

ACADEMIC ARRHYTHMIA: DISRUPTION, DISSONANCE AND CONFLICT IN THE EARLY-CAREER RHYTHMS OF CMS ACADEMICS

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ABSTRACT

Starting a career on the margins of the neoliberal business school is becoming increasingly challenging. We contribute to the understanding of the problems involved and to potential solutions by developing a theoretically-informed approach to the rhythms of academic life and drawing on interviews with 32 Critical Management Studies (CMS) early-career academics (ECAs) in 14 countries. Bringing together Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis (and his concepts of polyrhythmia, eurhythmia and arrhythmia), Zerubavel's sociology of time, and identity construction literature, we examine the rhythm-identity implications of the recent HE changes. We show how the dynamics between the broader pressures, institutional strategies, and our interviewees' attempts to reassert themselves are creating a vicious circle of arrhythmia – a debilitating condition characterized by rhythmic disruption, dissonance and conflict. Within the circle, identity insecurity and regulation, CMS ECAs' identity work, and arrhythmia are mutually co-constructive, so that it is hard for individuals to break out. We consider the possibilities and limitations of individual coping strategies and, drawing out lessons for business schools, advocate for more collective and structural solutions. In so doing, we contribute to the

reimagining of business schools as more eurhythmically polyrhythmic places where ECAs of all intellectual orientations have the time to learn and develop.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we examine the changing labor and identities of academics in the early stages of their career. It is now over 20 years since the publication of Frost and Taylor's influential book, *Rhythms of Academic Life* (1996), and given the significant changes in the nature of Higher Education (HE) over this period it is timely to critically consider how working lives have changed for this important group representing the future of the profession. We draw on a study of 32 Critical Management Studies (CMS) early-career academics (ECAs) in 14 countries, which we analyze as an extreme case of what it is like to be an ECA working in business schools today. Taking the lead from Frost & Taylor's (1996) metaphor of rhythm, we explore the changing rhythms of CMS ECAs' lives as well as the theoretical and practical implications of these changes for academic careers, labor and identity.

Whereas Frost & Taylor (1996) use the notion of rhythm as an unexamined metaphor for communicating the structures and challenges of academia to new faculty, we see a need for a more theoretically-informed engagement. Time is an inextricable part of human and organizational lives (Adam, Whipp, & Sabelis, 2002; Roe, Clegg, & Waller, 2009), and rhythm in particular, being a fundamental way through which individuals and organizations appropriate time (Bunzel, 2002), is so pervasive that, arguably, everyone possesses some idea of its importance. The latter derives from its role in the structuring of social and physical lives, ranging from music to historical and economic cycles, mechanical rhythms, and the life-giving heartbeat of physical and social bodies (Lefebvre, 2004). Rhythm is thus endemic to organizing, whereby 'everyday life in organizations is rhythmic' (Ancona & Chong, 1999: 40), organizing acquires its own rhythms, and organizational rhythms are continuously organized (Cunha, 2009). Keeping track of rhythms in

academia is therefore important in understanding how academic labor and identity are changing over time.

The extent of rhythm's significance and the ways in which it permeates academic lives can perhaps only be fully appreciated once it is disrupted, giving rise to the condition known as *arrhythmia* (Lefebvre, 2004). This notion originally comes from Greek *arrhythmia* ('lack of rhythm') and is commonly used in the medical sense, denoting a condition in which the heart beats with an irregular rhythm. It is a serious illness that can impact an individual's functioning and quality of life, resulting in tiredness, breathlessness, and in extreme cases death. In its sociological and philosophical sense, arrhythmia is similarly pathological, producing distress and crippling cognitive, social and physical consequences (Lefebvre, 2004; Zerubavel, 1985).

Drawing on the sociological notions of rhythm and arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004; Zerubavel, 1985), we take the pulse of academic work to examine its underlying condition in light of the recent HE changes. More specifically, much like medical researchers may focus on 'high risk' groups, we focus on the margins of business schools, where the impact of the changes has arguably been particularly profound (Grey, 2010; Huzzard, Benner, & Kärreman, 2017; Mingers & Willmott, 2013). Our research participants work on multiple business school peripheries – in terms of career stage, non-mainstream CMS approaches that are often at odds with the business school ethos (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014), and often geography too – that make them more vulnerable but potentially more reflexive about the HE system (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017). Considering their experiences in conjunction with previous literature on academic labor, we identify some continuities but also ways in which their lives are impacted by the HE changes. We argue that these changes lead to the rise of academic arrhythmia as a debilitating condition affecting academic work.

Moreover, we explore how these rhythmic developments and ensuing arrhythmia are tangled up

with struggles over academic identity (i.e. what it means to be a successful academic today). To do so, we approach identity as ‘a temporary, context-sensitive and evolving set of constructions’ (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008) that constitute individuals’ multiple and shifting reflexive self-narratives (Giddens, 1991). The focus on rhythms enables a greater understanding of the temporal dynamics and complexity of identity construction (the process through which identities emerge (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002)), helping to address the ‘when’ questions of identity research (i.e. when, and at what pace and rhythm identity constructions are taking place) (Alvesson et al., 2008). Conversely, bringing identity construction into the analysis of rhythms exposes some of the underlying mechanisms through which rhythmic changes happen. Key to this is the conceptualisation of identity construction as a dynamic and ongoing process that in contemporary contexts is driven by identity insecurity (inability to permanently secure stable identities). The process of identity construction combines identity regulation (a pervasive modality of normative control exercised upon individuals within the broader context of power relations) with identity work (a reflexive process through which individuals shape, maintain and transform their sense of self) (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003). We focus on how the rhythmic changes and challenges experienced by CMS ECAs are driven by the broader attempts to regulate academic identities (particularly the audit culture and the regime of business school ‘excellence’) and by academic insecurity. By examining our participants’ ways of coping with the growing arrhythmia and its consequences, we show how this intensifies our interviewees’ own identity work, creating further rhythmic changes and arrhythmias, and deepening academic insecurity.

The paper is structured as follows: first, we review the literature, starting with rhythms, arrhythmia and academic identity construction in the changing HE context, then moving on to the changing nature of the ECA experience and life on the margins of business schools. Following a review of our research methods, we then discuss our findings, implications and conclusions.

RHYTHMS, ARRHYTHMIA AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In his book *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (1985), which lays the foundations for the sociology of time, Zerubavel explores the role of rhythm as part of temporal regularity – ‘a phenomenon that involves the structuring of social life by forcing activities into fairly rigid temporal patterns’ (Zerubavel, 1985: XII). Zerubavel argues that modern Western society is characterized by a rigidification of life’s temporal dimensions, resulting in four pervasive forms of temporal regularity: rigid sequential structures (e.g. career stages), fixed durations (e.g. fifty-minute academic ‘hours’), standard temporal locations (e.g. rigid scheduling of classes), and uniform rates of recurrence (e.g. weekly seminars, annual conferences). Zerubavel stresses that temporal regularities are socially constructed and normatively prescribed conventions that situate and anchor the ‘normalcy’ of everyday life. This makes it possible to predict and organize activities. By contrast, temporal irregularities, including pathological deviations from rhythms, produce uncertainty and have disturbing and distressing cognitive and social consequences.

The pathological consequences of rhythmic disruptions are also explored by Lefebvre in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (2004), which develops a field of knowledge concerned with the analysis of rhythms and their practical consequences. For Lefebvre, at every conjunction of space, time and energy there is rhythm, and thus, as the world is in motion, rhythm is everywhere (Horton, 2005), though some rhythms may be slower or faster, more secret or public (Lefebvre, 2004). Social and physical lives are thus polyrhythmic – filled with multiple, diverse rhythms that interact with each other in complex ways – sometimes nestling within each other, sometimes coexisting whilst constructively enhancing each other (the state of eurhythmia), but sometimes also disrupting and conflicting with each other. Lefebvre calls the latter situation – the development of disruption, dissonance and conflict – *arrhythmia* – a pathological state that produces suffering and ‘brings previously eurhythmic organisations towards fatal disorder’

(Lefebvre, 2004: 16). Attention to arrhythmia informs rhythmanalysis (see methods section) not only because the former is an integral part of everyday polyrhythmia, but also because it is the onset of arrhythmia that makes taken-for-granted rhythms more obvious (Horton, 2005).

Historical Academic Rhythms

In exploring how the rhythms of academic labor and identity construction are changing over time, our starting point is the acknowledgement that academic lives are historically polyrhythmic, in that they have long been characterized by well-entrenched rhythms and temporal regularities, but also by their own temporal irregularities and arrhythmias. In other words, even though academia has undergone dramatic changes over the past decades (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2008; Huzzard et al., 2017; Willmott, 2003), there has never been an academic ‘Golden Age’ when multiple, diverse academic rhythms aligned completely eurhythmically. Similarly, identity insecurity is a lasting condition in contemporary society (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003) and needs to be understood as a historical part of academic lives.

Frost & Taylor (1996) offer a snapshot of some of the historical rhythms and identity challenges as they were over 20 years ago¹. Even though the notion of rhythm is not explored conceptually in the book, rhythms are fundamental to the academic lives described within. The book is structured into different kinds of rhythms (for example, rhythms specific to different career stages). The chapters are full of accounts of normatively prescribed rhythms (temporal embodiments of identity regulation) and temporal irregularities (individual academics’ acknowledged deviations from conventional temporal patterns) producing arrhythmia, identity insecurity, and necessitating identity work. For example, in Chapter 3 Erez narrates her experience of being behind the expected publication curve as a result of the decision to spend time with her newborn during her early career,

¹ *Rhythms of Academic Life* was published in 1996, but some chapters narrate accounts of experiences further back – e.g. Clegg (Chapter 5) describes his career starting in the 1970s.

which created uncertainty over her becoming a tenured academic:

The dean of the faculty at that time told me that the curve of my rate of publications differed from his own and those of other male professors. They published more right after they received their PhDs and then slowed down, whereas in my case, I did not publish much right after I received my doctorate, but I started to publish more a few years later. He suspected that I wanted only to get tenure, and expressed concern that I might not continue to publish after I received it. He could not understand that my having given birth to my son right after I received my PhD could have been the reason my publishing had been postponed. One conclusion that may be drawn from my experience is that women may differ from men in their publication curves, and this difference should be respected (Erez, 1996: 22-23).

In this example, Erez' deviations flag up a normatively prescribed temporal regularity (of publishing straight after the PhD). Erez deviates from the established sequential structure ('PhD-family-publications' rather than 'PhD-publications-slow down'), duration (the length of time between PhD and publications), and temporal locations (when she publishes more and when she publishes less). These deviations mean that there is arrhythmia between Erez' publication rhythm and the publication rhythm seen by the dean as normal. This feeds the insecurity of Erez' academic identity (the lack of understanding, concern, and barely making tenure). Erez' concluding reflection alludes to the identity work needed to regain some security (calling for acceptance of potential rhythmic gender differences – i.e. separating out rhythms to alleviate arrhythmia).

The Impact of the Audit Culture

Our next step is to consider how academic rhythms are changing. In the last decades, academic work and identity have been profoundly reshaped in many parts of the world, largely due to the adoption into academia of neoliberal governmentality, which brought about 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), 'marketization' (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2005) and 'corporatization' (Huzzard et al., 2017). Academic labor has moved towards a neo-Taylorist model of production (Mingers & Willmott, 2013), involving its 'bureaucratization' (Furedi, 2002) and 'McDonaldization' (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002). In many national contexts these changes have been accompanied by the 'audit culture' – widespread instruments and processes for continuous

measurement and management of academic performance (Strathern, 2000; Tourish, Craig & Amernic, 2017). The audit culture needs to be recognised as a complex phenomenon driven by multiple motivations (not least of which a desire for more transparency and meritocracy) and manifesting differently in local contexts. However, some of its more ubiquitous instruments, such as global journal rankings and university league tables, have attracted much critique for their adverse effects on academic labor (e.g. Adler & Harzing, 2009; Mingers & Willmott, 2013). One such effect has been the growing insecurity of academic identities, which now depend on the never-ending rounds of research and teaching evaluations (Knights & Clarke, 2014).

The rhythmic implications of these changes are potentially complex, but the review of literature suggests a number of trends. Firstly, the changes seem to herald a move towards temporal rigidification of academic lives through the bureaucratization and standardization of working practices, boosted by the routine management of academic labor and the growing administration that academics have to manage (Winter, 2009). In some contexts the audit culture can play a key part in the temporal rigidification of academia by ‘closing down the spatial and temporal autonomy long associated with the university lifeworld’ (Keenoy, 2005: 305). Secondly, the changes herald the arrival of the academic ‘culture of speed’ (Berg & Seeber, 2016), fastening the pace in academic lives (Vostal, 2015; Ylijoki, 2013) and increasing academic workloads (Fitzgerald, White, & Gunter, 2012; Menzies & Newson, 2007). This implies a general shortening of fixed durations and the introduction of new fast-paced rhythms in academic work, as marketization and mechanisms of academic performance measurement result in faster work turnaround times. For example, they result in faster, more frequent grading and the handling of a growing number of student complaints in a bid to provide a competitive service to students now seen as customers (Finney & Finney, 2010; Harland, McLean, Wass, Miller, & Nui Sim, 2015). Thirdly, the changes suggest a growing polyrhythmic complexity (Keenoy, 2005; Spurling, 2015), where rhythms clash

and compete with each other. The audit culture plays a key role in this, as performance evaluations prioritize some rhythms over others, so that there is ‘less space to ‘play’ and less time to do anything other than ‘perform’ to the ‘tune of the new measures’ (Keenoy, 2005: 305). In some national contexts, such as the UK, the audit culture acts as a profound form of identity regulation, because ‘excellent’ academic performance against narrowly-defined criteria has become so tightly linked to what counts as a successful academic (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014), exacerbating identity insecurity and creating a situation where academics are having to continuously prove themselves worthy (Clarke & Knights, 2015). Increasingly, this means that academics spur themselves and each other on to focus on ‘what counts’ – and, most often, this means publishing in high ranked journals. This has wide-reaching consequences for the rhythms of academic lives:

Large swathes of academic lives are overlooked. Teaching becomes something to be avoided if possible and is often passed on to junior faculty and teaching-only staff. Administration becomes seen as a pesky interruption to be passed off to those with interest in such matters. (...) Researchers plough thousands of hours of their lives into ‘crafting’ articles for submission, dealing with reviews, networking and much more. In most cases this means that the academic working day extends far into the night (Alvesson & Spicer, 2017: 105).

Underlying all of the above are the rhythms of academic resistance and compliance, as academics juggle conflicting demands and craft their identities in creative and complex ways (Alvesson & Spicer, 2017; Bristow et al., 2017). Moreover, adding to the rhythmic complexity and identity insecurity is the growing casualization and flexibilization of academic careers, as tenure and permanent appointments are increasingly replaced with precarious academic jobs involving zero-hours contracts, short-term research positions and hourly-paid teaching (Bataille, Le Feuvre, & Kradolfer Morales, 2017; Bozzon, Murgia, Poggio, & Rapetti, 2017). The flexibilization of academic careers brings about new freedoms and new pressures (Bozzon et al., 2017), and thus potentially both offsets and further entrenches the temporal rigidification of academic work.

This complex evolving polyrhythmic picture is in need of empirical examination. The review of

literature suggests that arrhythmia is growing in academic work (whilst eurhythmia becomes increasingly elusive) and is intricately tangled up with the processes of identity construction. The symptoms of arrhythmia are also evident in the increasing concerns about academic wellbeing (Gill & Donaghue, 2016; Horn, 2015), workaholism (Hogan, Hogan & Hodgins, 2016) and burnout (Záborská, Mudrák, Šolcová, Květon, Blatný, & Machovcová, 2017) as academics struggle with the pressures (Beddoes & Pawley, 2014, Dorenkamp & Süß, 2017).

We now turn specifically to consider academics working on the margins of the profession.

Early Rhythms Disrupted

Early career can be understood as a time of liminality, where individuals are transformed through collective socialization into successful academics (Smith, 2010) moving from the margins to the center of their fields (Laudel & Gläser, 2008). Conversely, they fail to survive as academics and leave the profession (Bataille et al., 2017). During the first few years in academia the construction of academic identity is particularly intense and often characterised by challenges, dissonance, anxiety, and disillusionment (Bristow et al., 2017; Smith, 2010). Furthermore, previous studies suggest that as a group ECAs are the most profoundly affected by the stresses of the HE changes (Laudel & Gläser, 2008), including pressures to publish (Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011) and difficulties in reconciling personal and professional lives (Dorenkamp & Süß, 2017). The latter is often cited as one of the top reasons for leaving academia (Bozzon et al., 2017: 335). The consequences are said to be especially detrimental for young female academics – most notably those planning a family or already with family responsibilities (Bozzon et al., 2017; Dorenkamp & Süß, 2017). This group tend to experience more stress and burnout than their male colleagues (Miller et al., 2011: 435). ECAs in teaching-oriented universities are also particularly affected in struggling to establish rhythms that are most valued for career development, whilst institutions produce ‘inflexible temporal conditions’ that make it hard to undertake research (Spurling, 2015).

Yet against this challenging background the role of ECAs is often underestimated, in that far from being helpless victims of the system ECAs often act as active resisters and make a difference in their working lives, institutions, and beyond (Archer, 2008; Bristow et al., 2017).

Focusing on ECAs therefore offers opportunities to explore a potentially extreme case of the rhythmic implications of recent HE changes, not least by drawing attention to the changing rhythms of academic career structures. Here Frost & Taylor (1996) offer a striking historical comparison. Individual deviations from ‘normal’ career paths aside, Frost & Taylor (1996) present an image of a discernibly rigid sequential structure of academic career stages. ‘Early rhythms’ are bounded within their own section of the book, followed in a temporally logical fashion by ‘middle rhythms’ and beyond. Constituting the ‘early rhythms’ are the rhythms of ‘becoming a teacher’, ‘doing research and getting published’, ‘working with doctoral students’ and ‘getting tenure’. Perhaps the most striking aspect from today’s viewpoint is the relative simplicity of these early rhythms. It is poignant that much of what is missing relative to today’s early career experience (administrative roles, collaboration, becoming a reviewer and an editor, curriculum development, consultancy, impact on policy) can be found in Frost & Taylor’s (1996) ‘middle rhythms’. Other rhythms – most notably those pertaining to external funding generation – do not merit their own chapter in the book at all. It seems that, as well as having to learn the basics of academic work appropriate to their own career stage, ECAs are nowadays also expected to juggle most of the rhythms that were previously the province of more senior academics.

Frost & Taylor (1996) offer only a glimpse into the rhythms of academic lives in the 1990s. Nevertheless, that glimpse is in line with other literature examining the impact of HE changes on academic careers. Studies have pointed to the increasing erosion of the previously relatively rigid two-stage academic career structures through the precarization of academic labor, with the ratio of short-term positions to permanent appointments growing (Bataille et al., 2017). Academics now

face an increasing chance of becoming trapped in the early-career stage for longer, or perhaps indefinitely; and with the risk of early-onset arrhythmia it is not a comfortable place to be.

On the Margins of Business Schools

Within the ECA predicament, our specific interest is in the experiences of ECAs on the margins of business schools. The latter have their own long-standing issues with academic identity, incorporating fields that are relative academic newcomers and not only tend to fall between the more established domains of the sciences and the humanities, but also struggle for recognition within the more recent domain of the social sciences (Zald, 1993, 1996). On the other hand, in the age of new managerialism, business schools have been highly instrumental in the production and dissemination of discourses and practices that have driven the recent changes in academic labor (Huzzard et al., 2017), arguably acting as a frontier of HE corporatization (Paulsson, 2017). Moreover, business schools are now often among ‘the largest of university departments, with the corresponding implications for institutional funding and reputation’, meaning that business academics can experience particularly intense pressures (Mingers & Willmott, 2013: 1052).

This is even more the case for those working on the margins of business schools. In this paper, in addition to the challenges of marginality implicit in the early-career stage, we explore the extra layers of identity insecurity and rhythmic complexity involved in being a CMS ECA. CMS is a non-mainstream area of management that is comprised of a broad range of theoretical, methodological and philosophical approaches linked together by the underlying questioning of management orthodoxies (including managerialism and the focus on business performance and efficiency) and by the focus on inequalities, abuses, tensions and contradictions within organizations and societies (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2009). This means that those self-identifying as critical management scholars often find themselves at odds with the highly performative new managerialism of the neoliberal business school (Butler &

Spoelstra, 2014; Bristow et al., 2017). As a consequence, CMS ECAs face double insecurity and can find becoming ‘excellent’ academics both challenging and problematic. Addressing these issues requires perennial and highly nuanced identity work that ‘continuously calls for creativity, inventiveness, courage, political astuteness and reflexivity’ (Bristow et al., 2017: 1201-1202).

The extra challenges faced by CMS ECAs in the contemporary HE context make them a complex ‘extreme case’ of academic work. This group also tends to be acutely aware of their own situations due to their doubly peripheral position within business schools (Bristow et al., 2017) and thus potentially more reflexive about the often taken-for-granted rhythms of identity construction. Additionally, due to their research interests, they are very aware of the consequences of managerialism, the exercise of power, and the impact of societal changes on organizations, which makes them astute observers of academic life able to engage in ‘rhythmanalysis’ (Lefebvre, 2004). We now proceed to the discussion of our research design.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Our research aims to explore empirically polyrhythmias, eurhythmias and arrhythmias of CMS ECAs’ working lives, and the implications for academic labor and identity construction. In addressing these aims, we draw on 32 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with CMS ECAs working in 14 countries. We adopt the definition of ECAs as those employed in a full-time lecturer post (or equivalent) for up to six years. All our research participants work within business schools and self-identify as critical management scholars.

Participants were recruited through wide personal networks and at CMS and AoM (CMS division) conferences, aided by a chain-referral strategy. We strove to ensure diversity of demographics and experiences: our sample reflects CMS ECA diversity in terms of age category, country of origin, country of work, type of university, career trajectory and early-career stage (see Appendix 1). Although we aimed for a global distribution, the final sample still remains somewhat UK- and

Europe-centred. This reflects, firstly, our own geographical location and the starting point for our networks and chain-referrals, and secondly, the geographical distribution of the CMS field, Europe (and UK in particular) being a historical hub for non-mainstream approaches to management and organization studies (Üsdiken, 2010). Despite this, we aimed to include voices from geographically- and linguistically-peripheral locations, and our participants include 14 ECAs in non-Anglophone countries and seven working in the Global South. We have classified our participants' workplaces as being either a Type 1 or Type 2 institution. A Type 1 institution is what is typically described as a traditional research-oriented university, whilst a Type 2 institution gives priority to its educational and engagement missions. Whilst this simple classification neither conveys all the nuances (e.g. oppositions between old and new, or public and private) nor fully captures national differences in education systems, it does enable us to balance the need to contextualise our interviews with the need to protect the anonymity of our research participants². Through our research design we wanted to get a sense of what the rhythms of academic life were like for our participants, how rhythmic clashes and harmonies shaped their lives, how their experiences compared with earlier accounts (e.g. Frost & Taylor, 1996), and how such changes impacted on aspects of academic identity construction. Therefore, we needed an approach that enabled us to give voice to CMS ECAs' lived experiences and allowed issues to emerge from the data around the broadly established questions, deriving from our literature review. Our interviews were guided by the overarching research question: 'What is it like being a CMS ECA today?'

The interview approach and analysis was inspired by Lefebvre's (2004) notion of rhythmanalysis. Lefebvre's aim was to help individuals develop awareness and appreciation of 'the diverse, multiple rhythms of everyday life' (Horton, 2005: 158). He argued that the rhythmanalyst must

² To ensure anonymity, research participants were given a pseudonym, taken where possible from a list of popular names for 2017 newborns in the country of their birth.

‘listen to her body, learn rhythm from it, in order consequently to appreciate external rhythms’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 19). She ‘will come to ‘listen’ to a house, a street, a town, as an audience listens to a symphony’ (p. 22, in Horton, 2005: 158). In our interviews we placed emphasis on helping research participants articulate the rhythms of their everyday academic lives and encouraged them to focus on rhythmic clashes and harmonies. We aimed to aid them in their own academic rhythmanalysis – that is reflecting on their own academic rhythms and evaluating how they are working and what effect they are having on what it means to be a contemporary academic (see Appendix 2).

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face at participants’ universities or at conferences, or via Skype (most of our international interviews were conducted via Skype). They ranged between one and two hours, and were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed using a multi-stage collaborative, iterative approach, in which we moved repeatedly between our data and pre-existing literature. Firstly, after explorative individual readings of the transcripts, we collectively negotiated and agreed the initial codes that emerged inductively from the data around the issues of rhythmic changes, their implications, the relationship between the rhythms, arrhythmias and identity construction, and CMS ECAs’ coping strategies. We then coded individually, aided by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Following this, we reviewed, renegotiated, and grouped codes into themes, arriving at a collective interpretation of the data. The resulting themes represent (1) our participants’ accounts of the rhythms of their academic lives, (2) experiences of polyrhythmic complexity, harmonies (eurhythmias), clashes (arrhythmias) and their consequences, (3) attempts to manage the relationship between different rhythms, including attempts to make rhythms more eurhythmic and (4) accounts of how these experiences relate to academic identity construction. These form the basis of our findings below.

FINDINGS

In this part of the paper, we first consider the rhythmic configuration of our participants' labor and identity construction in terms of both continuities and contrasts in relation to what is portrayed in historical literature such as Frost & Taylor (1996). We then discuss the growing polyrhythmia, increasingly elusive eurhythmia, and early-onset arrhythmia among our participants, and the latter's acknowledgement of the unhealthy nature of academic life. Finally, we analyze the ways in which our interviewees attempt to cope with arrhythmia and create eurhythmia, which often lead to further rhythmic and identity complications.

Rhythmic continuities

In general, we found that the broad 'rhythmic sets' (i.e. bundles of rhythms associated with particular strands of academic activity and facets of academic identity) that constitute historical academic polyrhythmia persist over time. The rhythmic sets of research, teaching, administration, engagement, academic citizenship and collegiality that pervade Frost & Taylor's (1996) accounts of academic life also play key roles in our interviewees' reflections. The rhythms involved in becoming a teacher, doing research, and getting published and 'established' as an academic were most frequently emphasized as fundamental to structuring working lives and shaping academic selves. For our participants, there was an often passionately-voiced connection between constructing and maintaining the vocation aspect of academic identity, which tended to be invoked in conjunction with their CMS ethos, and successfully (i.e. eurhythmically) coordinating the rhythms of these historical sets. This was often expressed as a deep-seated need to take time over meaningful research and teaching, and the cognitive implications of such time being hijacked by rigidifying and shrinking schedules:

So for me research is super important. (...) I realised that even when I'm involved in a lot of other things that are also important and meaningful, and I feel that my research is not getting as much attention as it should, I am getting unhappy (Vanessa – Switzerland).

The workload model is laughable. (...) You get half an hour in the model to prepare a new lecture for the first time. Fifteen minutes to prepare something you have already done... it just smells factory-style education. Lecturers were creating slides from the instruction pack. Cut and paste. (...) I would lose the will to live, sat in that lecture (Freya – UK).

Many of the rhythmic challenges facing our participants also appear to reflect older literature on academic work – in particular, most of our interviewees talked about the challenges of learning to keep up with the institutionally-normalized rhythms of publishing and teaching as part of being new academics, and the need for extra time (not available) to facilitate such learning:

As an ECA, it is so much harder to publish (...) It takes longer when you are new at something, than when you are experienced (Ella – Australia).

Similarly, the dissonance between CMS ECAs' professional and personal rhythms, where either the former or the latter risk disrupting each other's normalized sequential structures and fixed durations, triggering arrhythmia and operationalizing competing identity insecurities (e.g. 'being a good father' versus 'leaving the (academic) game before arriving' in the quotation below), was picked up in many of our interviewees' reflections:

We want to have a baby, but I'm not sure if I can be a good father right now, and I wouldn't want my wife to have all the responsibility. But at the same time, I also don't want to leave the game before I have arrived, so there is tension (Rafael – Brazil).

Changing rhythmic configuration

Against the backdrop of the above broad continuities, looking deeper within and across the rhythmic sets indicates noticeable differences, with movement towards rhythmic prioritization, temporal rigidification, faster pace, more advanced rhythms, and growing polyrhythmic complexity experienced by our CMS ECAs. These changes appear to be intricately linked with attempts to regulate academic identity through various controls associated with the audit culture.

Prioritization of rhythmic sets

The first noticeable difference is the changing relative importance of rhythmic sets, and in

particular, in many cases, the prioritization of the rhythms of publishing by linking academic performance evaluation with publication targets. This is exacerbated for those of our participants working in national contexts with national research evaluation exercises (e.g. UK, Brazil, Australia), whereby a specific number of high quality outputs needs to be generated every 4-5 years:

The only thing that really matters is publishing. Everything else is like: well if you do it just all right, it's okay... You don't have to be a great lecturer or a great supervisor, great administrator. You have to be a great publisher (Lucca – Brazil).

On the other hand, similarly to Spurling (2015), we found that many of our participants saw their time required to produce publications, despite the latter being institutionally valued, as easily pushed aside by other, more immediate, 'temporally-rigid' (Zerubavel, 1985) rhythms with shorter fixed durations, such as teaching: 'you know, the first thing that goes is writing, because that's seen as something you can do at home in your spare time' (Harriet – Ireland).

Temporal rigidification and the fastening of pace

Temporal rigidification is also a big issue for many of our interviewees and constitutes the second way in which the configuration of their working rhythms is impacted, often going hand-in-hand with the third – the fastening of pace and labor intensification. Many of our participants talked about how their lives were governed (and problematized) by increasingly rigid and unsustainable workload models (see earlier quotation from Freya) and seemingly blind bureaucratic timescales, for example in terms of targets and appraisals that were the source of much identity insecurity:

I had a colleague whose... probationary target was to submit certain things, and he went into his final appraisal and said: 'the PhD is all in hand and I am submitting the final version in two weeks' [...], and they said: 'no, sorry, you didn't hit the target and therefore we are terminating your contract in a month (Oliver – UK).

The more our interviewees were subject to temporal rigidification, the more they were generally 'time-famished' (Perlow, 1999). Teaching workloads were reported as increasingly unsustainable (fixed durations shrinking vis-à-vis the volume of work required) – e.g. one participant reported

marking ‘like a robot’, while another was given three new modules to develop and teach in one semester, which led to her being so tired that she was falling asleep at the dinner table. Those at Type 2 institutions were particularly affected:

Originally, we were taken on as teaching/research appointments. [...] I was on 30% research. They decided to stop this. Some people would be hired for research only, and some would be hired for teaching only. But for those, the teaching became ridiculous. The hours they meant to stand up in front of the class had doubled for everybody. For us, we would still have our [30% research], but it would have been eaten away by the increasing requirements for teaching (Ella – Australia).

In terms of research, many of our participants were faced with publications targets and timescales that were comparable to those of more senior academics within their schools and which therefore took little account of the individuals’ capabilities at their particular stage of career and development. The interviewees subject to such aggressive attempts of identity regulation reported how this felt like they were being ‘set up for failure’ as junior academics. Furthermore, there was a general acknowledgement among our interviewees that their critical management identity (often combined with geographical location) made this situation worse:

Being a critical entrepreneurship researcher means that you cannot publish anywhere. It’s really tough. [...] It was really funny in the last conference a few months ago. One of the gurus in the field, from the US, listed five top entrepreneurship journals, and he said no one in this room will publish there. It doesn’t mean your work is not good enough, but it will never go through (Rose – UK).

Encroachment of senior rhythms into the early-career stage

The point about publication targets leads to the fourth way in which the rhythmic configuration of our participants’ work and identity construction is impacted. Namely, alongside temporal rigidification, work intensification also disrupts the historical sequential structures and temporal locations in terms of what is expected at different stages of academic career. We see growing expectations for our participants to eurhythmically orchestrate, alongside other rhythmic sets, more advanced activities that would have previously been the remit of more senior academics – for example, leading external funding grants or taking on key administrative roles. Whereas this

sometimes creates exciting work and career opportunities that can help our interviewees gain ‘exposure’ for themselves and CMS work, it can also intensify and problematize the identity work required to be recognised as a successful academic. In other words, we see a deepening of identity insecurity, whereby many of our participants are constantly having to punch above their career-stage weight, ‘aiming high’ in the full knowledge that they ‘don’t get there’:

I have a full annual workload, plus two projects on top of it. Six papers, half of them were due in May, and the other half are seriously up against the deadline. I have no time to write them. I’m a course director, which is supposed to be a senior role, but I’m still at lecturer level. So I’m doing all these responsible jobs, for which I have no line management authority, and [...] you still come up against people who will just look at you and say ‘she’s a little slip of a thing. Who is she to tell me what to do?’ (Harriet – Ireland).

I feel that as well as doing the teaching and research, we are constantly being measured and jumping through these [funding] hoops to show that we are aiming high even if we don’t get there. I would like to say that this is ridiculous. I don’t want to bring in £250k to do a research project, I actually have lots of data, I am happy with taking on extra teaching, I am happy with working on 3 or 4 papers, I don’t need to do anything else (Megan – UK).

Polyrhythmic complexity

The disruption of the historical sequential career structures described above also adds to the fifth way in which the rhythmic configuration of our participants’ work and identity is impacted – namely, the proliferation of rhythms (growing polyrhythmia) leading to increasing rhythmic complexity and arrhythmic dissonance in working lives and selves. Our interviewees are expected to eurhythmically coordinate a large number of often conflicting rhythms, which can result in a situation in which they ‘have a lot of irons in a lot of fires but nothing is hot yet’ (Sophie – UK). This is tied to simultaneous working on several insecure identities that tends to be accompanied by a feeling of being somewhat lost professionally (‘I don’t know where I am going but I have got lots of places circled on the map!’ – also Sophie). For our participants the pull of CMS and business school identities in different directions can be particularly profoundly felt, which can be a source of creativity and innovation but also lead to rhythmic dissonance, disruption and conflict.

Additionally, for many of our interviewees the growing polyrhythmic complexity is also driven by the need to construct parallel but dissonant identities and working patterns due to the pressures of internationalization, which are in turn driven by the rising importance of global university league tables and journal rankings. These pressures are especially profound for those of our interviewees working in more geographically- and linguistically-peripheral (i.e. non-Anglophone) locations. Although the local contextual situations may differ, a common theme for such CMS ECAs is the growing need to become ‘internationally excellent’ academics (meaning, in practice, pursuing US-based or sometimes British, inevitably Anglophone, and preferably mainstream activities) as well as locally-relevant and impactful ones:

Right after my doctoral defense, I decided to write in French, because my dissertation was written in French, and for me it was more accessible to write and publish in French. Now I’m an assistant professor in an international institution, and clearly in my objectives I have to publish in English in very important international journals. We have an internal ranking. I would like to submit a paper to *Human Relations*, but the greatest achievement would be to publish in a US journal such as *ASQ* or *AMR*. If I want to follow the [path] of excellence, I have to publish in such journals. But then we are now asked to have an impact. For my topic, to have an impact on French policy-making, I need to write in French. I am writing a book in French, and some papers that are written for a broader audience than a scientific one (Lucie – France).

There is this huge pressure to move to an international approach in our publications, so to publish in ABS 3 and 4. ...This comes as a huge challenge for me because in a certain sense I feel like I am doing a new PhD to try to learn how to write and publish in a different language and in a different game (Lucca – Brazil).

Greater differences between local and ‘international’ contexts in these circumstances mean more rhythmic duplication, dissonance and conflict. They also mean a deepening of identity insecurity, where our participants struggle to keep up with both ‘international’ and local rhythms, and to learn the rules of both games fast enough. The process of learning itself adds new rhythms, pressures and complexities. One example of this is the need for regular language classes – one participant told us he had weekly English lessons in the expectation that he would soon be asked to teach in English. Another example is the time investment required in international travel to learn and

maintain the international game through conferences, networking and collaboration, which can disrupt other rhythms. In more extreme cases, local rhythms may have to be suspended altogether whilst ‘international’ rhythms are being learnt and ‘international’ identities constructed, as in the case of one of our interviewees who had to uproot to another continent:

I have worked in two other countries already. I started in Europe, then we moved to the US, and the move to the US was a way for me to match the expectations of the industry. I had applied for a job in [my home country], and... they expected me to have travelled the world, to have done postdocs in large universities, and so they told me that I had no ambition (Sara – US).

Polyrhythmia, eurhythmia, arrhythmia and their consequences

As can be seen from the previous section, our participants experience growing polyrhythmia and widespread arrhythmia. The five above-mentioned major ways in which the rhythmic configuration of their work is impacted by the pressures, identity regulation and identity insecurity within the contemporary HE system make working eurhythmically more challenging and bring about arrhythmic dissonance, disruption and conflict. The addition of new rhythms to our interviewees’ already busy schedules, and the growing rigidity and pace of rhythms and schedules, exacerbate the tensions and arrhythmias historically embedded in academic work (e.g. between teaching and research; professional and private lives). They also produce new tensions and arrhythmias (e.g. between national and international rhythms; ‘bread-and-butter’ activities and what was previously more ‘senior’ rhythms). These developments can create and normalize contexts where attempts to regulate academic identities are so obsessive and petty, rhythms so zealously enforced, and the resulting rhythmic clashes are so pervasive that it is impossible for our participants to be rhythmically successful (i.e. eurhythmic):

If you didn’t go to mandatory training, you got fined £50... I genuinely couldn’t go because every time they were running this course, it was clashing with my teaching. I am an empowered professional – I can make the judgment. The teaching is bread-and-butter, it takes precedent over some inane mandatory training. I got an email back from HR; everything was capitalised... I can read! What did you want me to do? No teaching? And then I was forgiven. If I didn’t go to the VC’s meeting, which clashed

with my teaching, £20 fine. If you don't do your marking in the 20-day turnaround, there will be disciplinary action... I found it quite offensive (Freya – UK).

We found that our interviewees were very aware of their arrhythmic conditions and were trying to understand how they were affected in terms of both cognitive and physical implications:

So it was a dual pressure [of research and teaching]. It really felt, I am really getting tired, I don't want to do this anymore, this teaching, this research, it is boring, I am writing papers that no one is going to read, I am not interested in the stuff I am writing, the teaching, the students are horrible (Jackson – UK).

[My supervisor] passed away and I started wondering about that. He had cancer, and I knew a lot of academics that had cancer. It might be related to the sort of job you have, because you are never turned off. You are full-time academic; there is no way of going home and turning it off. You're always thinking about it (Bruno – Brazil).

Coping strategies

We found that our interviewees were far from passive victims of arrhythmia. Quite the opposite, they were spurred on by it and the pressures of identity regulation and insecurity to devise a variety of strategies to work on the rhythmic configuration structuring their lives, whether it be by trying to address polyrhythmic complexity, combat arrhythmia through creation of more eurhythmia, or simply escape arrhythmia (or some combination of the above). These strategies could involve intensive, and often reflexive and creative identity work that required its own rhythmic patterns. Yet, although our interviewees sometimes won small eurhythmic victories, their responses tended to complicate the rhythmic configuration further and produce new arrhythmias.

Embracing polyrhythmia

The first strategy was to throw themselves into everything, embracing the polyrhythmic complexity and dissonance, and letting the pace of rhythms carry them through the early-career stage in the belief that they 'have to burn themselves when they are young because afterwards you can't pick up the pace' (Lucca – Brazil). We found that many of our participants, driven by the imperative they saw implicit in their CMS ethos and the academic vocation to make a difference in their institutions and beyond, routinely made things even harder for themselves by volunteering

for additional roles and responsibilities. For example, several of our interviewees were editors of journals they wanted to support or founding members of new scholarly societies. These roles helped them construct themselves as critical scholars living out their academic calling but were also time-consuming and disrupted their ‘core’ responsibilities. Participants themselves acknowledged that this strategy was unhealthy and unsustainable in the long term:

People say there are two types of workers. You have the camels and the horses. The camels, when they run out of food, they go slower, they stop, gradually, until you understand that they are slowing because of a problem. People say that horses are different. If you ask a horse to go, the horse just goes, until the horse dies. We are now following the horse model. So we are going very hard, but I don’t know if we can manage this for a long time. This is not healthy. This is not good, for our bodies and mind (Rafael – Brazil).

I sometimes fear I may have burnout in the next few years if I continue to work at this pace. It is not sustainable. So I have to either find smarter ways to work or find a new position in the next step (Ali – UK).

Reducing polyrhythmia

‘Finding smarter ways to work’ often translated into the second way of coping, where interviewees told us about doing the opposite of the over-commitment described above and knowingly abandoning or ignoring some roles and activities in order to cope with the rest. Although it helped to reduce polyrhythmia and somewhat abate arrhythmia, this strategy unwittingly contributed to the institutional entrenchment of some rhythms and identities as less important than others. For example, in many settings personal time and non-work identities became the ‘devalued realm’ (Hochschild, 1997) vis-à-vis the privileged realm of work. Non-work rhythms became seen as a disruption and breaks from work were abandoned:

My colleagues do nothing at the weekend but work. It was Thanksgiving, and it was our first break during the semester. So I said I had gone to this valley, and we did a big trip, and my colleague said: ‘I didn’t do anything. I hate breaks during the semester. They are a distraction!’ (Sara – US).

Among the work rhythms, the ‘sets’ of academic citizenship and collegiality, and administrative work, were often the first ones to be reluctantly abandoned, despite interviewees’ interest in them:

I did have a bad habit about volunteering for things, which I have tried to stop doing and I feel terrible. [...] I know the way things work here is: if you volunteer to do something, it is one more thing. You never lose something in return, you just get more work (Sophie – UK).

Interviewees who did this, reported feelings of guilt or even depression. The expediency of saying ‘no’ to things they would be good at hurt and saying ‘no’ to colleagues caused emotional disruption and the questioning of their identity as a good academic citizen and colleague. Even more painful were the situations in which our participants felt that they were sacrificing their CMS commitments on the altar of academic ‘excellence’ and business school managerialism. Several of our interviewees told us about months or even years when they had temporarily ‘lost themselves’, pursuing the relentless rhythms of performance evaluation to the exclusion of everything else, until there came a moment of realization that their work had become meaningless. At those points, it was their CMS identities and networks that helped them get back on track and develop more meaningful and often creative ways of coordinating the polyrhythmic complexity they were facing.

Creating eurhythmia

This leads to the third way of coping – consisting of efforts to make dissonant rhythms and identities more harmonic (eurhythmic), which was often an ideologically-motivated way of helping to redress the dissonances and dysfunctions as seen by our interviewees within the business school and HE systems. The critical orientation of our CMS-based participants tended to play a key role here. For example, despite the importance placed on research-led education by universities and international accreditors, one of the most persistent arrhythmias reported by our participants was between research and teaching. Many of our interviewees therefore worked hard to combat the dissonances between the two rhythmic sets wherever possible, aligning them more closely – for instance, by infusing previously mainstream management courses or programmes they were developing with their critical research or by making teaching a site of critical scholarship.

Another example was the effort to establish a eurhythmic relationship between research and collegiality. Whilst our participants frequently felt compelled to stay away from their universities to avoid interruptions and gain some ‘quiet time’ (Perlow, 1999) so that a writing rhythm could be established, they also recognised that it was more difficult to maintain a working rhythm if alone. So one solution was to develop their own collegial research rhythms in collaboration with others in a similar position, for instance by initiating regular lunchtime research discussion groups or reading clubs. Of course, similarly to the first coping strategy, this had the issue of introducing more rhythms into already busy schedules, and risked producing arrhythmias of its own:

We had to come up with some way of reinvigorating the importance of research. That was something very precious. We formed a sub-group and talked about our research projects. That (...) collaborative atmosphere, that is something I had to defend because it is something so easy to lose in the middle of the crazy expectations (Ali – UK).

The effort to make conflicting rhythms and identities more eurhythmic also sometimes took the form of attempts to integrate or at least accommodate them into some sort of overarching rhythm and pace. This could be about stringent personal scheduling and prioritization in a bid to establish sustainable rhythms for activities but also control them so that they do not swamp out others:

Usually I tend to work in the morning on things that require me to be fresh – that’s 4, 5, 6 hours in the morning. And then in the afternoon, 2-3 hours, I do things that are momentarily relevant (Alice – Switzerland).

Scheduling and structuring could also help establish more collective rhythms, and vice versa. For example, working with co-authors on a publication could help develop rhythmic structure, ensure deadlines were met, if only not to let the other person down. The self-discipline of scheduling also enabled some of our participants to make time for family, going to the gym, eating healthily and so on, but it was easily disrupted and would quite often ‘go to trash’ (also Alice) due to unforeseen time hikes and other temporal irregularities. A number of our interviewees were creative in attempting to remain in control by pre-empting such surprises – for example, by volunteering for activities with plenty of notice to avoid ‘being volunteered’ for them at the last minute. However,

in practice this was only ever partially successful, so on another level our participants also talked about establishing an overarching rhythm to set their own career pace:

If I had published more I could be a senior lecturer... I decided I would take things at *my* pace. Thank you very much (Harriet – Ireland).

As in this quotation, ‘own pace’ often meant ‘slow pace’ by institutional standards, and the corresponding ‘carving out of own identities’ (Bristow et al., 2017) in departure from the normalized rhythms of academic ‘excellence’. Sometimes this was an ideologically-motivated choice – an act of CMS resistance to business school managerialism. Other times this was a reluctant concession in recognition that, however hard they as individuals tried to reconcile conflicting demands, they were limited by institutional pressures and deadlines that ultimately shaped their everyday lives.

Escaping arrhythmia

The above recognition led to the final strategy reported by our participants – namely, fleeing arrhythmia by moving institutions or countries, or by leaving academia:

I told my husband that if we could find a job anywhere outside this country, I’m going, even if I have to fry potatoes or make hot dogs (Rose – UK).

Some of our interviewees pointed out that this extreme strategy was often surprisingly difficult to engage, as the depth of identity insecurity, and the rhythmic dissonance and conflict that made it necessary also brought on a kind of ‘paralysis’:

I think one major effect... is feeling somewhat paralyzed – not being able to move... You are a bit in a zombie-like state, where you hate where you are, but you are feeling unable to go anywhere. The way the institution can make you feel worthless is quite sublime (Anaya – UK).

The above quotation is a poignant illustration of the impact of arrhythmia on academic labor and identity construction, evoking images of ‘academic zombies’ with the potential connotations of illness, death, dehumanization and heartlessness.

We now turn to the discussion of implications of our findings followed by conclusions.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this article we examined the changing rhythmic configuration of academic labor and identity construction during the early stages of academic career on the margins of business schools. We brought together Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis, Zerubavel's (1985) sociology of time, and research on identity construction and insecurity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003) to explore the implications of the recent HE changes for CMS ECAs, who, we have argued, constitute a 'high-risk group' in the study of academic arrhythmia.

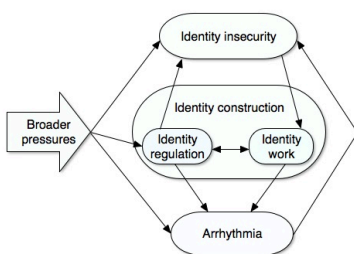
Although our analysis identifies some rhythmic continuities between academic life as portrayed in older literature (e.g. Frost & Taylor, 1996) and the experiences of our interviewees, it also points to five major ways in which CMS ECAs' lives are impacted by the changing HE and the arrival of the audit culture. These are: changing rhythmic prioritization; temporal rigidification; fastening and intensification of pace; encroachment of previously 'senior' rhythms into the early-career stage; and growing polyrhythmic complexity. These changes reshape the rhythmic conditions, within which our participants work, towards growing polyrhythmia, increasingly elusive eurhythmia, and the rise of arrhythmia. These developments are boosted by and also contribute to the deepening academic identity insecurity and attempts to regulate our participants' identities through increasingly rigid rhythms of academic performance evaluation.

Our interviewees are themselves implicated in these circular, mutually reinforcing dynamics of rhythms and identity. Far from being passive victims, they respond with a variety of rhythmic strategies that involve intensive, reflexive and creative identity work in relation to various facets of identity ('excellent academics', 'CMS scholars', etc.). Although they are sometimes successful in coping with or reducing polyrhythmia, in making rhythms in their lives more eurhythmic and in abating (or escaping) arrhythmia, their identity work tends to complicate the polyrhythmic configuration further, which produces further arrhythmias, and in turn further deepens identity

insecurity. There are certain parallels between these dynamics and Perlow’s (1999) vicious work-time cycle, in which software engineers’ individual time heroics perpetuated the time famine characterising their working conditions (driven by time-to-market pressures). Therefore, drawing inspiration from Perlow we suggest that the rhythm-identity dynamics we see in our study create a *vicious circle of arrhythmia*. This vicious circle is set in motion by the broader HE pressures, which problematise academic identities of our CMS ECA interviewees, lead to pervasive attempts of identity regulation in the form of the audit culture, and make the polyrhythmic configuration within which they work more complex, leading to growing arrhythmia. Our participants keep the circle spinning by dealing with these rhythmic and identity challenges in ways that add to the polyrhythmic complexity and arrhythmia, and further deepen their identity insecurity (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1: The Vicious Circle of Arrhythmia



Practical implications for CMS ECAs – breaking out of the circle

Similarly to Perlow’s (1999) engineers and Hochschild’s classic study of factory workers, CMS ECAs are ‘both prisoners and architects’ of the ‘time binds’ in which they find themselves (Hochschild, 1997). This suggests perhaps that they should stop playing their part in reproducing the arrhythmic conditions, but as we have shown this is not easy without losing the meaningfulness of work or giving up important aspects of their identities. Indeed, it is pertinent to understand the role of our participants’ multiple marginalities in the extent to which they are caught up in the

vicious circle of arrhythmia and also in their ability to break out of this circle. Firstly, the ‘make-or-break’ stage of their career means that their identities as academics are in a particularly intensive and vulnerable period of construction (Laudel & Gläser, 2008; Smith, 2010) for which they desperately need more time, and that they are not yet in a strong position to make the rules that shape their working conditions. Yet in many ways the arrhythmias they encounter leave them with no choice (unless it is to leave academia) but to actively work upon the polyrhythmic complexity in order to craft themselves as academics. Secondly, their CMS ethos places them in an extra insecure position on the margins of business schools (Bristow et al., 2017) and slows down the pace of their identity work vis-à-vis performance measures (e.g. in taking longer to learn how to publish critical work). It often puts them at odds with business school managerialism thus requiring creative rhythm-identity workarounds leading to further polyrhythmia and arrhythmia (most strikingly perhaps in the case of non-Anglophone CMS ECAs). On the other hand, CMS also acts as a source of reflexivity and creativity in the identification of arrhythmia and in the making of eurhythmia. It helps our participants question the demands of the rhythms of the audit culture and opens up the scope for identity work that makes their academic lives more authentic and eurhythmic. CMS can therefore be seen as a *pharmakon* (Derrida, 1981) – both a poison and a remedy for academic arrhythmia. It intensifies arrhythmia but also offers a means for CMS ECAs to put breaks on its vicious circle.

Breaking out of the circle completely is, however, a different matter, and this is where the dangers and limits for individual CMS ECAs must be acknowledged. The problem with the strategies available to our interviewees is that the most promising ones (such as creatively turning arrhythmia into eurhythmia) are also the most work-intensive and time-consuming, as well as physically, mentally and emotionally demanding. More importantly, they share the weakness of relying on the affected individuals to solve problems that are largely created and sustained by ongoing

systemic pressures and processes, which means that our participants are only ever able to treat the symptoms of arrhythmia rather than tackle the underlying condition. More radical individual approaches to combating systemic arrhythmia can become career-terminal, rendering CMS a pharmakon in its third sense of ‘scapegoat’ or ‘human sacrifice’, as CMS ECAs face professional ‘nonsurvival’ (Bristow, 2012) or at least ‘paralysis’ and ‘zombification’, as well as physical and mental illness.

It has long been acknowledged that ‘individual heroics’ have limited success in addressing time-related problems where the broader systemic pressures persist (Perlow, 1999). In such situations, a more collective and structural ‘time movement’ (Hochschild, 1997) is needed to treat the sources and implications of the pressures, and in the interim ongoing institutional support is required to sustain individual and organizational-level coping strategies (Perlow, 1999). Such collective approaches must therefore form a key part of addressing academic arrhythmia.

Practical implications for business schools – lessons from the margins

In considering collective and institutional interventions, we need to return to the issue of marginality of our interviewees. The question of whether business schools should care about what is happening on their margins goes back to the old debate over whether the persistence of non-mainstream approaches is a curse or a blessing for the management field (Knudsen, 2003). From a pluralist perspective that values the flourishing of alternative approaches, CMS ECAs’ stress, anxiety, illness, disenchantment, alienation and sometimes departure from academia is a loss to the intellectual diversity within business schools. Yet even from a less pluralist perspective, the relevance of CMS ECAs’ experiences to the broader business school ECA predicament still needs to be taken into consideration. Whilst the intellectual, geographical and linguistic marginalities make our participants’ arrhythmias more pervasive, their identity work more problematic and insecurity deeper, our review of literature (Archer, 2008; Bataille et al., 2017; Laudel & Gläser,

2008; Smith, 2010) indicates that much in their experiences is likely to be symptomatic of the problems faced by ECAs today more generally. In this context, there are lessons to be drawn from the margins about the ways in which vicious circles of arrhythmia can have a debilitating effect on the early stages of academic careers.

What then should be done on a more collective level to treat academic arrhythmia? We note that CMS ECAs rarely discussed support from their institutions – when we probed further, we were told that existing institutional support systems (e.g. training programs or mentoring schemes) were not particularly effective. They were perceived as adding to the pressures rather than helping to resolve them being seen as part of identity regulation aligned with the institutional goals of turning our participants into neoliberal academics. While this view does come from a CMS perspective, it is likely to also have some resonance with non-CMS scholars. What is needed instead, we suggest, is firstly, for business school HR/HRD departments to work *with* ECAs to create more genuinely bottom-up, de-instrumentalized development programmes capable of gaining ECAs' trust and addressing their own objectives and identities. Secondly, for business schools to explore how they can support ECAs to work with each other, for example through providing 'development days' where they can engage in collaborative activities (e.g. Action Learning working on mutually agreed areas of concern). ECAs could also be encouraged, for example through professional development elements of appraisal, to develop wider peer networks or perhaps even fora capable of championing improvement in ECA working conditions on a national level, a precedent in the Sciences being the *Australian Early and Mid-Career Forum* (EMCR) (Warren, 2018).

It is also time for business schools and universities to consider how they can develop their own strategies to combat academic arrhythmia. Understanding more deeply how the vicious circle of arrhythmia develops within specific national and institutional settings, and what pressures can be re-routed or alleviated could be the first step in this direction. There is much that can be done after

that depending on the specific context, such as institutionalising ‘quiet time’ (Perlow, 1999) to enable rhythmic solos by temporarily silencing other (dissonant) rhythms (e.g. writing retreats, bookable research time, marking days), creating ‘more elastic schedules’ (Hochschild, 1997: 29) where temporal rigidification is particularly damaging, and scaffolding what is expected from ECAs to take more realistic account of time required for academic development. More generally, interventions may be needed to slow down rhythms and re-introduce some stability of pace. This can be thought of as the development of academic *(s)pacemakers* – strategies that could give ECAs both time and space to develop and thrive as the future of the academic profession.

Theoretical implications

Bringing together Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythmanalysis, Zerubavel’s (1985) sociology of time, and literature on identity construction and insecurity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003) has enabled us to show how exploring the relationship between rhythms and identity can enrich both areas of knowledge. The focus on rhythms enables a greater understanding of the temporal dynamics of identity construction, helping to address the ‘when’ questions of identity research (Alvesson et al., 2008). Drawing on Lefebvre’s (2004) view of rhythms as multiple, pervasive and ongoing, identity construction emerges as a polyrhythmic process characterised by temporal multiplicity and complexity. Within this process, multiple facets of identity regulation and identity work have their own rhythms, which can be disrupted by temporal irregularities (Zerubavel, 1985) and which relate to each other in a number of different eurythmic or arrhythmic ways. Conversely, bringing identity construction into rhythmanalysis enables the study of how rhythms both shape and are shaped by who we are, who we are trying to become and whom other people, organizations and broader discourses are trying to make us. It exposes some of the underlying mechanisms through which rhythmic changes and their implications, including the crippling cognitive, social and physical consequences of arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004; Zerubavel, 1985) happen. The power-

resistance dialectics between identity regulation and identity work that sustain the identity construction process (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) can help to unpack the role of different forces in creating rhythmic clashes, conflicts and dissonance leading to arrhythmia or, conversely, offer insight into how they ally with each other to shape more eurythmic practices. We suggest that there is much potential for exploring the role of power relations in shaping complex polyrhythmic working arrangements through the identity construction perspective.

CONCLUSION

Having taken Frost & Taylor (1996) as our starting point, we contribute to the literature on the changing academic labor (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Huzzard et al., 2017; Clarke & Knights, 2015; Deem et al., 2008; Fitzgerald et al., 2012) and the CMS ECAs' predicament (Bristow et al., 2017; Robinson, Ratle, & Bristow, 2017). We have developed a theoretically-informed approach to the rhythms of academic life by bringing together Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis, Zerubavel's (1985) sociology of time, identity construction and identity insecurity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003). This has allowed us to take the pulse of early academic careers on business school margins, which we found fundamentally unhealthy. We have shown how the dynamics between the broader pressures, institutional strategies that seek to accommodate them, and our interviewees' attempts to reassert themselves in such contexts are sending academic lives spiraling down the vicious circle of arrhythmia – a phenomenon similar to Perlow's (1999) vicious work-time cycle. Within the vicious circle of arrhythmia, academic identity insecurity, identity regulation, CMS ECAs' own identity work, and academic arrhythmia are mutually reinforcing and co-constructive, so that it is hard for individuals to break out no matter what creative strategies they employ. We also contribute to the literature on the role of CMS in neoliberal business schools (Bristow et al., 2017 Butler & Spoelstra, 2014) by showing how our participants' CMS ethos acts

as a pharmakon (Derrida, 1981) – both a poison and a remedy of arrhythmia, sometimes leading to them becoming ‘scapegoats’ or the ‘human sacrifice’ of the system.

CMS ECAs are an extreme case, but one that, taken in conjunction with other literature on the ECA predicament within the changing nature of academic labor (Archer, 2008; Bataille et al., 2017; Laudel & Gläser, 2008; Smith, 2010) and older accounts of academic lives (such as Frost & Taylor, 1996), points to a worrying trajectory for business schools and academic careers more broadly. Contemplating this trajectory demonstrates the need for more in-depth understanding of how arrhythmia develops within specific contexts, and more systemic and structural approaches to problems in academic careers. Moreover, given that problems of identity, time and pace are endemic to large swathes of contemporary society (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003; Fleming, 2017), our paper offers the vicious circle of arrhythmia as a theoretical tool for exploring rhythm-identity dynamics in organizational settings beyond academia.

Our final thoughts are, however, reserved for business schools. The latter have arguably used their role in the production and dissemination of new managerialism to construct themselves more powerful identity narratives (Huzzard et al., 2017). However, our paper emphasizes the rhythmic costs of managerialist HE and the backlash impact these costs can have on business school identities. We hope that we can contribute some urgency to reimagining business schools as polyrhythmic places where ECAs of all intellectual orientations have the time to learn and develop, and which are capable of looking for identity narratives beyond managerialism – perhaps to eurhythmic diversity that could help address today’s complex societal problems.

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APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANTS’ PROFILES

Pseudonym of research Participant	Gender	University Type*	Country of Employment	Age Range
Ali	M	1	UK	25-34
Alice	F	1	Switzerland	25-34
Anaya	F	2,1	UK	35-44
Bruno	M	1	Brazil	35-44
Christos	M	1	UK	25-34
Curtis	M	1	New Zealand	35-44
David	M	2,1	UK	35-44
Ella	F	2	Australia	45-54
Freya	F	2,1	UK	35-44
Harriet	F	1	Ireland	35-44
Hugo	M	1	Sweden	25-34
Isabella	F	1,2	Chile	35-44
Jackson	M	1	UK	35-44
Julia	F	1	Netherlands	25-34

Lewis	M	2,1	South Africa	25-34
Lucca	M	2	Brazil	35-44
Lucie	F	2	France	25-34
Martha	F	1,2	UK	25-34
Martina	F	1	UK	25-34
Medha	F	1	India	25-34
Megan	F	1	UK	45-54
Namya	F	1	India	45-54
Niklas	M	2,1	UK	35-44
Oliver	M	1	UK	25-34
Rafael	M	1	Brazil	35-44
Rose	F	1	UK	25-34
Sam	M	1	UK	35-44
Samiya	F	2	Pakistan	35-44
Sara	F	1	US	35-44
Sophie	F	1	UK	25-34
Vanessa	F	1	Switzerland	25-34
Zac	M	2	UK	25-34

* In cases where participants have changed type of institution in the course of their careers to date we acknowledge this in chronological order.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

In the interviews, we used a set of pre-prepared questions as a guide to prompt our interviewees' rhythmanalysis. As our interviews were semi-structured, the question guide was used loosely and evolved in each interview to reflect that particular interviewee's reflections on rhythms and identity. We did not necessarily follow the interview guide in the pre-specified order, or ask questions exactly as planned. Instead, we encouraged our participants to talk at length around the subject (Cassell, 2009: 503). As the interviews progressed, we continuously adapted and refined the questions in order to focus on the ones that tended to work best. The list below represents the interview questions and probes that we found to be the most effective in eliciting the themes of rhythms and identity discussed in this paper.

What has it been like starting out as a CMS ECA?

How are the different aspects of your job structured and balanced? What has your workload been like? How have you been dealing with it?

Can you tell me about your typical day? Week? Year?

To what extent have you been able to establish a pace/rhythm? Can you describe this rhythm for me? To what extent does this rhythm function well?

Any examples of when the rhythm breaks down and why?

What main pressures have you experienced in your job? How have you responded to the pressures?

Do you feel you have conflicting demands? How does that make you feel? Are there consequences

for your career or personal life?

How do you prioritise your time? How do you make time to do what you want to do/follow your own agendas?

Have you had any support formally and informally in establishing your work patterns and dealing with the rhythms of work? To what extent has this helped? What institutional adjustments/support could help you in the future?

Do you feel that being a critical management scholar has in any way affected your experience as an ECA? If yes, how? If not, why do you think that is?

How healthy do you think the academic lifestyle is? What can/do you do to manage it?

How do you think your work will change over the next couple of years? What changes do you think you will make (to your practices), and why?

What advice would you give to others starting out, especially in terms of establishing a working rhythm?

Overall, how would you describe your experience as a CMS ECA so far?