

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

The Blended Roles of Professional and Academic Staff in Universities of Technology: Are We Getting It Right?

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Abstract

Tensions between academic and professional staff are still experienced in universities of technology. The article focuses on the mobility and shifting boundaries which appear to be developing in regard to this working relationship at one South African university of technology. The mixed-methods exploratory research involved data gathered in 2018 and in 2021 from both academic and professional staff. The data included findings from staff whose work spans both roles and those who have moved from one role to the other. Findings indicate that professional staff are often drawn into performing teaching and research functions, and yet experience barriers which impede their academic progress. The article argues for more overt recognition and facilitation of this blending of roles, which would seem to be particularly appropriate for universities of technology. No current literature exists on this phenomenon in South African Universities of Technology and this article hopes to fill this gap and initiate this conversation.

Keywords: university staff working relationships; blended roles; staff mobility; 3rd space professionals

Introduction

With growing student numbers requiring more support services, and a greater diversity of staff roles, the numbers of professional staff are increasing and the divisions between academic and professional staff are becoming increasingly blurred. Academic staff are defined as being “professional positions or standing among faculty members of an educational institution, usually expressed by official titles (professor, lecturer, instructor, etc.); (ERIC Institute of Education Sciences, 2024), while De Jong (2023: 99) defines professional staff as “degree holding university employees who are primarily responsible for developing, maintaining and changing the social, digital and physical infrastructures that enable education, research and knowledge exchange”. Discrepancies between these roles have been a reality, a cause of tension, and a topic of research since the 1960s, and, while recent research indicates that these tensions continue and are in some ways exacerbated as a result of the current expansion of administrative roles, too little attention has been given to finding a means of mitigating the tensions and seizing the current opportunities offered for finding win-win solutions.

A seminal article was written in 1962 by David Mechanic in regard to the tensions and divisions which exist within staff groupings in complex organisations (including universities). In the case of universities, the academics were those commanding the formal positions of power and the ‘lower participants’ were the secretaries or professional staff who served and supported the academics (Mechanic, 1962). While the article indicated the considerable power wielded by ‘lower participants’, particularly those of long-standing, through their ability to provide, or withhold, information and their access to senior managers, this was all informal power, and it must be recognised that in the intervening sixty years the situation with regards to university professional staff has changed dramatically. The neoliberal world order which has developed since the 1980s has replaced the earlier ‘social upliftment’ focus of universities which pertained after the Second World War when universities were funded largely

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by government (Etzkowitz *et al.*, 2000). In the United Kingdom this shift was reflected in the 1997 Dearing Report on Higher Education (Dearing, 1997), which raised tuition fees for undergraduates in response to the increasing numbers of students entering universities and the funding difficulties that universities were facing. The current global order has increasingly been accompanied by the positioning of universities as commercial enterprises required to raise their own funds, with a much-diminished role for government; close partnerships with industry; a primary focus on preparing students for their role in the economy; and a huge increase in the student population (Bell, 2019). The influence of this on the roles, categories and numbers of staff employed who do not fall within a clear teaching, and thus academic, category has necessarily been great (Whitchurch, 2006; Whitchurch, 2008).

More students mean more secretaries and interns to handle the paperwork, and more student support services (such as clinics, counsellors, writing centres, academic developers and quality assurers). Hence the numbers of professional staff now outnumber the academics, while the ratio of academics to students has decreased – and these proportions keep growing (Meyers, 2019; Bossu *et al.*, 2018). The current commercial focus means that research teams are involved in high level research and development roles, which require skilled and highly qualified team members who may not be permanent academic staff members but are increasingly significant as ‘third space professionals’ (Whitchurch, 2004; Whitchurch, 2008). Whitchurch (2008: 377) describes third space professionals as “blended professionals, who have mixed backgrounds and portfolios, comprising elements of both professional and academic activity”. At the same time, the exponential growth of technology requires not only technicians who can fix the computers, but experts to develop the technical support needed across the institution, and information technology (IT) specialists to teach the students (who may be IT academics or who may turn out to be the technicians covering two roles). Secretaries in this context should master complex IT skills themselves and are often required to assist in academic roles and to have human resources and public relations skills. Their education levels are also steadily rising so that the great majority of professional staff in South African universities are now graduates, and increasing numbers hold master’s degrees (Meyers, 2019). Overall, there has therefore been a growth of new categories, responsibilities and qualifications of professional staff, while all of this has a managerial, profit-seeking, focus which is necessarily ‘blended’ rather than ‘academic’. The boundaries between business and academe are becoming increasingly blurred, with both professional and academic expertise being equally required.

Currently, universities of technology (UoTs) in South Africa are becoming increasingly significant players in the country’s academic landscape, thus challenging more established universities at their own game. The focus of our research was on these universities specifically, as being involved in a growing number of disciplines, and potentially representing a more open and developmental approach to academe, not hidebound by old traditions. The research probed the experiences of a range of staff within two faculties of a leading UoT to identify both causes of tension between employee groups, and the grounds for better relationships to be developed. It is hoped that the findings will be valuable for staff policy decisions going into the future.

Literature Review

In Australia, it is recognised that professional staff support teaching and learning but are not always recognized or valued for these academic roles. Beckmann (2018) describes how ‘third space professionals’ assist departments by providing both professional and academic services. This leads to the ‘blended professionals’ playing an important role in the academic outcomes of learners’ studies in higher education and students appear to benefit as much from this interaction as they do from interactions with academics. Professional staff are, however, still seen as having generic administrative skills instead of professional skills developed for a specific purpose in higher education. Beckmann, however, expresses the hope that these staff members will receive the recognition they deserve in order to create the potential for third space inclusion – not exclusion. Seminal work on the nature and significance of this new phenomenon was carried out by Celia Whitchurch from 2004 (Whitchurch, 2004, 2006, 2008) and more recently by Veles and Carter (2016) and Veles *et al.* (2019).

Whitchurch’s 2006 article explained that “while identities have been defined traditionally via structured domains such as professional knowledge, institutional boundaries, and the policy requirements of the higher education sector, an emergent *project domain* has fostered the development of an increasingly multi-professional grouping of staff, with implications for career futures” (Whitchurch, 2006: 1). Thus, Whitchurch specifically situates her ‘third-space professionals’ within an emergent ‘project domain’ and less across the complex professional space of a whole institution. The focus of the present article is wider, as its lens is focussed on staffing in contemporary South African Universities of Technology more broadly, and on the numerous categories of ‘blended professionals’ who are working within these institutions, where a specifically ‘project domain’ is still in its early development stages

and is generally referred to as the generation of 'third stream income'. While Whitchurch's concept of 'third-space professionals' therefore captures a focus somewhat other than the situation in South Africa – there are overlaps between the situation of universities in advanced economies which is her focus, and our less developed economy in South Africa, but these are likely to converge as time passes. The distinguishing factor of universities of technology is that they focus on technology, innovation and skills transfer and offer technological, career-directed, educational programs. They engage with industry to produce innovative problem-solving research. Many of the programs offered include work-integrated learning that requires students to complete a structured program while working in an organisation. This exposure to industry develops additional competencies that are not gained through purely academic programs and assists graduates to find employment after graduation (Fern *et al.*, 2019).

Thus, the work of universities of technology is already firmly grounded in support for the economy, in research, which is practical and developmental, and in teaching which involves collaborative engagement with industry players. Staff members in this environment frequently make the transition to academic posts where they become lecturers in their previous professional disciplines, while technicians take responsibility (often informally) for lecturing students in IT, due to a lack of sufficient academic staff qualified in this discipline, and to the technicians' greater technical expertise, as demonstrated by the findings of this research. In 2019 Natalia Veles, Margaret-Anne Carter and Helen Boon of James Cook University, Australia, published an article 'Complex collaboration champions: university third space professionals working together across borders', where they argue that these 'blended professionals' are likely to appreciate the opportunities for productive collaborations and to champion the development of these 'blended' roles going into the future. These authors quote an earlier article (Veles and Carter, 2016: 1) in explaining that "*Third space* symbolises the emergence of new collegial spaces where university staff, academic and professional, collaborate on diverse projects in search of solutions to the challenges that universities face". Within the South African scene, the present paper argues that universities of technology are the institutions best adapted to take advantage of these developments and that their 'blended professionals' are in effect already traversing this divide, while often experiencing structural divisions/ barriers within their institutions which should have been eliminated from the 1990s.

Discussion concerning the role titles of professional staff is linked to this issue and has been ongoing for several years but without effective resolution. While 'non-academic' has been widely dismissed as inappropriate, 'changing the nomenclature from one broad descriptor to another, such as in the adoption of "Professional Staff", may [still] not achieve the desired fundamental shift in perception about this staffing group' (Sebalj *et al.*, 2012). Lawless (2017) affirms the continuation of the lower status given to professional staff, and it is common practice in contemporary South African universities for even senior professional staff to be addressed by their first names by their academic colleagues while they are expected in return (sometimes as a Human Capital directive) to address academics as 'Doctor' or 'Professor', 'Ms' or 'Mr'. Findings from the present study confirm that a technical staff member with a master's degree in IT education can be employed to design and teach IT to students in a situation where the official lecturer lacks the technical skill required. However, this work is without recognition as s/he has not been appointed to an 'academic' post, and is unlikely to be so appointed, given current staffing policy. Other findings involve professional staff still finding themselves to be 'invisible' in university circles where academics predominate, and still experiencing less respect from students than would be awarded to academics (Respondent 32). There are traces here of Mechanic's conception of professional staff as 'lower participants' in the institution.

Policymakers and university administrators are not interested as such in these issues, but what interests them is the interplay that the dynamics represent in terms of staffing patterns. The interest is not in the dynamics themselves, rather in their results in terms of acceptability. One main reason is to ensure a stable working environment within a campus through the delegation of tasks considered acceptable to all. A second reason is that stability in the sense of balancing institutional interests will lead to effective and efficient performance of tasks (Veles *et al.*, 2019: 80). For university staff, the wider implications of the *third space* phenomenon's proliferation are related not only to redefinition of professional boundaries but also to reimagining and enacting of new working practices, learning new collaborative skills and competencies, and, ultimately, to further integration of roles, portfolios and professions (Veles *et al.*, 2019: 80). It is thus the purpose of this article to argue for the potential value for universities of technology themselves of a conscious abandonment on their part of any discrepancies in status, salaries, or conditions of service between professionals and academics, in the interests of more 'effective and efficient performance of tasks' and 'the further integration of roles, portfolios and professions'.

The underpinning theoretical framework for this research was adapted from GC Spivak’s seminal essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (Spivak, 1988). Graham Riach’s analysis of this essay provides ‘A critical analysis of Spivak’s classic 1988 postcolonial studies essay’, in which she argues that a core problem for the poorest and most marginalized in society (the subalterns) is that they have no platform to express their concerns and no voice to affect policy debates or demand a fairer share of society’s goods (Riach, 2017). While the current context is quite different, the underlying issue is similar in that the structures within universities are not questioned, and professional staff (even the most senior) do not therefore have a platform at present from which to be heard.

Methodology

An exploratory mixed methods design was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing the roles and working relationships of professional and academic staff at the selected university. This involved data gathered from both academic and professional staff using both interviews and questionnaires. In 2018, the data were gathered exclusively by Leigh Meyers, while in 2021 they were gathered by the three authors jointly, with an additional focus in 2021 on staff who occupied blended positions, or had transitioned from one group to the other, or else were considering doing so.

Table 1: Participant Information – 2018 data

Total Number of participants	77
Academic staff	50
Professional staff	27
11 years and above of service	21
6-10 years of service	11
2-5 years of service	22
2 years and below of service	23
Faculty of Arts & Design	27
Faculty of Health Sciences	50

The 2018 qualitative data were gathered from interviews conducted with nine staff members, involving two senior academics (a Deputy Dean and an Acting Executive Dean), the University Registrar, and central professional staff from the Departments of Finance, Human Resources, Student Admissions, both Faculty Officers from the selected faculties, and one technical staff member. Thus, interview data was obtained from a well-informed, well-represented and diverse groups able to speak for the situation in the university. Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained from the 2018 questionnaires. Each quantitative question was accompanied by an optional qualitative, open-ended question. The same questionnaires were sent to all staff in the two selected faculties in order for a clear comparison of the answers made. Seventy-seven (77) staff members responded out of a total staff complement of 235 from the two selected faculties (Meyers, 2019: 54). Thus, a response rate of 33% was achieved. This represents a response rate of only 12% achieved from professional staff, with a slightly higher 21% from academic staff. This limited response was attributable to the perceived sensitivity of the material but can be balanced by the breadth of the sampling frame (a census of all faculty staff) and the richness of the qualitative data received.

Participant information from the 2021 initiative is as follows:

Table 2: Participant Information – 2021 data

Total number of participants	31
Faculty of Health Sciences	20
Faculty of Accounting and Informatics	11
Academic staff	11
Professional staff	9
A blend of academic and professional	11
Respondents who wish to become academics	15

In 2021, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three representative members of staff, two of whom currently occupy blended roles and one who was formerly a professional staff member but is now a senior lecturer. Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes and the data were transcribed verbatim and were then grouped into themes. The data gathered from the experiences of the interviewees in 2021 were incorporated into the design of the questionnaire which was the second phase of the sequential collection process in that year. Again, the

questionnaire was sent online to all staff in two (quite diverse) faculties: the faculties of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Accounting and Informatics. However, only those who occupied blended roles, who planned to transition to an academic role, or who had already made that transition, were asked to complete the survey. It was therefore not possible to calculate a response rate, as intentions and past histories were involved in the self-selection process and these are inaccessible – but it was felt that the number of responses achieved was significant, while the three targeted groups were well-balanced. Microsoft Forms (online survey creator) was used to design the survey questionnaire, and the data were analysed using Microsoft Excel 2016. Ethical clearance and permission were obtained to conduct the research studies in each year from the selected university’s Institutional Research Committee.

Findings and Discussion

Emerging from the findings, two clear *trends* underpinned nearly all the experiences of the respondents: professional staff roles increasingly overlapped with academic staff roles, and workloads were getting heavier. In addition, four distinct *themes* were clearly discernible from the data: workload issues, status issues, causes of division and structural divisions caused by embedded policies. Two further significant opportunities that were identified are: openings for closer cooperation between staff categories, and that these openings exist specifically within universities of technology.

Breakdown of staff categories in the 2021 data

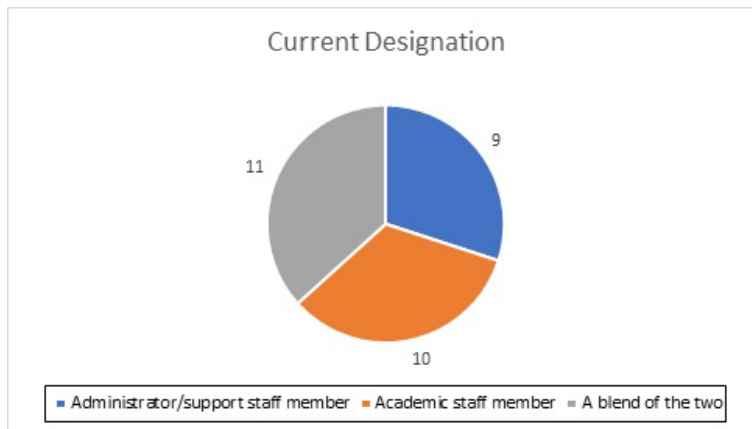


Figure 1: Staff current designation

Respondents thus represented a relatively equal divide amongst the targeted groups, with a slight preponderance in the number of staff members belonging to the category a 'blend of two'. The latter were in a position to provide useful information as they had the opportunity of being in both the designated positions, 'professional staff' and 'academic staff'.



Figure 2: Number of years staff had occupied their current position

The above graph shows that the majority of the respondents had been in their current positions for between 6 -10 years and twelve staff members had over 11 years of experience. Thus, most staff involved were experienced and in a good position to provide the information required.

Staff who had moved from professional status to academic status

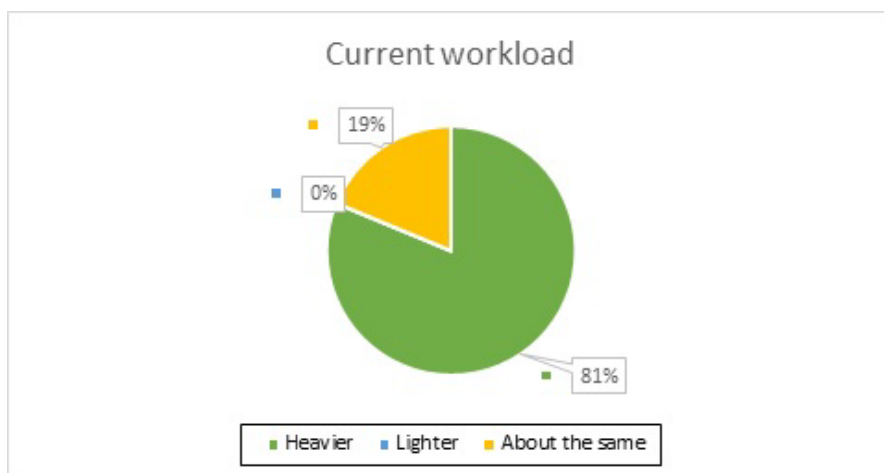


Figure 3: Workload

Respondents were asked if they believed that their current workload was greater, less, or about the same as they had experienced while administrators (professional staff), and in a subsequent question, if they found the work more fulfilling, less fulfilling or about the same. A significant trend was that these staff believed that their current workload is much heavier (81%). No respondents found that it was lighter. This is in contrast to the 2018 data where some professional staff admitted to envying the academics who could come and go as they wished rather than having a strict 08:00 – 16:30 schedule, the implication being that academic workloads were perceived to be lighter than administrative ones at that time. According to McCall et al. (2021), one of the challenges experienced by people moving into academia is the heavy workload in terms of both lecturing and preparation duties.

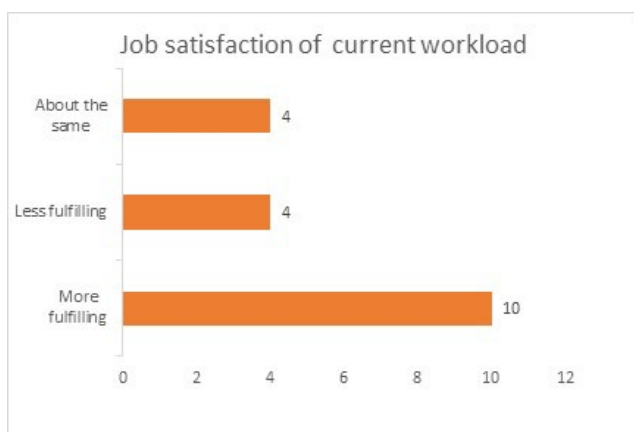


Figure 4: Fulfilment

However, heavy workloads were balanced by the increase in fulfilment that many experienced in taking up academic positions. This perhaps suggests that a more general acceptance of blended roles as the norm, could have a positive impact on the job satisfaction of staff.

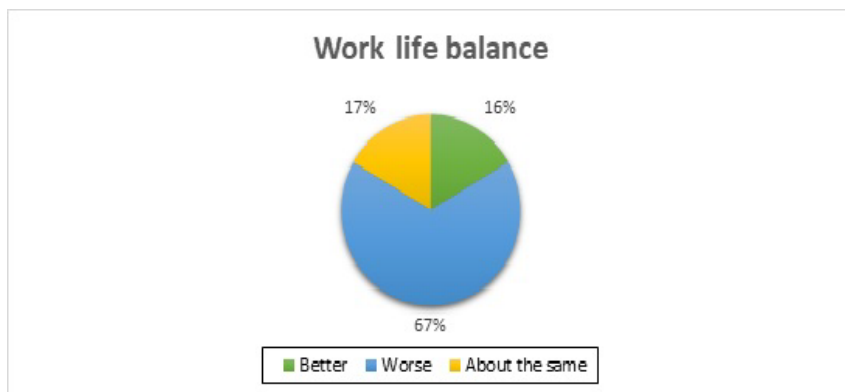


Figure 5: Work/life balance

To the further question: 'Do you feel that your work/life balance is better, worse or about the same', most (67%) felt that it was now worse.

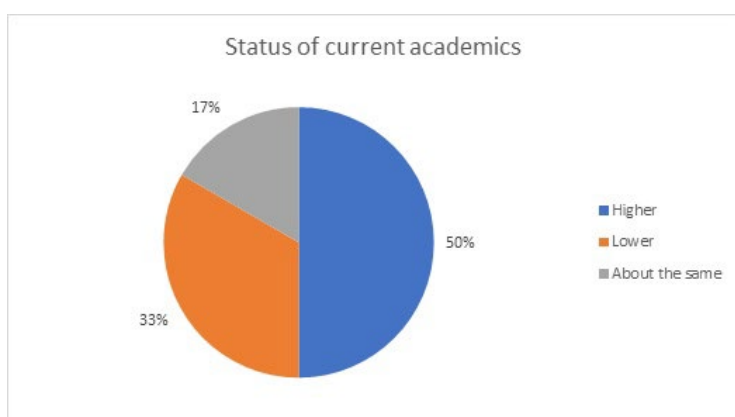


Figure 6: Status

To 'do you feel that your present status is higher, lower, or about the same?' there were mixed responses, with a third (33%) feeling that it had declined, but more feeling that it had increased (50%). There was a clear indication amongst the responses of professional staff in 2018 that academic staff felt superior to professional staff. This was also confirmed by the senior professional staff who were interviewed (Meyers, 2019). One explained:

It's like a disparity, because academics see themselves on another footing/ level to professional staff/technical staff (Respondent 38).

Responses to open-ended questions from staff who had made this transition indicated that, although there are benefits to being an academic, there are no boundaries and 'work extends for long hours...It erodes into one's personal life'

The current position is very challenging but it has numerous benefits to being an academic even though there is no cut off from work and personal life most of the time (Respondent 20).

These respondents also found that once awarded a PhD, staff are suddenly inundated with more responsibilities:

Work load increases in terms of, for instance, supervision and attendance at meetings (Respondent 41).

In 2018, professional staff were still able to believe that academic working hours were shorter. This no longer applied in 2021 when both groups were conscious of very heavy workloads:

I feel like I moved from an 8 to 5 position to working all the time and more is always expected (Respondent 6).

The administrative tasks overwhelm academics. This limits our abilities to fulfil other responsibilities such as research and community engagement (Respondent 25).

Staff who were considering a move to academic positions

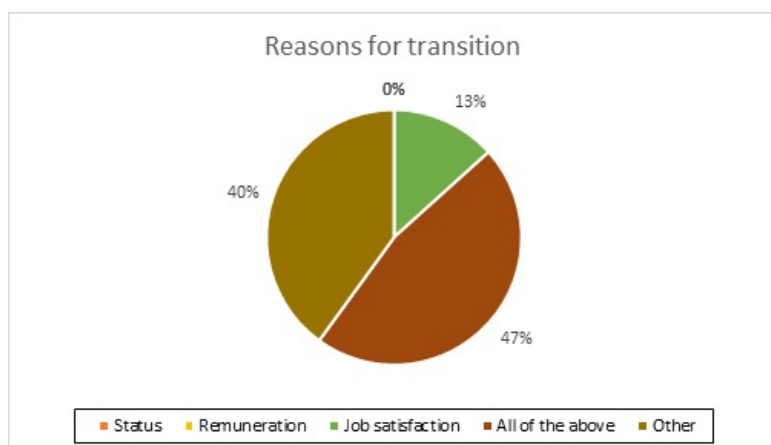


Figure 7: Reasons for transition

These respondents were asked what prompted them to consider moving into academe, with the choices: status, remuneration, job satisfaction, all of the above, or 'other'. Nobody selected 'other' or 'remuneration' on its own, while 47% selected 'all of the above'. In addition, this group were asked: 'What factors, if any, do you believe currently stand in the way of professional staff transitioning to academic positions?'

Responses given in 2018 indicated that professional staff felt that academic career growth is always given precedence over the career growth of professional staff. Responses in 2021 indicated that university structures were still widely seen as a barrier to these aspirations, with interviewees pointing out forcefully that there are limited opportunities for professional staff making this transition. Their attempts to upgrade their qualifications are hampered by the fact that they are not eligible for study leave, while formal teaching experience is almost always a requirement. However, although many do have teaching experience (notably laboratory technicians) this is not formally recognized. According to Noor, Aslam and Isa (2024), management staff in public universities in Pakistan show favouritism to some administrative staff and block study leave for others.

Comments include:

Lack of opportunities to capacitate professional staff to become academics (Respondent 8).

Where you apply for a teaching position firstly they want you to have teaching experience and, secondly, they open up the position to the outside as well. So there's no capacity building from within. So if you get a person with a PhD from somewhere else then they are going to come in so I can't move up (Respondent 32).

Staff whose current role involves a blending of administrative and academic aspects were asked only to comment on the pros and cons of this double role. This elicited generally negative response, with some exceptions. One respondent indicated:

...the joy experienced with the interaction with students in the classroom, I believe that acquiring experience in both areas enhances one's professional and personal development (Respondent 24).

Others who saw potential advantages (which augurs well for more official blending in the future) explained as follows:

I am gaining the opportunity to build my experience and understand the processes and planning involved in academia but I do not receive the same benefits and status an academic would receive because I am in an in-between role (Respondent 13).

Participation in administrative duties assists in understanding certain academic/admin processes. You also feel more involved in the process and are able to write reports from an academic viewpoint (Respondent 16).

However, the majority of participants stated that, arising from their overcrowded work schedules and time constraints, tasks are often not accomplished as efficiently and effectively as they would like. They also indicated that, where there is a blending of roles, more administrative tasks are accomplished, and having both responsibilities during exams and registration becomes particularly demanding. Professional staff were asked to perform academic functions, including lecturing and practical teaching, and were disillusioned by receiving no remuneration nor recognition for these academic duties. Academic staff who also undertook administrative tasks noted that in previous years, administrative tasks were less/lighter and so allowed them to give undivided attention to teaching. Respondents felt that in the past five to eight years, administrative tasks have increased exponentially.

Responses from this group include the following:

The academics identify you as academic when they need you to be an academic and then when they don't need you to be an academic, they remind you that you are just admin (Respondent 33).

As a Clinical Instructor my role is administrative and teaching (practicals and lecturing). A major con I feel is that I have less time than a person that is just an academic and focuses on one task, which is lecturing, even though they have numerous modules. Pro is that I love what I do. I love my interaction with my students in the clinicals that is not the same as in the classroom (Respondent 2).

You are expected to work after hours which is not paid for. Dealing with students and academic staff is draining as most people, especially in academia, think that professional staff need to do all the work for everyone. We are not remunerated well, yet most of the work is done by the professional staff. Expected to know everything; lack of resources (Respondent 28).

I am an academic, but at times it seems there is more admin work than lecturing (Respondent 10).

It is very difficult to do both the roles and be productive...sometimes administrative functions need to be accomplished and then that takes precedence (Respondent 20).

Where administrative tasks are overwhelming in a blended role, this hinders one's capability to accomplish other responsibilities/interests/passions i.e. research and community engagement (Respondent 25).

I used to fit the admin into my work as an academic, now I squeeze the teaching and learning into a sea of (often unnecessary) admin! Soon I'll be totally disconnected from the student on the ground - like Executive Management! (Respondent 12).

Common threads running through these responses indicate frustration, and some underlying resentment on the part of professional staff. It may be pertinent to note here that the 2018 data recorded a 94% agreement on the part of academic staff that the work of professional staff was appreciated – but only 52% of professional staff believed this to be the case. 51% of professional staff in that survey also either agreed or strongly agreed that they are taken for granted by academic staff, one respondent citing an incident where an academic said: “Oh, I saw an email from you, but I didn't read it. Was it important?” Overwhelming workloads were a dominant theme emerging from both groups equally, especially in the 2021 responses. Caldwell (2021) states that professional and academic staff have worked in their own “silos” for many years and that their relationship with each other is challenging and conflicted.

The study also found that roles between administrative and academic staff are often blurred. This was already noted in the literature nearly a decade ago (Simpson and Fitzgerald, 2014) and all of the evidence discussed above gives support to the ever-increasing blending of roles which is happening ‘naturally’ – apparently without being driven by any specific policy agendas, nor with any clear indication that the dissatisfaction this may cause is understood by senior management, or that it is being addressed. Respondents asked to comment agreed. One interviewee said:

It is becoming very blurred for a few reasons. Many academics are not equipped to handle the course/modules they are being given. They are relying more and more on assistance from admin staff. It's becoming very blurry where often admin people (I'm speaking for myself) are asked to do many academic things (Respondent 32).

Professional staff confirmed that they are doing the work of academics in respect of teaching, setting of tests and assignments and conducting presentations. These tasks are not officially recognised, however, and so cannot be claimed as formal teaching experience when making job applications. Indeed, the official response appears to be reactive, and sometimes regressive, as when a technician, who is an experienced demonstrator and facilitator, has been *forbidden* to teach in the computer labs, in order to maintain a clear role identity as understood in his job description as a technician.

A respondent pointed to the additional burden this uncontrolled situation involves for the management of an academic department:

If you don't have an HoD that is very much vocal in terms of who is supposed to be doing what in the Department, then the Department will tend to do its own thing (Respondent 34).

When asked to share their views concerning the potential advantages and disadvantages of this blurring of roles, and whether it should be made more formal and permanent, there were some positive comments as noted above. However, there was a repetition of the sentiment that professional staff are unappreciated. They are not included in training events, webinars and other functions created for academics. They also sense a lack of respect which can be demotivating and discouraging, despite believing that they generally have a greater insight into happenings in the Department than the academics – which is demonstrated by students going first to them for advice:

Professional staff have direct contact with students, through technical and administrative support. Demotivation of professional staff could result in poor performance and therefore hinder student progress (Respondent 17).

Thus, a situation of greater equality between the two groups, which could eliminate such official barriers and underlying discriminatory practices, would appear to be indicated.

Silvey *et al.* (2018) believe that universities have always been divided between academic and professional staff. In the past, staff often had an 'us' and 'them' attitude, but these authors also note how today many staff move between non-academic and academic roles as 'third space professionals' and how professional tasks are changing to include assisting students with academic skills and literature development. Significant for the apparently unstoppable nature of a trend towards professional staff moving into academic roles in the selected university, despite the challenges experienced, was this comment by a senior member of the professional staff in 2018:

Some love what they are doing and those who have wished to, have improved their qualifications and I've seen them move up. So I have seen professional staff move up to the rank of lecturer. So if they want to change their position, they go and get it (Respondent 5)

That an increasing workload is also a trend operating over several years is supported by the literature. For instance, Qwabe (2016: 92) states that the findings of his research indicate that both academic and professional staff feel that they are doing more work than they originally expected when they were appointed. The dissatisfaction this engendered was exacerbated by many of the staff members (both academic and professional) agreeing that 'there is a lack of transparency and equity between different workloads performed by different individuals'.

Conclusion

It is not the intention of this article to suggest specific interventions or policy initiatives which individual institutions may consider in regard to these issues, since different contexts will call for different responses – but rather to ponder, in broad terms, whether intractable barriers to change really exist. For instance, what prevents advertisements for posts from dropping divisions between 'Academic' or 'Professional' in favour of the level of expertise required and the focus of the post (which may be a blended one)? Why are colleagues expected (sometimes required) to address each other differently depending upon whether they are academic or professional staff, rather than simply using whatever title seems most appropriate for the occasion? Why is a senior member of the professional staff, with a wealth of relevant knowledge, deemed to be only 'in attendance' at meetings rather than being a full participant? Why should some staff qualify for study leave and be invited to seminars and workshops but others not? Why should experienced teachers and demonstrators be deemed to have 'no teaching experience' if occupying professional staff positions? All of these rhetorical questions would seem to apply most especially to the practical, work-orientated, focus of universities of technology, where outdated traditions have

apparently been allowed to creep in from old practices in long-established institutions, but without due consideration of their current value. The one common, and apparently intractable, theme which permeates all the most recent responses is the overwhelming workload both groups currently experience. It is clearly not possible for new policies to ameliorate this directly – but addressing issues of staff equity would be one way to “ensure a stable working environment within a campus through the delegation of tasks considered acceptable to all... and more stability in the sense of balancing institutional interests will lead to more effective and efficient performance of tasks” (Veles *et al.*, 2019: 80). Thus, at the least, the workload issue could have a stronger platform from which it could be tackled, and from which it could be addressed more equitably and thus more effectively.

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