courses and how do you deal with your clients ... we have always been left alone to carry on as we have been because we have been successful and why muck about with something that is successful ... the university are trying to set up a way of developing short courses and so obviously I have been an interested party ... I have deliberately avoided becoming part of their process because I think one of the problems the university's got is trying to come up with a single process in one size that fits all. ...because of the independence I enjoy running the unit ... I am part of the commercial offering but they let me get on with it. We have a way of operating that works and if someone was to come and say we need you*

to provide all the details of everything you do ... I would say hey, this is not necessary, I am proving it is not necessary in order to run something successful and the enjoyment of running it would be taken away by over regulation. [John]

Deborah accepts the barriers and challenges of systems with good humour despite a real frustration with the processes. Her ability to stand back and see what she is doing and to be persistent has clearly been important to her successes. This doggedness seems to be very strongly related to commitment to the students.

The administration is tedious to say the least and not the reason I'm on this earth. That's what frustrates employers. I do empathise but again there are rules and procedures for reasons. Very frustrating! It's just the usual university thing of three bits of red tape instead of one - it's intensive. You do have to go and find out and you start going round the admin offices and they go 'I've never come across that' 'we don't do that' 'we don't touch that' and so you've just got to find your way. There is probably a procedure for it I just don't know what it is. I hate not having it resolved. To me it's a very simple thing - I don't create further blockages in this tedious process. You might as well knuckle down and find out how to do it and phone up folk. You start finding people who know stuff and are approachable. It's weird but that's the way it is because I've got no authority over anything or anybody. So I use the skills of a consultant because I have no authority. Absolutely none! Now I reflect on it I'm going to retire. It's too much like hard work! [Deborah]

Hazel's approach to training leads to a very different role than might be perceived as the normal academic; she is largely engaged in an independent operation outside the confines of university campuses and procedures. She and Jill share a conviction that the university sees this type of work as a nuisance because it does not fit within the expected norms.

7.8. Engagement with the business facing strategy

Hazel has an excellent understanding of the big picture within her professional sector, explaining in some detail the historical background to the complex changes taking place in the health and social care arena. It is clear from her story that her role developed from professional conversation with peers and managers, resulting in a job being created with her in mind; she does not translate this to match the business facing agenda, rather seeing herself as outside the university and connected more closely to her professional history. Similarly, although approached for interview on the basis of her engagement with business facing activity, Jill makes no direct reference to this being part of what is happening. She too has not apparently made the connection to the university strategy, to the big picture of engagement within the community or to the value of work funded outside the standard funding body mechanism. Like Hazel, she has a clear view that the work she is involved in does not fit into the university.

> *I think our whole unit doesn't fit very well with the university because we're not academic in that sense. I think in some ways we're in a different world and ... there's a sense of this doesn't relate to us. We have our own evaluation so we're quite separate... in terms of getting out there and drawing people in we do that very well. I don't mind. I'm not a marketing person and I find that bit quite a challenge. [Jill]*

This is an interesting perspective when in many ways this activity is very much within the business facing agenda espoused by the university and one might expect this to be valued by colleagues and managers. Jill sees the lack of normal academic processes as being a difficulty in the sense of separating the work from the main stream of activity. She recognises the challenge of learning skills that are not a natural part of the academic role, such as marketing, but accepts this in a pragmatic way as a challenge to be overcome. One might speculate that the strong professional identity of these two individuals is the main driver, the connection to the university strategy has not been made for or by them.

On the other hand it is clear that Richard has a grasp of the big picture and where his enterprise fits in with the need for his school to earn money. It is clear from his comments that this understanding is not fully shared by all the members of his department, who still see commercial activity as optional. He is very aware that this approach is not unique and that other organisations are using similar strategies to generate income. A sense of his past frustration is revealed in the notion of the university catching up with the work he has been doing for some time. One also senses an annoyance at the lack of recognition for his work because it does not fit recognisably with the business label.

> *It's incredibly important to keep all of the money going and the turnover up and we get targets each year to work to ... I feel that the ethos of the university has caught up finally with what we've been doing for years... I'm not quite sure how it's perceived... many people think that 'business means business' rather than means our area. They might think that we're running courses ... doing odd things ... but it's exactly the same. We've been doing it for quite a while and we get people coming to talk to us about how we do things and what goes on… [Richard]*

Rather differently, Deborah is very aware of the big picture in a strategic sense and, although she has some questions about how this is being implemented, it provides her with a motivation to succeed. She takes a personal responsibility for meeting university strategic targets, is quite clear that she has a role to play and takes this seriously. She makes the suggestion that she knew this before joining the university and that the business facing dimension was part of the reason for taking the post.

> *If the university says we want more third stream funding do we actually know what kind of staff we should appoint? What do those people need to be like to do that kind of work? The other bit I've learnt is not to say 'of course we can do that' which is what I used to be like. I'd take stuff on then go 'gulp I can't quite do that.' Now I'm a bit more guarded and say I'm sure we could look into it. I think you've really got to have that empathy and understanding and not just from books. You can't do it from*

articles or what you read in the paper. It has to be real life and the ability to bring it back to the first priorities. It's the same as consultancy. I'm very much a company girl so the strategy and objectives that are defined for me as the mission and value statements of the School, the faculty, the university are important. I tend to think if I want a job here I should be doing that and part of it is they want you to be research, teaching or business facing. I was aware of that and I did want to keep up the interest with business that was important that there would be opportunity to do that. [Deborah]

Mike feels that he can make decisions because he has his eye firmly on the future; his actions now are part of an academic career plan to move him forward. It works well for him that the university is on a similar track, it is difficult to know whether his research plan is in response to the university strategy or predates it. Mike's opening words to me were that he was sad there was only him and one or two others who could be interviewed about third stream work as there is a large staff team in his discipline area and 'each one should have been here.'

Bill feels that commercial activity, rather than the traditional research grant, enables greater freedom and possibility for research and consultancy development.

... if you obtain income from commercial sources, you have a lot more freedom how you can use that strategically than you do with say a grant ... So there is a bit more flexibility over its use in terms of how I could deploy that resource within the research centre to grow and develop other things rather than simply deliver a research grant. [Bill]

This fits with Bill's approach to the activity; he is focused strongly on networking externally in order to develop partnerships, access information and establish links with commercial clients and so requires a team of staff who are able to spend time and energy on this. He is very clear about the importance of networking for the research and the commercial aspects.

Despite his commitment to income generation David asserts forcefully that it is not the money which motivates him, instead the money has been a means to an end in generating the research group or, in another instance, providing an appropriate experience for undergraduate students.

> *... because it has never been about money, money has just come to us [David]*

Tom provides a description of the two aspects of his role. The Wild West of commercial work set against research stopping for tea and three different kinds of cake is a vivid image!

> *I feel that I have got a leg in two very different camps across the university so when I go to research committees, it is almost anachronistic, it is the last little bastion of traditional bureaucracy. And on the commercial perhaps we should be more systematised, but I would say one is highly, highly, regulated, research degrees board is ... about avoiding litigation and then on the other hand you have got the commercial side which is like the wild west . There are not any roles, there are no boundaries, even down to how much are we going to charge, what can we get away with? What is the market, what will the market bear? I go through one door and research committee stops for tea at three and has three different kinds of cake and then you have got the other ... side of it, the wheeling and dealing side and negotiating a deal and going out and talking to people. [Tom]*

The issue of centralisation was discussed at some length; Tom understands why some colleagues think that this is the answer but is personally unconvinced. The notion of capturing information, of standardising procedures and providing a fixed contact point for external clients appears logical and sensible, however working in the commercial environment, and discussing with other HE colleagues, leads Tom to believe that this is not the way forward.

There was always this attempt to centralise things... let's have a business partnerships office and we will have people there listening and taking emails and getting phone calls and people on the outside will be ringing in and saying what can the university do for me... but I have spent a bit of time as part of staff development recently, going to events ... and someone asked a question how many people here have got an enquiry handling system - there were 50 people, every single hand went up and then they said how many of you can recall getting a piece of work through a cold enquiry? And I think about 3 hands went up, ... and what I realised is that particularly with the older universities who were successful in drawing research income in, it was coming in through the bottom, so what it meant was that consultancy really was being won on the strength of the research reputation ... I don't think there is any question about it we have to have CRMs and all the rest of it, but equally what we need to be doing is to be encouraging staff to go out and effectively they become the sales people...I think there are people ... who think that once we got everything captured, once we have got a database, once we have a got a CRM and everybody's name is on it... You tend to get this dichotomy where somehow the centre perhaps thinks that everything should be centralised and we should have this unit that writes bids, or units that deals with enquiries, whereas actually I think the way to do it is to promote a real business facing, whatever that is, culture from the bottom because I think the staff have to embrace it and they have to go out and do it, I don't think we can do it any other way. [Tom]

This consideration is underpinned by years of working of encouraging academic colleagues to engage with the commercial sector. Tom reveals throughout the interview that he has come to these conclusions over time, and indeed has worked in other, more separate, ways in the past. He is not suggesting that this is a straightforward or easy strategy and is working through the issues for himself as part of his formal role. He suggests that the university needs to be influenced less by what others offer and have greater confidence in its own strengths and unique attributes. He feels that trying to compete with commercial training

organisations is foolish; in recounting a particular example he reflects that academics do not want to be trainers on a permanent basis, although they can and do use these skills as part of their role, as they would be bored by delivering the same programme repeatedly. Tom shares the frustration of bidding for a project and receiving feedback on the rejection which suggested that a more academic approach might have been successful; a result of the university trying to compete directly on commercial grounds rather than putting forward its unique strengths.

> *We have got to really think through what we want in terms of a research culture and how we shape that ... I have realised that our strength is in the unique things... the strength is in the things that the universities should traditionally do. It is in our ability to accredit learning also in our ability to carry out academic research ... we have started to put ourselves in competition with other providers and deliverers of products that we can't compete with simply because they do a different kind of job and as a result of doing this they're perhaps more efficient at it and perhaps cheaper. [Tom]*

7.9. Engaging academic colleagues

Richard and John are clear that they have to negotiate for staff to work with, rather than having any managerial control over the allocation of workload. Operating with very little power to make the changes needed, without access to specific knowledge, is a difficult management tension to hold.

> *No-one is obliged to do it. It is really if they are interested and they feel that they have the time, then they will do it. I happen to have colleagues in both camps, some say no I am not interested and others who say let's see if I can fit it in. [John]*

> *If anyone mentions short courses they just say "oh you go and see Richard down the corridor he does short courses" whereas really everyone can. It's amazing; there's about forty three staff in the School ... and they've all got their own area of expertise where you could say to*

> *them 'what about running what you've got there as a short course' and one or two do respond ... but many of them say 'I don't do short courses' but of course if you're teaching that's what short courses are, you're delivering information to groups other than undergraduates or post graduates. [Richard]*

Persuasion is a significant part of the role in order to convince colleagues to join ventures; all the participants comment that commercial activity is not allocated to staff in the same way as teaching on funded programmes. It is presented as an optional activity, relying in part on the unit or project leader's skills to draw colleagues in. John encourages colleagues to become involved and provides appropriate support to enable them to build confidence.

> *I actively encourage [colleagues] and try to offer them mentoring, sounds terribly formal ... because it is hard to get them to have the confidence ... but you might do as part of a team so I might officially lead the team but basically delegate all the work ... when it comes to meeting clients I am there as someone who is used to doing it. [John]*

Mike is an enthusiast who wants to involve others in the range of work he is doing and is honest enough to say that this will also help him develop people management skills which fit well into his career plan. He sees an opportunity for others to address issues of teaching relevance, suggesting that this is important and something he can help with in facilitating the commercial experience. Interestingly, despite David's sense of being perceived as a nonconformist by managers and colleagues, he is proactive in trying to persuade others to follow in his footsteps. He puts forward the idea that anyone can do what he has done, revealing the element of chance in his achievements.

Deborah does not have the management responsibility to engage others and is not fazed by the fact that she may be one of only a few individuals able to be successful with KTP activity. She relates this to her own need

for achievement, not making a negative judgment about those who choose not to engage.

> *Some of my colleagues don't do it and it's fine but I like to achieve and I like to get things done. The feedback I've had from other people has been that I'm doing too much and shouldn't get so engaged but they're just people I work with I don't like that level of non-engagement. There's no point even sitting debating it with myself you know it's just not on. [Deborah]*

Earning money for commercial activity is a motivator for some of Mike's colleagues but he is clear that this is not unproblematic. He knows that if you become overburdened with work you need to deal with this by using your earnings to buy yourself out of teaching. This is clearly a dilemma that Mike and his colleagues wrestle with and he adopts a pragmatic approach to managing this for himself.

> *When you really got problems with time you tend to buy yourself out so the extra money that normally would be paid to you for this project just goes back to the university to fund the time. [Mike]*

The notion of a 'lot of effort' is reflected in several references Bill makes to himself and the team working 'exceptionally long hours and beyond workload'; in fact this is the main criticism he makes of the university. He suggests that all members of his group are working above the normal workload, in part because they also have significant teaching commitments, but believes that ultimately they will earn sufficient income to buy four or five additional members of staff. This is likely to be a very long term achievement but Bill is confident that the team are moving strategically towards this goal. Arguably many teachers and researchers also work beyond the allocated workload but it may be that Bill is making the point here that this form of business facing activity is not recognised in the allocation and counting of hours; the issue may be as much about recognition as the physical time and effort expended to get a new form of work established.

7.10. View of self: explicit and tacit

John underplays his role in ensuring effective communication with potential clients, maintaining throughout that his approach is one of common sense rather than any specific business training; in fact he shows a mature grasp of the key features with respect to running an external commercial venture.

> *I just think it is just common sense to be quite honest, if you want people to give you work and give you money then you do the best ... there is also the issue of managing clients expectations.[John]*

His ability to manage expectations of potential customers, saying no when necessary, reveals both a skilled customer interface and a clear grasp of the unit's capacity, belying his suggestion that anyone could do it and it is only common sense. Richard is able to articulate his reason for engagement and clearly gains personal satisfaction from the work. He had a positive role model in his predecessor and can't see himself giving up the work he does with the unit. This is strongly linked to his commitment to the discipline community to which he belongs.

> *It's what I've done and what I enjoy doing. There have been other opportunities to move sideways to different large administration type jobs in teaching but that's not as interesting. I think the very fact that you deal with a number of different people and there are challenges to try and keep things going, that's the thing that makes it interesting. So I don't know when I'll stop and hand it over to someone else. [Richard]*

David has moved beyond working within his own research and teaching, to an engagement with policy level decision making, and finds this challenging. At times his personal passion and commitment have brought him into conflict with the university and he has irritated senior colleagues, revealing that he has worried that someone will take him aside to tell him to stop.

> *... but I knew in my gut instincts, I knew that I was right and somebody was going to have to pull me back into a meeting, somebody in the OVC*

was going to have to see one of those meetings finished and then say David I now want ten minutes with you alone, you will never do that again ... and it never happened! [David]

David refers to various incidents which he feels indicate ambivalence in the attitude of the university to those who are non-traditional academics, earn income and who have, and express, strong views about the university's strategic direction in the business facing arena. He reveals that sometimes he is hurt by the throwaway comments of others and wonders whether they realise he is not as tough as he may appear.

...where I do get hurt, when someone sits in an evaluation saying 'well you just go off and do your own thing,' and I think if I had the time or if he was interested in that story. I think I am just as much an institutional person as anyone else... I am often, 'there he goes, you know, on expenses and all that and the other,' so I do get hurt.
He said it in a joking way but he meant it, 'apart from this maverick, we never know what he is doing', well I thought that is not entirely true, but I recognise that people do perceive me as that, 'he goes off and he does his own thing', I like to think that it is focused but not everybody agrees with that, but it is about why can't we do that, why do we accept this the way it is? [David]

As he tells his story David opens up the nature of his challenging approach; a sense of questioning and pushing those who are not as well informed or who do not share his passions. David feels that challenging the status quo is part of his role, even though this is an uncomfortable and difficult position and brings him into conflict situations. Throughout the interview David maintains his commitment to the institution in an entirely credible manner and explains the difficulty this questioning stance sometimes creates for him.

I don't always have confidence, sometimes it is done out of not so much fear of failure, but I just don't believe that the way that you are going is right, I will test this and if I am wrong I will fall back into line, but I do believe in certain things that are important

> *... it was not going to happen so I backed off that, I thought I am not going to win this anyway, I was able to take at the same time an institutional view that this is right regardless of what this is, what my area is and what my love is. [David]*

In particular he has found it difficult to find a way through the standard career channels for promotion, describing being interviewed in situations where the questions and concerns did not relate to his experience of academic work. Some promotions have been directly offered specific roles, rather than through the standard processes of interview and appointment; although colleagues may have seen this as preferential treatment David sees this as somewhat unsatisfactory, denying him the normal approval for achievement.

> *I wasn't expecting them to play to my tune, I still understood what the process was, but the conversation all about quality was just very unhelpful experience to me ... I am talking about business facing, probably didn't use that word, [you are talking] about quality, there is not a career path for me, there should be, it is funny this ... it was at the time that I finally twigged what it must be like being a woman in an organisation, it took a long time but I got it completely at that. [David]*

This notion of being in a minority – like being a woman – perhaps summarises David's personal position throughout the interview. He sees himself as fighting a particular corner, based on his previous experience, his passion, his commitment to the students and to research. This is potentially an angry or disaffected place to be but this is far from the case as he also makes clear his loyalty to the university and his gratitude for opportunities. He compares himself favourably with colleagues in the HE sector in realising he has been allowed to take ideas forward despite some failures. Senior colleagues, even though seeing him as a maverick, have been prepared to take the risk of allowing him to do what he wants.

…he didn't have what I had; he didn't have a manager at just the right time who was prepared to take a risk. To just say you sound passionate, this is interesting, why not, let us see what happens.

[David]

Jill talks eloquently about issues of control, accepting that this type of work requires an ability to manage the challenge and risks involved, acknowledging that she is this kind of person but that some others are not in a matter of fact manner without making a judgement. Personally she finds the challenge an exciting one, consciously thinking about how she manages the way of working in order to succeed. In an external environment she is very aware that her status is that of trainer, delegates are not interested in her standing as an academic.

I think the biggest thing is you have to do is come off your own pedestal. I wouldn't consider myself to be precious about status, however it's something that I have and that is part of me and I've worked for. I think coming away from that and meeting somebody where they are is difficult, even in the role which I am skilled and paid for and expected to deliver.

If it doesn't work I'm the one that's paid to deliver... it's no good me saying "oh well we're finishing at one today", it still has to happen so that's a big challenge, that flexibility and being able move with the day. [Jill]

John's ongoing personal commitment and active engagement with short course activity result in clarity of understanding of the challenges and possible pitfalls and an awareness that personal confidence is a key element of success. He is able to analyse his own development in the consultant role, where the need to deal with client's questions and manage the dialogue is a skill acquired over time, recognising that this is not a natural skill for some academics.

It is interesting meeting the clients and getting involved in the different projects and hearing the different areas of application. It brings in other aspects that I can bring into the job ... having to think about the money

side of things ... whereas if it was one enormous management consultancy organisation I would be involved in one little tiny bit of it, so I would not see the rest.
I am quite interested in people in general, the social side of things, so it is quite fun dealing with different sorts of people ... some clients are very interesting people, and how they operate in very unusual ways ... you have to still sit down and have a proper conversation with them and I think that helps rather than being frustrated with how they are, I can go along with it and develop a good working relationship. [John]

Hazel has a different experience, sometimes working with clients who do not see the relevance of the training and attend reluctantly. She speaks matter of factly about this and it did not appear to worry her that this was part of the work she has to cope with

Back then the flavour of the month was joint training. Whatever you did, whenever anything had gone wrong and there was a report ... you always had joint training ... so when they expanded mental health services the person in charge of that commissioning ... asked me if I would do that and so we got that contract I think it was a very clever move, she wanted the joint training not to be owned by any one of the agencies... I have done training in libraries; I have done training for jobs centre plus, voluntary organisations, for Tourist Information. I just do it for whoever asks ... and then we also go out to particular teams who have got in touch and say could you come and do so something for us. [Hazel]

She felt undervalued by her manager and academic colleagues, but took a pragmatic view that as she was nearing the end of her career and saw no need to be a 'proper academic', that this did not cause her any personal difficulty. She was more concerned that the important work she did would be lost as younger academics would not want to take on this rather thankless task.

In a related theme Deborah too has concerns about how success is measured, raising the problems of academic isolation with little feedback

or recognition. She is simultaneously aware that her level of personal engagement means she wants to know the whole picture, is inclined to do everything for herself and thus keep others out.

> *To be honest I don't know how success is measured because you work in isolation. I don't know what others are doing unless I ask them ... I did find it spooky at first how alone you are, how isolated, or it could be that it's just me wanting to do it all for myself. [Deborah]*

Overall Deborah is very aware of the power dynamic, or rather her lack of power, working through personal skills in negotiation and dialogue. She also realises that it is her personal commitment which drives her onward. The fact that she is a practical problem solver, not prepared to be beaten by barriers, is crucial to her success and to her personal satisfaction. At one point in telling her story she compares her previous business life with her work at the university; after an initial notion that her current work is easier she surprises herself by describing how much work she does and how hard it sometimes is.

David, despite a relatively senior academic position, is clear that his achievements come through negotiation, nagging, personal commitment and stubbornness rather than any authority from his role. David's loyalty to the institution is a persistent thread; enabling him to weather some stormy times, underpinning his recognition of risk taking managers and helping him to manage the career disappointments. He acknowledges the university's support in allowing him to carve out a particular path, engaging in work which corresponds to his personal passion and commitment. He recognises that this is not a unique relationship but that other mavericks are also allowed to survive and thrive within the university framework.

> *I do remember a quote of John Harvey Jones who said "I always stayed with ICI because they just let me do so many different things", and I just feel the same way, the university has been good to me, it has never guided me, it has just given me doors to walk through and I have tried to*

say to colleagues around the place that if you do stick your neck out, I don't know of that many people who have tried to do something different and been chopped off at the knees. [David]

So, as David is describing himself as a maverick, others use different metaphors to give a sense of their experience, John picked up the notion of translator from one of my questions and returned to this to explain what he does. As his field is highly specialised, he is regularly speaking to clients who know very little about the subject or what can be provided. He is an enabler, using examples and simple explanation to allow people (including me) to engage with the field at their own level and not feel foolish. This is clearly a great skill and one that he uses unselfconsciously.

So you are the sort of translator that helps them understand? [MR]
...a good way of putting it [is that I am the translator], so that I can put into my language, from my point of view so that I can understand what needs to be done [John]

John's self deprecating view of his contribution to the unit's success hides the truth which is that he is clearly a great asset, showing a creative and problem solving approach in his leadership.

Mike feels the need for a significant move into working with larger, more prestigious business partners but feels hampered because his research area is not led by a high profile professor; significant commercial partners are looking for names who can be invited to join boards and add kudos for the company. His perception of being a ' Cinderella' reappears at intervals through the interview and leads to an ambivalent view; either the university has let him down by not providing appropriate research leadership or this is an opportunity for him to fill the perceived gap.

I am trying to raise my game to work with much larger companies because I think there is a perception here that we are only equipped to work with small companies ... I think we really can do it, seriously do it. Work with small companies, it comes very naturally... but I do think we can work with bigger companies, I really do. I think the business school

has got these very successful people, high level professors but I think we are Cinderellas. So people like me I think we have got this opportunity to get a bit bigger. [Mike]

7.11. Phase two data: discussion and conclusions

I demonstrate my commitment to hearing the voices of individuals, using substantial quotes from the participants, and thereby allowing the reader to listen directly to their contribution. In drawing the threads together under the headings provided, I began the process of meaning making; I now engage further with this task in order to take some conclusions from this chapter forward into the final discussion. Where relevant I make links with the data analysis provided in Chapter 5 and with the underpinning ideas of learning through work, psychological contract and academic identity.

The discussion of teaching in its various forms (7.4) highlights the importance to individuals of maintaining and sustaining a teaching identity. There appears to be no difficulty in extending, developing and recasting the notion of teaching to include the commercial, workplace and campus based variety of activities that were discussed by the participants. The interesting feature emerging here is the notion of 'loss' if teaching is given up in favour of a focus on more specifically identified business facing work, indicating an underlying, essential need for teaching as part of academic identity. The driving force of the teaching engagement is clearly demonstrated both here and in Chapter 5 with individuals able to articulate their enthusiasm for working with a variety of learners, whether the traditional student on campus or the business facing client; even where individuals are critical of the campus based students there is no sense of seeking to escape this teaching. Learners, in the complex set of relationships that form a university, may also be seen as a face of the employer, certainly in terms of a financial transaction; the learner /student/customer designation is a continuing debate. Engagement with teaching is part of the affective commitment to

the institution with individuals anticipating a reciprocal engagement as part of the 'daily meaning' discussed earlier (2.6). The importance of this commitment to teaching is confirmed by those academics in my sample, perhaps traditionally labelled with the researcher identity, continuing to teach and seeing the integration of the two activities as beneficial. I am therefore led to conclude that teaching, in whatever form, is one component of the relational contract between the individual academic and the institution – put simply academics expect to teach and the university expects them to do so. In considering this argument it is important not to cloud the issue by interpreting teaching in a particular way – in my discussion I have opened up the teaching label to include a variety of engagement with students, this could be extended further to include mentoring of other academics or similar roles. From my data teaching emerges as a crucial element of academic identity, is part of the affective commitment and relational contract and, for the academics in my sample, is incorporated seamlessly alongside and within business facing activity, rather than seen as a competing demand. This being the case there are considerations for the institution in ensuring the reciprocal nature of the relational contract is met through the mutual expectation of teaching; potentially this relationship may be jeopardised if individuals are deprived of teaching, either actually or nominally, in order to facilitate business facing activity.

As with teaching, the notion of business facing activity encompasses a broad range of engagements under the overarching concept. In similar fashion, the participants were not concerned to label and differentiate but rather approached the various activities as part of their individual work portfolio. The theme of learning through work was strong with individuals providing many examples of developing their practice either consciously or tacitly through the experience of tackling new activities. Challenge is an important part of the process (5.3) and in this chapter comes across particularly strongly for those engaged with commercial and workplace

teaching (7.4.1 and 7.4.2). Seeking solutions through a process of trial and error, trying again after failure, rising above frustration and searching for assistance in unclear and unknown contexts are examples of how the learning through work process appears for individuals. In some instances participants seem unaware of their own persistence and achievement, underplaying success and assuming that colleagues could equally to the work if they were so inclined. This is informal learning that is unmanaged and unstructured, resonating strongly with the argument made by Billett (2004) that this does not mean a weak or ad hoc process; on the contrary it is clear that this learning through work is focused, swift, cognitively challenging for the individual and requires sophisticated learning skills to achieve successful outcomes. My proposition is that this willingness to learn through work is linked to the relational contract; the application needed to learn quickly and effectively might reflect the strength of the affective position.

The barriers and frustrations experienced in business facing activity (7.7) created significant challenge for some individuals and it is clear that this tested their loyalty and commitment to the university, in extremes leading to a sense of not being valued or being marginalised. The health professionals for example, appeared to feel marginalised in university terms and so retained a much stronger relational contract with the health profession – or could it be that an existing strong relational contract with health has not been transferred to the university and so they are unable to see a place for themselves? For others the sense that the university failed to support them in their business facing endeavours, through appropriate systems, recognition of achievement or promotion prospects, was rationalised at a personal level largely through a positive appreciation of the opportunities provided currently or in the past. In these instances loyalty to the organisation and the ability to overlook its failures suggest a very strong relational contract; this raises concerns about whether this will be sustained in the event of further failures on the part of the

organisation to deliver on its side of the contract. Some indication of this appears in the discussion of centralisation and bureaucracy (7.4.1, 7.7 and 7.8) where individuals are clear that there are potential changes that may result in them relinquishing business facing roles; their comments are not a rejection of the work involved, nor a fear of change, but rather centre on the lack of recognition for their expertise or the potential for a diminution of the service they offer and a consequent loss of professional pride.

The conclusions I drew in Chapter 5 with respect to the notion of becoming an academic are replicated in the data explored in this chapter. For some individuals (Jill, Deborah) this is an explicit recognition of developing the skills they perceive as necessary for successful achievement in the academic role; for others (David, Tom) it is about forging a new way of being an academic in the changing context of the university. The notion of a process, developing over time and opportunity (7.10) is again persistent and extends beyond the personal project to involvement in the development of others (7.9) and having expectations of the university in the support that might be available. The research dimension, minimal in the school of education data, is more strongly represented in this wider group of academics and demonstrates with greater clarity how individuals perceive this element of becoming an academic through the gradual establishment of a personal reputation.

I concluded Chapter 6 with Pratt and Foreman's (2000) notion of multiple identities, pluralistic organisations and rapidly changing environments and this is further confirmed by the data analysed in this chapter. My exploration of academics developing practice in response to business facing activities across the university, confirms the notions of a rapidly changing environment and a pluralistic organisation. I chose not to include the interview detail of various enterprises, new activities and bids for work, but was personally amazed by some of the projects, having no idea that work of this kind was occurring in the university. In many cases

the work bore no relation to the standard teaching of undergraduates, requiring individual academics to venture into unknown territory, in some instances with very public and high profile exposure. The participants spoke cheerfully of the wide range of roles they assume - the small business manager (7.7), the consultant (7.4.2), the translator (7.10), the trainer (7.4.1), the facilitator (7.6), the researcher (7.5), the networker (7.6) and of the skills they used in marketing (7.7), events and venue management (7.7), customer care (7.6) and finance (7.8). This indicates that individual academics are not only able to manage multiple strands within their identity, but actively choose to do so; it seems unlikely that any of my participants are working to a specific job description that captures these many and varied engagements that take them far beyond the traditional academic roles of teaching and research.

8. Establishing the conceptual framework

8.1. Introduction

A strong practice base, with a focus on workplace reality for me as well as for my participants, has been very much the driving force of my research. Lines of enquiry emerged, questions developed as part of the exploration and understanding grew in parallel with data collection and analysis. This approach, which embodies my commitment to practice based research, enabled me to gain detailed insights into the experience of individuals and use the data alongside my practice knowledge to construct meaning.

My ontological position is influenced strongly by my perspective as an experienced academic with significant management responsibilities who has lived through this period of change in the university's trajectory. This positions me in a unique space where some of my understandings are intuitive and I 'attempt to create a seamless link between the theory and the practice embodied in the enquiry '(Clandinin and Connelly 2000:41); this results in ideas and concepts being threaded through the work from the beginning and I now take the opportunity to draw these together. My intention in this chapter is to set out the story of my research, in an account which relates the elements of my work in a considered whole, and then to establish more firmly the conceptual dimensions that emerge.

Academic identity became the key concept in considering the experience of business facing academics. The combination of data analysis and ideas drawn from the work of other writers (Chapter 6) brings me to an understanding of academic identity as a dynamic interaction, a process of becoming, and a career long project. My central notion is that academic identity is not something established once and for all, but rather is a significantly personal construction that is fluid over time and has a contextual dimension. My university's shift to a business facing strategy creates an impetus in reconfiguring individual academic identity; an impetus that is largely unrecognised and, more specifically, is

unappreciated as a potential feature in achieving desired strategic outcomes.

I realise that I have reached the point of connection between what I am trying to understand and my own experience (Belenky et al 1986:141); this creates a tension between trying to simplify and codify for the purpose of research something which in practice is a complex, messy and shifting. Because I care about the academics I work with and manage, finding their engagement with academic work and identity an endlessly fascinating, frustrating and intellectually challenging process, the conceptual dimensions I establish must match with my practice experience, arise from the research in an appropriate manner and have an authentic resonance with the voices of the individuals who took part in my work. This chapter reveals the process of assembling the meaning of my research.

8.2. An account of my enquiry

My enquiry is based in a particular context - that of an individual institution at a specific point in time, with an espoused position in the Higher Education landscape. I explored the broader concerns of the Higher Education sector (Chapter 2.5) and, in particular, considered the issues surrounding third stream funding, establishing that the sector turbulence, with the resultant changing landscape of Higher Education, means that individual universities have to make choices in order to survive and thrive. In the case of my institution this resulted in a specific declaration of business facing intent and the university – in the form of the governors – setting business facing strategic goals for itself; achieving these targets then became a significant driving force for the whole institution. This progression from the turbulence of the sector, through the strategic positioning of the university, to an extended notion of academic work is publically documented through strategic plans, policy statements and the structuring and re-structuring of university departments in order to deliver the current strategic goals. Traditional

teaching and research are not replaced by business facing activity, rather additional, often innovative, strands of work are added to the tasks of the academic community. The daily discourse of academics, clearly revealed in the interviews with my participants, showed awareness, to varying degrees, of the change in university strategy and the diverse forms of business facing activity. The university has explicit strategic intentions, transparently visible to the academic community in terms of the new opportunities, projects and areas of work that are being created. These new projects are obvious in the data and, although I chose not to include the specific detail in the participant quotes, it is clear from the full transcripts that there is considerable variety and scale to these new types of work.

The strategic shift to a business facing institution results not only in an extended set of academic activities but in a reframing of the employer's expectations with respect to academics individually and collectively as, although the strategic goals are not themselves focused on individuals, they can only be achieved through the engagement of individual academics. This shift in expectations from the employer is an unspoken feature of the need to achieve strategic outcomes, implicitly requiring individuals to accept new roles and aspects of academic life, to operate in different environments and to step outside the structured bureaucracy that deals with many aspects of academic engagement. Most importantly, there is the expectation that individuals will embrace the ideological perspective of a business facing university. My initial interest in academics in the school of education rising to challenge, and the frustrations I felt that this conversation was not part of my experience as a university manager, is symptomatic of the unrecognised nature of this aspect. The changing nature of the employment relationship is an unconsidered part of the move to the business facing agenda, not explicitly acknowledged at institutional level. The employment bargain, established over time and based on implicit beliefs held by both sides, is

changed by the new strategic direction. For example the shared understanding of what it is to be a lecturer, and what it is reasonable to expect of those who lecture, is challenged by the expectation that individual academics will teach in places other than university classrooms, working with learners who have very different characteristics from those of the standard student. This shifts not only the practical reality but the reciprocal obligations; the employer is expecting increased independence and confidence, making an assumption that the academic can take on new roles in organising off site teaching, engaging in work without the standard structures of modules and programmes. As a corollary the employee expects that engaging in new forms of work will be supported, and possibly rewarded, by the systems and structures of the university. In order for a positive psychological contract to be maintained the affective commitment of the employee needs to be sufficiently embedded to manage this shift and recast perceptions of the role of lecture to incorporate the new demands, thus re-confirming the reciprocal obligation. My data shows this can be a problematic process, with individuals experiencing a tension between their loyalty to the organisation and their frustration with its perceived inability to meet their needs as they work in new ways. As both employer and employee shift their position in response to the business facing agenda the psychological contract is reconstructed and realigned over time. Academics make choices, both explicitly and implicitly, as to whether and how to reconceptualise their work to include the business facing dimension, not merely on the basis of practical and explicit understanding, but on the basis of their commitment and loyalty to the organisation. It is this latter which appears to determine whether they will make the additional effort required to engage with challenging activities.

Alongside the shift in employer expectations to engage with new forms of work there is a further dimension of change in terms of the work itself. Although the creation of new business facing activity is an explicit feature,

the nature of the work, the potential shift from more traditional forms of teaching and research and the way in which academics will learn the new skills required, is largely unexplored. As individual academics seek and create daily meaning for themselves they develop a repertoire of skills and attitudes in response to the new demands. The process is a gradual accrual of new knowledge and understanding rather than a rational sequence of deduction. As a result individuals have a different understanding of themselves and of the process of becoming an academic, largely unconsciously developing their identity through the work they do within the organisation. My research reveals that that this is a tacit, undocumented and unmanaged shift.

In summary the process of establishing a business facing strategy is an explicit one, with public declaration and documented strategic goals. However, the resulting implications for individual academics are largely implicit; the changed expectations of the employer leading to a shift in psychological contract, the assumption of learning through work in order to engage with innovative activity and the impact on academic identity are unconsidered features. I capture these relationships in Figure 4 below which begins to unpick the complexity uncovered in my research.

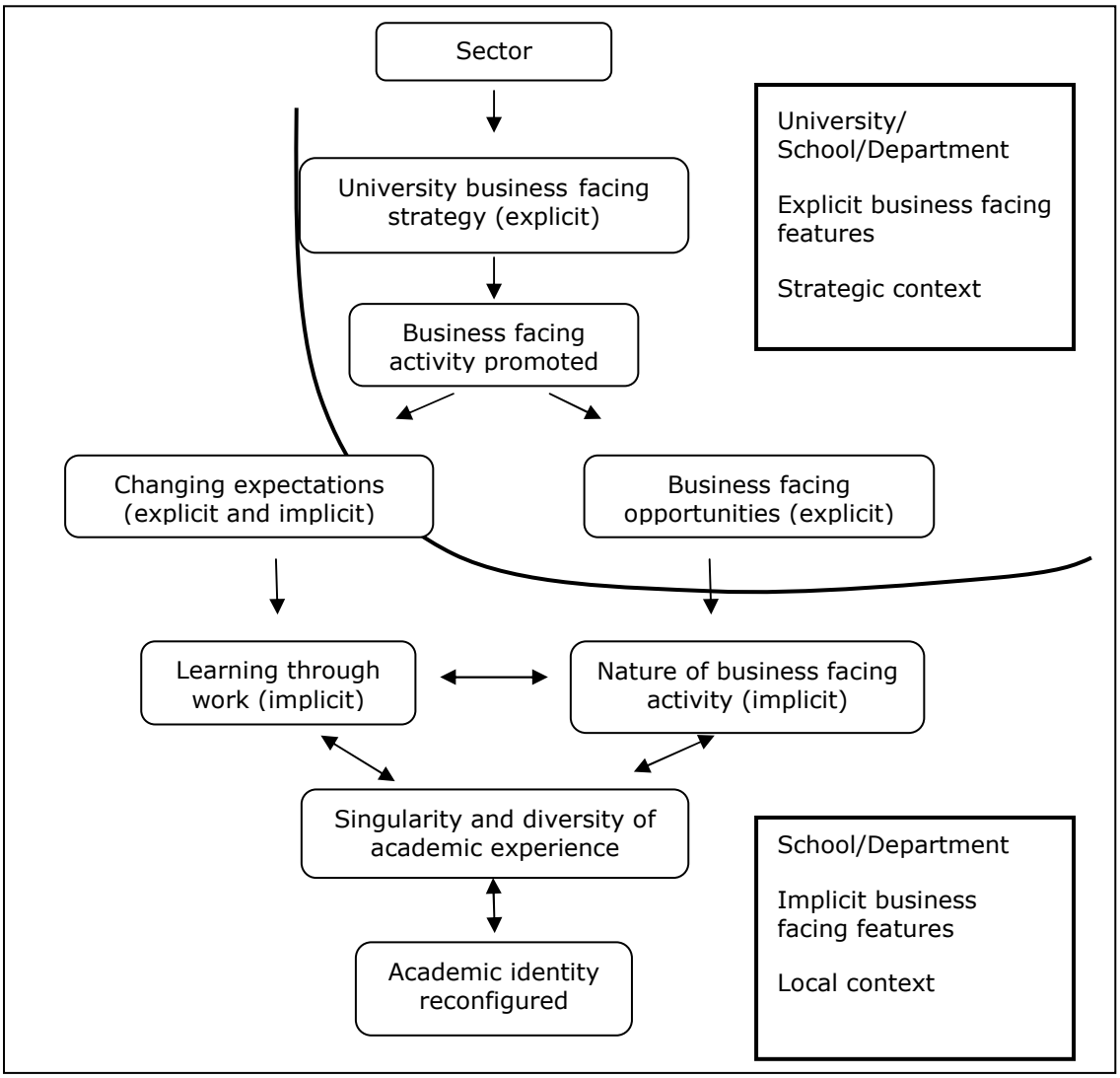


Figure 4 Establishing the connections.

It became clear during the course of my enquiry that the University – in the sense of the central management and the documented strategic intentions – operates with explicit goals and expectations with respect to business facing activity. This provides the strategic context for the academic community. The unconsidered features which implicitly follow from these requirements largely operate within the local context of the school or department. It is this latter which is of interest and has been the underpinning thread of my work. Focusing on the implicit dimensions identified in Figure 4, I reflect on three concepts that have emerged from

my research - the nature of business facing activity, learning through work and the enabling context – in order to provide a richer, more closely examined understanding of their importance.

8.3. The nature of business facing activity

8.3.1. Relationship with teaching and research

Business facing activity challenges traditional notions of academic work being defined as a combination of teaching and research within a disciplinary framework. As Figure 5 shows the business facing dimension has a substantial overlap with teaching and research but adds a further area of academic endeavour. At the centre of the diagram the seamless engagement with a range of activity, demonstrated by several participants, is evident; other examples fit in the category of business facing research or business facing teaching, whilst some funded projects and activity might be labelled 'pure' business facing activity and have no direct overlap with the traditional elements of teaching and research.

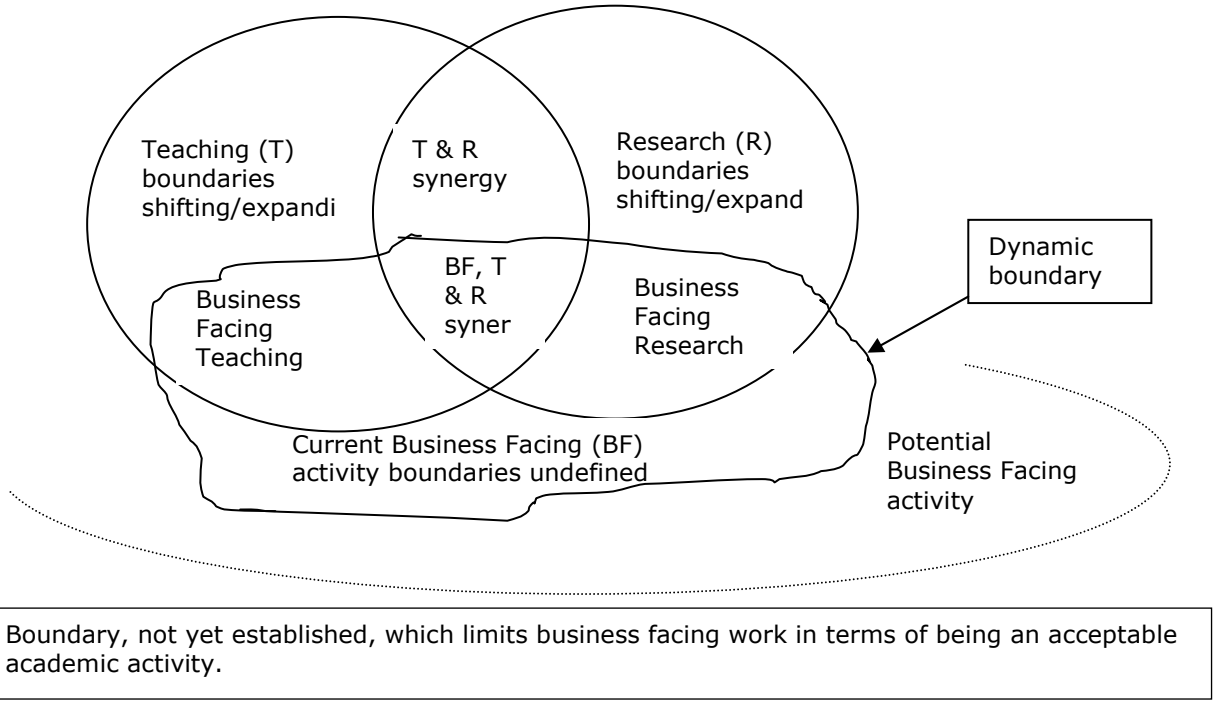


Figure 5 Relationship between teaching, research and business facing activity

Acceptance of this model allows a more appropriate categorisation of activity where this is desirable; the negotiable boundaries currently offered by business facing activity ensure that individuals, disciplines and universities are able to be flexible in their decisions as to what may, or perhaps more interestingly may not, be included. In dealing with this latter issue, of what is outside the work of an academic, it is important to note the strong connection to teaching and research illustrated in Figure 5. Business facing activity is not a separate or unconnected element of academic work in which 'anything goes' but rather has to demonstrate its relationship to the academic underpinning. In the site of my research it is clear that the connection to either/both teaching and research is strong, with individuals being clear about the synergistic nature of the work. The stretching of the boundary and the extent of the overlap are matters of individual or institutional decision; different decisions may be made in other universities.

Projecting this model forward leads to a number of possible outcomes; business facing activity could become a more defined area of academic work with generally accepted delineations similar to those which currently apply for teaching and research – an unambiguous third circle in figure 5. In some institutions, or for some people, it may be that the business facing activity is absorbed into teaching and/or research through a further stage in the process of boundary shift and expansion. This would result in a return to the definition of academic work in terms of teaching and research through a dilution/extension in the categorisation, or because the particular institution/individual engages only in work which is near to the existing boundary. Potentially there is an alternative scenario where teaching and research become absorbed into business facing work so that an institution's academic activity is seen as a coherent whole of commercially based engagement. The boundary between academic and non-academic work will also be a site of differentiated positioning for institutions and individuals, particularly given the financial constraints and

pressures to generate commercial income. My data, in the particular timeframe of the first decade of the first decade of the 21st Century, shows academics making clear decisions and relating commercial activity firmly to teaching and research within their disciplinary understanding, but this position may be challenged by future developments in the HE sector.

In the practice setting business facing work appears as a messier, more uncertain set of activities with boundaries that remain undefined, although overlapping with current teaching and research. The data does not demonstrate a strong concern with disciplinary issues, rather highlighting the different nature of business facing activity in terms of the features encountered by individuals.

8.3.2. Business facing activity: characteristics

The characteristics of business facing activity which emerge from the data set show some substantive contrasts with those of teaching and research. In the main teaching and research is planned activity, often repeating previous versions or building directly on earlier engagements, strongly bounded by university procedures and quality systems. In comparison business facing activity has greater elements of risk with a need to move outside the standardised systems in order to engage with external partners and clients. It is tempting to assume that where business facing activity involves teaching, or teaching-like, activity this is comparable to standard university teaching of students and only the venue is different. The data reveals that this is not the case; the teaching engagement has other, different features. It may be that of teaching as an exchange with peers, working with professional colleagues in the development of knowledge and skills where, in part at least, the learners know more than the academic. The repertoire of delivery strategies is broader to encompass the needs of a range of clients, for example where the skills or knowledge of the attendees is not a good match with a short course. Importantly the nature of the learners is different, often more positive

and motivated than typical undergraduates but conversely having strong expectations that particular outcomes will be met or needs satisfied, such as the requirements of the KTP graduate and employing organisation. Short course activity brings particular forms of engagement, with the need for lecturers to gain knowledge of the group rapidly in order to succeed with the input. The participants identified the challenges of business facing teaching activity – that of managing marketing and recruitment outside the university structures, dealing with learners who have a wide range of expectations and skill levels, the need to be resilient in delivering on off-site situations and independent in managing resources outside the normal university structures.

Business facing activity has an external dimension, integrating the needs of customers with the university offering, not merely in the sense of the seller and purchaser relationship but in understanding the client and being able to translate their desires into a deliverable product. Shared ownership of the activity in partnership with an external body is a common feature and brings with it the need to manage relationships and demands, set boundaries and communicate effectively. My participants proposed that business facing activity is operating at the cutting edge, moving beyond the traditional knowledge base and requiring a dynamic engagement with deep professional/academic knowledge. The reputation of the individual academic involved may be crucial and is dependent on expertise and practitioner knowledge as well as intellectual understanding. Credibility and currency may be tested by the client as part of establishing a relationship with the individual academic or a group and, although the university reputation is an important element, it is clear from the interviews that individuals have to demonstrate relevant knowledge in order to evidence their standing in the field or profession.

The ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory, nature of business facing activity is evident in the data with participants viewing this uncertainty as an integral part of the work, accepting that this is balanced by a level of

freedom to develop new ideas. The variety of activity and the tacit nature of the understanding shared by academics mean that explicit training and development for individuals prior to taking on new work is unlikely. As it is clear that academics are mastering these new forms of activity the concept of learning through work discussed in chapter 4, and positioned in figure 4, has particular relevance.

8.4. Learning through work

The notion of learning through work as informal and thus 'implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured' (Eraut 2004:250) was discussed in Chapter 4, coming to the conclusion that the learning is thus an additional and unanticipated outcome of the work itself. This remains a central core of the concept and is revealed strongly in the data where individuals are concerned with achieving the various tasks of the business facing engagement rather than with seeing these new activities as learning opportunities. Establishing a more complex, layered and meaningful conceptual understanding of learning through work offers a contribution to practice in terms of allowing a greater insight into this process.

Permeating the data provided in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7 is the sense of individuals finding their own learning and using this to develop practice. The participants in this study viewed the engagement with new and innovative activities, where they were forced to rely on their own resources and initiative, as a normal, indeed welcomed, part of academic life. The notion of restricting one's work to a set of tried and tested activities was seen as an incomplete engagement with the academic role and likely to result in poor quality outcomes. This suggests that although the need to learn through work is an unstated part of the university's expectations it is in fact matched, for at least some individuals, by a similarly tacit need to engage with challenging activity. The important issue for the participants was that they were interested, engaged, challenged by their work in a way which retained their interest, enabled

them to develop new ideas and, for some individuals, provided opportunities to work with respected others. Individuals were seeing goals for themselves that had a close match to the university's strategic intentions; in some instances this was explicit in terms of a clear understanding of the need to engage with the business facing strategy, but in others there was no direct connection. An alignment, between the goals of the institution and the challenging work opportunities sought by some individuals, results in a significant potential for effective learning through work and both institutional and individual needs to be satisfied.

Taking this idea further might suggest that a more explicit focus on the needs of the institution would enable academics to align their own needs more closely but this is an overly simplistic view. The participants, even where they were fully aware of the institutional needs, had other drivers for their learning through work; in particular, notions of ethical and academic integrity were revealed as important considerations. This links strongly to ideas discussed in 8.3.1 above of establishing boundaries between what is, or could be, legitimate business facing activity and what is beyond the boundary for the individual, group or institution. Individuals were clear that they would not be pushed into business domains that were not of interest or not seen to be valuable, nor would they act in business like ways that did not sit comfortably with their own identity as an academic. Interestingly individuals seemed to have no difficulty in identifying for themselves where boundaries lie and although the position or reasoning was variable between the different individuals, none found this problematic.

Consideration of a university as a workplace and, more particularly as a learning environment for academics is, as I have discussed, an unusual standpoint. If the current pace of change and the concomitant need for universities to reposition, or even reinvent, themselves plays out in the sector then this understanding of how academics learn through work may have something more important to offer. The rhetoric of academic life as

the measured and considered development of knowledge and skills is not matched by the lived experience of the business facing academics in my study. They are learning quickly, efficiently and willingly to take on new tasks, to teach and research differently as they venture into new areas of activity, to be bold and innovative, independent and entrepreneurial; they are learning these new ways of being not through training or an academic apprenticeship but rather through the very tasks that they are engaged with. Traditional myths and discourses of acculturation into an academic community over a long period of time, building a career that looks very similar to those before you, may need to give way to other ideas of innovative and intuitive academics learning through work in order to grasp opportunities and establish changed patterns of academic engagement.

8.5. The enabling local context

For the academics in my university individual experience in the shifting, unstable and incoherent environment of Higher Education is mediated by the local context. The school is the managerial representation and the organising function of the university; in reality individual academics relate to departments, schools or faculties rather than to the institution as a whole. Indeed as I discussed earlier (2.6) individuals may develop idiosyncratic deals in psychological contract terms with an 'immediate boss' (Guest 2004). The strategic shift and the resultant demands are communicated downward from the Vice Chancellor's office to managers, particularly the Heads of School, for interpretation and implementation. For the academics in my sample their experience is of working within a unit where a manager, or management team, are making sense of these new demands in particular ways that influence substantively the local context for the individual. The business facing academics in my university wide sample were chosen for their successful engagement and were able to verbalise the need for an enabling local context. Drawing out the key features suggests that these local contexts are experienced by

individuals as being able to hold some key tensions that arise from the business facing demands. Returning to the theme of 'richness' of environment discussed in Chapter 4.4 it is clear that engagement in the business facing context creates contradictions, diversity and difference that have to be held within the local context. Participants reveal the challenges of how and whether payment for external work is offered, the need for workload models which recognise business facing activity, the competing demands of a plethora of targets and financial imperatives. The local context has to manage these inherent tensions or the complexity which individuals are coping with has the potential to degenerate into chaos. Participants spoke of individual managers who trusted and supported, of ways in which schools and department embraced the new forms of work, in equal measure with frustrations about systems that failed to deliver and barriers that impeded. It is at the local level that these daily tensions are encountered and the enabling context is one which supports individuals in managing the complexity, nurtures and confirms intuitive and innovative action and finds ways to build confidence. Putting together the data to provide an overarching picture, constructed from the myriad of detailed comments, leads me to a tentative matrix (Figure 6) which offers a way of considering the enabling context.

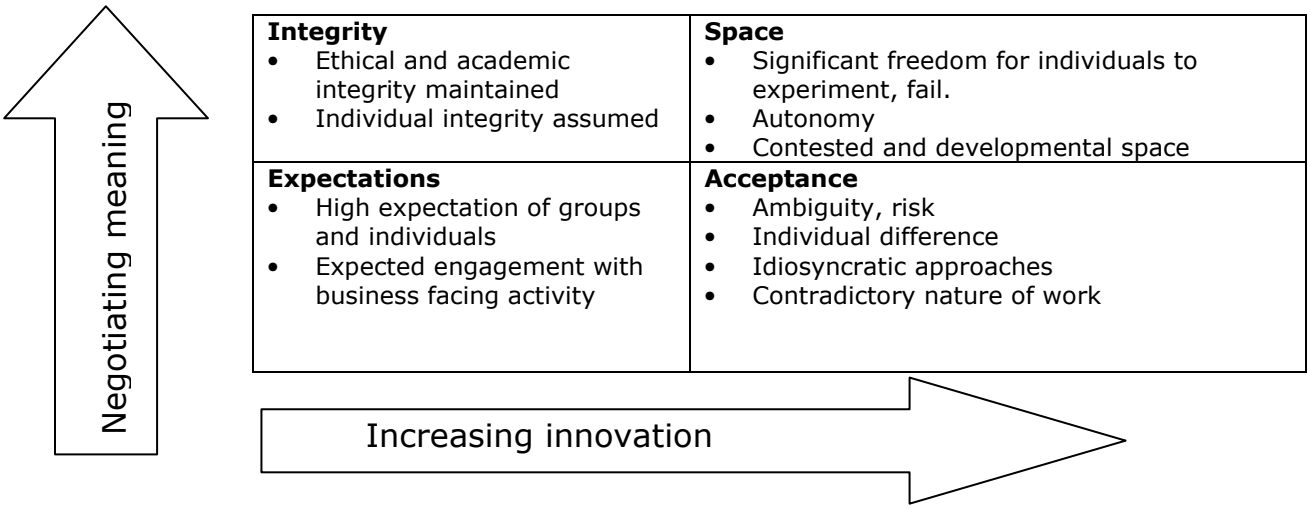


Figure 6 The enabling context

The creation and maintenance of appropriate local environments in which business facing academics can thrive becomes an important priority to underpin strategic delivery. Without the support and nurture at this local level individuals will not be able to construct the new meanings required to be successful in the commercial environment. Explicit expectations of business facing engagement alone are not enough, in order to feel supported in these new forms of work participants needed to have their academic and personal integrity recognised, enabling them to create, individually or collaboratively, the new meanings. Innovative work arises only if individuals are trusted, allowed to operate idiosyncratically 'outside the box', take risks and responsibility for their own decisions; this requires an acceptance from managers and colleagues, a belief in their ability to deliver. A strong theme from the data was that of academics resisting systemising and centralising of their successful initiatives, feeling that this would lead to unresponsive and cumbersome structures that would no longer be able to respond flexibly and quickly to changing environments. The notion of freedom to fail, of the need for space to try, to develop and to contest ideas was also strong with individuals recognising that this asks a great deal of managers where results are uncertain and ways forward unknown. The matrix I offer is not to suggest that there is a linear or even circular process for the context that moves around these enabling features but rather that participants recognised these features as being important to their development as a business facing academic.

8.6. Reconfiguring academic identities

Taking an inclusive approach to these new ways of working, thinking and being an academic leads to a different understanding of academic identity that is fluid, multi faceted and not easily defined or bounded. At the individual level represented in Figure 7 it is clear that academic identity is a process rather than a fixed point, so that although possible to name features of a particular identity at a given point in time this will be

transitory, fluid in time and space as the individual moves through a process of continual reconfiguring.

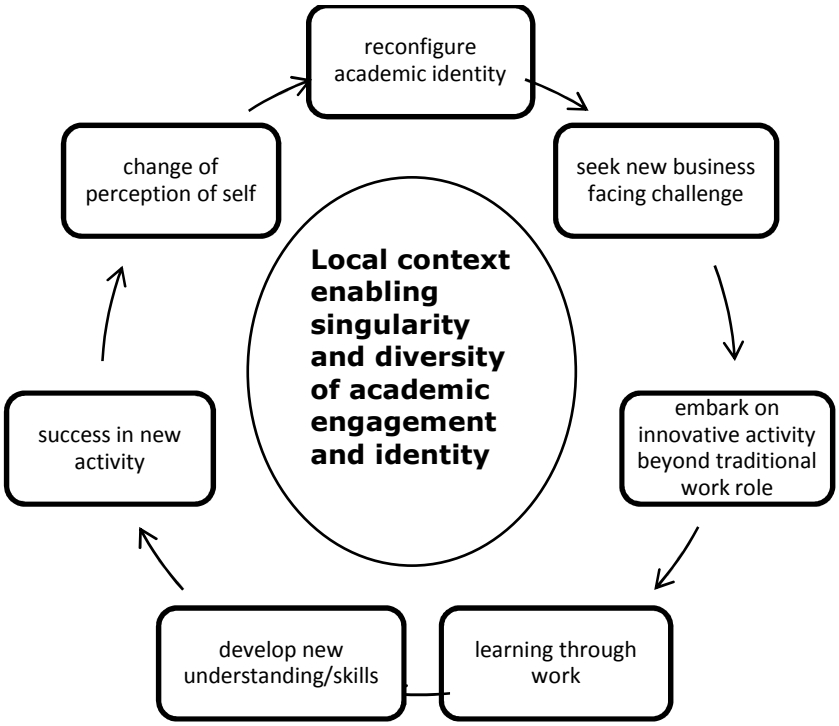


Figure 7 Reconfiguring academic identity: the individual process

This individual process, with its continual development and change, suggests the potential for a wider and more complex variety in academic life than the traditional notion of a choice between an academic career based on research or teaching. It allows for the valuing of multiple identities, both sequentially for the single individual and in the acceptance of difference, offering an inclusive stance and the ability to incorporate new ideas and ways of being an academic. My research provides a more relevant definition of academic identity in the business facing context, revealing the lived experience and valuing the dimension of the individual voice that is frequently muted in the Higher Education literature.

The experience of business facing academics captured in this study enables a better understanding of the shifting nature of academic work and identity. This is not to suggest a dichotomy where individuals choose between the traditional form of academic identity and the business facing or commercial identity that has been my concern. Not only is this

comparison not the substance of my work, it is not where my professional and work based understanding leads me. Rather I am proposing the shifting boundaries suggested by other writers and referred to in Chapter 6 have a particular resonance in the business facing context. I return to the work of Duberley et al to suggest that 'what it means to be an academic is being reconfigured' (2007:495).

9. Academic identities: discussion and conclusions

9.1. Introduction

In this final chapter I draw together my contribution to the understanding of developing academic identities. I began my work within the particular context of a post-92 university, at the time unusual in its robust public commitment to the business facing agenda, with an initial intention to seek local outcomes and an assumption of potential impact and relevance for similar institutions. The contemporary nature of my study however means that over the five year period the situation has moved on; the Higher Education sector has come under increased pressure to demonstrate its value to society and, more importantly, to future national and global prosperity. As a consequence my contribution has increased in relevance to the sector more broadly and provides a timely engagement with this important debate; I therefore feel justified in making more significant claims with potential to influence the practice of academics and university managers. Indeed I would be bolder, proposing that universities must address, to varying degrees, the issues and questions I have been working with, in order to secure the future of the sector.

My initial local interest was a practice based concern with individual achievements I observed in the business facing activities of the school of education. From this starting point, a process of iteration that mirrored my research framework, in being open to questions arising and being prepared to reconsider and develop, led finally to formalising my research questions as a set of interrelated enquiries. Living with the uncertainty of a qualitative and constructivist approach and working with emergent issues was an intellectually and personally challenging experience. Notions of a linear process from research question to completed thesis proved to be a chimera but the reality, although at times frustrating and

difficult, has through its twists and turns brought me to a point where I am able to offer my contribution. More importantly, at this ending point I now understand that this is only the beginning; the position I have established for myself, and hopefully for others, is just the platform for further consideration of an endlessly fascinating and important personal and professional project – that of becoming an academic.

My investigation led me to a range of literature sources: Higher Education and third stream funding provided the contextual positioning for my study; psychological contract offered a metaphor to understand the connection between the individual and the organisation; workplace learning presented an unusual lens for a consideration of academic practice; academic identity emerged as an important concept to understand the position of the individual. In order to capture my conclusions I use a framework of the research questions as they crystallised over time, with an assumption that the reader understands that this rational summary is representative of the messier, engaging and more challenging research experience documented in my dissertation.

One important feature of this drawing together is the acknowledgment that school of education academics (data presented in Chapter 5) and those in the broader university (data presented in Chapter 7) provided complementary insights despite the move from a restricted to a more open interview strategy and the time gap between the two phases. The reader therefore should assume that reference to academics, and particularly business facing academics, from this point forward includes both phases of my enquiry and data from both groups of academic participants unless specifically indicated otherwise.

9.2. How do academics develop their practice in response to new (business facing) activities?

My engagement with the field of work based learning in Chapter 4 led to the conclusion that learning through work, where the learning is an

additional and unanticipated outcome (Eraut 2004), is a key strand in understanding how academics develop their practice. This argument is substantiated through my consideration of the primary data, where individuals articulated the new skills and understanding gained through work tasks as additional outcomes rather than the primary purpose of activities. In Chapter 8 I explored the concept of learning through work in terms of its implicit relationship to the demands of a business facing university. Adding to this the notion of learning as participation (Felstead et al 2005) provides the further dimension of engagement with the world as being a key element; at one level one might argue that these propositions provide a sufficient explanation, with an assumption that individuals are learning through engagement with the real world tasks generated by a business facing strategy and thus are tacitly learning through work. However, my enquiry shows this to be a partial, though important, understanding that can be developed through consideration of other relevant features. Billett's (2004) notion of cognitive space is one such. Making an assumption that academics by their nature are individuals with considerable cognitive capacity, one might draw the conclusion that the potential for cognitive space is a realistic one; at the level of individual example my data does offer this explanation, with academics suggesting that parts of their work have become routine and that this provides the space to take on new activities. However, this engagement with new work is not recognised specifically by the individuals in terms of seeking new cognitive learning opportunities, but rather in the sense of seeking a new challenge. Although the notion of challenge may encompass a cognitive dimension this is unlikely to be the complete explanation. In some instances engagement with challenging activity was an explicit, acknowledged part of retaining their interest in work and in others a more generic notion of liking new opportunities; this suggests that attitude and disposition are also factors impacting on development of practice, resonating with earlier discussion (5.6) of the subtle nature of development. Individual and collaborative willingness to

learn through work, evidenced in the data across a range of activities, is also clearly an influencing feature. This begins to unpack a more complex understanding of what developing practice might mean in the academic context.

Much of this complex engagement is currently hidden, even from the academics themselves; this is more than the unintended and unanticipated notion above that relates to the learning from particular activities. In a broader sense some academics in my sample are unaware of their specific engagement with business facing activity – despite the criteria for selection for interview – and in other instances seem not to appreciate the range and depth of skills they have developed, frequently underplaying successes, suggesting that anyone could do the work. The notion of learning 'simmering' until it surprises the individual when challenged (Franklin 2007) is a possible explanation; participants telling their story during the interview were surprised to realise, as they verbalised their work, how much they had learned about particular activities. Deborah for example (chapter 7) explains her gradual understanding of the KTP mechanisms and requirements and, despite knowing that some colleagues fail to manage these demands, is quite dismissive of her own developing abilities. This might suggest that academics develop their abilities unknowingly in the general as well as the particular, linking again to notions of personal biography and the attitude to work explored in Chapter 5. Individuals are constantly defining, and redefining, what they do and how they might explain this to others (Whitchurch 2007) and, given the experience of the interviews, it may be in this explanation that an understanding of their own learning emerges.

> *The question for us all is what do we think we are up to, how are we to account to ourselves and to others for the activities we initiate, support or discourage? How are we to explain what we do and don't do? How are*

we to think about our contribution? In other words, how are we to practise? (Shaw 2002:12)

My role as a practice based researcher has been to draw out an understanding through a synthesising process. It is important for me that the participants also gained from the experience and I am confident that the process of talking with me offered something to all the individuals in terms of addressing the important questions of who we are and what we do.

The speculative relationship between teaching and business facing activity (Temple 2009) discussed in 2.5 has of course to remain speculative, in the same way that the teaching/research relationship is still the subject of debate. However, it is interesting to note the significant commitment to teaching universally espoused by the participants and, more than this, the positive engagement with teaching in all its forms. The discussion of teaching provided in Chapter 7, for example, demonstrates the links between teaching activity and business facing work illustrated in Chapter 8 Figure 5. Academics are developing their practice in response to new forms of teaching challenge; testing their abilities in new situations and taking risks with their teaching approaches. The new audiences and learners prompt a substantial development of teaching practice, this is in turn feeds back into the normal academic engagements of campus based students and programmes. The more negative connotations of change, offered by authors such as Benmore (2001) and Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000), are not reflected to any significant degree in the data; participants suggest they are not looking for an easy or comfortable life and are prepared to engage with new activities and challenge. This understanding of the importance of teaching is also influential in terms of identity, which I discuss in 9.3 below.

As I discussed in Chapter 8 the business facing agenda adds a further, particular, dimension to developing practice. Business facing activities are by their nature new, innovative, different from those traditional activities

familiar to generations of academics. Accepting that business facing activities are of an innovative kind, shown in the data through explanations of solution finding and problem solving, confirms the need to develop new skills rather than drawing exclusively on repertoires of past experience (Fenwick 2003). The data reveals the importance of individuals understanding their own capabilities, being able to take and manage risk and accepting occasional failure (5.3). As I proposed in the concluding section of Chapter 7, and developed as part of the conceptual framework in Chapter 8, this process of development is not weak or inferior, but rather is a robust and effective strategy with the potential for individual academics to find and engage with their own learning.

The change of university expectations, engaging in new forms of work, diversifying teaching, communicating with the outside world, are built in assumptions of business facing strategy and in effect have changed the university side of the relational contract. As I set out in Chapter 8.2 and figure 4 this change is explicit – in the sense of documented and publically stated –yet is not consciously recognised by the academics in my sample as a substantive shift. Rousseau's model discussed in Chapter 2 offers the transactional contract where pay has to recognise employee effort in order to guarantee high performance, potentially possible in a business facing environment where some individual academics could earn significant rewards for commercial products. This scenario however was not apparent in the data, with only a marginal increase in income for a few individuals, usually spent on teaching release. The positive relational contract, dependent on an affective commitment with employees perceiving obligations and having loyalty to their employer, is more in evidence. The data suggest that it is a result of the ongoing, day to day experiences of the individual played out in the university context and confirmed positively or negatively through interactions with individuals, with processes, with decision makers, with strategy and policy. This local nature of experience and the potential for the idiosyncratic relational

contract reflects the loosely coupled nature of a university and the importance of the local enabling context. The data showed clearly the possibility of individuals simultaneously holding both positive and negative views of the university; loyalty and criticism can go hand in hand. The participants in my enquiry, although passing comment on the challenges and demands of working life, are able to see themselves responding to the changed demands of the organisation. Individuals are prepared to learn new skills, adopt different working strategies, overcome internal barriers, work with colleagues, engage with their discipline knowledge in innovative ways and seek fresh alliances with commercial partners. This would indicate that the relational contract with the university remains intact, still strong enough to bind the individual to working in the new context.

A deliberate decision in planning my study was to interview only those academics who were engaged in and working with the new business facing agenda. This is a limitation of my work in respect to this question as I have no opportunity to consider academics leaving the university because of the change in strategic direction, or individuals continuing to work without engagement in the strategy.

My findings suggest that those academics, who are working in the business facing direction, develop their practice in response to challenge in the workplace; the learning is tacit, unanticipated and unrecognised. Features of personal biography are important in terms of underpinning a positive attitude to new activities; and further indicators such as working with colleagues, solving problems to overcome barriers and being committed to teaching activity are likely to be relevant. It may be significant that the academics in my sample were all experienced individuals, corresponding with the notion of mid-career learning. Given the sample criteria of business facing engagement any conclusions drawn need to be tentative but it appears that a positive attitude to work, and more particularly to challenge, leads individuals to develop practice in

order to meet the needs of the tasks. Whether this might be true for any task, rather than specifically for business facing tasks, is a question to be answered by further research beyond the scope of this thesis.

9.3. Is a different understanding of academic identities needed in the contemporary university?

I established in Chapter 5 that academic identity amongst those undertaking new activity is a fluid and multi-faceted construct that develops from experience and learning through work; by its nature new identity is not easily defined, labelled or bounded and individuals will shift in response to particular situations. Exploration of the Higher Education context confirms that the nature of university work has changed in terms of the potential settings, the learners, the activities and engagements and thus requires a different way of thinking about both process and practice. Skelton suggests that individual academics have to develop a personal philosophy of teaching that 'works through competing pedagogical theories, disciplinary traditions and our own values and beliefs' (Skelton 2009:109). My data suggests that this process of working through values and beliefs may also be relevant with respect to business facing activity; new meanings are developing from new work. This is not a shared development of a single new understanding but rather replicates Fanghanel's (2007) work in showing a range of fluid and shifting identities.

The theme of becoming an academic has been a thread throughout the work, commencing with the individual responses summarised in Chapter 2 Figure 2, reappearing in Chapter 5 Figure 3. In the conclusions to Chapter 7 I discussed the range of different engagements assumed by participants as they engaged in various forms of business facing activity. There is a temptation to merely list the range of roles, responsibilities, activities and ways of working that may be included in the business facing portfolio but this does not address the key issue. The idea of academic identity as an individual construction, as discussed in 6.4, is an important

one; with fewer identity givens (Albert et al 2000) individuals are not able to rely on standardised models of what it is to be an academic.

My exploration leads to a need to articulate a different understanding of academic identities; the existing models are too narrowly dependent on a particular view of universities and the work within them. Teaching and research, even given the wider inclusion of activities discussed in Chapter 8.3, do not encompass the full gamut of academic work in a business-facing university in the 21st Century; the different nature of the business facing activity revealed in the study – the networking and translating, the creative approach to commercial work – is potentially denied. Developing a revised model of academic identity, merely making some alteration to the existing balance between teaching and research or adding business facing activity, is of little use as it does not allow for fluidity, meaning that in time, possibly in very short time, another shift will require further addition or alteration. In a complex environment with constant change, an unknowable future and challenge to the role of the university in society, an academic community able to sustain its position over time, maintaining a flexible and authentic engagement with the range of activities current in higher education, would be better positioned to survive. Rather than enumerating acceptable forms of academic behaviour, and encouraging further debate over the balance of specific activities, my proposition is that a new recognition of becoming an academic is needed. This is not a new model of academic identity; rather it is reconceptualising how academic identity is perceived and enacted in order to cope with an uncertain present and allow future transformations, as yet unknown and unimagined, to be incorporated. This encourages a focus on enabling the individual academic to secure a form of identity which can be established and developed as a career long project; my research offers a view of academic identity as a process – a way of becoming in the higher education environment.

It would be arrogant to suggest that in such a small scale, single institution enquiry I reach conclusions about academic identity per se, particularly as this is a contested field, containing a broad range of views as to what is important in terms of knowledge, philosophy and activity. Where boundaries between different elements of the academic role are drawn and re-drawn, what is acceptable and what must be rejected are speculated upon and argued over. My contention is that, rather than delineating and deciding in a protectionist manner, a more proactive and inclusive stance is needed to open up and explore the potential of academic identity at the individual level; enabling academics to have a clear purchase on their developing, distinctive academic identity and what this means in terms of working engagement. This in turn means that any, or indeed all, of the current considerations of academic identity may be relevant; the challenge is not to decide which is right but to enable, or more precisely ensure, a process of individual understanding. This is not in itself the solution; we then face the much greater challenge of allowing this individual understanding of multiple identities to influence engagement with academic work of all kinds.

9.4. What are the implications for academics, managers, the university and the sector?

A significant proportion of the academics in my sample fall into the category of mid-career learners identified by Eraut (1994) and discussed in Chapter 4. In terms of formal learning the traditional academic route – first degree, Master's degree and PhD – and incorporation into a university discipline is the path taken by some individuals. Others have moved through business or professional qualifications, arriving in the university with formal qualifications and a significant level of experience, possibly at a later career point. Further formal qualifications such as doctorate programmes are available but may not contribute directly to the development of academic practice with the business facing dimension. Explicit support for the development of practice through a focus on learning through work offers significant potential benefits for the

individual and for the business facing university, where new ventures require a changing skill set and expansion of the academic role. Established academics who have mastered the traditional elements of teaching and research are able to use the cognitive space identified by Billett (2004) to engage with new activities and develop their own, and consequently the university's, capacity to respond to the business facing agenda. The lack of knowledge of learning for the mid-career professional and the paucity of advice to managers about how best to ensure that individuals are able to engage effectively in innovative activities needs to be addressed at the individual, the managerial and the organisational level.

The relationship between the academic and the university is a reciprocal one; the affective commitment of the academic is important and requires identification with and involvement in the organisation. The shift to business facing activity has the potential to jeopardise this reciprocity as the university has changed its expectations and takes a risk that employees may not respond to this new positioning. The challenge for universities is to nurture and sustain individuals in the creation and understanding of academic identities. This requires a future facing, inclusive and innovative stance, resisting the temptation to judge current academic identities by the established notions of the past. If one accepts that 'the institutional frameworks in which it has been shaped have become less stable and cohesive' (Henkel 2005) there is a requirement to engage proactively with identity as an individual and open-ended project, accepting that engagement with the process, rather than establishment of definitive position, is the aim. This is not to suggest an endless process of staff development or professional conversation - although these have their place - but is rather about managers creating the enabling context, thinking differently about their staff, working with multiple and changing academic identities, not in the superficial sense of considering a CV before allocating tasks, but in knowing individual preferences and aspirations,

restrictions and talents. Management of academics involved in business facing activity requires a more flexible, trusting and individual approach than is traditionally seen in universities. Effective third stream academics are disposed to seek challenge as they proactively construct an interconnected set of activities that feed each other and provide satisfaction for the individual. The leadership challenge is to enable and support, providing subtle prompts and strategic steer rather than specific instruction, alongside an acceptance of the occasional failure.

Putting aside the need to define academic identity in relation only to the teaching/research continuum opens up potential for a different way of considering academic identities. There is no longer the need to try and compartmentalise particular activities, in fact the opposite – encouraging individual academics to seek synergies, overlaps and links in order to create their own seamless engagement. Although on the surface this may appear a 'soft' option this is an illusory notion; this is a challenging and demanding approach to managing academic work. My consideration of the context in enabling learning through work (4.4) suggests that it is the richness of environment, the range of opportunities and engagements available to individuals, that supports the potential for learning through work and thus for developing both practice and identity.

An understanding of academic identities is important for the individual, for groups, for departments and disciplines and for universities as a whole; the university community needs to surface this debate. A contested process to support individuals in locating academic identity in relation to self, discipline and institution, and hopefully in respect of a broader engagement with sector and society, requires commitment and enabling space; particularly as this is not a single positioning but is revisited and re-established on an ongoing basis.

To succeed in its stated aims of being a successful business facing university an affective commitment is needed from a substantial number

of academic staff in order that they will pursue the entrepreneurial activities and engagements to deliver on this strategy. It is not sufficient to merely assume that academics will pursue some of this work for their own ends; rather the institution has to seek ways in which to strengthen the relational contract with academics in order to build and retain the appropriate workforce for the present, and more importantly for the future.

> *... to have a university career will continue to mean different things to different people, and to shift and mutate to meet the ever-changing concerns and interests of the modern university. Old elites will, no doubt, continue to survive and flourish at the time that new institutional power bases will seek higher status within the new order. These in turn will continue to offer, for potential university workers, a heady yet confusing mix of career opportunities, the eventual destination of which is likely to be increasingly impossible to determine. (Weiner 1996:68)*

9.5. Changing academic identities

As I have explored the experience of business facing academics in a UK university I have discovered a great deal about the ways of being an academic and about myself as manager, academic and now researcher. The research process has not only enabled me to offer my contribution to knowledge, through the new understanding of academic identities, and my contribution to practice, in terms of the difference this needs to make to the management and leadership of academics, it has also provided the lived experience of changing academic identities on a personal level. I have learned through this process, been supported by the watchful and enabling university colleagues in my supervision team and strengthened my relational contract with the university as I have understood more about its business facing intentions. This thesis therefore offers an alternative management perspective founded on an understanding of changing academic identities and intended to enable and engage a 21st Century Higher Education workforce.

Appendix A Interview request and consent

Phase One interview request

Dear Colleague

As you may be aware I am studying with the first EdD cohort within the School of Education. I am embarking on some small scale research and am looking for volunteers from the School to be interviewed. If you feel able to help me in this way I would be most grateful but there is no requirement to do so.

My research at this stage has the theme of individual response to challenge and opportunity in the workplace. I would like to interview a small number of staff about their experience of work both in the School of Education and elsewhere with a focus on times when you have taken on a challenge or responsibility or developed an area of work activity. My intention is to do this through a semi-structured interview lasting a maximum of one hour, followed up by the provision of tape and transcript material to the interviewee for editing or comment.

It is important to stress that this research activity is not part of the management or appraisal process, what is said will be confidential and I will be operating within the university ethics guidelines set out in UPR AS/A/2. Should any matters arise which might impact normal working activity we will discuss and resolve this as a separate issue only if you wish to do so. Data arising from the interview will be coded anonymously for use in the research report.

If you would like to volunteer please fill in the form below and return in the envelope provided. If not please recycle the paper and envelope.

Phase One Consent Form

Name (please print) ……..

I am prepared to be interviewed on the basis outlined and understand that this will be managed within the UH ethical guidelines for research.

Following the interview I understand that I will be given the opportunity to listen to the tape and to read any transcript material and may at that stage provide further comment or feedback. I may also be asked to provide additional data after the interview but will have a choice as to whether or not to engage with this further activity.

Specifically I understand that this activity is not part of the managerial or appraisal processes in the School of Education/ and that I have full control of the amount and detail of the information I reveal to the interviewer. I also understand that data will be written up anonymously.

Signed …… Date ……

Please put this slip into the envelope provided and return to the school secretary by noon 31st January 2006.The envelopes will not be opened and I will select unopened envelopes to ensure that the sample for interview is chosen randomly from those who volunteer. The envelopes not chosen will be retained unopened in case of any unforeseen difficulties, such as absence, with the selected volunteers and if necessary a further selection will be made at a later date. I will let all staff know by email when the selection has been finalised so that you will know whether or not you are required. Once the interviews have been carried out I will destroy any remaining unopened envelopes.

Thank you very much for volunteering. If you are not called upon this time to take part in the research there are likely to be future occasions and I hope you will consider volunteering again.

Phase Two interview request

Dear .....

As part of the research for my EdD I am interested in academics who are working successfully in third stream activity and I am writing to ask whether you would allow me to interview you? I would expect this to take no more than an hour and to be focused on your experience as an academic in this arena. Nothing for you to prepare and questions very open.

Obviously if you are able to agree I will send you the formal consent form to make clear that this is a process of research and not connected to my managerial role.

If you are able to help please let me have a couple of preferred time slots in March. For me 3rd March, 5th March in the morning and 16th March are looking good opportunities at present but feel free to suggest others to suit you.

Phase Two consent form

Name (please print) ……..

I am prepared to be interviewed on the basis outlined and understand that this will be managed within the UH ethical guidelines for research.

Following the interview I understand that I will be given the opportunity to listen to the tape and to read any transcript material and may at that stage provide further comment or feedback. I may also be asked to provide additional data after the interview but will have a choice as to whether or not to engage with this further activity.

Specifically I understand that this activity is not part of the managerial or appraisal processes in the university and that I have full control of the amount and detail of the information I reveal to the interviewer. I also understand that data will be written up anonymously.

Signed …… Date …….....

Appendix B Deborah's story

Continuous prose version of interview

Deborah's story

Deborah is a dynamic, straight talking; enthusiastic lecturer who approaches work with a total commitment to the student experience and an impatience to shift university systems and processes to help the kinds of activities she is involved with. She uses her substantial experience of business to support and inspire not only the students she works with but the business partners who offer placements. Her approach is a can do, fast paced engagement with a wide range of activities and she describes herself as a 'company girl'. Here is her story.

I don't think I've ever been a standard undergraduate academic because right from the get go, because of my business experience; there was always a push toward the business element rather than the research. So straight off it was trying to understand what learning and teaching was about. What it should be - not what ancient academics were trying to tell me or not tell me. It's very hard to find out what you should be doing if you've got no experience. The Business Partnership Office (BPO) was quite keen to make sure I was on I10 expertise database straight away so I went straight into a KEEP programme which is the one year funded where we employ an associate and they work in the company. I was involved in that in the first year and since then it's been KTP applications which is the two year funded programmes. What I do on the business side is always about keeping in touch with employers.

With teaching I think I got away lightly the first semester and then by the second I was module leader, but I've also been working on curriculum development. With the teaching and business side of it that gives me quite a gamut of things to do. Curriculum development was part of my experience so it wasn't just ad hoc there was a bit of reasoning behind it. So I had the business facing thing of trying to see where we were, where we could fit our course in, what was the market but linked to that also franchising it to Hong Kong. I do the business element of a module so the students have to prepare a business plan and present it and we encourage them to enter the Shell Livewire competition. Then I went on to do the career skills development because I'm a great believer in the industrial placement. I believe in it from my experience - that's how I did it - and also as an employer I recognised the difference between people who had gone through that avenue and not. When I see the

students on their final year project who have done industrial placement you do see the difference amazingly.

There was always a sense in the School that employability skills were embedded in the course, because of the industrial placement, the guest speakers, the technical nature; because we're project based for a lot of our teaching with contact with outside industry. There's been quite a number of KTPs so again that means that lecturers are going out into industry and bringing back ideas, keeping in touch with the right thing. So there was a bit of a knee jerk reaction to try and bring a module to show that we really are doing employability the same as the business school or wherever. The students have to start looking at skills, very basic nothing too strenuous but it's kind of seeping in. I'm doing it because I was always the change manager in industry. I was a change consultant for a long time so it's always been my job. I've seen the opportunity, although I don't think my university managers realised, but the guy who organises the business contacts and makes sure that the people are matched up with the right job did. He instantly put me on because I said I didn't want to do research, not the type of research that was being conducted, it really didn't interest me at all.

When you go out with the KTPs the BPO escort you there. I think they're scared to let you out alone because I suppose everybody's got different skill levels and different personalities and you can imagine some academics being quite reticent. Then you also got that bit from the employers which I used to have; "here comes an academic. He can tell you the square root of a jar of marmalade but he can't open it and spread it." I know all these comments; when working in business there is that sense of nothing practical can come out of contact with a university. So there is that little touch of that when you first get there and then the BPO person learnt to shut up and let me talk so that I can say "oh you've got customer problems and your suppliers do this to you and that to you". It's more about empathising with the realities of their day to day life and if you empathise with them and they think you know what they're talking about, or you give a couple of good examples, then you can go into the how we can help you.

I've definitely added skills through this work, like realising I don't have ownership for each of my students submitting something. I have to let go and let them do it, whereas at first I was saying "if you do it this way". I've certainly learnt that you go in with advice and help but you can't do it for them. I can't finish it for them. I've had to let it go. I've had to say

what I'm expecting to be done and what we've both agreed together and then take a step back to make sure I'm seeing the whole picture to give the right advice and not getting embroiled in the nitty gritty. I think I have learnt to support rather than do.

I did spend time with the business partnership office because I like to know what I'm getting myself into. I go round and ask stupid questions. I'm nosy but I had to go on the website and sort it out and understand where the funding came from because I like to know. Maybe other people wouldn't but I like to know the detail. At first everybody went 'oh KTP is fine don't worry about it.' Heard that before! I'll go and have a wee look. Then you find that you have to prepare an application and you go through this pain. Very much like research; you go through the pain of application and getting it knocked back and then you get a whole list of rules and seminars and workshops and how many times they'll come and check. I was surprised.

I really like working with the companies. I like to see the successes of the projects and the potential that some of them have and it's my chance to keep in with the terminology, with the manufacturing. It's like lecturing I do think you get the confidence of talking to groups of people, and maybe the fear that they know more than you, but you get over that and you start saying but I'm here to talk about this and to help you get over it. I'm not here to drill it into you, I'm here to try and get you to think about these things and unravel it a little bit. It's definitely about persuasion. Teenagers respond to persuasion better than telling and so do most men that are involved in the manufacturing industry. I'm quite confident to go out and talk knowledgeably but the skills have always been with me, that's the way I've always been. I've only developed by different experiences and responding to different situations and experiences. The first KTP project I sat up till one in the morning getting this application ready and the first thing an associate does is write a new one. Drives you nuts but now I know what I have to do. It's the overview not the detail, taking a step back.

I think what I'm interested in is how we're helping people. If the university says we want more third stream funding of various kinds do we actually know what kind of staff we should appoint? What do those people need to be like to do that kind of work? It does worry me when you hear that a colleague has gone out and you think 'oh am I going to get that one?' And I'm usually right - especially with the finicky worriers

who see all the black side and tell the employer. The other bit I've learnt is not to say 'of course we can do that' which is what I used to be like. I'd take stuff on then go 'gulp I can't quite do that.' Now I'm a bit more guarded and not over the top about it and say I'm sure we could look into it and debate whether or not it's feasible. I think you've really got to have that empathy and understanding and not just from books. You can't do it from articles or what you read in the paper. It has to be real life and the ability to bring it back to the first priorities is really what you want. It's the same as consultancy. You go in and you could sell anybody anything because they don't know what they want. They pay you a lot of money to tell them what they already knew but they just haven't had the time to sit there and see the wood for the trees. The core things that you should be concentrating on to get the most benefit you tend to need somebody to come in to tell you that because they're not embroiled in it so it needs to be more the consultant type.

To be honest I don't know how success is measured because you work in isolation. I don't know what others are doing unless I ask them which I thought was quite interesting. It was getting a bit better but I've been here three years nearly and I've had three offices and three bosses. I did find it spooky at first how alone you are, how isolated, or it could be that it's just me wanting to do it all for myself.

The administration is tedious to say the least and not the reason I'm on this earth. That's what frustrates employers. I do empathise but again there are rules and procedures for reasons. Very frustrating. It's just the usual university thing of three bits of red tape instead of one - it's intensive. You do have to go and find out and you start going round the admin offices and they go 'I've never come across that' 'we don't do that' 'we don't touch that' and so you've just got to find your way. There is probably a procedure for it I just don't know what it is. I hate not having it resolved. To me it's a very simple thing - I don't create further blockages in this tedious process. You might as well knuckle down and find out how to do it and phone up folk. You start finding people who know stuff and are approachable. It's weird but that's the way it is because I've got no authority over anything or anybody. So I use the skills of a consultant because I have no authority. Absolutely none. Now I reflect on it I'm going to retire. It's too much like hard work!

Some of my colleagues don't do it and it's fine but I like to achieve and I like to get things done. The feedback I've had from other people has been that I'm doing too much and shouldn't get so engaged but they're just

people I work with I don't like that level of non-engagement, I can't do it. There's no point even sitting debating it with myself you know it's just not on. I still use my mentor from my first year here. He's a good sounding board and generally calms me down or agrees with me. I must admit the academic life where you get this break thing has been a revelation because I worked for American companies so you got two holidays a year. Before I came here I used to work at Amazon and Christmas Day and New Years Day were the only holidays you were guaranteed to get. Everything else was negotiable and it was only twenty days a year. It was shift system 24-7 and you wondered why you were doing eighty hours because the place never shut. I got off that merry go round.

I suppose I'm very much a company girl so the strategy and objectives that are defined for me as the mission and value statements of the School, the faculty, the university are important. I tend to think if I want a job here I should be doing that and part of it is they want you to be research, teaching or business facing. I was aware of that and I did want to keep up the interest with business that was important that there would be opportunity to do that.

An interesting thing I did recently was actually fill out an employment form so that I had it in case something came up internally and I thought fill it out then you've got it there and you can think about it. When I filled it in I thought I'm doing too much, I can't do anything else. I don't want to be in that place where I'm not doing very well because I'm doing too much.

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