

Academic Staff Identity and Emotional Labour: Exploring Pride, Motivation, and Relationships in Universities

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Abstract : The perceptions of the work an academic does, and the environment in which they do it, contributes to the professional identity of that academic. In turn, this has implications for the level of involvement they have in their job, their satisfaction, and their work product. This research explores academic identities in British and Irish institutions and considers the complex interplay between identity, practice, and participation. Theoretical assumptions made in this paper assert that meaningful work has positive effects on work pride, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship, and motivation; when employees participate enthusiastically they are likely to be more engaged, more successful, and more satisfied. Further examination is given to the context in which this participation happens; the nature of institutional process, management, and relationships with colleagues, team members, and students is considered. The present study follows a mixed-methods approach to explore work satisfaction constructs in a number of academic contexts in the UK and Ireland. The quantitative component of this research (Convenience Sample: 155 academics, and support/ administrative staff; 36.1% male, 63.9% female; 60.8% academic staff, 39.2% support/ administration staff; across a number of universities in the UK and Ireland) was based on an established emotional labour model and was tested across gender groups, job roles, and years of service. This was complimented by qualitative semi-structured interviews (Purposive Sample: 10 academics, and 5 support/ administrative staff across the same universities in the UK and Ireland) to examine various themes including values within academia, work conditions, professional development, and transmission of knowledge to students. Experiences from both academic and support perspectives were sought in order to gain a holistic view of academia and to provide an opportunity to explore the dynamic of the academic/administrator relationship within the broader institutional context. The quantitative emotional labour model, tested via a path analysis, provided a robust description of the relationships within the data. The significant relationships found within the quantitative emotional labour model included a link between non-expression of true feelings resulting in emotional labourious work and lower levels of intrinsic motivation and higher levels of extrinsic motivation. Higher levels of intrinsic motivation also linked positively to work pride. These findings were further explored in the qualitative elements of the research where themes emerged including the disconnection between faculty management and staff, personal fulfilment and the friction between the identities of teacher, researcher/ practitioner and administrator. The implications of the research findings from this study are combined and discussed in relation to possible identity-related and emotional labour management-related interventions. Further, suggestions are made to institutions concerning the application of these findings including the development of academic practices, with specific reference to the duality of identity required to service the combined teacher/ researcher role. Broader considerations of the paper include how individuals and institutions may engage with the changing nature of students-as-consumers as well as a recommendation to centralise personal fulfilment through the development of professional academic identities.

Keywords : academic work, emotional labour, identity friction, mixed methods

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