

Human Resource Management Implications of 'Working Lives' findings on working practices of Academics in Higher Education (0162)

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Introduction

The work of the 'Working Lives' research team focused on the nature of work practices within HE, the findings of which have led to this study which seeks to explore issues and implications for the management of human resources within HE. Some of the findings concerned issues such as the blurring of boundaries between work and home and the role of the academic and how they juggle teaching, research and administration (Gornall et al., 2008; Daunton et al, 2008; Cook et al, 2009 and Cook, 2009).

Whilst it is recognised that some academics value the autonomy in the way they organise their work and some even indicated that it made it easier for them to manage their personal commitments there was considerable 'talk' of the stress of juggling commitments within the workplace and at home and its intrusion on family life. This is arguably intensified by the unrelenting work intensification brought about by approaches to managerial control such as key performance indicators, work load frameworks, the requirement to demonstrate research output and income generation / third mission activities.

Effective Management

It is contended that the knowledge that exists within a University resides within the people who form it and that knowledge value depends on their potential to contribute to the achievement of the institution to achieve recognition and funding. Much research has been done within organisations on human capital and its attributes, and the impact on human capital and its attributes, and the impact on organisational results (Pfeffer, 1998 and Wright et al., 1995).

Effective management generates a higher capacity to attract and hold employees who are qualified and motivated for good performance, and also the benefits from having adequate, research active, motivated and conscientious academics who are ready, willing and able academics and researchers (Daunton, 2008; Gornall et al., 2008; Cook *et al.* 2009). The effective management of the human resources within academic life is contended to be essential in order to ensure the well-being of the institutions so it is perhaps surprising that there is little evidence that overall, academics are included within any 'resource based view' of the organisation (Wright, 1995) are they not a 'unique selling point' of why a student chooses to come to study?

It is clear that academics do value the freedom to work from various locations, be it home, or within the office, and indeed some come into the profession in order to have that autonomy there are however implications of this practice that perhaps need to be considered. What then is the responsibility of line management in managing this? There are relatively few empirical studies with regards to clarifying and exploring the links between HRM practices, employee wellbeing and performance

relationships within the University setting (Baptise, 2007). What is also of interest is the need that exists to control and audit (Deem, 2007), with pressures and constraints being placed upon staff to account for every hour of the day?

Managerial culture

Various commentators have explored the theme of managerial culture, such as MacDonald (2005), Kogan and Hanney (2000) and Holmes & McElwee (1995). Work that is worthy of mention here is that of Doherty and Manfredi (2005) who explored challenges in delivering work life balance for academics and argued that it is complicated by there being two different discourses about the academic role which have been conceptualised as *Plato's Academy* and the *Teaching Factory* (Doherty and Manfredi *ibid*). The first is associated with the pre 1992 elite universities and the second more with the post – 1992 universities. A fundamental difference between the two 'labels' is the relationship that academics have to manage their working time. In *Plato's Academy* there is the freedom to organise his or her own time with the boundaries between work and leisure not always clear, as the pursuit of knowledge through research is often a source of leisure in itself whereas the 'Teaching Factory' illustrates an opposite perspective. This is consistent with elements of choice and preference of individuals as well as differing institutional cultures and managerial styles.

The other consideration is technological advances making it much easier and perhaps more convenient to work from home or indeed wherever it is convenient and a move towards improving temporal flexibility which is likely to attract those looking for work life balance (Harris, 2003). With this comes the inevitable question of trust and the importance of there being an "implicit" psychological contract that reflects understanding and trust and this has been well recognised within literature (Watson, 1987 and Cullinane and Dundon, 2006). Some argue of a decline in trust and discretion placed in academics (Deem et al, 2007) and this resonates with some of the findings in that respondents talked of higher workloads and longer hours with finance being used as a basis for decision making, remote senior management teams and more pressure for accountability. This causes some inconsistencies and contradictions when considering the norms particularly within a traditional 'Plato's Academy' type organisation. There is also the consideration of the changing focus of 'Teaching Factory' type organisations in the drive to become more research driven, whilst not considering the managerial style, and the hours required to do this and *visa versa*.

This study seeks to further explore **the** parameters of enquiry into some of implications that may be posed by these findings from the perspective of HRM, **particularly** given the persistence for the long hours culture amongst managers and professionals in the UK in that working intensively is translated into the kind of commitment which is required for career progression, and an explanation as to why academics do not speak up about the tensions between home and work lives (Doherty and Manfredi 2006). The question then is Do Human Resource Managers within Higher Education have a duty of care towards its academic staff? Given the findings of 'Working Lives' research, this may not be a simple answer, and may call for a consideration of levels of responsibility and perhaps a realignment of cultural

requirements, work commitments identification and recognition of the ideology and nature of the psychological contract.

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