

Shaping the Future: Challenges and Opportunities for Early-Career Academics

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INTRODUCTION

Academics starting their careers today will shape the profession in many ways, and represent its future. Looking into the future of management education therefore involves examining current challenges faced by these new management educators. Early-career academics (ECAs) may encounter economic and status precarity, various forms of discrimination, bureaucratic excesses and managerialism, crushing workloads and unrealistic performance requirements. They also face strong normative expectations of what it means to be an academic – which spheres of activity they should privilege, and what their career trajectory should look like. So what does the current predicament of ECAs can tell us about the future of management education?

In this chapter, we draw on the literature on ECAs and on our own research (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017, 2019; Ratle, Robinson, Bristow, & Kerr, 2020; Robinson, Ratle, & Bristow, 2017) to explore this predicament. We met during our doctoral studies, and upon starting our respective careers we discovered gaps between our expectations and the realities of working in contemporary business schools. Our programme of research was therefore triggered by these early experiences, and also by our own questioning of the mixed ways in which ECAs are often portrayed in the literature. ECAs can be seen as a vulnerable group that has limited capacity to resist the growing neoliberalism of higher education and its effects (Laudel & Gläser, 2008). These early years can also be seen as a time of liminality (Smith, 2010) that implies an active process of identity construction for new entrants. This process is fraught with challenges and anxiety (Henkel, 2004; Trowler & Knight, 2000) but also presents many opportunities for ECAs to make positive differences in their working lives and beyond (e.g., Archer, 2008a, 2008b; Bristow, 2012; Harris, 2005; Smith, 2010).

Whilst each of the publications we refer to has its own methodological characteristics, overall our research draws on a dataset of 38 semi-structured interviews with ECAs from 15 countries. Specifically, we studied Critical Management Studies (CMS) ECAs for a number of reasons. One is that our own affiliation to this group means that we have a vested interest in its

experiences and future. Another consideration is methodological: in that studying a specific group of ECAs contrasts with most existing studies that treat the category 'ECA' as a generic phenomenon. Finally, CMS ECAs often occupy a doubly-marginalised position: they are newcomers in a field where the ethos is more aligned with the tenets of neoliberal capitalism than with its critique.

Below, we discuss five different challenges, and what can be done about them. These challenges do not constitute an exhaustive list of what ECAs may have to face but are representative of the themes emerging from our research over the years. For individual academics, how they engage with these challenges will shape their future: whether or not they endure within the profession, and the extent to which they thrive professionally. These are also challenges for the future of the profession as a whole if it is to escape the narrowing of its horizons. The collective response to these challenges will determine whether or not management education can be a field characterised by pluralism, diversity, and the possibility of critique – something we come back to in the discussion section, before concluding the chapter with some reflections on the need for collective actions and solutions for shaping the future of the early-career experience, and therefore the future of management education.

CHALLENGE 1: TRANSITIONING FROM PHD STUDENT TO UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEE

In becoming a university employee, an ECA experiences a serious change from being on the receiving end of management education for many years to actually delivering it. What happens when these tables are turned and ECAs find themselves the transmitters of management education to incoming cohorts of students? How do ECAs learn to become management educators? Is the transition a smooth natural extension of their doctoral studies or is it fraught with dilemmas, identity struggles and learning shocks? It is pertinent to pause to consider how the experiences of these incoming management educators might effect and shape the future of management education.

Of course, this is not always a sudden transformation: PhD students often engage in teaching as graduate teaching assistants and are socialised into being an academic through PhD programmes (Prasad, 2013). Indeed, the PhD journey has often been referred to as an apprenticeship for an academic career (Austin, 2009; Bansel, 2011). Even so, the transition from PhD to ECA has been characterised as a liminal and often painful period of transition (Bristow, 2012; Prasad, 2015; Raineri, 2015). Our research into the experiences of CMS ECAs conveys how despite PhD socialisation, many early career experiences are filled with shock, disorientation and disillusionment. In studying this transitional period and the disjunctures between ECAs' expectations of academia and the lived experience of working in the neoliberal business school, we have drawn on Bourdieu's notion of hysteresis (Bourdieu, 2002) to demonstrate how ECAs struggle to modify their (PhD) habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) to align with the expectations of their schools (Robinson et al., 2017).

Such disjuncture between expectations and practice sometimes leads to what we term 'starting pains' (Robinson et al., 2017), characterised by a mismatch between realities such as: work overload and conveyor belt mentalities versus notions of vocation and nurturing teaching; lack of agency versus notions of academic freedom; and lack of support and mentorship from senior colleagues versus notions of collegiality. Dealing with the amount and type of teaching can be both a shock and a draining experience for many. ECAs talked of spending day and night including weekends marking, just sleeping briefly on the sofa, falling asleep at the dinner table, and having to develop three new courses in one semester (Robinson et al., 2017). This 'conveyor belt' approach worked against their sense of responsibility as educators (Bristow et

al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2017). Others talked of being bored with what they had been given to teach and not wanting to do the same thing for the next 20 years (Bristow et al., 2017). Initially not knowing what working conditions were acceptable and negotiable was a challenge for ECAs who lacked the experience and background knowledge to contest them. This was also impacted by often extremely heavy probationary targets (Ratle et al., 2020).

Whilst the transition from PhD student to university employee can be a serious challenge, we found evidence that it is a time that can provide ECAs with opportunities to reappraise their expectations, reaffirm their convictions, and trace the path to their future. It is also a time for 'job crafting', creating an opportunity to reflect on how they can do their work, and how they relate to it. Over time our participants developed what, following Bourdieu, we term a 'critical habitus' where CMS ECAs put their critical credentials to good use finding ways of challenging unreasonable workloads and adapting mainstream courses by stealth to suit their own politics and preferences, or by reacting to the *Zeitgeist* to make their courses more critical when they see an interest or need from their students (Bristow et al., 2019). Our data highlighted an absence of good mentoring from senior colleagues, yet encouragingly it also showed much information-sharing amongst ECAs. Forming social networks thus allowed ECAs to share tips and tricks and build up courage to challenge managerial excesses (Bristow et al., 2017, Robinson et al., 2017).

Taken together, such practices amount to 'small spaces of hopefulness' (Archer, 2008a: 282) which help ECAs individually and collectively to achieve acceptable teaching conditions but also to gain confidence to develop and change teaching approaches to fit their own sense of vocation and preferences. Such practices also help ECAs in the development of their own academic identities. Processes of academic identity development will be discussed in the following section.

CHALLENGE 2: CRAFTING AN IDENTITY AND FINDING MEANING

The second challenge for ECAs is how to craft a professional identity for themselves and find meaning in their work as management educators. This necessitates developing and balancing all aspects of an academic role (teaching, research and administration), as these are not always mutually supportive (Bristow et al., 2019). Crafting an academic identity is not an easy task as such identities tend to be insecure and fragile (Grey, 2010; Knights & Clarke, 2014). The audit and excellence cultures of the neoliberal business school have many mechanisms in place to measure 'academic excellence' and judge academics on all aspects of their performance (Butler & Spoelstra, 2012, 2014; Jones et al., 2020). Trying and often failing to be the 'ideal academic' (very narrowly defined), where one is never better than one's last publication or teaching evaluation is often in sharp contrast with trying to find meaning in academic work (Clarke, Knights, & Jarvis, 2012; Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011). Not surprisingly, performance anxiety and mental health issues have been growing in academia over the past decade (Morrish, 2019; Smith & Ulus, 2019) with universities being labelled 'anxiety machines' (Hall & Bowles, 2016).

For ECAs, it could be argued that such identity challenges are exacerbated by the transitional and precarious nature of the ECA experience which often involves fulfilling challenging probation criteria and being on a series of short-term contracts (Laudel & Gläser, 2008). Archer draws our attention to the plight of ECAs trying to be both 'authentic' and 'successful' academics who must negotiate on a daily basis not only their attempts at 'becoming' but also the threat of 'unbecoming' (Archer, 2008b: 385). How then do ECAs craft their academic identities and what identity work do they have to undertake in order to establish identities in

line with their own ambitions and values but also which are in line with the exigencies of their multi-faceted roles?

In Bristow et al. (2017) we investigated academic identity creation and its interplay with resistance and compliance, and demonstrated that ECAs use multiple and diverse ways of negotiating and developing their academic identities in response to strong normative pressures to conform – what could be interpreted as institutional identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). However, our research has shown that ECAs are not passive and docile worker-bodies who become inscribed with dominant managerial discourses (Thomas & Davies, 2005). Instead they demonstrate considerable autonomy over their identity construction (Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2001), actively engaging in ‘self-determined action and alternative subject positions’ (Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013: 559).

ECAs went through a reflexive process of reproducing, maintaining, contesting and transforming their sense of self (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) in which they posed the questions ‘who am I?’ and ‘who do I want to be?’ in their working lives (Bristow et al., 2017). Such identity work becomes particularly important as the disjunctures between expectations and ambitions and life in contemporary business schools that we saw in Challenge 1 hit home for incoming academics. The following example shows the tensions between what sort of meaningful management educator/researcher an ECA wanted to be and the stark realities of the business school:

I always wanted to become a teacher, and I enjoyed reading and researching. Being an academic meant being able to do both at the same time... I am doing teaching because we are raising the new generation; we are giving them something. And we are doing research to create something new... But a year ago, I realised we are doing teaching to get money... and we are doing research because of the stupid REF which in the end means nothing. (Interviewee 2 in Bristow et al., 2017: 1198)

Much identity work would be needed to reconcile these two positions. What gave us hope was the energy ECAs put into picking themselves up following such disappointments and how they worked to forge their own paths through the system in ways which made them neither powerless victims of the system, nor careerists fully capitulating to it (Clarke & Knights, 2015). Rather what we saw was ECAs engaging in a complex and nuanced dance between compliance and resistance (see also Challenge 3 below).

Several tactics were employed in developing their educator identities. One important manifestation of identity forging was their ability to develop themselves as CMS educators largely through micro-political practice. Examples include using critical questioning to challenge students firmly held beliefs through a sort of ‘micro-emancipation’ (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This can come at a cost as speaking truth to power entails ‘risk and danger and threat’ (Fournier & Smith, 2012: 467). One participant recounted a row with a senior colleague as she tried to change assessment to bring it more in line with her pedagogic values. Although she felt she had gone too far and suffered a sleepless night, she subsequently received an email from the colleague in question saying that he appreciated her taking a principled stand (Bristow et al., 2017 and interview data). Sometimes ECAs hid behind their perceived newness to do things that more seasoned colleagues would not dare to do. Others initially followed the normative paths pointed out to them, but at points in their journey had moments of epiphany where they realised they needed to develop an academic identity they were more comfortable with. Such trigger points included, for example, being bored and unhappy with what they were teaching and researching, not finding meaning, or not getting the success they expected.

Resolving such issues sometimes involved changing institutions, forging solidarity with other colleagues, or taking on stimulating external roles such as journal editing. So such apparent moments of crisis could be an opportunity for reflexivity, reassessment, and the making of important and positive career decisions, in other words: an opportunity for crafting identity.

CHALLENGE 3: FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND COMPLIANCE

The challenges experienced by ECAs in transitioning from PhD to their first academic jobs (Challenge 1) and their struggles to construct meaningful academic identities (Challenge 2) led us to probe the extent of their agency. Given their struggles to establish themselves, what opportunities do ECAs actually have to make a difference and shape their field? And at what cost– to the ECAs and to management education – does this shaping currently occur?

From our own ECA experiences, from conversations with colleagues and from the ECA literature, we became aware of the tendency to construe ECAs as passive and helpless victims of the damaging effects of the HE system (Laudel & Gläser, 2008). This included even the best-meaning senior colleagues, who advised us to avoid speaking out and to keep a low profile. ‘Wait until you are more established,’ they would say, ‘then you can take a stand’. We felt strongly, however, that such an approach underplays and, in some ways, even erodes ECA agency. Postponing ECA agency risks ‘domesticating’ ECA critique, making it more ‘toothless’ as junior scholars become enculturated into the norms and practices of the neoliberal ‘Brave New Higher Education’ and less willing to initiate radical change (Bristow, 2012).

This links to the paradox of embedded agency, and in particular marginal actors being more willing but less able, and central actors being more able but less willing to institute change, which is a persistent conundrum in organisational and social theory (Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Seo & Creed, 2002). We explored this conundrum empirically (Bristow et al., 2017) by looking at CMS ECAs as a poignant ‘extreme case’ because of their double marginality. Moreover, their critical orientation, which calls for reflexivity, de-naturalisation, non-performativity and anti-managerialism (Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2009; Fournier & Grey, 2000) places them at odds with performative, neo-managerialist HE, and makes them acutely aware of this dissonance, and willing to challenge the established conventions and practices.

This is where the opportunity for agency lies. We found that this dissonance translates into an ongoing struggle to find a balance between resistance – in its subversive but also in its constitutive and transformative sense (Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Thomas & Hardy, 2011) of trying to make a difference and (re)shape the field – and compliance (keeping to existing norms and expectations). Due to their position, ECAs can avoid neither compliance nor resistance but have to engage in a continuous, tension-filled, contingent and nuanced working out of their relationships to the conflicting manifestations of forces at the intersection of which they find themselves. To do this, they make use of the complexity and contradictions in the discourses and practices constituting the neoliberal business schools and their regime of ‘excellence’ (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014). ECAs develop multiple strategies including a mixture of diplomatic compromise, radical heroism and authentic idealism through which they navigate the complex power relations on a daily basis. Through this effort they produce more tensions and contradictions but also make use of overlaps between conflicting discourses and practices and create new alliances. In these everyday, micro-emancipatory (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and micro-compliant ways they actively shape not only themselves but also the business schools in which they work.

The field-shaping willingness and capacity of CMS ECAs, who are in a particular challenging position due to their critical orientation, highlights the role of ECAs more generally in constituting the future of business schools and management education. Yet this role is currently perilous and comes at a great cost. Getting the balance between resistance and compliance wrong can have grave consequences, including alienation, mental and physical ill health and loss of employment or voluntary departure from academia. Even where ECAs avoid those consequences, the sheer effort of the daily balancing act can be debilitating. We explore these issues in more depth in the sections on Challenges 4 and 5 below.

CHALLENGE 4: SETTING THE PACE AND FINDING A RHYTHM

A recurring theme emerging from our research is that starting an academic career in a contemporary business school is particularly challenging because of the ways in which academia and academic labour have changed over the last few decades. Much has been written about the commercialisation, consumerisation, marketisation and McDonaldization of academia (Fitzgerald, White, & Gunter, 2012; Furedi, 2002; Hayes & Wynyard, 2002; Huzzard, Benner, & Kärreman, 2017; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), which is now driven by a neoliberal new-managerialist governmentality characterised by the audit culture with its pervasive mechanisms of measuring and managing academic productivity and performance (Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Strathern, 2000; Tourish, Craig, & Amernic, 2017). One of the aspects of this ‘New Higher Education’ (Jary & Parker, 1998) is the growing intensification and complexity of academic work.

In Bristow et al. (2019) we drew attention to the challenge this poses for ECAs in terms of trying to establish working rhythms and pace. Considering this challenge through Lefebvre’s (2004) sociological notions of polyrhythmia, eurhythmia and arrhythmia helps to appreciate its extent and implications. Lefebvre wrote of the pervasiveness and importance of rhythms in social and physical lives, and of the *polyrhythmic* nature of social and physical bodies. Polyhythmia refers to the ways in which social and physical lives are organised through multiple and diverse rhythms, which sometimes coexist in harmony (i.e. *eurhythmically*) with each other and sometimes clash and conflict with each other, producing the dissonant state of *arrhythmia*. Similarly to medical arrhythmia (a life-threatening condition in which the heart beats with an irregular rhythm) sociological arrhythmia is a debilitating condition affecting the future of management education.

Comparing older literature on academic labour (e.g. Frost & Taylor, 1996) and our data, we found that academic lives are becoming increasingly polyrhythmic and arrhythmic, making eurhythmia increasingly elusive. In particular, changing prioritisation of certain rhythms (typically those to do with the narrow notion of academic ‘excellence’) over others; increasing temporal rigidity of deadlines and performance measures; fastening and intensifying pace of work; encroachment of previously ‘senior’ rhythms (for example, those of external funding applications and significant administrative roles) into the early-career years; and growing polyrhythmic complexity mean that there is an increasing proliferation of academic rhythms coexisting and vying for ECAs’ attention and that these rhythms continually clash with each other. ECAs are thrown into the deep end of this rhythmic cacophony, faced with the expectations to deliver simultaneously on multiple fronts at the levels previously expected from much more senior academics and with no time to learn the multiple facets of academic work whilst trying to orchestrate this complexity.

In this context, we found that ECAs are faced with what we call a *vicious circle of arrhythmia*. Struggling to juggle many clashing rhythms and unbearable workloads, they attempt to develop coping strategies. These include embracing polyrhythmia (throwing themselves into

everything and working at an unsustainable pace whilst hoping that this is a temporary measure before they become established), reducing polyrhythmia (knowingly and strategically abandoning some rhythms at the expense of others), creating eurhythmia (reshaping conflicting rhythms so as to make them more harmonic with each other) and escaping arrhythmia (moving universities or leaving academia altogether). These strategies can be brave and inventive, but with the exception of leaving academia (which creates a loss to the future of the profession) and strategically abandoning rhythms (which can create problems for career development, alienate ECAs, and erode the notion of the complete academic engaging in all aspects of scholarship (Boyer, 1990)), they tend to have the effect of piling further rhythmic and workload burdens on already overloaded individuals, therefore making the problems worse. It is striking that the most promising and field-shaping strategy of finding ways of making conflicting rhythms more eurhythmic is also the most time-consuming, labour-intensive, and mentally and emotionally demanding for ECAs. Struggling to cope with arrhythmia adds its own new set of rhythms and arrhythmias to the rhythms and arrhythmias they are attempting to address. For these reasons, with the exception of leaving academia, it is hard for individuals to fundamentally break out of the vicious circle of arrhythmia.

Systemic time-related issues are notoriously difficult for individuals to resolve (Perlow, 1999), and it is therefore crucial that a more collective and radical approach is taken to addressing the vicious circle of academic arrhythmia if business schools and management education are to have a sustainable future. Current support mechanisms (e.g. training, mentorship schemes) are seen by many ECAs as largely ineffective, because they are mostly experienced as yet another demand on their time and yet another burden to bear. Rather than curing the underlying condition of arrhythmia they merely and superficially treat its symptoms; because they do not address the systemic issues, they end up contributing to them. What is needed instead is a bottom-up approach to ECA support and a much more gradual and realistic scaffolding of what is expected from ECAs during the early career stage in order to enable them to learn, grow and develop. This approach needs to engulf all levels of university structures and processes and be supported through wider HE policy in order to effect a noticeable and sustainable change. This should go hand-in-hand with a deep reimagining of academic work, business schools and management education. At its core, it links to rethinking what matters in society.

There are latent opportunities here to address the unsustainable pace, temporal constraints and complexity of business school lives, reconsidering the effects of relentless neoliberal capitalist productivity and competition that are becoming even more apparent in the context of the 2020 pandemic. At this unique historical moment, when both global and local social, economic, mental, emotional and physical resources are stretched ever further beyond their limits, the fundamentally unhealthy condition of academia places its people and institutions at an increasing risk of collapse. Now is the make-or-break time – an opportunity to make use of the widespread questioning of the ‘normal’ ways of doing things to consider what truly matters and what should be set aside in rethinking the purpose of management education and its role in society. If this opportunity is not wasted, it could pave the way to a much more eurhythmic future.

CHALLENGE 5: DEALING WITH ADVERSE CONTEXTS

Whilst the previous section depicted academia as an exhausting and potentially unhealthy place for many ECAs, here we add to this portrait by exploring how for some it can be a place characterised by fear, violence and domination – key concepts we used in Ratle et al. (2020) to understand ECAs’ experience of target-driven cultures. We wanted to problematise the audit culture within universities (Chandler, Barry, & Clark, 2002; Strathern, 2000; Tourish et al.,

2017) and specifically business schools (Huzzard et al., 2017; Willmott, 2011), and to explore how, for ECAs whose careers are set against the background of externally-imposed target-focused cultures (Jones et al., 2020; Mingers & Willmott, 2013), the inculcation of fear through processes of domination is a significant feature of their lived experience.

We draw on Bourdieu (1976, 1980, 2016) to distinguish modes of domination and their related forms of violence: *inert*, *overt* and *symbolic*. Bourdieu argues that contemporary societies are generally characterised by ‘soft’ forms of power. A lasting and stable social order requires the ‘dominated’ to acquiesce in their own domination, thus domination must either be objectified and stabilised through impersonal institutional mechanisms – what Bourdieu (2016: 212) calls the inert violence of institutions – or mediated through close interpersonal encounters between the dominant and the dominated (2016: 212-213). Those interpersonal modes of domination operate through two forms of violence: overt violence (Bourdieu, 1980: 217-218) and symbolic violence.

Inert violence was something present in the discourse of most of our participants, who viewed the university systems as being imposing, impersonal, and largely incomprehensible. This inert violence of institutions is enacted in a variety of places, such as: workload models skewed to generate heavy workloads, rules around work visas that render foreign citizens vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, or contractual rules asymmetrically imposed that legitimise exploitative arrangements. The negative effects of this inert violence were many and included: feelings of isolation and confusion; feelings of being crushed, undervalued and bullied by the system; feeling constantly under surveillance; fear of failure to perform adequately and having no recourse to appeal; or fear of losing their jobs for arbitrary and unjustified reasons.

Overt or economic violence involves, ‘[the] direct, daily, personal work’ of domination, enforcing power relations in an overt way, through physical threat or the threat of economic ruin’ (Bourdieu, 1976: 190). This is relevant to academia given the widespread precarity to which ECAs are particularly vulnerable (Bataille, Le Feuvre, & Kradolfer Morales, 2017). Our participants experienced how the impersonal exigencies of the audit systems were mediated through interpersonal relations with line managers, members of evaluation committees, or deans. We heard many times the ‘shifting goalposts’ story, where the slipperiness of targets, the lack of clear guidelines led to distressing situations. One participant was told that whilst the targets set to pass probation and achieve permanence of employment had been met, that was invalid, as the targets were too low in the first place. Another was told that under previous rules, the publication targets had been met, but that under brand new rules, the worth of those publications was demoted, and that the targets were now unmet.

Overt violence requires more effort for the dominant to enact, and as such, is less ‘efficient’ than the ‘softer’, more subtle and seductive strategies of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu, 1976: 191; Kerr & Robinson, 2012), which can be understood as the imposition and misrecognition of arbitrary power relations as natural and legitimate (Bourdieu, 1976: 122). In Ratle et al. (2020), we argue like Roumbanis (2018) that it is well embedded within university cultures, and we show how this subtle form of violence is exercised through line management relationships and other day-to-day governance mechanisms. For example, personal development reviews can be more about hitting targets (Tourish et al., 2017) than supporting, nurturing and guiding new entrants into the profession. Some participants pointed out that mentoring relationships can have two sides: mentors can genuinely help the development of ECAs, but they can also enforce the demands of the system. Whilst we set out to draw attention to symbolic violence, ultimately we were astonished by how important inert and overt violence were in the accounts of ECAs. This can suggest that symbolic violence goes unrecognised, but also that academia may rely more on inert and overt violence, making it (from a Bourdieusian

point of view) a relatively ineffective machine of domination. This offers another glimmer of hope, and an opportunity for agency.

We also sought to account for how ECAs dealt with such adverse contexts using those opportunities for agency. The emerging theme here is similar to those highlighted in Challenges 3 and 4 – namely that ECAs are far from being passive recipients of violence but rather strive to make a positive difference to their own working lives. However, they are also constrained and impacted by the pervasive violence of the system, which has consequences for the extent and effects of their actions. We explored this tension using Meyerson and Scully's (1995) notion of tempered radicals, who are 'individuals who identify with... their organizations and are also committed to a cause, community or ideology that is... at odds with the dominant culture of the organization' (p. 586). Such individuals are 'radicals' because 'they challenge the status quo, but they are also 'tempered in the sense that they seek moderation', and like steel in a fire, are strengthened by experience, while retaining their 'temper' (anger) against the dominant culture. Seeing ECAs as tempered radicals enabled us to identify many individualised small acts of resistance against a powerful regime, but we also saw a danger that those acts of resistance ultimately reinforce the system they are meant to fight against. This is because in dealing with adversity, ECAs often end up being violent towards themselves, as well as being violent towards the system that exerts violence upon them. The hope for a better future of management education, by contrast, is to eradicate its violence much more radically – the opportunity for which lies in collective action and approaches.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After nearly a decade of studying the predicament of ECAs, our solution to many of the problems they face is simple: ECAs need structures of support that are genuinely and sincerely aimed at developing and nurturing their careers. This would be in contrast with many existing structures which, under the appearances of promoting personal development, are merely elaborate disciplinary mechanisms. A measure of success would be that those structures, rather than instilling the fear and anxiety described in Challenge 5, would create something like joy and genuine enthusiasm, and a sense that one has control and freedom over their own career and academic practice. In fact, those feelings should ideally characterise the entire experience of working in a university – something that still has the potential to be a wonderful and meaningful occupation, as many of our research participants highlighted. So how can we get there?

First, we wish to reemphasise the importance and the opportunity of academic activism, and the potential role ECAs can play. By simple virtue of being newcomers, ECAs do not have the same stakes in the 'old ways' of doing, and they can be the catalyst for real changes in management education. Society is confronted with crises on different fronts – economic, social, political, environmental, and the multi-faceted consequences of the 2020 pandemic. Echoing Jones et al. (2020), we refuse to give-in to pessimism, as crises often reconfigure power relations and create opportunities for agency. This is a moment to seize for radical reforms on all these fronts, and within the different spheres of academic work. As *teachers*, we see an opportunity for ECAs to privilege values-based education, replacing the technocratic agenda of mainstream management education with a search for purpose and meaning. As *scholars*, we see an opportunity for a deeper and more public engagement with societal issues (in the UK context, 'impact' is exactly what national research policies profess to want to achieve). And as *colleagues*, we see an opportunity for ECAs to exemplify and enact a different way of being an academic, and to be the agents of this much needed transformation.

Second, as we have argued in each and all of our collective writings (Bristow et al., 2017, 2019; Ratle et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2017), how ECAs individually respond to the pressures and the challenges they face can often be contributing to reproducing or even worsening those pressures. For example, we have discussed how ECAs' commitment to the profession can lead them to accept more hardship than they should (Robinson et al., 2017), and the individual strategies developed to deal with unbearable workloads can create a vicious circle of arrhythmia (Bristow et al., 2019), rendering the problem even more acute. We have seen also how, by trying to deal with adversity and deal with a system that exerts violence upon them, ECAs can end up being violent towards themselves. We hope that this chapter and our work preceding it will contribute to raising consciousness about the limitations of individual strategies and coping mechanisms.

This brings us to our *third* point, derived from the previous one: if the effectiveness of individual strategies is limited, collective and concerted action is essential. Who is meant to be part of this 'collective action' is the final question we wish to discuss here. We are tempted to say: 'Everyone!', and it is probably true that different stakeholders have a role to play: ECAs themselves, but also their colleagues, and middle and senior academic managers. Deep structural and radical change does not happen easily, and ECAs could benefit from as many allies as they can enlist. However, it is also clear to us that such transformation cannot happen without ECAs, and that their senior colleagues cannot solely be relied upon, even with all the best intentions in the world. Whilst we have discussed in Challenge 3 the paradox of embedded agency (marginal actors are more willing but less able to institute change, whilst central actors are more able but less willing), here we wish to turn our focus on the question of ECAs diversity, and what it could mean for the future.

Taking stock of the five challenges described in this chapter, one can feel that starting a career can be a real obstacle course. A few will survive and thrive, some will merely survive, and some will not survive at all. We are concerned about the possibility that each of these challenges, if not addressed, could contribute toward the homogenisation of academia. Individuals who thrive in academia can appear as a relatively homogeneous group of individuals who are willing and able to make great personal sacrifices, and to find a narrow niche to publish within, ideally in large quantity. In relation to this homogeneous group, there is a second group which, everything suggests, is becoming bigger: those who merely survive, or who simply leave academia. Whether or not this section of academia has a voice will be indicative of what the future holds.

We are concerned that this disadvantaged group appears to come from sociodemographic groups that are already underrepresented within academia. It has always been the case that, for example, being a woman, a single parent, or not being white, all bring additional challenges to being an academic. Speaking from a UK context, we could add to that list speaking with a regional accent or having studied in a non-elite institution (Śliwa & Johansson, 2013), or simply being perceived as 'a foreigner'. We are seeing Brexit reshaping society, and some of us have been called upon to understand its profound impact (Bristow & Robinson, 2018). In society at large, we may wonder who is welcome in this post-Brexit era, and who becomes marginalized and excluded. In the workplace, many accounts are emerging of non-native workers suffering new forms of discrimination in a context where those holding nativist or xenophobic views feel emboldened to express them. Considering that in the UK, over a quarter of the academic workforce (28% in 2014/2015) are non-UK nationals (Royal Society, 2016), universities could become foci of new forms of hostilities and exclusion, both from the inside (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018) and from the outside, where a potent mixture of racism, xenophobia, colonial mentality, and anti-intellectualism all participate in silencing from the public sphere voices that are traditionally more critical.

Whilst this is a bleak picture, times of upheaval also offer opportunities, and we find hope in seeing colleagues taking the mantra of ‘intellectual activism’ (Contu, 2017, 2020; Rhodes, Wright, & Pullen, 2018) to call out and challenge racism and exclusion in the business school (Dar, Liu, Dy, & Brewis, 2020). Fighting against exclusion and toward diversity in the University is traditionally associated with student activism (Rhoads, 2016), and as we advocate for a more public engagement from scholars (Bristow & Robinson, 2018), we cherish the hope that ECAs will also seize this opportunity to insure that it is them – as a plurality of voices – who are shaping the future.

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