

The Automation Game: perceptions on the impact of the changes on business school tutors' roles and identity during the introduction of technological student retention activities: an 'unbundled' HE.

This paper demonstrates the importance of considering lived experiences of adjunct teaching staff during the introduction of automated student messaging services in a UK Business School. With cost-orientated moves to expanding online provision through emergent technologies and the growth of alternative HE strategies, such as credit-bearing MOOCs, traditional group-orientated student and tutor interactions are developing into a continuum. Whilst automated messages, in aiming to increase retention, have standardised the student experience in terms of academic qualification communications, these messages have necessarily required adjunct teaching staff to learn new processes, thus unlearning previous pedagogical support routines and this has altered their academic role and their perception of their academic identity. This research was undertaken using focus groups with adjunct teaching staff, which were transcribed and analysed using content analysis with the project aim of uncovering the effect on their unlearning and learning processes, changes to their role and in consequence their perception of their academic identity. The investigation adds to emerging literature by examining these processes during this period of change and its impact on a group of adjunct teaching staff. the outcome of the change initiative. Study into these changes to academic routines and identity has value, as the shifts in perceived identity demonstrate a tangible impact on the teaching staffs' motivation; their role and perception of their identity and has resulted in resistance to change. This project adds to the literature as much existing retention literature privileges the institutional or student experience, and much of learning / unlearning literature is in a non-educational setting, therefore combined with academy identity this give insight into the values of developing an institutional inclusive culture during change processes.

Keywords: academic identity; unlearning; change

Word count:

Introduction

A proliferation in technological enhancements coupled with new UK governmental funding regimes has led many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to seek a route to quality, mass-customised learning provision for student retention support in what Laurillard (2011) has identified as ‘affordable and acceptable ways’. In facilitating this outcome, they are engaging with student data and learning analytics tools with the aim of cost-effective improvements to retention and support. The particular relevance of these tools to the distance learning (DL) marketplace is discussed by Inkelaar and Simpson (2015), whilst the attractiveness of these managerial strategies is indicated by reports on technologically-driven retention activities, which have multiplied in recent years. This is both from Government perspectives e.g. Browne et al. (2008), Venit, US Education Advisory Board (2009) and from individual HEIs, for example, Long and Siemens (2011), Pistilli et al (2012) Ferguson (2012), Slade and Prinsloo (2013).

The UK Distance Learning Market currently accounts for around 80,000 FTE students, 6% of the total HE market (OU UK Undergraduate Product Strategy, 2014). The X University attracted 73,232 FTE DL students during the academic year 2012/2013, which is a significant percentage of this market. With the advent of changes within the UK HE marketplace, in particular issues around the increase of student loans in England in 2012, the part time (PT) undergraduate (UG) sector declined by around 20%. However, with the recent fanfare around credit-bearing MOOCs, and associated promises to offer ‘more efficient, competitive and learner-focussed study options’ (Peter Horrocks, VC, Open University, in Weale, 2016) this marketplace continues to appear challenging, as well as offering opportunity, to incumbents.

Hence, in 2014, with the rationale of offering equivalence in the student experience and making cost savings by utilizing call centre technologies and freeing up tutors for more complex pedagogical work, the X, who adopt a blended learning model, launched a programme of automated student support messaging. These interventions are sent as emails to students for both proactive and reactive study support based on analytics information, such as for missed assignments or offering generalised study advice. The X Business School took the opportunity to particularly focus this rolling programme of automated messages on its introductory degree-level business and management modules. This was due in part to the size of the faculty undergraduate introductory level intake (c. 6000 students p.a.) and existing faculty retention studies (see Stephens and Myers, 2014) indicating that the introductory courses have the greatest number of student withdrawals. Historically, the responsibility for ensuring that students submitted assignments on time and identifying those students at risk of withdrawal was part of the remit of the adjunct tutor. Institutional experience also suggests students will also be in need of the greatest amount of pastoral care, as well as general learning support, during their early modules.

However, whilst the benefits as well as contradictions (e.g. Laurillard, 2007) for cost-effective administration of university teaching, more information on student behaviour that enables greater support (see e.g. Prinsloo and Slade, 2016) and the prospect of a neoliberalistic future that offers to ‘unbundle UK higher education and

give more control to students' (Weale, 2016) has been highlighted, notably the tension at play between mass customisation, standardisation and individual student needs (for further discussion see Bates 2015, 2016.). The majority of this emergent literature appears aligned to institutional perspectives and the student experience rather than narratives grounded in the identity processes of tutors.

Brown et al (2010) acknowledge the major issue of casualization of university teaching, reporting on the “flexibilized factory” and recent Australian debates on rationalisation and managerialism in the system. Their study recognizes a divide mirrored in the wider economy of a gulf between a relatively secure manager class and growing numbers of casual workers, albeit highly educated professionals, pointing to the gendered nature of this division. Brown et al cite the Bradley Report (Bradley et al, 2008: 23, 71) which stated that ‘sessional staff experience income insecurity, workloads beyond their paid hours, and feelings of isolation from the university community’.

From the UK perspective, the marketisation of HE in the wake of US developments and its (correctly) predicted increase is described by Bryson (2004). Casual teaching in higher education in the UK has entered the mainstream political landscape; with e.g. Chakraborty and Weale (2016) discussing an academic “Sports Direct” model in *The Guardian* and campaigning by Unions (see also UCU annual report 2016-7).

The adjunct tutor experience of these online automated messaging options is important, given that with the advent of credit-bearing MOOCs and technologically enhanced initiatives such as Edinburgh University’s *Teacherbot* (see Bayne, 2015), boundaries between learning approaches and lecturer involvement in distance and online HE are becoming fuzzy, with student and adjunct tutor interaction levels on different courses now emerging as a continuum dependent upon student choices. Many of these initiatives then have an impact on adjunct tutor practices, with changes being imposed by new technological frameworks and impacting established, personalised teaching-related routines (Akgün et al. 2007). A large proportion of these changes and standardisations can be viewed in light of the wider HE governance literature, where Universities have been perceived to be growing more managerialised, with coherence emerging around principles of efficiency, productivity, and commercial focus at the expense of a ‘romanticised’ historical collegiality and academic autonomy. (For a detailed discussion on this apparent dichotomy, and analysis of definitions, see Tight, 2014: 295). These ideas, coupled with what Knights and Clarke (2014: 335) have identified in practice as the ‘proliferation of managerialist controls of audit, accountability, monitoring and performativity’, these changes to practice may have significant effects on adjunct tutor behaviours, and subsequently, their identity, particularly in light of where managerialism in Universities has been cited as a factor in the changing role of adjuncts (Bilsberry, 2014; Lawrence & Sharma, 2002; White et al., 2011; Winter, 2009).

Typically students receive these automated messages orientated toward student support at the start of each module on the degree programme, as each assignment due date draws near, and, for those not submitting on time, as a reminder. Towards the end of the module, students also receive automated exam support messages, and reminders to re-register. Additionally, students receive operationally focussed messages orientated towards loan system checking. Messaging systems were introduced as part of a more

comprehensive change to university organisation, with adjunct tutors additionally receiving ‘dashboards’ showing student interaction online, and these were supported with the introduction of a centralised call centre, as a one stop shop for student facing services aligned to a particular faculty.

Whilst one of the proposed benefits for adjunct tutors was the intent to lessen the administrative burden of tracking student submissions, with the advent of the intervention programme of automated student messaging, our aim was to investigate how adjunct tutors were perceiving these changes to their pedagogic routines, and how this might affect existing relationships with students, administrators and management involved in the change. The objective was to understand what pedagogic and administrative practices they might need to *unlearn* (e.g. Hedberg, 1981, Akgün et al. 2007, Tsang and Zahra 2008, Hislop et al. 2014) to effectively work with the automated messaging system and supporting call centre technologies and what changes to their routines and behaviour might be needed to take advantage of time released to focus on more complex individual student needs and ultimately understand the impact this has on their perception of their own academic identity.

A series of focus groups were therefore undertaken over the first year of the initiative around adjunct tutors’ perceptions of the new processes. Empirical work was undertaken in tandem with an iterative approach consulting the literature as themes emerged from discussions.

Definitions in use in this paper

Whilst UK universities use a proliferation of titles to identify staff on heterogeneous fixed-term, flexible or temporary contracts (e.g. sessional or variable-hours tutors), for the purposes of this study, the language used reflects the terms in use at the institution. Adjunct staff at the University are formally known as Associate Lecturers, ALs or tutors, and are characterised by having rolling fixed term contract(s) to teach on a module(s), subject to fluctuations in student numbers annually, and are distinct from those on permanent contracts. (For recent clarification on these issues in the UK, see Bryson and Barnes, 2015). Their roles have been defined for many years as academic support working with students’ cognitive needs in learning, i.e tuition, and non-academic support- working with students’ organisational and emotional issues around learning. The role in this paper is defined as what the adjunct tutor *does*, a prescribed or expected behaviour associated with the position in the organisation.

Literature Review

Learning and Unlearning

The concept of *unlearning* has been explicitly paired with *learning* since Hedberg (1981: 3), who proposed, drawing from initial studies undertaken by Garfinkel (1967) that: ‘...this discarding activity – unlearning – is as important a part of understanding as is adding new knowledge’.

This, and other subsequent contributions, forms two intertwining bodies of work

regarding learning and unlearning; organizational, and individual, as tabulated by Hislop et al. (2014: 543). However both Akgün et al (2007) and Tsang and Zahra (2008) highlight that unlearning understanding has 'languished' (Tsang and Zahra, 2008: 1435), referring to casual mentions in the literature, rather than clear articulation of the concept. They highlight the notable exception of Nystrom and Starbuck (1984), who 'proffer that unlearning is a precondition for organisational learning' (cited, p.1436). Tsang and Zahra additionally highlight the contribution of Huber (1991) to the privileging of learning status through the conceptual subsuming of unlearning. This is despite Hedberg's initial classification, (see p. 1449), who also leaned the larger part of his discussion towards learning to the detriment of a more thorough exploration of unlearning as a process.

In their typology, Tsang and Zahra (2008) set out three distinct types of change which they characterized as; episodic change (infrequent and discontinuous), ostensive change (via a set of written procedures and practices), and performative change (to actual routines of implementation). Hislop et al. (2014: 547), and Turc and Baumard (2007), all observe close links between organizational change including specific unlearning phases, which are perceived as essential for facilitating adaptive behaviour. Hedberg (1981:18) posits that 'organizations learn and unlearn via their members'. The impact of individual level unlearning on organizations has however, been perceived as 'difficult, challenging and time consuming', Hislop et al. (2014: 548).

Tsang and Zahra's definition of organizational unlearning 'discards' (see p.1437) old routines; and the authors highlight the implication of intention in this choice of word, seeking to strengthen this conscious choice through their table of definitions, drawing a clear distinction between intentional unlearning and unintentional forgetting (see p. 1441). Much of the unlearning literature indicates that organizational unlearning impacts processes as part of personal and institutional change; for mature organizations, (which would include much of HE) routines are indicated as more entrenched.

Whilst Akgün et al. (2007), Tsang and Zahra (2008), and Hislop et al. (2014) all make important theoretical contributions toward surfacing this neglected area and positioning it within the wider organizational change literature, drawing in, for example the work of Weick and Quinn (1999) in distinguishing 'change that is continuous, evolving and incremental, and change that is episodic, discontinuous and intermittent' (p.1446), each of these papers focusses on a typology. Hislop et al (2014), in particular, draw attention to the research gap in empirical study, acknowledging the research of Rushmer and Davies (2004), whose thoughtful contribution to the relevance of unlearning to healthcare professionals underpins the value of these conceptual ideas. They write: 'We speculate that unlearning is a distinct process; usually not spontaneous; has a varying nature; and should form a pivotal part of the management of professional practice where risk minimisation is critical' (Rushmer and Davies, 2004, ii 10). They see a major challenge to healthcare quality in getting people to stop doing things, as well as learning new ideas and practices. It has been asserted that business schools lack a culture of reflexivity (Solitander et al 2012; Antonacopoulou, 2010) but that questioning of current practice is required if the organisation itself is to unlearn (Hibbert, 2012).

Three distinct types of unlearning are proposed by Rushmer and Davies (2004), and subsequently developed by Hislop et al (2014), and are identified as fading, wiping and

deep unlearning. However, fading, as routine unlearning, is seen as unconscious, and therefore forgetting, and not considered as part of active, intentional unlearning. The two remaining categorisations in this typology are ‘wiping’ and ‘deep unlearning’, where the definition of wiping is typically focussed on conscious attempts to give up particular ideas or behaviour. For deep unlearning, this is seen as emotionally affective learning, although without empirical data, Hislop et al are dependent upon examples offered by Rushmer and Davies, and distinctions may appear to be artificially imposed in practice. Whilst healthcare and higher education offer different functions, there would appear to be enough similarity between large-scale public sector bodies, with high numbers of professional staff, for the use of this framework to be applicable to this investigation.

A final area of interest is explored via ideas around ‘resistance’ (p.554) and unlearning; Hislop et al (2014) highlight neglect in this area of academic study which may be made around ‘the assumption that people will embrace wiping-type unlearning relatively willingly’ (p.554). The work of Philo and Miller (2000) in their challenge to social scientists may also be relevant for further exploration, in highlighting the question of ‘subversion’ – in this context if adjunct tutors choose to ignore the automated messages in their teaching practice, and this may ‘lead to a critique of the system’ (p.838) via a passive, if not active, resistance.

Academic Identity

A key concept for evolving academic identity is the link to developing managerialism in Higher Education. This has been particularly recognised in Business Schools, e.g. see Knights and Clarke, (2014: 339) in their discussion of externally imposed institutional audit footprints such as student satisfaction surveys (NSS) and quality assessment audits, (QAA), although their sector-level discussion does not include metrics aimed at the individual teaching practitioner in HE (for example this would typically include marking turnaround, online effectiveness and student satisfaction surveys). Berg et al. (2013:383) write about how, of late, ‘...private sector practices of accountability, audit, control and surveillance have proliferated in the public sector’.

This paper supports the notion that identity is multiple, and can be relatively fluid, which is particularly relevant to a study of unlearning by adjunct tutors during a period of transitions in Higher Education. As individuals we embody multiple identities (lecturer, partner, sister, son etc.), and these can change significantly over our lives and academic careers, so any study on unlearning during academic change should necessarily encompass the notion of workplace identity. Here, the term workplace identity is used to refer to adjunct tutors own definition of themselves in a work related context i.e., the attributes, groups, roles and professional/occupational experiences we use to define ourselves in an employee role (Schein, 1978). While acknowledging the concept of multiple, shifting identities, some identities are more central to our self-definition, and are more embedded and valued in our daily life, while others are only relevant in specific contexts and situations such as our professional lives (see Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Ebaugh, 1988). Workplace identities are characterized by a greater degree of reflection and intensity, particularly at times of change; reflecting the degree of effort we make within the role itself and the integration between self and role (Ebaugh, 1988. Workplace identity transition refers to the process of questioning, and

eventually disengaging from a central identity while exploring and eventually integrating another, and has some parallels with the process of unlearning (Ibarra, 2005).

This paper is therefore situated within transitions in workplace identity and identity processes (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). It builds on key insights from several emergent threads from this literature and previous empirical work (Myers et al, 2015; Collins et al, 2016), notably the concept that while unlearning and learning take place adjunct tutors experiment within their role with provisional selves that serve as a test for possible, tentative workplace identities, (concurring with Ibarra, 1999). As raised by Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufman, (2006), Baumeister, (1986) and Gioia and Thomas, (1996) adjunct tutors also actively engage in identity work to stake out, alter and test the boundaries of their identities in a shifting HEI environment. These authors established that we construct identities by situated, social action, and that what we desire in our future rather than our present identity is the lens by which we interpret current events and decide upon our actions. Ibarra, (2005) extended this thinking by focusing attention on identities situated in the future, i.e., possible selves, and explicating the processes that move the conspicuous hierarchies that organize them, and in addition proposed ways in which buffering and narrative push a transitory workplace identity from early explorations through to an altered workplace identity without formal rites of passage. The focus within this paper is within the concept of identity but more specifically academic identity. Quigley, (2011), highlighted the issue with the term academic identity in that the term 'lacks precision in terms of description and cannot therefore be summed up in a few sentences'. He posited that in order to achieve an understanding of academic identity we need to deconstruct the concept of academic ontology (how academics come to be) in order to understand "how academics might form epistemologies (how academics come to know)". Identity refers to the enduring beliefs, values, motives and experiences that are characteristic of individuals who enact the same professional role (Ibarra, 1999). As faculty work within their role, they are influenced by both the academic aspect of their identity and as managerialism comes into play they are affected by the contradictions and conflicts that arise from what can be competing identity claims (Henkel, 2000). Academic identity refers in this paper to the extent to which an individual defines themselves as a member of a profession (Ibarra, 1999; Raelin, 1986). Although adjunct tutors have both an administrative and a professional identity, Winter, R. (2009) argued managerialism itself creates the conditions by which an individual will try to align themselves with the organisation, which is a form of managerial identity or will try to separate their academic selves from the organisation, maintaining their academic identity. This process of aligning values and separating values are integral to academic identity formation (Foreman & Whetten, 2002).

Academic identity is based on achieving an ideological rewards, such as the value of an academic community of practice, respects, and professional autonomy (Ramsden, 1998). Academic identity is also based on the acquisition of qualifications, knowledge and skills that equip an academic to self-regulate their job performance (O'Neill & Meek, 1994). These beliefs, norms and values are enshrined in discipline based work structures that govern the content and process of academic work (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Organisational statements or actions, such as in this case that are perceived to run counter to these ideals and emotional buy in defended rigorously by academics, as they are often central to the individuals values and identity (Nixon, 1996; Parker & Jary, 1995).

Collins (2013) discusses recent changes in the HE environment and the introduction of new procedures (e.g. automated messaging processes) that may erode collegiate cultures, thus challenging traditional ideas of academic identity and associated ways of working. This supports earlier work on new managerial approaches in the sector by Goolnik (2012:19), which highlights academics feelings of mistrust and of professionally and personally unfulfilled selves emerging from change programmes. This is particularly apparent in a distance learning setting with synchronous and asynchronous interactions between adjunct tutors and other faculty staff, students, and administrators.

Although detailed identity studies have produced classifications of alternative selves (Obodaru, 2012), threatened selves (Petriglieri, 2011) and narrative selves (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010); for the purposes of this paper, we adopt Clarke and Knight's (2015:15) assertion that, 'instead of presenting 'resistant' selves, academics are inclined to comply with or conform to the demands of the performance culture...' Studies such as Hinings, (2005) suggest that academics are increasingly pressurized to consider the way they think and behave as more managerial cultures develop, and to reflect on the organizational rather than necessarily pedagogical, aspects of tutor delivery.

Research Gap

This paper is attempting to address two distinct research gaps, firstly in the field of technologically driven retention activities, where articulation of institutional and student perspectives appears privileged over the reporting of adjunct tutors' actual teaching experiences. Secondly, from the *unlearning* perspective, as the majority of extant contributions tend towards theoretically orientated typologies, rather than empirically led investigations. Distinct from much of the research around organizational unlearning in conjunction with identity, this investigation was undertaken within an HE institution.

This combined undertaking is valuable to study, as with the emergent continuum of varying student and tutor interaction in online learning away from the traditional supported small group, and the advent of technological interventions, academics will undergo many changes to their traditional roles. For instance, Weale (2016) comments on the trialling of modules through MOOC platforms for students; if successful, this will necessarily mean the greatest impact of variations on a continuum of involvement will be felt by introductory module tutors. How the institution utilises adjunct tutors to bridge the transition between attraction to, and transition to successful study will be key.

Approach Taken and Methods of Analysis

The aim of this research is to add to emerging literature by examining the process of unlearning and identity using a sample of introductory module teaching faculty within Business and Law. Impressions were collated over a 12 month period whilst the HEI introduced automated student support systems. The objectives were to evaluate, using qualitative methodologies, adjunct tutors' perceptions of these automated messages and of the potential impact on and changes to their role and identity as tutors including the learning and unlearning around automated messaging and their associated impact on both their pedagogic routines and student retention.

We decided to use a focus group approach to draw upon participants' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. Therefore, themed focus groups were selected as an appropriate method of eliciting views on adjunct tutors' work in supporting students and possible impact of new learning interventions on the tutor role as well as on student experience. This was also because our research questions were quite generic and we wanted to allow the participant to take the discussion in the direction they feel appropriate. We decided not to introduce direct questions about feeling and emotion for that reason, A group of six Business and Law adjunct tutors teaching introductory undergraduate modules were engaged with the project, and were given preparatory copies of organisational strategy and change documents beforehand to inform and support their continued contributions to the group. (These papers included the original confidential proposals to the University Senate, and the rationales behind the proposed changes, including cost savings, estimates on retention rate improvements and the final reports from institutional piloting).

Participants were selected on the basis of substantial teaching experience with introductory level students, and to ensure a representative of each module. To ensure fuller understanding, all had held their part-time, fixed term tutoring contracts for a number of years prior to the study (although, additionally some also held down other substantive posts elsewhere, such as with other HEIs, in industry or as consultants).

Opinions were explored over the period through a series of telephone, online and face-to-face focus groups. Discussions evolved depending upon interviewees' experiences, producing data around topics including student focus, changes to tutor role, managerial communication, student services, and evaluation. Verbatim transcripts were subsequently coded and evaluated independently by the four researchers, to identify dominant themes with the results then synthesized into a group response. Analysis was grounded in the words and reported experiences of participants. Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework was adopted to support theme triangulation, qualitatively evaluating perceptions of potential impact on and changes to their role around automated student interventions, both in the lead up to, and following, the introduction of these interventions. Data were stored and manipulated via Nvivo10 to identify common word and phrase choices by participants.

Therefore, research objectives for the focus groups were set out as follows:

- What were the adjunct tutors' first impressions of what the University is trying to achieve through automated messages to students?
- What else would they like to know to help them support this programme?
- What would the focus group like to see in any future iterations of the automated messaging programme?
- What perceptions did they have of any impact to their own role, and any changes they would like to discuss?

Finally, some secondary analysis of insights into effects of these changes to routines on individual academic identities as tutors are included, as this has been an area identified as worthy of future study aligned to changes in the roles of introductory level

adjunct tutors.

Main Findings

Focus group discussions centred on the four questions around what tutors thought of the new ways of working, the various ways that adjuncts might unlearn and learn new processes/procedures in the future and perceptions of what this might mean for their own roles. However, data here are presented via three emergent and overlapping strands of thematic responses offered: practical responses to working with automated technologies, applications for working with introductory level students, and changes to the perceived core role of an adjunct tutor.

As adjunct tutors had been given strategic and operational documents as part of the investigation and invited to share their opinions for the first time via the research process (which can be seen as an example of ostensive change in itself), the overarching purpose of the focus group idea was very well received by participants; for example, one commented positively on the opportunity to input in “any meaningful way” rather than just report back.

Whilst the following discussion partially reflects the typological criteria of Hislop et al (2014) of fading, wiping and deep unlearning, a conscious choice not to adopt a priori theoretical approaches to coding data was taken. This was largely as the introduction of automated student support messages and work with a supporting call centre can be categorised as episodic change (as per Tsang and Zahra, 2008), and therefore conditions for fading were not applicable to this project.

Practical responses to working with automated technologies

Many of the findings categorised in this area reflect the articulated, conscious responses offered by participants, the ‘wiping’ (Hislop et al, 2014) that represents a conscious effort to stop certain intellectual and practical routines also known as ‘directed unlearning’ or ‘behavioural unlearning’ in Rushmer and Davies (2004), and their subsequent replacement by new procedures or routines.

Contributions here included participants’ suggestions for changes to working with automated interventions, mentoring other adjuncts, peer monitoring, working with Blackboard Collaborate recordings, adjunct staff development events and networking. Participants reported past good practice identified with sending out their own emails if a student failed to submit an assignment on time; however, with the confidence that the organization would send a reminder intervention message, adjuncts indicated they would then choose to call or text as alternative use of their time. One in particular was very enthusiastic about time freed up away from the ‘*admin burden*’, saying:

‘I think it’s fantastic. I read through the interventions and I looked at how they work with my weekly group email messages to my students, and it just means that some of the kind of well not necessarily administrative, more progress issues can be dealt with which is just fantastic and I can spend some time with other students doing something else that’s more in line with my kind of academic role.’

Another could see positive benefits, but recognized there would be work needed in their own role to make best use of the new technology and support to best effect:

‘...it’s quite a job of work for me to go through each of these interventions [for] modules and carefully think about what I actually want to say to supplement those messages and not duplicate them, because I read a few of them and I thought oh well that means I don’t have to send this in now.’

Whilst other comments in this vein showed the automated messaging system receiving broad support in principle, there was less qualified approval, and lack of confidence expressed for the partnership with call centre technologies. Supporting proposals offered by Hislop et al (2014:554) that not all individuals would embrace wiping of existing routines willingly, some comments indicated resistance to purported benefits of saving academic time through partnering with the call centre, with one participant confirming strongly their identification with the wider AL community through the following statement (which received general agreement from the group):

‘[An] AL feels a very strong ownership of their 20 plus people [students] and a determination to drive those through and they feel sceptical that somebody who’s contacting 100 people in that day will have that same commitment to get hold of that person you know come hell or high water.’

Additionally, another tutor remarked that although:

‘I’ve had some very good experience with Learner Support, for example with those ...[assignment] things where between us we’ve helped negotiate retaining people who might otherwise have been lost in the ether....’

They considered that the wider institutional targets for completion of contact emails and calls to vulnerable students were less ambitious than those they set themselves when they tried to remain in contact with every student in their group, and feeling *‘disappointed with yourself if you haven’t retained [your students]’*. Scepticism of being able to *‘rely’* on a call centre approach, and the need for good collaboration was also articulated.

Much of the focus group material around practical responses to new ways of working with these technologies suggested that during the implementation stage episodic change tended to be focussed around discussions of changes to student support, study skills support and peer working benefits rather than more formal teaching and assessment practice. As these areas did not feature strongly in responses at this stage, implications for assessment practice appear unchanged for adjunct tutors at this time.

Applications for working with introductory level students

As would be expected from a group of tutors teaching introductory level modules, many of the emergent discussions in the focus group centred on potential changes to their role in supporting the particular needs of this cohort of students. However this theme also dealt with the introduction of the technological tools which replaced a high percentage of the additional pastoral care a level one tutor is normally responsible for. As participants knew they had been selected due to particular strategic faculty focus: e.g. *‘Where could we make the biggest difference?’* (X Undergraduate Faculty Academic Lead, and project sponsor), large sections of discussion centred on study skills and pastoral needs early on in the student journey. This emerged as two themes, the first few weeks of study (for example, how students start with part time distance learning, and applicability of business studies to their lives and jobs), and at the intersection in

transitioning from the introductory level modules to level 5 study. However, the question of responsibility was linked throughout both themes.

In terms of unlearning pedagogic practices during the early window of student support in introductory modules, participants raised concerns about information overload in terms of support emails from the institution and tutors:

'I'm going to have to change my practices so that [introductory students] don't become overwhelmed.'

Participants acknowledged that the work done on automated interventions so far was good practice in terms of bolstering administrative and pastoral support for these students. There were strong perceptions of early '*quick wins*' with introductory level students from the application of support interventions. However there were detailed discussions around making the most of innovative approaches, and what benefits the technology could have for developing study skills at the next phase of implementation.

Recommendations for support from the institution requested from participants included a shared online forum specific to introductory level tutors, and a need for a critical mass of '*people willing to get engaged*' in changing support practices. From two participants with significant experience in other HEIs, there was also a consideration that learning skills presented through automated interventions needed to be systematically integrated into module design and qualification frameworks and '*tweaked*' a little higher at each level throughout the whole student experience as part of assessment rather than '*added on*'. Contributions here included discussions on sharing study skills attainment with students at introductory levels, such as referencing, critical thinking, English language skills etc. in demonstrating evidence of student performance at each level through the degree programme.

Participants, although not directly articulating a resistance to unlearning their current teaching practices, expressed that the institution needed to undertake a great deal of work to utilize these technologies in supporting the transition from introductory level 4 to academic level 5. Specific questions around '*capacity for supporting students with aspirations*' and the need to make students understand that developing skills at introductory level would be compulsory later on in their degrees were raised. Some tutors highlighted that they took it on themselves to prepare students for the next level where students had mastered introductory work, as, '*the assessment criteria in [introductory level module] doesn't give me the opportunity to prepare them for [next level module]*'. One tutor, taking their own initiative, focussed on marking criteria. Another tutor, drawing on multi academic level experience, knew, based on which tutors students had received on introductory levels, what skills would have been covered, highlighting inconsistencies and missed opportunity to share best practice which they felt that technology might improve.

However, what was clearly articulated across these discussions around introductory support and study skills was the theme of responsibility. One respondent feared lessening ties from automation of what was perceived as part of the pastoral function and a severed relationship with students, stating:

'...I am just a bit worried about where students will feel guidance should come from.'

Others reported how these interventions and the support centre would start to blur the boundaries of their own pedagogical practice:

'...[It] really does start to cut across and impinge upon the [tutor]...role responsibilities.... this is about articulating how you want those responsibilities done differently, so leave this bit to these people and do that with them.'

And:

'I think it is important this balance between SST [Student Support Team] and AL [Associate Lecturer] intervention and as an AL we do need to become clear on what our role is and what the role is of the new evolving SST... I think it's not 100% clear at the moment where levels of responsibility lie'.

Also: *'I don't think of myself as an academic now. That responsibility has been removed from me now the relationship with my student has been broken. I fear that all I am is a script marker- factory style. What drew me to X university in the first place, the almost parental caring role for students has been stripped off.'* It has appeared from these, and similar comments, that with strategic change and the introduction of automated tools the institution had created an abrupt change in established routines, which offered adjunct tutors a "potentiality" (Colebrook, 2012: 96) for practice change. Previous routines and procedures were temporarily suspended; whilst in focus group discussions tutors consciously articulated the terms in which they were prepared to change, and therefore equally consciously, 'wipe' their previous practices.

Changes to the perceived core role of the adjunct tutor

Discussions on responsibilities for student progression between the institution and the tutor started to indirectly support the other relevant classification of unlearning in Hislop et al's (2014) typology. Whilst opposed to instances of wiping where participants on occasions clearly spoke about conscious change, or stopping doing certain activities, articulations of 'deep unlearning' were not present.

However, reference to reports made by Rushmer and Davies (2004) indicate useful parallels where participants showed emotionally engaged insight from these changes. For Rushmer and Davies, in drawing on a case where established nurses found it difficult to change practices in caring for premature babies, refer to this type of unlearning as a 'gap between what we see or hear and how we believed the world to be', (2004, ii11). In their discussions, although the principle focus is on how this can be presented in shocking and sudden ways, rather than perhaps after sustained personal reflection, and reflexive adaptation, there is still applicability to teaching work. Whilst education professionals do not generally have to deal with the sudden knowledge of choices presented to their healthcare counterparts as researched above, phrases such as: *'it's just struck me...'*, *'surely, of course we have our original thoughts'*, and *'the thing that does my head in, and I can't get my head past it...'*, indicate adjunct tutors attempting a deeper understanding of what these technological interventions might mean to them as educators.

In our discussions participants had the insight that the role of a tutor was being eroded, and they looked to the institution to reassure them, and help them manage, such as in the list of comments below:

'...people will worry their pastoral side... is being slowly taken away from them'

'...but there's so many positives we have to be careful in a way to be able to manage you know the worries of people'

'...concern... about our viability in terms of student numbers...'

'...who is driving the bus...?'

Other phrases they utilised in self-description indicated their sense of selves would change with automation of part of their roles. One described herself as *'quite a mother hen and hands-on tutor'*, and worried about being clear about what her new role would be. Another expressed feelings of threat, and articulated resistance to perceived changes to ownership of student issues and his sense of identity as a tutor, saying:

'I'm not quite so comfortable with that...pressure I'm feeling I think there's dragons in that in all sorts of ways. I think ultimately there's got to be someone who says well listen matey, it's my hands on the tiller here and thanks for your input, this is what we're going to do, and I think that ought to be the Associate Lecturer.'

In these indirect ways tutors indicated their academic identity might start to erode as a result of imposed automation and the perceived loss of pedagogic support routines and pastoral care, as discussed by Goolnik (2012). This concurs with Archer(2008) in Quigley (2011) who concluded that Archer then notes that "it has been argued that the current „new times“ are disrupting notions of professionalism, what constitutes academic work and what it means (or what it should mean) to be an academic". However, where participants had previously received personal validation from their expertise in pastoral care to their own students, this had been curtailed through standardisation, and led to a loss of the adjuncts' own value in the pastoral skills that accompanied their academic expertise. A loss was felt in terms of specialisation and hence autonomy:

"I had such a rapport with my students, and I prided myself on that, it's been hard, it's like breaking the umbilical cord as it were...."

This change in the Tutor role had a direct impact on participants' belief in the value of their role. When asked about their academic identity in a digitized University a number of respondents highlighted fears of being faceless, going online to lose their linked identity with a student was reported by one, and future fears of being just a marker were raised by another.

For UK based Faculty, perceptions of reduced bonding between student and tutor were also remarked upon, and fears around reduced retention as a result were articulated. Adjunct tutors also became aware of their changing academic role as more management structures were put in place, for consistency around student support. Comments such as these support the work of Berg et al. (2013) and their focus on the impact of managerialism on academic identity:

'The driving of the bus is still being driven by the policies that are in place and the role we're not changing it, we're trying to ensure that it's consistent across the piece.'

It was also the case that with variance in the backgrounds of some of the adjunct tutors had extensive experience in the private sector before either opting for portfolio careers or utilising their management skills to 'give back' to education, their views on the impact of increased managerialism on their professional/commercial/traditional academic selves varied. They considered that some tutors from commercial backgrounds may be more receptive to automation than those with a strong sense of academic freedom and identity to support their students, 'As an individual you bring your personal stamp to it and we have variations,' one respondent commented:

'You will have ALs who are practitioners who will not have any experience of an HE environment whatsoever. Yes, it's easy to assume it runs like a large business'. Our findings concur with Meek and Woods (2016) who introduced the idea that variations in organizational messaging, rhetoric, and incentive systems can trigger specific types of work identity dynamics that lead to different outcomes, notably identity misalignment.

Notably, it was acknowledged that taking part in the research itself could be seen as a means of greater engagement with the change processes and routines, thus reinforcing organizational and individual (un)learning and identity.

Conclusions

This study of an aspect of organizational shift in HE from a collegiate to a managerial culture provides empirical evidence that academic identity, learning and unlearning has been impacted by automated student messaging. Positive outcomes have been seen as an improvement in practical and consistent support to students. However, the study has indicated how the perception of automation in working with students is resulting in adjunct tutors questioning their academic roles and routines and this is eroding their perceptions of themselves as an academic and having an academic identity. This concurs with the work of (Fenwick, 1998, 2002; Pratt et al., 2006) who concluded that how people react to the changing demands of work is shaped by work identity. This may increase as the breadth of HE options expands into a continuum of teaching and learning opportunities.

We have drawn upon the work of Petriglieri (2011) by paying close empirical attention to how tensions from the result of organizational changes in a higher education context can impact on the productive and engaged identity of the individual adjunct tutor. In contrast to Petriglieri (2011), however, our findings and analysis suggest that in interaction our identities are always, at least potentially, under threat from competing and alternative possible identities but that these are managed discursively so that a coherent (in the moment) identity is (re)produced, although discussion surfaces the potentiality for change as we unlearn and learn.

Findings concur with Clarke and Knights (2015) who state that ‘Identity management often manifests itself in contemporary academia.[...], as a response to the performative demands of managerialism’. Although they characterize this as ‘instrumental game-playing’, in our work we viewed this as evidence of the adjuncts’ need to negotiate academic identity initiated by the learning and unlearning work. The difference may be explained by comparative insecurity in part-time tutor as opposed to tenured faculty roles. Additionally automation may weaken the traditional triangulated support between tutor, institution and student. In consequence, the type of deliberate, individual unlearning considered here does not involve the permanent loss of something, but instead involves a person consciously discarding, abandoning or giving up particular values, knowledge or behaviour, by consciously choosing not to continue using them. In summary, the perspective on individual unlearning adopted here is that knowledge and values are not necessarily permanent, as either consciously, or unconsciously, people may at some point in the future begin to reuse that which they had previously abandoned or unlearned. An example of this would be when someone changed how he or she undertook a task by returning to do it in a way that had been previously abandoned as is typified here with student support. Adjuncts are wiping this knowledge but potentially keeping it to use later.

Niaura (2002), proposes that this wiped or abandoned knowledge is not completely lost or destroyed and so cannot have been said to have been effectively unlearned. Niaura (2002) defines unlearning in strong or extreme terms, relating it to the extinction of conditioned responses. In doing so, Niaura is sceptical about whether full unlearning can ever happen, as he argues that conditioned responses can never be completely destroyed. However this was written in the context of addiction rather than academia. Wiping is relabelled by Hislop et al, 2014 as behavioural unlearning. This refers to the individual unlearning of specific practices, activities or routines, which have no (or limited) impact on people’s underlying values and assumptions. In the context of this case the process of cognitive unlearning that has been initiated by an external change directive is likely to be different from cognitive unlearning that has been initiated by a

specific, individual experience. We posit that this potentially represents a sub-conscious effort to maintain academic identity.

Whilst these insights were offered over a reasonably narrow window of time, i.e. the year of the introduction of these ways of working, investigations have now commenced on whether the embedding of these practices has produced more long-term effects on unlearning and subsequent routine and identity transitions. A further comparative study is underway using auto-ethnography to observe evolving tutor academic identities in response to continual changes instigated by the shift from collegial to managerial culture within a university. Collaboration discussions for a comparative study between a distance learning and a blended learning institution, which includes a cross-cultural perspective are also in progress.

References

Akgün, A. et al, (2007). Organizational unlearning as changes in beliefs and routines in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol 20, 6,794- 812.

Antonacopoulou, E. (2010). Making the business school more “critical”: Reflexive critique based on phronesis as a foundation for impact. *British Journal of Management*,21, 6-25.

Archer, L. (2008) Younger Academics' Constructions of 'Authenticity', 'Success' and Professional Identity. *Studies in Higher Education* 33, 4, 385-403.

Ashforth, B. E. (2001) “Role Transitions in Organizational Life: An Identity-based Perspective.” Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Baumeister, R. F. (1996) Identity: Cultural change and the struggle for self. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bayne, S (2015) Teacherbot: interventions in automated teaching, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20:4, 455-467,

Becher, T., & Trowler, P. (2001). *Academic tribes and territories: Intellectual inquiry and the cultures of disciplines*. Milton Keynes: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Berg, E. et al, (2013). Introduction to special issue - ‘biting the hand that feeds’: reflections on power, politics, identity and managerialism at work in academia. *Workplace rights*, Vol. 17(3-4), 383-388.

Billsberry, J., (2014). The Rise and Rise of Management Edutainment. *Journal of Management Education*, 38(2), pp.151-159.

Browne, T. et al, (2008). 2008 Survey of Technology Enhanced Learning for higher education in the UK, UCISA

<http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/publications/~media/290DD5217DA5422C8775F246791F5523.ashx>> [Accessed 29 September 2013].

Bryson, C., and Barnes, N., (2015), "The casualisation of employment in higher education in the United Kingdom", *Academic Work and Life: What it is to be an Academic, and How this is Changing*, 187-241, [http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1016/S1479-3628\(00\)80102-1](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1016/S1479-3628(00)80102-1) (accessed 17.01.17)

Clarke, C. et al, (2015). Careering through academia: Securing identities or engaging ethical subjectivities? *Human Relations*, 68: 1865-1888.

Colebrook, C (2012) *Gilles Deleuze*, Hoboken, Taylor and Francis, available from EBSCO host Ebooks (accessed 03/04/16)

Collins, H, et al .(2016) 'Automation in distance learning: An empirical study of unlearning and academic identity change linked to automation of student messaging within distance learning'. 10th International conference on e- learning, 1-3 July 2016, Funchal, Madeira.

Collins H., (2013). Transition identity: the role of communication tools. *EGOS conference 2013*. Montréal, Canada, July

Ebaugh, H. R. F. (1988). *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Fenwick, T. (1998). Women's development of self in the workplace. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 17(3), 199–217.

Fenwick, T. (2002). Lady, Inc.: Women learning, negotiating subjectivity in entrepreneurial discourses. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21(2), 162–177.

Ferguson, R., (2012). Learning analytics: drivers, developments and challenges. *International Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*, 4 (5/6), 304-317.

Foreman, P., & Whetten, D.A. (2002). Members' identification with multiple-identity organizations. *Organization Science*, 13(6), 618–35.

Garfinkel, H., (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Prentice Hall.

Giddens, A., (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of Structuration Theory*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Gioia, D. A., and Thomas, J. B. (1996) "Institutional identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sense-making during strategic change in academia". *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41(3): 370-404.

Goolnik, G., (2012) Change Management Strategies When Undertaking eLearning Initiatives in Higher Education. *Journal of Organisational Learning and Leadership*, Vol 10, No 2, 16-28.

Hinings, C.R., (2005). Changing nature of professional organizations, *Oxford handbook of work and organization*, 405-424.

Hedberg, A., (1981). How organizations learn and unlearn. In: Nystrom, P. and Starbuck, W.H. (eds), *Handbook of Organizational Design*. Vol 1, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 3-27.

Henkel, M. (2000). Academic identities and policy change in higher education. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Hibbert, P., (2013). Approaching reflexivity through reflection issues for critical management education. *Journal of Management Education*, 37(6), pp.803-827.

Hislop, D., et al, 2014. The Process of individual unlearning: A neglected topic in an under-researched field. *Management Learning*, Vol 45 (5), 540-560.

Ibarra, H. and Barbulescu, R., (2010). Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness and consequences of narrative work in macro work role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (1),135-154.

Ibarra, H., (2005.) "Identity transitions: possible selves, liminality and the dynamics of career change." In *Working paper no. 31/OB, INSEAD*.

Ibaara, H. (1999) "Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation". *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4): 764-791.

Knights, D and Clarke, C (2014), It's a Bittersweet Symphony, this Life: Fragile Academic Selves and Insecure Identities at Work, *Organisation Studies*, vol 35 (3), 335-357

Laurillard, D. (2011). Productivity: Achieving Higher Quality and More Effective Learning in Affordable and Acceptable ways.

<http://tel.ioe.ac.uk/productivity/productivity-achieving-higher-quality- and-more-effective-learning-in-affordable-and-acceptable-ways/> (accessed 15 06 2016)

Laurillard, Diana (2007) "Modelling benefits-oriented costs for technology enhanced learning". *Higher Education*, 54 (1). pp. 21-39. ISSN 00181560 (Print) 1573174X (Online) (accessed 31st December 2011) via <http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/506/>

Lawrence, S., & Sharma, U. (2002). Commodification of education and academic labour—using the balanced scorecard in a university setting. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 13, 661-677.

Long, P. and Siemens, G., (2011). Penetrating the fog: analytics in learning and education, *EDUCAUSE Review*, 46,5:31-40.

Meek, W.R. and Wood, M.S., (2016). Navigating a Sea of Change: Identity Misalignment and Adaptation in Academic Entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 5(40), pp.1093-1120.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M., (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis, 2nd edition*. Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

Myers, F; Collins, H; Glover, H; (2015) “Is there a connection between academic identity, un-learning organisational routines, and the success of automated student messaging?” ABS Learning, Teaching & Student Experience Conference , 28-29 April 2015, York.

Niaura R (2002) Does ‘unlearning’ ever really occur: Comment on Conklin and Tiffany. *Addiction* 97: 357.

Nixon, J. (1996). “Professional identity and the restructuring of higher education.” *Studies in Higher Education*, 21(1), 5–16.

Nystrom P.C. and Starbuck W.H., (1984). To avoid organizational crises, unlearn. *Organizational Dynamics* 12, 53-65.

Obodaru, O., (2012). The self not taken: How alternative selves develop and how they influence our professional lives. *Academy of Management Review*, 31 (1), 34-57.

O’Neill, A., & Meek, L.V. (1994). Academic professionalism and the self-regulation of performance. *Journal of Tertiary Education Administration*, 16(1), 93–107.

Parker, M., & Jary, D. (1995). “The McUniversity: Organization, management and academic subjectivity.” *Organization*, 2(2), 319–38

Petriglieri, J.L., (2011). Under threat: Responses to and the consequences of threats to individuals’ identities. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(4), 641-662.

Pistilli, M., Arnold, K. and Bethune, M. (2012) Signals: Using academic analytics to promote student success. *Educause Review Online*. Available at <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/signals-using-academic-analytics-promote-student-success>.

Philo, G. and Miller, D., 'Cultural Compliance and Critical Media Studies', *Media Culture and Society*, Vol. 22: 831-839.

Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., and Kaufmann, J. B. (2006) “Constructing professional identity: the role of work and identity earning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents”. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49, No. 2: 235-262.

Prinsloo, Paul and Slade, Sharon (2016). Student Vulnerability, Agency, and Learning Analytics: An Exploration. *Journal of Learning Analytics*, 3(1) pp. 159–182

Quigley, Steven Anthony.(2011) "Academic identity: a modern perspective." *Educate*~(page 21) 11.1 : 20-30.

Ramsden, P. (1998). “Learning to lead in higher education”. London: Routledge.

- Raelin, J.A. (1986). "The clash of cultures: Managers and professionals". Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Rushmer, R. and Davies, H., (2004). Unlearning in healthcare: *Quality & Safety in Health Care*, 13, 10-15.
- Schein, E. H.. (1978) *Career Dynamics: Matching Individual and Organizational Needs*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley Publishing Company.
- Slade, S. and Prinsloo, P.,(2013). Learning analytics: ethical issues and dilemmas. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57 (10), 1509-1528.
- Solitander, N., Fougère, M., Sobczak, A. and Herlin, H., (2011). We are the champions: Organizational learning and change for responsible management education. *Journal of Management Education*, p.1052562911431554.
- Stephens, C and Myers F., (2014) Signals from the Silent: Online Predictors of Non-success in Business Undergraduate Students, *International Journal of Business and Management in Higher Education*.
- Tight, M., (2014) Collegiality and managerialism: a false dichotomy? Evidence from the higher education literature, *Tertiary Education and Management*, vol 20, (4), 294-306
- Tsang, E. and Zahra, S., (2008). Organizational Unlearning. *Human Relations*, 61 (10): 1435-1462.
- Turc, E. and Baumard, P., (2007). "Can Organizations Really Unlearn?" in McInerney, C.R. and Day, R.E. (Eds.). *Re-thinking knowledge management: From knowledge objects to knowledge processes*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 125- 146.]
- Weale, S (2016) *The Guardian*, 26 May, MOOCs to earn degree credits for first time in UK at two universities <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/may/26/moocs-earn-degree-credits-first-time-two-uk-universities> (accessed 15 06 16)
- White, K., Carvalho, T., & Riordan, S. (2011). Gender, power and managerialism in universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33, 179-188.
- Winter, R. (2009). Academic manager or managed academic? Academic identity schisms in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 31, 121-131.
- Venit, E.P (2009) A Survey of Student Retention Early Warning Strategies, Special Research Brief for the Education Advisory Board in partnership with the IMS Global Learning Consortium. Available at <http://www.imsglobal.org/pressreleases/pr031709.html> (membership required) (accessed 19 September 2013).
- Wang, C. and Ahmed, P., (2003). Organizational learning: a critical review. *The Learning Organization*

