

Universities Responding to Change: Implications for Academic and Professional Identities in Higher Education

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The projects

- Two studies funded by the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE)
- 9 institutions; 70 respondents; UK/US/Australia
- 42 respondents with professional contracts, but also doctorates, publications, and/or experience of teaching/research
- Their roles had significant academic elements (tutoring, programme design, learning support, institutional research)
- Therefore crossing boundaries...

Mixed roles

- Backgrounds in eg adult and further education, policy agencies, charitable sector
- Research training prepares for careers that may not be purely academic
- Job description for Learning Partnerships Manager (UK) required: “...academic credibility... experience of generating external income, and involvement in project management”

Areas of activity that cross boundaries

- *Teaching and learning* eg tutoring, programme design/documentation, study skills/academic literacy
- *Community partnership* eg employer and public engagement, workplace learning, outreach sessions
- *Online learning* eg programme design and development, web-based discussion fora
- *Research enterprise* eg preparing bids, knowledge transfer, spin out, bespoke programmes for industry
- *Institutional research* into eg student recruitment/outcomes, benchmarking, educational practice

Preference for crossing boundaries

- People who could have gone ‘either way’ ...
- Positive choice arising from eg:
- Ideological commitment to eg widening participation, equity and diversity
- No longer committed to function or discipline
- Preferred team working/project orientation
- Pragmatic eg role offered route into higher education, career development, funding opportunities; wanted job in specific location

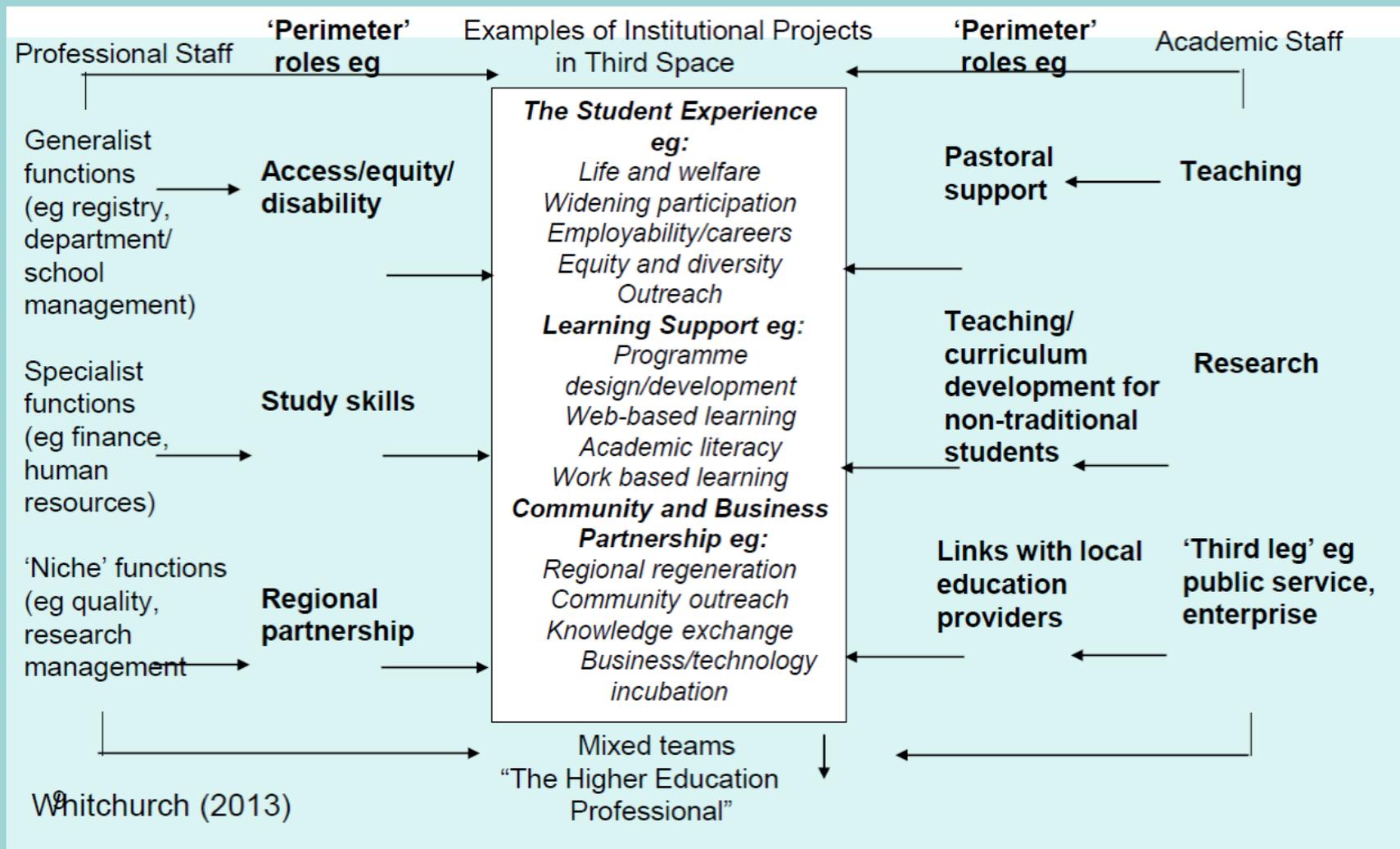
The emergence of '*Third Space*'

- “I’ve always worked at interfaces.. although I will occasionally say ‘well of course we’re just marginalised’... I like to be where it doesn’t matter if you bend the rules or do things differently” (learning partnerships manager)
- Formal employment categories (‘academic’ or ‘non-academic’) don’t reflect reality
- This has created a '*Third Space*' between academic and professional roles

The concept of *Third Space*

- Concept from cultural studies
- A way of exploring spatial relationships as opposed to cumulative or historic accounts of human and organisational behaviour
- Specifically applied to the impact of diversity and difference eg cultural geographies of east and west, race, gender and class
- Provides for new voices and perspectives, making the invisible visible, the implicit explicit

Third Space as applied to higher education



Spaces

- Ambiguous conditions arising from working at interfaces:
- “Sometimes an academic unit, sometimes an office” (learning partnerships manager)
- Turning this to advantage eg not being seen as associated with specific agendas
- Sense of being ‘under the radar’
- Reflected in “invisible workforces” (Rhoades 2010) and “secret managers” (Kehm 2006)

Spaces

- Safe space in which to be creative/experiment eg work-based research; programmes of study; support of senior figure/mentor *but also*
- Lack of organisational checks and balances
- Sense of struggle/tension (the ‘dark side’)
- Working with given structures for practical purposes, but also critiquing them
- May be outside mainstream communication channels...

Knowledges

- Contextual, cross-boundary knowledge: “It’s not enough just to know how to be able to be an accountant... or to manage staff... in order to be effective within a university you need to understand the context” (faculty manager)
- Applied, evidence–based (Mode 2) institutional knowledge eg research into student outcomes or own practice

Knowledges

- Transforming ‘information’ into ‘knowledge - interpretation and presentation
- “My role isn’t just to present data but to try to interpret data... through policy analysis... timing, politics, the media you use, the way you communicate it, is probably even more important than the actual findings of an analysis” (institutional researcher)
- Contribution to body of knowledge in higher education as academic field

Relationships

- “if you get the relationships right everything else falls into place” (learning technologist)
- Lateral team working across hierarchies
- May lead in one setting, be led in another
- ‘Partnership’ rather than ‘management’
- Internal and external networks: ‘weak ties’
- Becoming ‘multi-lingual’, interpreting between different constituencies

Legitimacies

- Status of *Third Space* work:
- “I’m a director but not a director... the extent of my authority is unclear...” (enterprise manager)
- “There’s no authority that you come with” (planning manager)
- “It’s what you are, not what you represent” (partnerships manager)
- “I’ve had to create my own role, find my own way into systems... force my way into meetings, rather than wait for someone to ask me to contribute” (learning technologist)

Legitimacies

- Credibility built via non-positional authority
- Appreciating attitude of academic colleagues that "If you solve a problem for us, we'll come back and work with you again" (teaching and learning manager)
- Understanding different academic and professional work "rhythms" eg approach to timescales, budgets
- Ability to participate in "disinterested debate"

Paradoxes and dilemmas

- 'Safe' and 'risky' space
- Academic credentials but 'non-academic'
- Politically aware but neutral positioning
- People-oriented but diffident about 'managing'
- Differential perceptions of
power of academic and professional staff
the individual and the collective...
- *Third space* only recognised by those within it...
- When does *Third Space* become

Adding value

- It can be argued that *Third Space* roles:
- Support academic roles eg raising the quality of the student experience, sourcing funding, building social capital in the community
- Provide experimental or exploratory space
- Release academic staff to focus on mainstream teaching and research *but*
- Onus on individuals to demonstrate this
- May also be advantageous not to be too explicit...

Possible responses

- Recognition in workload models/promotion criteria of *Third Space* work
- Support of senior person/mentoring/coaching
- Flexible career pathways
- Development opportunities via eg secondments, internal consultancy, work-based research, publications, links with eg HE policy unit
- Responsibility on individuals as well as institutions...