

Hybrid Managers in Higher Education: Power, Identity and Challenges**ABSTRACT**

In higher education institutions, like in other professional bureaucracies and public organisations, the hybrid-manager role is the link between professionals and management and is responsible for helping deliver organisational strategy. Hybrid-managers are characterised by their straddling of the managerial and professional roles – deemed to face particular challenges associated with identity conflict. However, a more nuanced examination of their role and its enactment, that goes beyond identity conflict, has been called for – especially outside of the healthcare context. This paper reports the emerging findings of a pilot study on Heads of Department – a classic hybrid-manager role in UK universities. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the emerging findings highlight the different ways in which academic hybrid-managers navigate their two worlds – shunning or integrating them to varying extents - and the reasons for this. The findings also start to uncover the ways in which power is perceived in the role, with a view to better understanding how different types of academic hybrid-manager employ power for different ends – contributing to our understanding of the effectiveness of academic hybrid-managers and more widely, for improving the effectiveness of public organisations.

Key Words:

Hybrid; manager; professional; identity; power.

Introduction

Hybrid managers are professionals that manage; in other words, they manage in professional contexts, overseeing the work of other professionals (Fitzgerald and Ferlie, 2000). In recent decades, the importance of the hybrid-manager role in professional bureaucracies has been brought to the fore (Giacomelli, 2019). Straddling the worlds of both ‘management’ and ‘worker’, the hybrid-manager is situated such that they have purview of both worlds and are deliberately placed to be the lynch pin that enables the delivery of policy ‘from above’ and the implementation of it ‘by the below’ (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007). As the connection between senior leadership and those on the ground, they are critical in the contribution they make to knowledge brokering, strategy formation and implementation (Burgess and Currie, 2013) and facilitating change (Breit, Fossetøl and Andreassen, 2018).

While middle managers in all organisations straddle the worlds above and below them, unlike middle managers in non-professional organisations, the hybrid-manager usually has a strongly developed identity based on their professional membership (McGivern, Currie, Ferlie, Fitzgerald and Waring, 2015). The hybrid-manager is increasingly common in public sector organisations such as healthcare and education and has been linked with the introduction of ‘new managerialism’ – intended to replicate private sector values (Deem, 1998; Newman and Clarke, 1997; Spyridonidis, Hendy and Barlow, 2015). These sectors, therefore, are home to professionals with strong existing role identities (such as physicians) who subsequently take on managerial roles, and for whom the adoption of such working practices can cause identity-related challenges and a re-evaluation of how the individual perceives themselves professionally (Blackmore and Kandiko, 2011; Spyridonidis et al., 2015). Whilst the experience of being a hybrid middle manager may be similar in some respects to those in other organisations, the identity challenges are what make these professionals’ experiences unique and important to study.

One of the criticisms levelled at the research on hybrid managers is the reductionist approach taken to understanding the hybrid-manager role, which Fulop (2012) has encapsulated in her observation that ‘hybridity’ is often used as a blanket term. Similarly, referring to hybrids as ‘reluctant managers’ (Hallier and Forbes, 2005) doesn’t reveal all the very different forms or shapes that reluctance can take, nor the influence of role identity challenges on this reluctance. While scholars have started to uncover the more nuanced shades of this concept (e.g. Blackmore and Kandiko, 2011; Spyridonidis et al., 2015), Giacomelli highlights that there is still a way to go and challenges scholars to shed light on the ‘in between space’ (2019: 1638) that is represented by hybrid-managers.

Furthermore, Giacomelli’s review of the literature on hybrid-managers identifies the need to diversify the context of studies. The skew towards examining the healthcare context doesn’t reflect the prevalence of hybrid managers across many different sectors and in response to this and other identified limitations of the research, we provide an insight into the different ways in which hybrid managers in UK academia experience and enact their role – highlighting the different origins of hybrid type and their different uses of power in the role in order to understand better the effects and effectiveness of different types of hybrid-manager. In so doing, we illuminate the liminal space between the ‘no longer’ (a pure professional) and the ‘not yet’ (a manager) (Giacomelli, 2019), that goes beyond reductionist approaches to date.

A broader conversation focuses on the public sector reforms that have affected UK universities (e.g. Woodall, Hiller and Resnick, 2014) and impacted on the hybrid-manager roles in academia (Deem and Ozga, 2000) and has led some to question whether the hybrid-manager role is even still an appropriate one in light of the changes. However, for the time being, this role remains very much in place. If Mintzberg (1998) is indeed correct in asserting that professionals need little direct supervision but more support, then it is important that universities develop clarity on how to support hybrid-managers to successfully navigate the

challenges associated with this role, in order to be effective in it – regardless of their motives for becoming a hybrid-manager. This is supported by Giacomelli (2019:1638) who suggests that ‘a far more niche and underdeveloped avenue for research seems to be related to the enabling conditions and managerial levers that help professionals exert hybrid roles.’ In order to understand the conditions and support required to enable hybrid managers, their unique motives, needs and challenges must first be understood.

The Hybrid Professional-Manager Role

As Giacomelli puts it: “Professionals appointed with managerial roles working in public organizations are expected to act as the junction between the professional and managerial domains, and to add value by spanning organizational and professional boundaries” (2019: 1624). The hybrid professional-manager role has been examined in a number of contexts (e.g. health, law, education, accounting) and while this literature is relatively well-developed, it has primarily focused on the healthcare sector (e.g. Bresnen et al., 2019; Currie and Croft, 2015). Giacomelli’s (2019) review reflects this bias, showing that the majority of studies – 43 out of 57 – have been conducted in healthcare, with only 3 examining hybridity in education broadly. While an important aim of this body of research, and the present study, is to make observations about the hybrid-manager role that may be applicable to all contexts, the higher education setting has idiosyncrasies that make its exploration therein important for gaining insights for that sector.

Different scholars have attempted in different ways to characterise the dichotomy that is inherent in this role. McGivern et al. (2015) draw on identity theory when depicting hybrid roles as being “framed by both professionalism and managerial logics”. Forbes, Hallier and Kelly (2004) distinguish between ‘investors’ and ‘reluctants’ in their study of ‘doctors as manager’. Critics of these attempts to examine the role have suggested these to be too simplistic

– drawing on a logic that pits one role against the other, in conflict. In line with this critique, Spyridonidis et al. (2015) identified the processes that are involved in developing into a hybrid-manager role in the healthcare sector and described three different identities that emerged: ‘innovators’, ‘sceptics’ and ‘the late majority’. Bresnen, Hodgson, Bailey, Hassard and Hyde (2019), in their analysis of healthcare hybrids, draw on career narratives in order to differentiate between ‘aspirational’, ‘ambivalent’ and ‘agnostic’ hybrids and their transition into hybridity.

Like these studies, the present research seeks to build on the more black and white thinking of ‘neither manager nor professional’ in order to reveal the many different ways that hybrid-managers navigate the duality and challenges of their role. It is perhaps because of the potential challenges associated with undertaking this role that Kirkpatrick (2016) has identified the need for further research to examine the *impact* of hybrid-managers – as he states: ‘the wider effects of professional involvement in leadership and management remains patchy’ (2016: 185). A key step towards addressing that knowledge deficit is therefore not only gaining a fuller understanding of hybrid managers’ experiences in the role but also the way that they use their power in this role in order to achieve outcomes; such an approach could help start to unpick some the ‘effects’ that Kirkpatrick talks about needing to explore and who those effects are useful to – the individual or the organisation. As such this study examines the ways in which different types of hybrid manager perceive and use power in their role and to what ends. The findings reported come from a single sector – that of higher education, but through this focus on the origins of different hybrids and their associated use of power, we make contributions applicable to the wider hybrid manager literature, which can enable understanding of the effects of hybrid managers as well as to help inform conversations geared towards identifying support and development for those in hybrid-manager roles more widely.

The Hybrid Manager Role in Academia

In the UK, the higher education sector has increasingly become viewed as an economic commodity in its own right, and the ensuing introduction of New Managerialism has fundamentally shifted the structure of higher education as a result (Hill and Kumar 2009; Floyd, 2016). As a result, there has been a move away from roles such as head of department or dean of faculty as ‘academic caretaker’-type positions to something much more akin to the hybrid-manager roles found in other public sectors. In 1997, the then-UK government published what is known as ‘the Dearing Report’ (Dearing, 1997), which opened the door to significant expansion of the UK higher education sector and an introduction of ‘new managerialism’ and a market approach. Since then, marketisation and increasing government scrutiny have driven a substantial shift in the culture and values in universities dominated by business-focused and market-driven ideologies (Shepherd, 2015; Woodall et al., 2014). As such, there has been a significant increase in the types and numbers of staff working in administrative functions such as human resources and marketing, as well as the impact on the nature of the academic-leadership roles such as head of department and dean of faculty.

There has been a fundamental shift away from the traditional cultures of collegiate communities of scholars working with academic leaders who took it in turn to step into the main leadership roles of the institutions (Shepherd, 2015). As such, the higher echelons of leadership in academia are today more likely to comprise senior leadership teams which combine both academics (as hybrid managers, e.g. deans and vice-principals) and pure managerial staff (such as HR, finance and marketing). The primary concerns of those at the various management levels in higher education are on budgets, staffing, estates, teaching and research quality, marketing activities and student recruitment and public perception – often indicated through league tables. Despite the focus on these more ‘managerial’ concerns, academic staff still progress to these roles based on their academic achievements, such as

research outputs and grant income, rather than whether they are suitable for the requirements of the management role itself (Deem and Brehony, 2005; Blackmore and Kandiko, 2011). Furthermore, since academics are recruited into universities primarily to teach and do research, their professional identity is likely to be that of being an academic first and foremost, with their first real experiences of management often being when they step into head of department roles.

Head of Department Role in Academia and existing research

The development of a quasi-market state in higher education due to the introduction of students fees and the expansion of public-scrutiny has resulted in a modernisation of universities in order to make them more responsive to ‘consumers’ (students) and funders. As a result, the once ‘caretaker’ role of head of department has morphed into a more dynamic form of management. There is a divide in the UK higher education sector in how the role is recruited to. In 1992, former polytechnics in the UK (defined as tertiary educational establishments which specialised in STEM and technical subjects with a focus on vocational education) were permitted to attain university status. These ‘post-1992’ universities tend to appoint heads of department as externally recruited roles which are permanent and provide career progression for academic staff. However, the head of department role in the more traditional and more predominant (pre-1992) institutions, tends to be a rotating role for 4-5 years that is financially rewarded by a small additional honorarium. As such, academics from within a given department will step up for a period and then return to the ‘rank and file’ after their rotation ends. This is an idiosyncrasy about the hybrid-manager role that is particular to higher education.

Whilst limited research has focused on senior positions such as Pro-Vice-Chancellors (e.g. Denney, 2020; Shepherd, 2011, 2015, 2018;), there has been relatively less attention paid to the complexities of academic middle managers – despite the head of department role being

a critical one in universities in terms of contributing to strategy and implementing change on the ground (Creaton and Heard-Laureote, 2019). Where research has been conducted, it focuses on the tensions inherent in the role; because the head of department role in academia will usually be conducted by an incumbent and practicing academic, this requires the role holder to undertake two distinct roles – academic and manager. The conflicts experienced by hybrid-managers in academia are perhaps best understood with reference to Bourdieu's ideas of 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus'. Academics develop careers within a career *field* which has certain associated behavioural norms and underpinning values, and *capital*, which can be expressed in terms of things such as qualifications (a PhD for example) and research outputs (Bourdieu 1984, 1988; Floyd 2016). Blackmore and Kandiko (2011) furthermore define academic work in terms of the process of the work done as well as the outputs of the work (research articles, books etc) and that the academic work is intrinsically rewarding in and of itself. They state that academics get their sense of belonging or *habitus* from the approval and acceptance into the discipline of their peers in an academic department. However, when an academic assumes a hybrid-management role, *habitus* is always in tension with other aspects of the role, due to the time restrictions which prevent the individual from investing in the work that is meaningful to them and that leads to the outputs that are valued within their field. Existing literature tends to reflect that hybrid-managers in academia therefore experience the ensuing development of multiple identities and often stressful conflict between those identities (Blackmore and Kandiko 2011; Bourdieu 1984, 1988; Floyd 2016). In line with these findings, Floyd and Dimmock's (2011) study examined a post-1992 institution and characterised heads of department as one of three types: *jugglers*, *copers* or *strugglers*. This typology emerged from the ways in which heads of department develop multiple professional and personal identities – for example, being a researcher, a teacher, a manager, a parent etc. Their work examines the tensions and conflicts between roles and how those are managed and falls into the same type

of study as those targeted by the afore-mentioned critique – accused of an over-simplified focus on *conflict* in hybrid-manager research.

The work conducted by Professor Alan Floyd of Reading University in the UK, has mainly researched the experiences of heads of department in a single post-1992 university, with a subsequent expansion of his work to cover a single pre-1992 institution (Floyd and Dimmock, 2011; Floyd, 2012, 2016). Whilst the findings are therefore limited in applicability to other higher education institutions and to the hybrid literature more generally, Floyd's work provides an account of the identity-conflicts experienced by heads of department, how those in the role cope, as well as how the role functions in terms of perceived career progression for the occupants. Floyd's work, in addition to Blackmore and Kandiko's (2011), highlights hybrid academic managers' experiences of identify conflict resulting from time demands of the dual role – diminishing time to focus on research and to produce the *capital* or prestige factors that may have actually played a role in getting the position in the first place. Therefore, like the broader hybrid literature, it is limited to the experience of identity conflict and tensions between the roles.

To summarise, we seek to provide a more detailed account of the different ways in which hybrid-managers in academia navigate the movement between their identities and linked to their specific hybrid-manager journey, how they use power in the role and for what purpose. In so doing, we move the conversation on from one of merely identity conflict, to one that reveals the more illuminating way in which identities, and belonging to multiple groups, are steered, as well as the implications for individuals and organisations. We seek to address the following research questions:

- What are the different ways in which academic hybrid-managers internalise and navigate their academic/manager identities?
- What are the reasons for managing their identities in this way?

- How is power perceived/ employed in the role by the different hybrid types and for whose benefit?
- What are the challenges specific to each type?

In the next section we describe how we are using this pilot study to start addressing these questions and outline how this fits with the larger study it precedes.

Methods

The study reported here is a pilot that focused on the experiences of hybrid-managers in two UK universities. The pilot findings will inform a larger study that extends across higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK. The pilot study is ongoing and currently consists of 9 interviews, with a further 11 scheduled in January/February 2021. Table 1 provides a breakdown of participants interviewed to date. The purpose of the pilot is to draw out relevant understandings of the hybrid-manager role in academia and the ways in which power is perceived and employed to enact the role. The pilot will inform a broader study – which, in expanding to all UK HEIs, takes account of context, including both pre-1992 and post-1992 institutions and a mix of Russell Group and non-Russell Group universities, among other contextual factors. The broader study will also focus on current and former Heads of Department allowing the capture of hindsight thinking about the role once Heads have returned to their pure academic role and can provide perspective from that vantage point. Hereafter, we are referring only to the pilot study.

Sample and recruitment

The pilot study has been carried out within two pre-1992 UK universities. Prospective participants were approached by email and invited to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured interview. The participants cover all disciplinary areas in the two universities. From an initial

approach to a total of 47 heads of department, we were able to schedule interviews with 20 as well as being given access to two further networks of HoDs, that hitherto we had been unaware of. For anonymity, participants' disciplinary affiliations have been kept broad referring to faculty level labels (e.g. 'arts and humanities', 'social sciences', 'biological sciences') in Table 1.

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Interviews and analysis

All interviews to date have been conducted by both researchers. This ensures that themes were explored thoroughly and allowed the researchers to check interpretation of the interviewees' responses and seek clarity in interviews, where necessary. In addition to building constructively on themes, conducting interviews together helped to avoid researcher-'Zoom fatigue.' Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately one hour and throughout the data collection process, the interview questions have been revised and redeveloped. For example, where it was recognised after the first two interviews that the idea of sacrifice may play a role in understanding how Heads relate to their roles, questions were included to ask about the types and degree of sacrifice felt in undertaking the Head role.

Initial analysis has been conducted using content analysis and the emerging findings are reported in the following section. Both authors coded the data, with disagreements resolved by discussion that informed ongoing coding. While only 9 interviews have been analysed, the findings point to a set of emerging hybrid profiles. These profiles will be confirmed, disconfirmed or altered and added to as we continue with data collection in the pilot and main study. This will be done through adopting an approach of constant comparison (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006), with data from subsequent interviews. The wider study will allow the

refinement of profiles, as well as a much fuller account of how power plays out for the Heads in these profiles and across different contexts.

Findings

We identified four emerging profiles: Aspirational hybrids; Loyal Hybrids; Oscillating Hybrids; Isolated Hybrids¹. The pilot interviews with Heads of Department (Heads) reveal that the Heads differed in the extent to which they identified with each of their identities – ‘academic professional’ and ‘education manager’ – once assuming the role, revealing the different ways and extent to which individuals choose to separate or integrate their professional/ manager identities. For each profile, this is addressed in the ‘*role identity*’ section. The origins of a particular profile of academic hybrid-managers are addressed by considering the motives for and journey to undertaking the role. For each profile, this is addressed in the ‘*Origins of Hybrid type*’ section and helps to understand the perceptions and employment of power. Accordingly, a third section in each profile focuses on power. The final section outlines some of the challenges, contradictions and tensions specific to that profile. This is addressed in the ‘*Challenges associated with this hybrid type*’ section.

Each profile is described below, drawing on the findings that speak to that profile. Illustrative quotes are provided in Tables 2 – 5.

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¹ We have labelled the first group ‘aspirational heads’ in line with Bresnan et al. 2019 because the of the ostensible similarity of this group with the Aspirational hybrids in their research.

Aspirational Hybrids

Aspirational Hybrids were Heads who embraced their management identity, whilst eschewing, to some degree, an academic identity based on the traditional values of research output. Although not necessarily seeing the role in this way themselves, a number of the Heads identified it as a ‘steppingstone’ to more senior administrative roles, hence the label ‘aspirational’ – like the hybrids seeking career progression in Brenen et al.’s analysis (2019). These individuals were also the individuals who were most similar to the post-1992 Heads identified by Floyd (2012) and Deem (2000) who wanted to move away from teaching and research. We identified 2 of these in the pilot – Lianne and Caroline.

Role Identity

One of the Heads, Lianne, was an individual who planned to go on to higher echelons of management in HEIs. She had already applied for (but didn’t get) a Vice Dean role elsewhere and repeatedly stated wanting to take her career into education management. She was therefore willing and happy to embrace the norms and values of the management culture. In fact, this Head was proactively getting involved with management even higher up than her position at the middle level of the institution.

While Lianne would fight her department’s corner on certain directives from above, once she had made her opposing viewpoint known to her own superiors, she would ultimately make sure her departmental colleagues executed the directives – and wouldn’t blame the more senior leadership in front of her them - describing herself as ‘quite corporate’. This differs from Heads in other profiles who, at times, chose not to execute their senior leadership’s mandates.

Another difference between these Heads and other types of hybrid in the sample was their clear drawing of a line between themselves as manager and their colleagues. They had chosen to prioritise their manager role even at the expense of friendship:

“So, we are friends, but you go from being a colleague and a friend to actually having to be their manager and hold them to account for their behaviour. And I think originally, she thought it might be that I would just sort of say ‘it [an disciplinary issue that had arisen] will be all fine, don't worry about it’” (Lianne).

Origins of Aspirational Hybrid type

Neither of the Heads within this profile had been particularly research-active in their purely academic roles – one stated she did not see hers as a ‘*research career*’ and the other had come up via a predominantly teaching route; she had only got her PhD late in her career and explained:

“I was recruited as a practitioner. I wasn't recruited as a researcher and then when we became a research led institution.. the massive pressure to shift your academic identity..”

These origins may explain the ease with which Aspirational Heads were able to embrace their management identity and speaks to role identity salience playing a role in the type of hybrid manager ones becomes.

Power

Because of their wish to rise up through the managerial ranks, these Heads appreciated experiences that enabled that – ones that provided them with career capital. Indeed, one Head distinguished between those who view the role as career-enhancing vs. career limiting. Because of the personal capital this role helped these Heads build, they deemed it to be the former –

suggesting implicitly, they were gaining power in their own careers. Caroline described in positive terms the insight she was able to get from her dual role – academic professional and management - as she now understood the ‘*machinations*’ of the university and insights into what was happening behind the scenes. She stated: “*I would have never had that opportunity to see that side of the institution*”. She went on to explain how access to this vantage point gave her power by way of connections: “*It's afforded me other opportunities as well to network outside of [University I] now.*” Lianne highlighted being ‘*at the forefront of decisions*’ – giving her power to influence decisions in the faculty – not just her department. However, they also wielded the legitimate power that came with the role in order to ensure colleagues carried out mandates from above. Emerging findings suggest that the way power was used by these Heads was to do the wider university’s bidding, but also for furthering their own career related ambitions.

Challenges associated with this hybrid type

This positive perspective on being in a management role didn’t preclude these Heads identifying difficulties with the role. Caroline highlighted the difficulty with being ‘sandwiched’ between those above and her colleagues below and explained that she may struggle to return to the rank and file, as she would have her own ideas about how she wanted things to run - being an Aspirational Head relinquishing that power might be hard. This created a psychological paradox of having set out a plan for the department but not being able to see it through – potentially challenging for individuals who wanted to demonstrate their achievements in order to move up the organisational hierarchy.

Loyal Hybrids

Loyal Hybrids are individuals who do not aspire to a career in HEI management but firmly plan to return to their academic role and further, see the senior management as an entity to protect their colleagues from during their Headship. Given that the professional identity of many academics at this career stage is likely to be strong, formed over many years, it is perhaps logical that most of the Heads in the sample fell into this profile. The ‘loyal’ label reflects their felt commitment to their home department and research groups within it, over and above their senior leadership, as well as to a commitment to their research. We identified 4 of these, Janine, Martin, Kate and Sandy.

Role identity

The very strong bond these individuals felt with their academic colleagues was noted, as well as the attempts to run their department in a non-hierarchical manner. Unlike the Aspirational Heads who had created clear boundaries with their colleagues, these Heads did the opposite – they created a clear boundary with management or as one put it – *‘banded together in opposition of the faculty and [University 2]’* (Janine). This Head distanced herself from the decisions being ‘handed down’ from senior leadership, siding with colleagues to *‘push back’* and in some cases, simply ignore strategy and instructions. Exemplifying the choosing of a side that this group represented, another Head, Martin, admitted to *“defending your staff [...] even when you don't necessarily think they should be defended”* when describing a recent conflict between the department and senior management about Covid-19 related teaching practices. Like Janine, Martin also talked about *‘standing up to’* individuals within the management structure. Indeed, very much distinguishing himself from a previous Head of his department, he explained the difference:

“He wanted to rise up the greasy pole of university administration and his dream was to be a vice chancellor somewhere. And being head of department was merely a steppingstone to being a Dean, to being you know.. And, and he was very vocal about that, everyone knew it. And it caused a lot of resentment, because people got the sense that he was only doing things that the higher-ups wanted and he was not, you know, representing the department...” (Martin)

The disliked Head he described could be characterised as an Aspirational Head.

Origins of Loyal Hybrid type

From a very practical perspective, Heads in this profile understood that their time in the role was temporary with the rotational dimension of the role. With an intention to return to their department as an academic colleague, they saw themselves as loyal to their group and its interests. This loyalty meant that for three of the four Heads in this group, the role was taken on out of a sense of duty – a duty to address things they felt needed improving (e.g. the curriculum; equity and transparency in decision-making such as workload) or a duty to block someone unsuitable from stepping in.

“Despite having never ever had any desire to go into university administration.. And it's the big thing I'm sort of, you know, mentally readjusting my head to at the moment and.. I did it, and it will sound, perhaps, I don't know.. out of a sense of almost a patriotic duty to [his department]. It's a department which I feel very passionate about, you know, lots of our colleagues do. You know lots of people in [the department] join and then stay there forever.” (Martin)

Even the Head, Sandy, who recognised it as a temporary role had undertaken it with a view to bettering the reputation of his discipline within the department and externally - as he was heading up a new department that placed a focus on the digital aspects of the subject and saw

this as important to the success of the future of those in his department. So these Heads were perhaps more strategic in accepting their role – seeking to prioritise the good of their sub-unit and its future. Social capital derived from a lengthy tenure in their departments seemed key to the reasons that these Heads had ended up becoming Loyal Hybrid Managers.

Power

These Heads were seemingly not interested in the legitimate power that came with the Head title for reasons of career progression or managerial control. Reflecting this, two of the Heads used practices that shared power; ensuring that others in their department were part of decision-making processes or running a ‘*horizontal department*’, as Janine put it. Another of the Heads explained that he was not interested in micro-managing and trusted his colleagues because he thought of himself as a leader rather than a manager. In addition to sharing power because they were not vested in having more power than their colleagues, these individuals ensured they used their position and the inherent power within it for the good of their department first and foremost. Janine used her role and the power of where she was located in order to block ‘poorly conceived’ policy and protect her staff from it by ignoring it.

Challenges associated with this hybrid type

One of the challenges that these Heads highlighted was the tensions caused by their strong identity with their academic role. Specifically, having to enact the ‘manager’ role came with obligations that prevented them from enacting important aspects of their academic role – most notably research – which Sandy described as ‘a major sacrifice.’ While most Heads saw this as a tension that either they, or Heads more generally faced, this was felt keenly by Loyal Heads, whose identity was firmly rooted in their academic role. All referred to ways they tried

to manage this – doing research ‘around’ the manager role (weekend, Christmas holidays, after daughter had gone to bed etc.)

Oscillating Hybrids

Oscillating Hybrids were enacting both of their identities relatively successfully throughout their Headship. Although they noted the difficulties associated with being in the role, they were good at finding strategies to ensure their effectiveness in interacting and being integrated with both their academic group and their manager group. They also saw the benefit of the dual role and keeping a foot in both camps – possibly why they sought such strategies to make the role work. There were 2 oscillating hybrid heads – Simon and Margaret.

Role identity

In being an Oscillating Hybrid, these Heads were trying to serve the aims of the ‘higher-ups’ and ‘lower-downs’ simultaneously and so identified with both. One individual spoke about the different motives for becoming a Head, which represented both the university’s interests as well as his Department’s, explaining wanting to make a difference *“both in terms of how we improve student experience, but also in terms of how we actually grow as a group”* (Simon). For this Head, maintaining dual identities and securing outcomes associated with both roles was made more possible because of the nature of his research. He suggested that the practicalities of researching in Health Economics were such that researchers worked in teams. This meant he could maintain his research activity, which anchored him in his academic identity, at the same time as being Head of Department. His willingness to oscillate between being an academic alongside his colleagues at one moment, then their manager the next, was demonstrated in his readiness to delegate work to colleagues, as and when it was required. As well as embodying his manager identity by doing so (many of the other Heads were reluctant

to ‘dump’ work on their colleagues), it also allowed him to enact aspects of his academic role (e.g. by freeing him from management meetings to go to important research meetings by sending his deputy on his behalf).

Balance was found in a different way by the other Head in this group. Talking about effectively being a manager to her erstwhile peers, Maragret stated that she maintained her teaching role. In that way, she was able to be a manager but do so in a way that meant she was subject to the same pressures as the colleagues she was managing and the directives they were experiencing – i.e. she was in the same boat. She believed that she would struggle to have a good managerial relationship with her colleagues if she hadn’t kept up teaching. Referring to the teaching and other roles she’d had, she further added:

“I’ve been through those processes, so I know how tough they are. And I think that’s important to have had that experience. So that when you’re talking to somebody and they’re trying to explain why something’s difficult or, you know, when you’re trying to ask someone to take on a role, you know what the impact will be and you know, whether they’re going to be okay with it or not. I think that’s important as well” (Margaret)

Origins of Oscillating Hybrid type

Neither of the two Heads in this group felt pressured into taking on the role and one proactively put themselves forward. Both had previous leadership experience in smaller departments and mentioned this – these earlier roles may have provided an insight into how to successfully manage the dual role they now inhabited. Simon also explained the benefit of being a Head – it brought him greater exposure and therefore research opportunities for his other, academic role – with such benefits possibly being a reason to undertake the role and do so in way that serviced both his academic colleagues and managerial ones.

Power

Good relationships with both those above and those below her allowed Margaret to have influence in her role. As outlined above (with her continued teaching), demonstrating empathy and leading by example allowed this with her colleagues, while an open relationship and history of friendship with her manager allowed this with her seniors. She also highlights her conflict training as being ‘hugely important’ in managing her role well. For Simon, this power came from having contextual awareness of when to flex which identity such that both roles could mostly seamlessly be enacted. As noted above – he was happy to delegate decision making power to his divisional lead when his academic role needed enacting. These Heads used their power to maintain a seemingly successful balance between their roles, the identities associated with them and the obligations they met to both the organisation and the colleagues. This suggests that the way power was employed by Oscillating Heads had positive implications for both the colleagues in their department but also the wider organisation. That said, as with the other Hybrid types, this one also had challenges – relating to being pulled in two directions.

Challenges associated with this hybrid type

Unlike the Aspiring and Loyal Heads, whose allegiance was clear, challenges for Oscillating Heads arose because of this dual allegiance and willingness to oscillate. Being all things to all people – i.e. both an employee and a manager, meant that there were expectations of them that sometimes conflicted but which they felt equally responsible for meeting. One Head describes being seen as ‘the enemy’ by colleagues, union representatives or management at different times. She recounted a time during strike action at her institution that she had faced difficulties in trying to simultaneously be both an employee and a manager. Her manager had expected her to cross the picket line which went against her duties as an employee and she had also been stopped from entering a building to ensure some marking had been processed because

she was seen as a person engaging in strike action – which stopped her engaging in her duties as a good manager.

Isolated Hybrids

The fourth profile identified was the Isolated Hybrid who felt kinship with neither the academic community nor the management community. Just 1 of the participants in the pilot study fitted this profile – Alison. This hybrid-manager was not content – either when she wasn't or when she was a Hybrid Head. However, this had less to do with being a Hybrid and more to do with lack of identification with either role identity – suggested 'hybrid' may be the wrong term.

Role identity

Asked whether she saw herself more as management or an employee, she responded '*When I give up being head of department. I will be one of them again*'. Her language is telling, othering her colleagues by referring to them as 'them'. She later described colleagues '*rejecting and fighting her*' and spent a good deal of the interview describing her problematic relationship with either management or colleagues – suggesting she felt like an outsider from both groups.

Origins of Isolated Hybrid type

With this Head, the hybrid-manager role had given her an opportunity to escape her purely professional role, in which she had experienced difficulties with those managing her and to '*try her hand at not being evil and toxic*' as she put it. However, once she was in the leadership role, she struggled with taking on the difficult responsibilities that were expected of her from her manager:

“I was asked to address that [employee performance], and I was like, ‘Oh, shit’. I’d already said to [her boss] when I was appointed, cos he’d mentioned this, I said ‘don’t appoint me if you want someone to come in and wield a machete. If you want someone to come in and sack people and restructure that isn’t me, get someone else.’” (Alison)

As such, she describes the results of her Headship as being mixed.

Power

This Head described a difficult relationship with power – whether she had it or didn’t. Being an employee she felt she didn’t have it and that was problematic, but being a Head she felt she did have power, which was also problematic – because that was used against her:

“And but what struck me was at [University 1] I was bullied because I was powerless. Here I was bullied because I was powerful. And I was dehumanized because I was head of department. I became an Aunt Sally figure that people could throw bricks at”
(Alison)

Challenges associated with this hybrid type

The challenge for this Head was linked to not wanting what either role brought – being stuck between a rock and hard place. Thus, when thinking about stepping down she decried a return to a heavy teaching load and a now unfamiliar role, but she equally described feeling ‘sad’ about having agreed to stay on as Head for an extra year (due to a wish by senior leadership at the university to maintain continuity during the crisis of the pandemic).

Insert Tables 1- 4 around here

Discussion

This study reports emerging findings of a pilot study on hybrid-managers in academia. It responds to the calls of scholars to address the limitations of the research to date on the hybrid role that is common to professional bureaucracies. Only recently Bresnen et al. (2019:1364) have suggested that “it is clear that the concept of hybrid managerial identity needs to take greater account of its variegated, situational and dynamic qualities to present a more complete picture of what it means to become and to be a hybrid manager.” In seeking to do that, the present study not only identifies the different ways in which hybrid managers see themselves and others, but also how they relate to those in more powerful roles and use power themselves.

While incomplete, the emerging findings reported in this study provide initial insights into the dynamic aspects of the academic hybrid manager role. By starting to build emerging profiles of academic hybrid Heads, the study can pave the way to a better understanding of how power and influence are used by different types of hybrid and the individual and organisational implications. Further data collection will shed far greater light on the dynamics and employment of power, however, from the initial pilot interviews, an enlightening way of considering power was highlighted in the distinction between describing the role as career enhancing vs. career limiting. How Heads viewed this pointed to where the balance of power, for themselves, was tipped. More needs to be examined in relation to the power dynamics.

At this early stage of analysis, one broad implication that can be draw is that the different origins and identity profiles of each hybrid type suggest the need for varied approaches in the design and provision of institutional and managerial support for those undertaking this role. For example, taking the Oscillating Hybrid – who is ostensibly the gold standard of hybridity for Heads of Department, seeming, as emerging findings so far indicate, as though they are satisfying all – their ability to wear both hats so convincingly comes at a

personal cost to the individual highlighting the need for individual targeted support related to coping with the challenges this presents.

Further work, building on this pilot by expanding across national higher education institutions, will allow the more detailed investigation of how situational variables and context also play a role in the dimensions of this role discussed in this paper.

As well as contributing to the general hybrid-manager and public administration literature, the findings will contribute to the field of higher education organisational research, which is still nascent. The importance of this stems from higher education having become viewed by successive governments as being a useful economic commodity which can be traded and competed with on a global stage (Floyd, 2016). The present study should therefore present opportunities for further research in this sector, including international comparison studies, as well as providing guidance for those who seek to support and develop hybrid-managers better.

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Table 1. Interviewee demographics and hybrid profile

Interviewee Identifier Code	Disciplinary Area	Academic role	Gender	Length of Time as HoD	Profile
Margaret	Arts and Humanities	Professor	F	5 years	Oscillating
Caroline	Social Sciences	Professor	F	4 years	Aspirational
Sandy	Sciences	Professor	M	2 years	Loyal
Simon	Sciences	Professor	M	2.5 years	Oscillating
Alison	Sciences	Professor	F	3 years	Isolated
Janine	Arts and Humanities	Professor	F	2 years	Loyal
Lianne	Sciences	Professor	F	2 years	Aspirational
Kate	Sciences	Professor	F	4 years	Loyal
Martin	Social Sciences	Professor	M	1.5 years	Loyal

Table 2 The extent to and ways in which role identities are embraced – by profile

	Aspirational	Loyal	Oscillating	Isolated
Role Identity	Heads seeking to embrace their management identity; happy to leave behind academic identity	Heads who resist aspects of the management identity in favour of their academic professional identity. The management identity is a temporary one	Heads embracing the best of both identities; they seek to appease both the 'higher-ups' and the 'lower-downs' by enacting whichever identity best serves at a given moment	Heads feeling a lack of affiliation to either management or their academic colleagues due to lack of belonging, marginalisation or discrimination
	<i>"I'm quite corporate in that sense. I wouldn't present anything to my department, that I didn't really think I would do myself and I wouldn't say, 'Oh, but [the institution] are telling us we have to do this'; that's not my approach. So there are some uncomfortable times when you when you really think, actually, I've said my piece [to senior leaders], but we do need to implement this". (Lianne)</i>	<i>"I strove to run a very collegial horizontal department and we banded together in opposition to the faculty and [University]. So we support one another in the blizzard of, you know, delay and incompetence" (Janine).</i> <i>"Okay, frankly speaking, I have more loyalty to my team members rather than the top. You know why? I step down in two years. However, I hope for my team to be successful. That's my philosophy." (Sandy)</i> <i>"defending your staff [...] even when you don't necessarily think they should be defended" (Martin)</i> <i>"And so there were top down, you the strategy.. I just don't like top down strategies. I just don't think that they embed themselves. And it just makes you feel pissed off. So I just ignored all those" (Janine)</i> <i>I have no ambition to continue in these kind of more administrative roles. (Kate)</i>	<i>"Sometimes you know there is... there's always the ridiculous bureaucracy, you know that we all suffer with and bits of it where you see it coming and you just think 'Oh God. I've got, I've got to channel this down' and... and... You know, so. But then again, the other thing that I've always made sure that I've done. And I know that not all heads of department do this... I've always taught [...] And I would feel really uncomfortable if I didn't do any teaching because it means I'm subject to the same, you know, things that I have to do. And also I'm an admissions tutor. I've been a subject leader, you know. So I know... And obviously that was some time ago, but I've been through those processes, so I know how tough they are. And I think that's important to have had that experience. So that when you're talking to somebody and they're trying to explain why something's difficult or, you know, when you're trying to ask someone to take on a role, you know what the impact will be and you know, whether they're going to be okay with it or not. I think that's important as well" (Margaret)</i> <i>Well I launched quite a big deal around, you know, the role actually giving me an opportunity to make a difference. Both in terms of, you know, how we improve student experience, but also in terms of how we actually grow as a group. (Simon)</i>	<i>"I wanted to try my hand and being not evil in toxic" "I feel like have done a lot of good for those who didn't reject me those who didn't fight me every inch of the way" "And I was asked to address that, like, Oh, shit. I'd already said to Paul, what I was appointed as he mentioned me if I said don't appoint me if you want someone to come in and wield the machete. If you want someone to come in and sack people and restructure that isn't me get someone else" (Alison)</i>

Table 3 The origins of hybrid profiles

	Aspirational	Loyal	Oscillating	Isolated
Origins of Hybrid Manager type	Heads have less pronounced academic identity	Heads have strong academic identity and identification with academic colleagues and department	Heads employed a kind of 'frame switching' in order to be effective in respective roles	Head felt lack of kinship with either group - academics or management
	<i>"I was recruited as a practitioner. I wasn't recruited as a researcher and then when we became a research led institution, the massive pressure to shift that shift your academic identity" (Caroline)</i> <i>"I'm not ever going to be a researcher, you know" (Lianne)</i>	<i>"Despite having never ever had any desire to go into university administration. And it's the big thing I'm sort of, you know, mentally readjusting my head to at the moment and, and I did it and it will sound, perhaps, I don't know.. out of a sense of almost a patriotic duty to [his department]. It's a department which I feel very passionate about, you know, lots of our colleagues do. You know lots of people in [the department] join and then stay there forever because it's, as I say, it's unique. It's very, it's very different to most other departments." (Martin)</i> <i>"Okay, frankly speaking, I have more loyalty to my team members rather than the top. You know why? I step down in two years. However, I hope for my team to be successful. That's my philosophy." (Sandy)</i>	<i>"And I just thought, you know, some of that experience if I actually start applying it in the wider context and you know look at other divisions other Areas, probably, I could actually contribute to that to some extent. So the position became available. And I just thought, Okay, let's try to, you know, Let's try to roll this out to wider to the department and see what happens. And that's why I ended up doing this" (Simon)</i>	<i>"It [her prior experience of being bullied by managers] informs why I wanted to be a Head of Department [...] Because I've been in other departments which were lead in a.. I mean, nobody's perfect and no university or department is perfect.. But some of them are evil and toxic. Right, and I wanted to try my hand at being not evil and toxic" (Alison)</i>

Table 4 The ways in which hybrid profiles perceive and employ power in the role

	Aspirational	Loyal	Oscillating	Isolated
How Hybrid Head types perceive/employ power in the role	<p>Heads perceived the legitimate power from the managerial position as enabling them to move up the hierarchy through doing the university's bidding</p> <p>"I enjoy having a voice within the faculty senior leadership team and you know we're doing some new and different stuff. [...] you know, being at the forefront of the decisions. Yeah. I enjoy all of that and I've just, I'm just now being part of some outward facing things within the [University], you know [...] So something outside of the faculty within the wider [University] and I'm really enjoying that was a great learning experience" (Lianne).</p>	<p>Heads perceived power as something to be shared with colleagues with the aim of furthering the department's interest - engaging in overt or covert acts of resistance</p> <p>"No, because I always made it absolutely clear whose fault it [unwanted directives] was. So, I always in all departments, made a point of explaining in detail how certain decisions have been handed down and what we might plan together and to push back on that" (Janine)</p> <p>I do not like to be a micro-manager because I trust other people. I prefer delegate to the team (Sandy)</p>	<p>Heads perceived power as something to be used to help them achieve the dual aims of both groups they represented, as well as themselves. Relationship management and delegation strategies allowed them to switch between the different role identities effectively.</p> <p>"I'm also a very strong believer of, you know, delegation. Delegation actually works. So let's say if I got a grant deadline next week And I think that I need, you know, three full days uninterrupted, etc. then I give the head of department role to my divisional lead and say that, can you actually look after the Department for those few days. You can make any decision you like in my absence that's entirely up to you, but I need on interrupted time and, you know, and that way it works very well" (Simon)</p> <p>You know that I'm lucky in that I've got a kind of history of relationships (Margaret)</p> <p>"That's been hugely hugely important having that training. That's, I would say, of all the training. I've had that has been the most valuable completely" (Margaret)</p>	<p>Heads perceived power as something that was used against them, regardless of their dual role</p> <p>"And but what struck me was at [University] I was bullied because I was powerless. Here I was bullied because I was powerful. And I was dehumanized because I was head of department. I became an Aunt Sally figure that people could throw bricks at" (Alison)</p>

Table 5 The specific challenges associated with hybrid profile type

	Aspirational	Loyal	Oscillating	Isolated
The tensions, paradoxes and difficulties Heads encounter	<p>These Heads struggled with being given a title but not the autonomy to go with it</p> <p>"Well, no, I think, I think for me, recruiting new staff is absolutely vital when people leave. It's just... it's just there's more and more layers - well there have been within [department], more and more layers to get a job approved. And then every time you think you've sort of got you've got exactly what you need, then the goalpost change. "Oh, it's a different form" "It's got to go to this committee and that committee..." you know, "you've got to do... You've got to do this Lianne. You've got to cycle up wherever and balance something on your head and then whistle a tune and then we might consider." (Lianne)</p> <p>"But there are things that we've really really wanted to do that. We haven't just quite seen through [During her Headship]" (Caroline)</p>	<p>These Heads are engaging in menial tasks (administrative) when they could be engaging in personally meaningful tasks (research)</p> <p>"This is overstating it, but I feel like I'm losing touch with my discipline which as I say, is a massive overstatement. But I don't get time to read journal articles and I don't get time to read books, you know, I don't get time to read anything at the moment, apart from bloody emails and documents for meetings" (Martin)</p> <p>"I don't think anybody would agree to be head of department if they were intending to do any research. It's not... I mean, why would you? It's pointless and you're just, you know, going to be made, unhappy" (Janine)</p> <p>"I think the major sacrifice is research" (Sandy)</p>	<p>Being both roles could backfire when the two were pitted against one another - there were expectations from both camps</p> <p>"I'm a union member so I wouldn't cross a picket line. So on the one hand, I had my head of school... I remember him standing over me [...] rocking on his heels saying: 'You can't... You've got to cross the picket line' and I'm saying, 'well, I can't.' And then at the same time I was having to manage the process of sending marking off campus. And at one point, I remember going down to a room where we kept everything. I went down there. And this was after I'd had this row. [...] And I went downstairs to say, 'Look, can I just check that everything is in the order that it's supposed to be in?' I was told I wasn't allowed in the room because obviously I was, you know... [a union member on strike]. And that was like, 'Oh, well, I was just going to do my bit of the job to make sure that... Okay, fine. Someone else can do it then'. So there were moments like that" (Margaret)</p>	<p>Being part of these groups by name but not feeling part of those groups</p> <p>"And which I'm kind of somewhat sad about [having to stay in the Head role an extra year]. Although there is... it's ignoble, but I'm going to be honest, it's hard to think of the loss of status and the loss of influence. So, but on the other hand, it's such a pain. I have 116 academics and 10% of them are always having a tragedy a crisis or a tantrum" (Alison)</p>