

Working in Universities Through Covid-19: An Interpretation Using the Lens of Institutional Logics

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Abstract

In higher education institutions, as in other organisations, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected the ways in which individuals work and resulted in the loss of pre-existing boundaries between work life and domestic life. UK universities are a multi-billion pound-sterling contributor to the UK economy and in 2020 the sector-representative body, Universities UK, made a request to the UK government for £2.2 billion to help to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In spite of the dramatic impact on the lives of university staff, however, there has been little attempt made in the existing literature to try to understand their experiences, motivations and actions of working in academia through this unprecedented time. This paper reports the emerging findings of an initial tranche of interviews with 28 individuals working across 23 different UK universities and uses an institutional logics perspective to understand their experiences in the context of what was happening at the time. The findings indicate the continued importance of market, professional and managerialism logics but highlights the dominance of a hitherto-unidentified logic, the 'students first' logic. The findings also demonstrate the ways in which individuals negotiated the competing logics of family and professional and meshed them together in a unique covid-specific hybrid and identifies a complex interplay of the logics.

Keywords

Institutional logics; covid; higher education