

Understanding lecturers' development in novel researcher roles in the context of new universities in transition. A longitudinal, qualitative analysis of weekly written narratives.

Abstract

Due to the changing role and context of (new) universities, roles of lecturers are renewed and diversified. In this study, weekly written narratives from lecturers on their development in novel researcher roles at new universities are collected over time and analyzed correspondingly. Understanding how individuals accomplish role transition is important to the health of individuals and organizations alike. The method provided examples of configurations derived from within-case analyses and illustrates lecturers' work and learning activities, kinds of support and affirmation succeeded each other which resulted in changes of intermediate outcomes during lecturers' development trajectories. In studying lecturers' role transition, outcomes such as role learning, identity and competence development, and strides in building up research capacity are taken into account. The analysis of the narratives provides meaningful insights into the inspiring, challenging, and ambiguous, erratic nature of the transition into researcher roles at new universities, as experienced by the lecturers.

Introduction

The context of this study concerns new universities which recently have expanded their core practices of higher professional education with practice-oriented research. Due to this organizational transition, from teaching-only to both teaching and research, lecturers have to engage in novel researcher roles while maintaining their performance in teacher roles. A salient aspect is that these researcher roles are rather novel both for the lecturers and their institutions. In this study narratives from lecturers' development in researcher roles are collected over time and analyzed correspondingly. Methods such as document analysis, interviews and questionnaires are most often used in research on lecturers' development in research roles (Baum, 1998; Chetty & Lubben, 2010; Gething & Leelarthapin, 2000).

Aim

The research question in this study is: How do lecturers-researchers develop into researcher roles in the context of new universities in transition? In order to do justice to the multi-layered nature of role transition (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2010), both concepts on lecturers' development and on the dynamic interaction between lecturers and the social domains teaching, research and professional practice were used. Eighteen lecturer-researchers were asked to write weekly logs about their research activities. In order to capture the nature of lecturers' role transition, the content of the narratives were first analyzed to acquire the full variation of lecturers' experiences in their development. Second temporal patterns in lecturers' series of narratives were analyzed.

Lecturers' development

In universities lecturers must cast about for roles that appear to resonate with their work and learning needs and desires (Brew & Boud, 1996). Understanding how individuals accomplish role transitions is important to the

health of individuals and organizations alike (Ashforth, 2010). Role transitions (Ashforth), are the psychological and physical movements between roles, including disengagement from one role and engagement in another role. In Ashforth's view role identities are particularly relevant to each type of role transition: 'Identification leads the newcomer to faithfully enact role identity'. Research roles are rather complex and therefore, when investigating lecturers' development trajectories, issues such as role learning, identity and competence development, and boundary management are taken into account.

From environmental perspective, the sequences of events in professional life may strongly affect lecturers' adjustment to new roles. Lecturers routinely decode events to learn about their role identities and their work contexts. Moreover the lecturers influence the institutional contexts just as the contexts influence the lecturers, the two co-evolve over time (Ashforth). Therefore this study also focuses on the dynamic interaction between the lecturers and their institutional context.

The weekly logs method

Data collection

The participating lecturers (n=18) were asked to send ten weekly written narratives during a period of twenty weeks. Through purposeful sampling, a broad variation in hard- and soft-applied disciplines (Becher, 1989) and in research experience was obtained. Beforehand the participants were given an explanation about what a log should contain. In the log assignment the topics, related to their trajectory were: Which research activities did they perform, why these activities, how these activities were performed, how they combined research and teaching, with what resources, which meaningful events occurred, and which was their development? Lecturers were asked to integrate accounts on their personal thoughts and experiences of their development in their narratives.

Data analysis

The data analyses consisted of three phases. During the first phase, fragments of the series of logs were selected which reported on changes in intermediate outcomes over the course of lecturers' trajectories such as prosperity or adversity in task performance, awareness of researcher identity, milestones in competence development, and strides in building up research capacity. Fragments about forces on the course of lecturers' trajectory were also selected: Lecturers' activities related to associated working and learning tasks, provided and utilized human and non-human resources, and experienced affirmation from stakeholders. All fragments were then clustered based on similarities. These categories, which emerged both from the data and the research questions, were systematically described in a category scheme.

During the second phase, the developed categories were combined in time-ordered matrices for each lecturer separately. The resulting matrices provided an overview of the chronological ordering of the categories for each lecturer as reported in the logs. Within-case analyses were conducted on the matrices of each lecturer (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, categories were combined concerning the intermediate outcomes during the trajectory and the forces which play during the trajectory. Changes in intermediate outcomes appear in particular sequences and these sequences can vary arising from both activities of lecturers, and experienced support and affirmation from the environment. Second, similarities in each time-ordered matrix were identified concerning

the intermediate outcomes during the trajectory and the forces which play during the trajectory. And third, comparable configurations were described on a more general level.

During the third phase, cross-case analyses are planned to explore which configurations of forces during the trajectory and related changes in intermediate outcomes during the trajectory could be retrieved for all lecturers.

Results

The findings illustrate how the use of the aforementioned weekly logs provides detailed insights into lecturers' development trajectories in universities in transition. The developed category scheme resulted in an understanding of the variety of forces, facilitating or hindering lecturers' role transition, e.g. lecturer-researcher hard-applied discipline: "Last week I did not have time to fully write the algorithm. I sat one day in a real flow. Frustrating is that they have talked two years about scheduling enough spare time for research, but in practice this still cannot be realized". The method provided examples of configurations derived from the within-case analyses and illustrates the activities, kinds of support and affirmation succeeded each other which resulted in changes of intermediate outcomes during lecturers' development trajectories, e.g. lecturer-researcher soft-applied discipline: "I developed myself both as researcher and lecturer-researcher. Along the way, I'm much more seeking connection with teaching. That makes other lecturers enthusiastic. It is visible what I'm doing as (lecturer)-researcher". The analysis of the weekly written narratives provides meaningful insights into both the inspiring, challenging, and ambiguous, erratic nature of the transition into researcher roles at new universities, as experienced by the lecturers.

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