

Full Length Research Paper

Spanning professional and academic: The changing identity of professional administrators and managers in Hong Kong's higher education context

Cheng Tak-lai

Department of Childcare, Elderly and Community Services, The Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Sha Tin),
21 Yuen Wo Road, Sha Tin, New Territories, Hong Kong.

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This paper builds on Whitchurch's notion of the 'blended professional' which aims to examine how mixed professional activity affects professional administrators and managers' identity disposition in universities in Hong Kong. In response to complex missions and demands of contemporary higher education globally, diverse projected-oriented professional managers have emerged in universities and are dedicated to a wide range of short- and long-term funded projects. Certainly, Hong Kong is no exception. The distinction between academic and non-academic staff has become less prominent for these managers who work across and between university functions. Yet, amongst discussions, Hong Kong – even in Asian Country – has received scant attention. By drawing empirical data from three professional managers currently working in a Hong Kong university' research and development centres, this qualitative paper investigates through Whitchurch's framework, how professional activities affect their identity disposition at their workplaces in Hong Kong context.

Key words: Blended professional, professional identity, identity disposition, narrative identity, administrator, third space.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, studies have emerged concerning professional administrators and managers' identity disposition. Responding to globalised world and rapid changes in the higher education environment, increasing numbers of multi-professional administrators and managers requiring a different blend of skills and responsibilities have emerged and crossed universities' various boundaries.

However, at the same time their role and identities in higher education might problematize the organisational

culture of university (Birds, 2014; 2015). As administrators and managers' role and duties in Hong Kong universities have been scant concerned, the present paper specifically addresses the conceptual framework 'blended professional', that is, professional managers who span academic and professional domains, as a 'heuristic device' (Whitchurch, 2008a) to research how professional activities affect their identity disposition at universities in the Hong Kong context. Before delving directly into identity disposition, the paper provides a brief

E-mail: t.l.cheng@lancaster.ac.uk. Tel: +44 (0)1524 593572.

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background of contemporary changes to universities in Hong Kong. After reviewing literature related to the significance and emergence of professional managers who span academic and professional domains, the paper then outlines Whitchurch's conceptual framework of the blended professional and takes it into account in analysing narratives of three cases in public-funded Hong Kong universities.

A brief background: Contemporary changes of staff structure in universities in Hong Kong

With the growing pressure for enhancing own global competitiveness, many governments in the Asia and Pacific region expect universities to contribute significantly to the innovation agenda, and therefore have expanded their higher education systems in the past decades (Chan et al., 2017; Mok, 2016; Mok and Neubauer, 2016). Hong Kong is no exception (Lee, 2016; Lo and Tang, 2017; Kember, 2010). The latest policy paper 'Governance in UGC-funded Higher Education Institutions in Hong Kong' (UGC, 2015) has highlighted challenges faced by Hong Kong universities nowadays:

In the 21st century, therefore, universities play a central role in economic and social development. No longer, as in previous centuries, can they be regarded as remote ivory towers distanced from the everyday world of the new globalised economy. On the contrary, the contemporary university must engage with this world and therefore must interact with a much wider variety of legitimate stakeholders than was the case only a generation ago. All of this means that universities have grown in complexity as well as in scale. This has created new challenges both for the internal management of universities, but also for the way in which they manage their interactions with the wider society (UGC, 2015).

Probably, the golden age of higher education probably has passed (Taylor, 2008). Universities are no longer viewed as ivory towers of intellectual pursuits and truth seeking but enterprises that peruse the world-class status in association with benchmarking and university rankings (Altbach, 2012; Marginson, 2014). With the quest for regional education hub and pressing educational demand in the globalised world, universities themselves have inevitably undergone several distinguishable transformations in response to challenges of internal management for admission mechanisms, student support, funding and so on (Ng and Tang, 2016), while their staff structure at the same time has changed, and non-academic staff has become correspondingly more important. According to a statistical table from Hong Kong University Grant Committee, the number of non-academic staff employees has increased steadily in the

past decade. In 2005, approximately 3,700 administrators and technical staff, about one-third of the total employment, were working non-academically in funded higher education sectors (UGC, 2016a). After 10 years, an extra thousand staff member has been recruited, and in 2015, the proportion of non-academic staff had risen to 40% of total employment (UGC, 2016b). However, the statistical table mentioned earlier does not reflect the distribution of staff members' functions and positions. In this circumstance, these apparent changes in staff profile display, at least some degree, the non-academic staff as being important to institutional development, but their situation is being under-developed.

Changing role and identity of professional administrators and managers

Pre-determined roles and duties, in accordance with staff organisational structure in universities, are no longer the major source of non-academic staff's identity disposition. For the sake of institutional development and innovation, universities have expanded partnerships with communities and enterprises by conducting various broadly based, wide-ranging institutional projects related, for instance, to support and welfare, enterprise partnership and professional development (Whitchurch, 2012).

Consequently, for reasons of governance and management, universities nowadays tend to adapt a more flexible staff model in facilitating innovative development (Whitchurch and Gordon, 2013). Colleagues with academic credentials or professional experience may be employed on non-academic or split contracts for projects in academic department or faculties. As such, universities' workforce is becoming more diversified (Whitchurch, 2010b). This is a response to interests of external agencies and necessary translational functions amongst academic agendas (Whitchurch, 2010a). The binary distinction of academic and non-academic staff is therefore no longer clear-cut; instead, increasingly multi-professional administrators and managers have emerged in projected-based areas and have shifted away from traditional bureaucracy towards a more networked and collegial ways of working (Kolsaker, 2014; Veles and Carter, 2016).

Concurrent with institutional developments, non-academic staff's role and duties, is increasingly complicated and no longer limited to general office work (Graham, 2012; Jisun and Jung, 2015). The occupational structure is less prominent as an expression of identity disposition for multi-professional administrators and managers who have established themselves as hybrid workers, crossing function areas and developing fields of knowledge in universities (Altbach, 2012; Whitchurch 2006).

In regard to this phenomenon, Whitchurch (2008b) has

conceptualised their territory as ‘third space’, spanning academic and professional domains: ‘it is not necessarily co-located geographically and virtually in institutional structure but characterised by a wide range of short-term or long-term projects such as bidding for external funds and quality initiatives’. To examine the broader view of possible trends in the identity movement of professional administrators and managers, Whitchurch (2009) launched a seminal work. This research interviewed 54 multi-professional administrators and managers from the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, evidencing that their identity disposition is significantly affected by their interpretation of personal academic background and responsibilities, and activities in the workplace.

Changes to universities’ organisational structure in recent decades mean that a new framework is required to provide better understanding of colleagues’ identity dispositions in higher education (Henkel, 2010). It is significant for further researches because how they view their roles at higher education institutions is a central success factor for their work (Ryttberg and Geschwind, 2017). Therefore, straightforwardly categorising multi-professional administrators and managers into ‘non-academic staff’ no longer provides insight into the shift of identity disposition in universities, but downplays the discourse of staffing nomenclature (Sebalj et al., 2012).

Amongst limited discussions, in-depth projects related to professional administrators and managers’ identity disposition in Hong Kong universities—even in other Asian universities—have been invisible and remained susceptible to uncertainty during the last decade. However, they stayed tuned to the regional position and education policies of higher education in Hong Kong (Cribbin, 2015; Lee, 2014; Tang, 2014; Mok, 2016; Mok and Neubauer, 2016).

To fill the gap, this paper used the conceptual framework of the blended professional as a heuristic device (Whitchurch, 2008a) to examine three professional managers’ narratives about how their identity dispositions are affected by work spanning professional and academic domains in universities in the Hong Kong context. Such a study can not only improve our limited understanding of former identity disposition, but also generate useful implications for the situation of contemporary higher education.

Narrative identity: Space, knowledge, relationship and legitimacies

This paper deploys the narrative approach because institutional context has been regarded as an important ethnographic accounting of implications for researching professional administrators and managers’ identity dispositions. In fact, this approach has frequently been used in many disciplines to study participants’ identity dispositions, for instance, university teachers (Cheng,

2016), public health nurses (Dahl and Clancy, 2015), mental health services users (Grant et al., 2015) and Chinese diaspora families (Fong, 2013). Because identity is constituted by ‘our interpretation of ourselves, and our experience is constitutive of what we are’ (Taylor, 1985), informants’ narratives not only describe events, but also identities of those involved (Kenny et al., 2011). In this sense, when identity disposition’s storied lives evolve, with complexity and meaningful interaction with significant others over a period of time in specific contexts, the narrative approach can serve as a significant tool to illuminate how identity disposition of professional managers is affected in universities in the Hong Kong context.

In higher education sectors, professional activities are inevitably affected by the system in which they are situated, and this circumscribes work groups’ interactions and beliefs (Trowler, 2008). Unlike acting out fixed roles in pre-determined job descriptions, this interactive process affects identity disposition and comprises certain contextual factors like building communicative relationships and networks in universities (Whitchurch, 2008a), occupational practices, cultures and values (Szekeress, 2011), the ideology of an individual’s discipline (Fanghanel, 2009), personal niche knowledge and technical expertise (Whitchurch, 2006) and even personal background (Bitzer and De Jager, 2016). Because the link between institutional context and changing identity disposition has been under-theorised (Trowler, 1998), and because we lack developed theory of the nature of professional administrators and managers’ identity disposition, this paper relied on respondents’ narratives. Therefore, also, it borrowed the conceptual framework of the blended professional (Table 1) as a filter for analysing three professional administrators and managers’ identity disposition by recounting vignettes of interaction in their workplaces.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative case studies

This qualitative paper permits ‘inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context and nuance’ (Patton, 2002). Because identity disposition relies on how interviewees’ interpret reality and how they perceive themselves in first-person perspective within their contexts (Henkel, 2000; Hsieh, 2016; Sadovnikova et al., 2016), a case studies approach is employed. Case studies can ‘catch up the close up reality and thick description of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation’ (Cohen et al., 2007).

Purposive sampling is used here because selecting information-rich cases can generate insight and understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). Considering that the nomenclature ‘manager’ is not used in standardised position classification scales amongst institutions (Sebalj et al., 2012), contact was purposely made to project-based managers who had at least 5 years’ full-time experience at positions in academic departments affiliated centres in Hong Kong’s public-funded universities.

However, difficulties were encountered in identifying blended

Table 1. Conceptual framework of blended professionals.

Dimensions of professional activity	Identity dispositions
Spaces	Offer multiple understandings of the institution; Accommodate ambiguities of third space between professional and academic domains; Re-define and modify professional space and boundaries; Work around the formal structure
Knowledge	Embed and integrate professional and academic knowledge; Undertake research into institutional activity; Create interactive knowledge
Relationship	Enter and understand academic discourse/debate; Form alliances with key partners; Facilitate autonomy of own staff; Construct professional internal and external networks
Legitimacies	Offer academic credentials; Achieve credibility in academic debate/space; Challenge the status quo; Manage the duality of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' to academic space

Source: (Whitchurch, 2008b; 2009).

professionals because project-based managers rarely have sufficient work experience; they often leave a position after the funded project ends. Therefore, as the opportunity arose, snowball sampling was adopted (Creswell, 2008), but only when suitable interviewees (working in higher education sectors for over 10 years) were referred by another interviewee.

Data collection

Interviews were conducted in April 2017, to discover how professional activities affect the identity disposition of blended professionals in universities in the Hong Kong context. To avoid unwieldy and superficial perspectives in results, three cases drew on semi-structured interviews, which allow participants to guide the interviews' direction to capture their perceptions and experience's complexities across dimensions of professional activity. Guided by the conceptual framework, interviews covered selected topics, that is, interviewees' understanding of the workplace, academic space, relationship between external and internal parties, and knowledge application. For instance, on the relationship between external and internal parties, interviewees were asked to share work relationships between academics and key parties, experience in networking internally and externally and so on. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were informed of the inquiry's purpose and method before the interview commenced. Individual interviews were conducted in a conversationally and lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in Cantonese, so participants felt comfortable conversing and expressing their concerns in their first language. Interviews were then transcribed in verbatim for further analysis. Next, to enhance this study's credibility, transcriptions were translated into English, and sent to participants for further comments.

Data analysis

Data analysis was situated in an iterative, dynamic and recursive process, in which the author moved amongst data, the theoretical framework and the research question (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Practically guided by the coding steps and process introduced by Creswell (2008), informational segments were labelled with 32 codes after preliminary exploration of the data's general sense through reading scripts in their entirety and writing memos. After deductively coding the entire text within the theoretical framework

and later inductively coding iteratively, similar codes were further aggregated to form themes and provide information on how interviewees perceived themselves within each dimension of professional activities. As mentioned, 'the informants' narrative not only describes events, but also describes identities of those involved'. Thus an attempt is made to use the framework to interpret the study's findings with vignettes that represent the range of dimension of professional activities, and illustrate placement of interviewees' identity disposition through interaction in Hong Kong university workplaces.

FINDING

In this section, three participants'-Gary, Herman and Watson (pseudonyms)-interviews are reported. Narratives arising from case materials are themed according to the blended professional concept (Whitchurch, 2009). Accordingly, four dimensions, namely, spaces, knowledge, relationships and legitimacies are identified in this paper. However, these dimensions are intertwined and, in practice, are likely to occur in parallel.

Spaces: Accommodating the ambiguities of third space between professional and academic domains

For interviews, respondents crossing professional and academic spaces in universities were sought. All acknowledged that in addition to teaching and research, they have functioned as third pillars in university development. For instance, Herman stressed that his role is to compensate for academics' inadequacy in front-line experience. Unlike research, academic and administrative positions, respondents evidenced contributions to industry and community through applied research and projects. At the same time, however, they very often must accommodate their positions'

ambiguities in the workplace:

Although I thought that I was an academic staff member in the early stage of my reporting duties as a project manager. This idea was dismissed while I was managing a funding project. The host organisation doesn't regard me as academic staff by regulation of application, because the definition of academic staff was referred to as only those who have taken up teaching duties full-time in universities (Watson)

I doubt my position in the university.... Our roles are of paramount importance as we transfer academic knowledge and professional experiences we acquired back to the university by putting them into practice.... Nevertheless, we are in a dilemma when facing academics and other organisations. On one hand, academics may not agree to the need of putting professional experience into practice and treat us as those who run errands.... On the other hand, it remains uncertain how external organisations comprehend our 'professional knowledge' and what it represents (Gary)

Respondents also reported that clear demarcation exists between professional and academic staff in university (for further discussion, see finding on 'relationship'). Members from academic departments and faculties are seldom involved in other units' duties and vice versa. For instance, Herman admitted that he preferred to take up small-scale research activities with his centre members, rather than cooperating with those from academic departments. This 'us' and 'them' perception occurred throughout all three interviews. All respondents even acknowledged that their main duty was to develop professional projects for front-line practices, rather than to conduct small-scale research; but they still mean that they have taken part in academic activities in the unit. Moving back and forth between domains in the workplace evidenced ambiguities of the third space they attempt to accommodate.

Knowledge: Embedding and integrating professional and academic knowledge

Unlike other administrative staff members in a university, blended professionals can have less technical expertise in an accredited specialty, for instance, human resources and estate management. Instead, respondents showed the importance of embedded professional and academic knowledge:

'Education' was not my major study.... Although courses and subjects available in universities are not directly linked to my current occupation, it's still related to my academic background, and so I am

able to have academic discussions with academic communities from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Watson).

Respondents were dedicated to development of front-line strategies and practices that rely on both their professional expertise and academic knowledge. Thus, embedding serves as a two-way street between the university and the broader community. That is, on the one hand, blended professionals develop university projects based on academic knowledge; on the other hand, they bring back project experience for consolidation through institutional publication or presentation. As Gary stated:

For me, 'academic' refers to the process that combined the use of theories, logic and empirical study in pursuing the truth and producing knowledge.... Unfortunately, under the current system in the university, 'academic' only represents issues related to job posts. When we write a funding proposal or encourage the education industry to carry out a reform, I also need to collect data and participate in academic-related work like academic seminars, essay writing and editorial work for consolidating projects' experience (Gary).

Apart from Watson and Gary, Herman also declared that professional managers are expected to have niche knowledge with specific applications in the institution, for example, tutoring, coaching, community outreach, industry innovation and broad bundles of activity in relation to student affairs on and off campus. These extracts illustrate that managers integrate professional and academic knowledge in an interactive and practical way because they bring expertise and experience from outside higher education into the university, and meanwhile apply academic knowledge to projects outside higher education in the community.

Relationship: Exercising the hierarchical relationship relying on staff organisation structure

In their interviews, Watson and Gary said that they have constructed professional networks and formed alliances with key partners externally. For instance, Watson has been nominated as a committee member of certain professional associations in China and Hong Kong, while Gary is a panel adviser of an education bureau. However, internally, when they were invited to share relationships with academic staff members, all of them revealed that they rarely contacted academic staff members in universities:

Only one or two academic staff members who are close with donors or funders are important to my work. Otherwise, there isn't conflict or a relationship between them and me.... (Gary)

There is no subordinate relationship between academic staff members and me. In case we must work with an academic department, like taking up teaching duties, I just need to contact departmental administrators (Herman)

It is an alienated relationship. We are busy with our own staff, respectively. Normally I do chitchat with my friends who are on the academic staff. But there is no collaboration unless projects strictly require their involvement (Watson).

Interviews demonstrated that respondents work around the formal structure and tend to exercise relationships by relying on the hierarchy of staff organisational structure. This tendency was also reflected when Watson came into contact with academic staff members from other universities:

They treat me as academic staff as well.... However, I would try to explain to them I am not an academic staff, indeed, as universities in Hong Kong have precisely classified academic staff and professional staff. At least, in my perspective, academic staff refers to those responsible for teaching and conducting research in universities. In this sense, I don't think I am positioned in the group of academics (Watson)

This clear demarcation also gives rise to disputes between project-based professional managers and executive staff, as Herman shared in his observation:

According to the staff organisational structure from the human resources office, project-based managers have been categorised into the group 'Administrative and Support Staff'. Therefore, how administrative and executive staff members understand my role is rather important....

Despite lack of interaction with academic staff, the relationship with executive staff is crucial to project-based managers (further discussed in finding legitimacies). For example, according to Herman, conflicts have arisen because the executive staff might not understand the nature of blended professionals, but still apply hierarchical bureaucracy's dull rules to them in daily operation, especially because they are in the category of 'Administrative and Support Staff'.

Legitimacies: Building legitimacies through personal academic credentials

Respondents showed that their legitimacies depended on personal academic credentials. Frankly, here, the crucial personal academic credential is the doctorate. As Watson pointed out:

As I have already completed a doctorate, most of the university students and colleagues regard me as a scholar rather than a professional manager.... If I had not yet completed my doctorate, I cannot imagine how my duties could be done smoothly in my workplace.... In Hong Kong, most people have much regard for the title 'Dr'. They treat you as an expert regardless of your academic focus, or whether it is irrelevant to your work content.

On the contrary, for those who have completed only a dedicated master's programme, their legitimacy in the university has been challenged by various stakeholders internally and externally. The job title could not give them credibility in the workplace or in academic debate. As Gary stated:

When I first contact the external organisation, it is unavoidable to introduce myself with my job title. As such, I must make extra effort to earn their trust and show my professionalism because my duty is to improve the school setting based on my personal academic judgement.... In case they don't trust you and your professionalism, they might not follow your idea and even take over the project I am in charge of. However, legitimacy is based on academic qualification, that is, a doctorate, either a Ph.D. or Ed.D. If you don't have a doctorate, those stakeholders or academic staff who do think they are in charge of the project instead of you.

A similar struggle also occurred when respondents interacted with administrative and executive staff during daily operations. As Herman explained:

A doctorate is significant to our legitimacy in the workplace.... The executive staff recognises only those colleagues who have obtained a doctorate. For instance, last time we had to work as a team in organising a conference, the executive staff assigned the honourable duties at the reception to those managers with doctorates, while the others were assigned to technical support, like video and photography, etc.... I have had resentment against these arrangements, indeed, because one of my duties is to network external parties throughout industries. Especially in a previous partnership programme, though I was just a technician because he had seen that I was responsible for taking photos in another conference. Regarding my dignity and professionalism, I was totally discomfited by this experience....

Personal academic credentials are of capital importance in building legitimacies and responding to the challenge of the status quo for professional managers. The doctorate tends to be strictly prerequisite for professional managers in

establishing their discipline and credibility in lateral relationships with colleagues and stakeholders inside and outside the university.

Institutional context beyond professional activities

As mentioned earlier, institutional context has significant bearing on professional activities (Trolwer, 2008). Respondents' identity disposition was affected by institutional structure and senior management's leadership. First, for the structure, institutional operation that is quite specific to each university and the bureaucratic procedures to a greater extent relied on its size and scale (Schubert and Yang, 2016), for instance, Gary indicated how it influences rule systems and activities in which he is involved:

Like me, situated in a relatively small-scale university in Hong Kong, all our projects' operations must follow institutional procedures and guidelines. For instance, to invite some visiting scholars for professional projects, in my past working experience in a university comprised of various faculties, the financial office would assign a responsible officer to my unit for handling issues with flexibility, as they understand that expenses for visiting scholars differ amongst departments like medicine and art. On the contrary, (now that I am) situated in a relatively small-scale university, the entire proposed budget must follow the standard guidelines of the finance office. It is a structural problem influencing the competitiveness and quality of projects.

In addition to structure, institutional context shapes, but is also shaped by individuals as well as by senior management's vision and leadership (Delanty, 2008; Kenny et al., 2011). In other words, leadership agency and his qualities are important to drive institutional transformation in times (Howells et al., 2014). The three respondents all revealed that their roles and identity disposition are closely tied to senior management's rule system and leadership. They stayed in their current positions almost entirely because they can still exercise autonomy in the workplace and because their personal goal is partly consistent with the head of unit. As Herman and Gary stated:

Respect and trust from the head of unit is the main reason that I took this position. It is significant to me.... I quit my job and have taken the role of project manager because the direction of the head of unit is same as mine, with strong passion and knowledge of the specialty; various individuals would work for him, but not for the salary (Herman).

The staff grading of head of unit is crucial regarding

my job status. For example, recently, I was developing a proposal that suggests rebuilding the garden and office-the presupposition is that, at the same time, the office nearby must be relocated. In the cross-board meeting, if your unit head is not positioned in senior management and not supporting you, colleagues in other departments treat you in respect to your staff grade; in this sense, normally, most of your suggestions will be ignored or abandoned (Gary)

Apart from the institutional structure and senior management's leadership, the funding sources for their salary should not be overlooked. Market values of Hong Kong's higher education have become more prevalent within the academy than in the past (Cheung et al., 2010). Whether to obtain funding or to maintain market competitiveness in recruitment, external pressures from the market and even research funders are now translated into internal pressures. Facing funding-linked evaluative policies and practice changes, market imperatives and institutionally defined notions are exerting strong influence on Hong Kong universities' structure and activities (Lin, 2009). Unlike the academic staff whose salary is largely separated from institutional entrepreneurial activities, managers and administrator are under threat and in order to survive they have to participate proactively in the funding-linked institutional activities (Yang, 2012):

Honestly, (even if the unit is self-funded) the university can help you survive it will. For example, the senior management or president could offer funding sources to help you to sustain your position and projects in the unit...as both the university and industry need the projects we have developed. Therefore, our centre will not be closed in a short period of time. Honestly, we are the largest and one of only two university centres in Hong Kong providing these kinds of professional projects.... (Herman)

If the position is UGC-funded, those colleagues who work continuously for over 6 years in the same occupation will be offered tenure, through which the salary package is subsidised by the government. In contrast, project-based managers are employed on a self-funded basis; therefore, employment continuity depends entirely on project status. These two financial principles directly influence the nature and work attitude of colleagues. For example, like me, the position is self-funded. Therefore, my chief work duties are to develop funding proposals and to organise charge activities for the steady income of my unit, and thus to ensure my position can be continued in the next academic year (Gary).

Instances of the contextual situation involve institutional structures and leadership's notions. Probably, background characteristics identified here might be seen as the limitation of this paper, and further attention to be paid to them. However, this might also serve as a reminder that in any identity study, institutional context should not be overlooked. Merely focusing on professional activities might under-determine the impact of contextual influences and institutional positioning in responding to global academic changes.

Conclusion

Informed by the blended professional concept, this study aims to arouse the academic concerns and adds to the current limited knowledge of how professional activities affect identity disposition in Hong Kong universities. The study sought to revisit contemporary discussions of professional administrators and managers' identity disposition. The paper proposed individual narratives as important ethnographic accounts for researching identity disposition, which was impacted by how they perceived interactions and professional activities in the workplace.

Based on Whitchurch's conceptual framework, professional activities were unpacked into four dimensions-spaces, knowledge, relationships, legitimacies-for analysing project-based professional managers' identity disposition. On one hand, findings indicated that in the Hong Kong context, the blended professional was affected by dully exercised hierarchical relationships as determined according to staff organisational structure. Blended professionals' legitimacies are mainly built on personal academic credentials.

On the other hand, a rich institutional context was found for identity disposition existing beside the professional activities that have occurred. In that regard, two immediate new insights arise with implications for further related studies. First, further research should consider the institutional context's impact and its cultural dispositions. Especially, university education has undergone structural changes that include funding-linked evaluative policies and practices. If we focus simply on motivation and change at the personal level and on workplace interaction, we might neglect pre-existing values and attitudes embedded in the institutional context. The second insight follows naturally from the first.

Because institutional culture is by no means a dead concept, but depends on dynamic understanding of cultural processes (Linstead, 2008), further work should unpack implications of narratives that might not be apparent at first sight. That is, further studies are recommended to induce social theories for analysing practice under institutional culture, for instance, ways in which work is organised, decisions are taken, power is distributed and the nature of values and attitudes

about the university (Dressman, 2008) to avoid institutional cultural influences being in 'great danger of becoming meaningless' (Trowler, 2008).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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