

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Academics in England Responding to Digital Change Pre and During the Pandemic: The Case of Lecture Capture Policies

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Research Domain: Digital University and new learning technologies (DU)

Abstract: The tensions between competing logics of digital managerialism and traditional professional values have further intensified in universities in the context of COVID19 pandemic. Lecture capture is a particularly relevant example of digitalisation that cuts across managerial priorities and into the sense of professional autonomy for academic staff, generating the need for academics to respond. Drawing on Kartz (2004) continuum of opposition through resilience, reworking and resistance, this study explores academics individual and collective responses in three institutional case studies before and after the onset of the pandemic. The three case studies represent the variety of practices with regards to mandated use of lecture capture and varying degrees of individual and union mediated opposition to the pressures to record teaching.

Case 1: Post-92 university pre-pandemic opt in policy, proactive negotiation with the UCU Branch. During pandemic stayed opt in. Active union branch, long history of strikes.

Case 2: Pre-92 university pre-pandemic opt in policy proactive negotiation with the UCU Branch, during pandemic stayed opt in. Active union branch, no history of strikes.

Case 3: Post 92 university pre-pandemic opt out policy, reactive negotiation with the UCU Branch. During pandemic became compulsory. Active union branch, limited history of strikes.

Paper: Introduction and conceptual framework

Competing logics of managerial control sustained by neoliberal values and traditional professional logic centred around high quality teaching and research (Vican et al., 2020) have further intensified in universities in the context of COVID19 pandemic (Ma et al., 2021). Digital technologies that enabled teaching to go on have also promoted managerial agenda often at the expense of academics job satisfaction and job security (Woodcock, 2018).

A particularly relevant example of digitalisation that directly intervenes with the teaching process is a practice of lecture capture. Lecture capture involves a technological platform that is designed to record live lectures, store and deliver them later as well as a policy that specified conditions of use. The policies typical fall into optional (opt in) and mandated (opt out) for teaching staff. Demands of the Covid19 pandemic have further promoted LC's integration into the teaching processes.

LC policies are rife with complexity and contradiction (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Managerial logic views lecture capture technology and associated implementation of policies as a tool for augmenting curriculum pleasing the student-customer. Yet, traditional professional logic suggests that recording of lectures also operate as surveillance, reduces professional discretion, undermines the quality of teaching, and weakens professional autonomy and labour rights (Edwards et al., 2018). Despite profound complexities, managerial logic tends to predominate portraying the use of this technology as largely unproblematic and a minimal service provision. Counteracting attempts to problematise the nature of these policies and technologies from within professional logic are far and few between (for an excellent example of this see Ibrahim et al, 2020). Literature offers examples of academics exercising agency in response to managerial logic through resistance, insulation, disengagement and leaving (e.g. Vican et al, 2020). Those who stay in academia may exercise agency at individual and collective levels involving trade unions (Tarrant, 2018) or institutional governance structures.

In this research we draw on Kartz (2004) continuum of opposition through resilience, reworking and resistance to take account of the constraints posed by the managerial logic and capture the dynamic nuances of worker experiences and initiatives to resolve tensions between competing logics and rebalance the relationships of power.

The following research questions have guided this study:

Before and during the pandemic:

- How and to what degree are LC policies were negotiated with academics or representative bodies?
- Which forms of response academics engage in with regards to lecture capture policies and practice?
How do individual and collective forms of response interact?

Methodology

We have drawn on the mixed-method comparative case study method to investigate how LC polices are negotiated and implemented in universities in England and Wales. To capture collective responses, we surveyed UCU branch presidents to establish patterns of implementation and negation of LC policies. Based on the emerging patterns we have selected 7 institutional cases with differing patterns of negotiation and varying degrees of professional autonomy embedded in the LC policies.

We conducted further in-depth qualitative case studies of 7 institutions. This paper will be reporting the outcomes of 3 contrasting case studies.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with UCU branch chairs, a minimum of 5 academics, a Head of Department, and a representative of a teaching and learning unit. Thematic data analysis involved manual coding of data using an inductive list of codes with a focus on negotiation practices and academics response to lecture capture policies before and after the start of the pandemic.

Preliminary findings

The three cases chosen for this study have several similarities and conceptually interesting differences.

The general patterns in each institution were as follows:

Case 1: Post-92 university pre-pandemic opt in policy, proactive negotiation with the UCU Branch. During pandemic stayed opt in.

Case 2: Pre-92 university pre-pandemic opt in policy proactive negotiation with the UCU Branch, during pandemic stayed opt in.

Case 3: Post 92 university pre-pandemic opt out policy, reactive negotiation with the UCU Branch. During pandemic became compulsory.

The range of concerns varied depending on the degree of choice academics had with regards to the policy, with many who resisted the policy before the pandemic voluntarily embracing the policy once the pandemic started in order to support their students. Academics views of LC practice was more positive and accepting in the contexts where they had a choice as compared to the context where the practice was mandated. Academics demonstrated compliance, presence and lack of resilience, examples of reworking, and acts of resistance both individually and collectively.

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