Neoliberalism and atomised, disaggregated Gig Academy workers: A challenge for HR professionals in the Higher Education sector?

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Abstract

In this article the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in the UK Higher Education (HE) sector is interrogated, with a focus on the Gig Academy. A literature review of the casualisation of academics in the sector is undertaken and critiqued through the consultative unitarist values and behaviours of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), predicated on the mutual gains model of good HRM being good for both employer and employee. It is argued that the Gig Academy, situated within a neoliberal context, emphasises the needs of the education market but is at odds with these values and behaviours. More particularly, disaggregated, atomised labour is used to meet the needs of the performative university at the expense of gig academics, particularly women and ethnic minority academics, experiencing precarity and a lack of mutuality. Precarity experienced by gig academics further contributes to the de-politicising of academic staff as a means of meeting government metrics, at the expense of other stakeholders. This article argues that to address these issues, cultural rather than disaggregated HR practice is required in the HE sector, based on a commitment to HR professionalism and the values and behaviours of the CIPD.

Key words: Neoliberalism, Employee Relations, Unitarism, HRM, Higher Education, Casualization, Gig Academy

Introduction

This paper interrogates the implications for HRM (Human Resource Management) practice within the UK Higher Education (HE) sector of traditional employment relationships being de-emphasised through gig work which replaces long-term employment contracts with short-term contracts or freelance work. The Gig Academy within Higher Education doesn't involve intermediary platforms providing gig workers for requesters (as in the wider Gig Economy with firms such as Deliveroo and Uber) but through direct assignments (or 'gigs'). Loveday (2018) reports that 34% of academic employees in the UK were working on a fixed-term contract in 2017, contending with multiple forms of uncertainty associated with their 'casualised' positions. Research by the University and College Union (UCU 2019) has estimated that 70% of researchers in the sector are on fixed term contracts, and between 25 and 30% of teaching is undertaken by hourly paid teachers. Academic contracts may also be classified as atypical, with such contracts made up of temps' agencies such as Coventry University's subsidiary company FutureWorks Ltd which supplies the university with temporary staff (UCU 2016).

In examining the impact of the Gig Academy on HR (Human Resource) practice this article critiques such practice from the consultative unitarist values of the professional map of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the professional body for experts in people and work. The choice of consultative unitarism in this paper is one which enables analysis of the Gig Academy from the perspective of CIPD values and behaviours, leading to recommendations for HR practitioners in managing gig academy workers. It will be argued that the consultative unitarist assumption of good HRM being good for all, involving higher levels of trust, voice and reciprocity (Guest 2017) in employer-employee relations, is compromised by the Gig Academy. HRM, situated within the current neoliberal context of

market individualism, has privileged managerial concerns and the needs of the market through the Gig Academy, but undermined 'cultural' unitarist HRM practices of importance to meeting the needs of gig workers, particularly ethnic minority and women workers, but also other stakeholders beyond the performative university. Such cultural HRM would situate academics within a culture of employee engagement, work life balance and employee voice, together with training and development to meet the needs of both employer and employee.

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Section 1 outlines the nature of the Gig Academy within the context of neoliberalism and the HE market. Section 2 illustrates how the consultative unitarist values of the CIPD are challenged by such neoliberalism in HE. A key argument is that the use of gig workers in academia, in atomising work, is reducing the function of HRM to one focused on controlling depoliticised academics for the needs of the performative university. More particularly, TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework), REF (Research Excellence Framework) and National Student Satisfaction (NSS) metrics are privileged through the control of gig academics at the expense of other important stakeholders and wider social and environmental goals, which this article argues requires a cultural form of HRM or consultative unitarism (Fleming 2017). The focus should be on 'soft' HRM including belongingness, teamwork and employee commitment, rather than 'hard' HRM's hierarchy, regulation and surveillance.

Section 3 looks at stakeholders other than the performative university - the gig worker in academia experiencing precarity, and in particular the impact on gender and ethnic diversity (key stakeholders) of worker atomisation in the absence of a cultural HR to challenge structural and institutional inequality. Section 4 then discusses the deleterious impact of such atomisation on local and global communities through the self-responsibilisation of gig academics to meet the needs of metrics at the expense of more innovative research of benefit to wider stakeholders beyond the performative university.

This paper thus addresses a number of questions relating to the atomisation and disaggregation of gig academics within a neoliberal context which, it is argued, undermine the unitarist, cultural approach to HRM, required if HRM is to meet the values of the CIPD and the needs of key stakeholders beyond those of the education market. To what extent should HRM in the Gig Academy be just about the education market rather than broader issues relating to social justice for gig workers? What is the impact of the resultant positivist hard HRM practice on the wellbeing of gig workers in the Academy? Shouldn't there also be a non-exclusive focus on performance (Spicer *et al*. 2009) advocated by critical scholars in the management of academics, and a regard for distributive justice and transparency (procedural justice) for casualized workers (Thompson 2011)? A key question relates to the extent to which an overall shift from academic collegiality to an atomised worker experience in the performative university can be reconciled with other stakeholders in education through HR professionalism based on the values and behaviours of the CIPD.

In analysing the impact of the Gig Academy on HRM, as discussed above, the themes addressed will apply to a greater or lesser extent dependent on the degree of casualisation in the individual university. They may apply, for example, more significantly in some Russell Group universities, with an average of 58.5% of contracts fixed term or atypical, compared to post-92 universities with an average of 44.5%. Within Russell Group Universities there is, however, also a wide range in practice, with the highest number of insecure contracts issued by the University of Oxford (77.2% of academic staff) and the lowest issued by University College, London (32.3% of academic staff) (UCU 2016).

1. The impact of Neoliberalism on HRM

Neoliberalism in HE relates to the linking of the sector with the human capital needs of the economy, and a shift in focus from academic autonomy and collegiality (Shore and Wright, 2000) to accountability and competition within a new HE quasi-market. Within this context universities are judged through performance indicators on graduate employability, research outputs captured in the REF (Research Excellence Framework), the needs of students within TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) and the National Student Survey (NSS).

The NSS is a final year undergraduate assessment of a school's subject-level teaching quality, based on a student survey of the quality of teaching, formative feedback on assessments and academic support, and is used to inform Newspaper League Tables. Data collected within the NSS, together with further data on student retention and progression to further study or employment, is used to award each University school with Bronze, Silver or Gold awards within the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (Cruickshank 2019). The REF is an assessment of a school's research output and is important for both the reputation and funding of the University (Cruickshank 2019).

The focus of universities on such external metrics has created the market conditions for the performative university in which academics are governable subjects used and controlled to meet the needs of the market (Jones *et al*. 2020). Casualised and insecure gig academics within this education market experience particular pressure to meet REF and TEF targets set due to their precarity (Cruickshank 2019, Desierto *et al*. 2020).

The role of HRM, within this neoliberal discourse, has become one of strategic HRM focused on the diktats of the government in terms of quantitative measures captured in league table rankings, NSS, TEF and REF, and an individualised hard HRM focused on performance monitoring and performance appraisals. Gig academics, within this context, are constructed

as a 'depersonalised unit of economic resource whose productivity and performance must constantly be measured and enhanced' (Shore and Wright 2000, 62), with this used to subjectify staff within the managerialist neoliberal discourse and to normalise performative behaviours to ensure the university is auditable. A key argument of this paper is that HRM in HE has been further eroded by the Gig Academy through a deepening of the neoliberal cause of individualisation and disaggregation. Fitzgerald and Gunter (2017) describe the emergence of the Uber-academic, incentivised to meet student enrolment, satisfaction and pass rate targets and to provide knowledge at reduced cost, and just-in-time.

2. CIPD Values and the Unitarist Frame of Reference

A policy of individualism and disaggregation of academics conflicts with the values and purpose of the HR profession, promoted by the CIPD:

> to champion better work and working lives. Everyone connected to the world
> of work has a role to play in delivering this, which is why it sits at the heart
> of the new Profession Map' (CIPD 2021c: para. 1).

More specifically, there is a conflict in values in terms of frames of reference relating to employee relations which can be egoistic, unitarist, pluralistic or radical/critical. The frame of reference on which the Higher Education quasi-market is predicated is egoistic whilst the HR profession is steeped in a unitarist frame of reference.

The egoistic frame of reference is essentially a neoliberal marketized regulation of employment in which market competition is assumed to align the interests of self-interested and rational employers and employees. Within this context a concern for employee voice is redundant as labour is considered a commodity (Budd 2020). The focus on both work and working lives by the CIPD (CIPD 2018, CIPD 2021a) conversely indicates an idealised (normative) unitarist

frame of reference of effective HR being good for both employers and employees - sometimes referred to as the mutual gains hypothesis (Van de Voord *et al*. 2012). HR strategies relating to employee engagement, employee voice, pay and reward, inclusivity and diversity are good for the employee but also the employer in terms of increased employee discretionary effort, employee retention and an enhanced employer brand. This is further supported by research in the wider HRM literature which reveals high commitment HR practices impacting positively on employee relations, and in turn employee performance through a more fulfilled psychological contract (Latorre *et al*. 2016)

The CIPD's unitarist philosophy is further evident in the eight behaviours for effective HR professional practice contained in the CIPD professional map: particularly working inclusively, ethical practice, valuing people and professional courage, but also insights-focused, having a passion for learning, situational decision-making and commercial drive, which direct practitioners towards the needs of both employer and employee (CIPD 2021b).

The aim of Unitarist HRM suggested by the CIPD is one of consensus as the norm, focused on long-term sustainable objectives, with conflict seen as deviant to be deemphasised/resolved through the inculcation of norms and values in line with an organisation's strategy, achieved through the use of teams, social relations and employee engagement strategies (Guest 2017). The nature of unitarism suggested by the CIPD is in line with consultative unitarism in which employers and employees work together in meeting organizational goals, determined by the employer through consultation, for the benefit of both employer and employee. This contrasts with autocratic unitarism involving managerial directives which are thought to benefit both the employer and employee (Bray, Budd and Macneil 2020).

HR professionalism further involves a focus on stakeholders beyond the shareholder (or government in the public sector) through sustainable long-term objectives based on corporate social responsibility (CIPD 2013). The CIPD report on good practice (2015a) asks HR professionals to ask the following question:

> What is the end goal for the profession? Is it to implement the people aspects of the business strategy – efficiently and with minimal risk – whatever the human cost? Or, is it to act as a critical adviser, asserting human-centred business practice and nurturing healthy organisational cultures that deliver sustainable value for all stakeholders, including people? (CIPD 2015a:3)

Unitarism contrasts with the previous pluralist view of the personnel function (and industrial relations) which assumes a common interest in terms of business survival and growth but conflicting interests between employer and employee centered on the costs of wages and conditions of service such as pensions, sickness pay, health and safety and flexibility (Budd *et al.* 2004). Collaborative pluralism requires employees and employers to work together on mutual goals through compromise and a recognition of differing interests, whilst adversarial pluralism involves employees pursuing goals separately and securing these go through negotiation with employers (Bray, Budd and Macnei 2020).

A fourth frame of reference is the radical/critical perspective which assumes conflict between employer and employee due to opposing interests, with HRM within this context likely to privilege employers (representing shareholders, or government in the public sector) over other stakeholders. The radical ideal solution in a market economy would be a shift from shareholder capitalism to worker co-operatives (Budd 2020).

The focus of this article is not to consider all the frames of reference regarding employee relations but to apply the consultative unitarist frame of reference to the Gig Academy; particularly the impact of the education market on gig academics with reference to the CIPD 'professional map' lens on HRM values and behaviours (CIPD 2021b). This leads to guidance on how HRM professionals might apply the unitarist framework more effectively informed by CIPD literature, including HRM's role in corporate responsibility (CIPD 2013), ethical decision-making (CIPD, 2015b), employee voice (CIPD 2017a), the road to good work (CIPD 2018) and diversity and inclusion (CIPD 2020).

Unitarism in HRM practice, whether consultative or autocratic, requires an organizational culture within which norms and values are inculcated in employees in line with the needs of employers and employees. We might call this Cultural HRM (Fleming 2017). A key argument of this article is that the Gig Academy, embedded within the education market and neoliberalism, and a view of workers as individualized, egoistic/self-interested and self-responsibilizing (Fleming 2017) is antithetical to unitarism and cultural HRM in having a narrow focus on managing atomized, deculturated employers for the needs of the performative university at the expense of other stakeholders. In this way HRM has become immiserated, narrowly focused on managing atomized, deculturated gig academics for the needs of the performative university:

> As capitalism grows and extracts greater wealth (capital value), the related conditions of those making the wealth (labour value) goes into relative material deprivation over time' (Dundon and Rafferty 2016, 388).

To redress such immiseration, it is argued, will require the HR profession in Higher Education to apply the values and behaviours discussed above in the CIPD professional map. The goal is

HRM which is good for both employer and employee, rather than an egoistic concern only for the market.

3. Inequity and inequality in the Gig Academy

As discussed above, a pro market ontology in HE, and associated hard strategic 'business partner' HRM, has led to the increased use of gig academics who have a qualitatively different work experience to permanent academics. The evidence points to a positivist HR practice in the performative university limiting a focus on the wellbeing of casualised academics, with the role of HRM no longer one of steward of the social contract but one of reducing costs and serving the impression management needs of the education market (Thompson 2011). In shifting the power to the performative university, HRM predicated on human capital theory also limits a regard for fairness (distributive justice) and transparency (procedural justice) for gig workers (Thompson 2011). This is reflected in a significant division between full time academics and a standby reserve of teaching and research staff with hyper-flexible contracts (Cardozo 2017).

As with the wider Gig Economy casualised HE academics experience precarious work in the shape of extended hours, uncertain wages, and stress due to the threat of unemployment (Aloisi 2016). Gig work is further isolating and insecure in the absence of benefits such as sickness pay (Fleming 2017), with many in the Gig Academy experiencing significant precarity, and even falling into the category of working poor (UCU 2016). HR, based on academic atomisation can do little to ameliorate the loneliness and depression associated with the Gig Academy (Zanou 2013), the lack of time or opportunity for career progression in terms of research (Cardozo 2017), the marginalisation of casualised academics viewed as only 'casuals',

or address the limited numbers achieving permanent positions in a labour market which favours the employer rather than the employee.

A counter argument in analysis of the wider Gig Economy is that gig work has issued in a new innovative and entrepreneurial self (or 'Free Agent Nation') (Pink 2002). The evidence in HE, however, points to a damaging form of Post-Fordist HR which moves the University to ever closer perfect neoliberal control (Wright 2019), with the idealisation of the creative entrepreneurial gig Academy worker a smokescreen for labour exploitation, worker isolation and work impacting on all parts of the casualised academic's existence (Wright 2019). Such exploitation, it is argued, has led to the 'neurotic academic' (Loveday 2018), caused by anxiety intentionally created by government as a means of responsibilising casualised staff to meet the performative agenda of the university for survival in the HE quasi-market. Research from UCU's *Counting the Costs of Casualisation in HE* (2019) reveals that:

> 71% of casual academic staff surveyed in the UK stressed that their mental health had been destroyed by working for contracts without job security and 83% stated that their casualised status at work made it hard for them to commit to any long-term decisions such as purchasing a house or planning to have a family (Desierto and De Maio 2020, 151).

Similarly, Berg *et al*. (2016) argue that casualisation is designed to deliberately act on the minds and bodies of academics, with the resultant anxiety designed to act as a self-disciplining practice, creating the idealised entrepreneurial academic in line with the REF and TEF audit culture.

As identified by the CIPD (2015a) in relation to HR practice more broadly, there is seemingly a significant gap between rhetoric and actual HRM relating to ethics and moral values in HR practice, as it relates to Gig Academics. HRM as an agency relationship would appear severely limited by the move to a disaggregated HRM (Thompson 2011). Such a conclusion resonates

with Guest's (2017) argument that there has been far less concern in both HR research and practice for worker well-being, with a much greater focus instead on reducing costs and/or improving performance. It is a situation at odds with the employee voice advocated by the CIPD as a means of improving well-being in its idealised practitioner behaviour of working inclusively and valuing people. The CIPD (2017) outlines a number of issues for HR practitioners to address relating to worker voice, which could be included in HR practice in the Gig Academy to meet the needs of both employer and gig academic through improved inclusivity. These include guidance to facilitate worker voice by combining individual self-expression with organisational values, combining formal channels of communication with informal ones to capture the authentic voice of workers, developing listening and empathic skills in leaders to minimise feelings of isolation, facilitating democratic and participative decision-making whilst not compromising efficiency, and developing leaders who hear and accept diverse voices even if they challenge normalised practice (CIPD 2017a).

In other words, to challenge immiseration in HE HR practitioners would be required to offer gig academics a cultural, rather than an atomised form of HRM, in line with CIPD values and behaviours, including higher levels of trust, fairness and justice, employee emancipation (Sambrook 2014), and voice (Guest 2017). More specifically, the values of the market would need to be challenged through an emphasis on ensuring gig academics are seen as 'complex human beings motivated by intrinsic rewards and social concerns, and, by some accounts, entitled to fairness and justice' (Budd and Bhave 2019, 53). Budd and Bhave (2019) describe this as the socio-behavioural alternative to homo economicus in which workers are viewed as having intrinsic and social motivations above those of self-interest. Applied to the Gig Academy, HR practice would shift from viewing workers as a factor of production to a concern for equity and voice, autonomy, self-esteem, citizenship, worker identity, self-determination and reciprocity. Such practice would appear all the more pressing in light of research in UK

(and Australian) universities suggesting little evidence of an ethic of critique in tenured line managers relating to the careers of non-tenured (casualised or fixed-contract) researchers:

> We found little evidence of an ethic of critique where tenured academics might challenge dominant discourses and institutional structures that negatively impact the careers of NTRs. We suggest that while tenured academics may feel prepared to operate outside of textually mediated relations to undertake caring work on an individual basis, they may not feel that they are in a position to question existing structures and ruling relations (Smithers et al, 2022, 23)

A concern for equity and voice would appear to be particularly important in relation to women and ethnic minority gig workers to challenge what some academics argue is the institutional reproduction of white and male privilege in the Gig Academy and spaces of exclusion for women and ethnic minority academics. With specific regard to gender diversity, evidence of women in the wider gig economy experiencing lower incomes and other forms of gender discrimination (Barzilay and Ben-David 2016) reinforces the need for cultural HRM. Hunt and Samman (2019) explain how asymmetries in power contribute to such discrimination and inequality, with women experiencing labour market inequity and inequality in economic decision-making, as a consequence of neoliberalism inculcating societal norms that assign women unpaid work. Of particular concern is the need to uncover how gender intersects with other structural inequalities relating to class, race, age and disability (i.e., a recognition of intersectionality), especially for marginalised groups of women where the Gig Economy is growing. The review of Hunt and Samman (2019) illustrates the disadvantages of individualised HRM practice for female gig workers in limiting the focus on supportive organizational cultures and family-friendly policies (Hunt and Samman, 2019) required for emancipation, social justice and equity.

In relation to gender diversity in the HE sector the research of Ivancheva, Lynch and Keating (2019) also illustrates the importance of cultural HRM for social justice and equity for women embedded within masculinist care-free norms of geographical mobility and the 24/7 availability of the ideal academic; in particular to challenge a weak relational commitment and hegemonic masculine model within which women in the Gig Academy are disadvantaged because of the culturally assigned expectation to be primary carers in the home environment (which limits the geographical mobility required to secure serial employment). The choice for women is one of either accepting the need to be mobile, at the expense of care responsibilities and intimate relations or opting out, with the outcome one of continuing precarious work, low income, welfare payments and poor career prospects. In other words, women can adapt to the weak relational commitment and hegemonic masculine model to achieve career success at the expense of having a family or they can emphasise family life and live with the consequence of being an academic failure in the Gig Academy. This is what Mills and Berg (2010) describe as the 'gendered political economy of contemporary academic practice', in which a patriarchal disciplinary regime is normalised as a means of appraising academic output, leading to a hegemonic model in which the white, male scholar is privileged in the Gig Academy (Amsler and Motta 2019).

Further research suggesting the need for a more cultural, less immiserated, form of HRM to address issues of gender inequality, rather than an atomised one, includes evidence of sexual harassment in HE (Phipps 2020), masculinist codes of practice privileging men at the expense of women (Davies and O'Callaghan 2014), and gender bias in recruitment and promotion (Bagilhole and White 2013) due to a privileging of the masculine 'assertive' style of communication as a hegemonic indicator of success. Research further reveals the importance of cultural HRM to challenge gendered work such as female academics undertaking tasks

involving emotional labour, and male networks excluding female academics from opportunities for individual development (Van den Brink and Stobbe 2014).

An atomised approach to HRM is also limited in its scope for challenging inequality relating to ethnic diversity. More specifically worker disaggregation, rather than a culture of anti-discriminatory practice, prevents a focus on the gap between 25.7% of part-time BME staff in HE and 16.7% of part-time white staff on fixed-term contracts in 2016 (ECU 2016). It also doesn't easily allow the resolving of the limited number of only 110 Black professors in the UK out of 19,630 in 2014/15, or the 72% of BAME respondents indicating that they often experienced bullying and/or cultural insensitivity from managers (Mahony and Weiner 2020).

A disaggregated approach to HRM similarly makes challenging overt racism from university managers and the failure in managers to respond to accusations of racism (Bhopal 2016) more difficult. Rather than genuinely tackling the inequality experienced by BAME academics the pressures of marketisation, research suggests, has led to a façade of presenting diversity policy (rather than actual change) as evidence of challenging racism (Bhopal 2016), paradoxically leading to bias and prejudice increasing, because racist values and behaviours are identified but not challenged.

A less disaggregated approach to HRM would more easily enable the training and development identified by Loke (2018) to contest racism, including leadership development which facilitates understanding of white privilege, unconscious bias training, and co creation of the curriculum to reflect race diversity. It would also facilitate the recommendations of the CIPD for addressing race inclusion in the workplace which include better quality people management practice for all ethnicities, the identification of barriers in career progression for ethnic minority groups, including the intersectionality of race and gender, and the building of

an inclusive culture in which diversity is celebrated and employee voice on issues of inequality is provided (CIPD 2020).

To challenge immiserated practice, as discussed above, the identity of HR professionals would need to align with CIPD values relating to gender and ethnic inequality to contest, rather than support, the atomisation of academic staff (CIPD 2017b).

4. The Immiseration of HRM and wider stakeholders

The research of Loveday (2018) suggests that precarity in the Gig Academy is a regime of anxiety for self-responsibilising neurotic gig academics to meet the outcomes required in TEF and REF, a process which Loveday (2018) calls 'neuroliberalism'. Wheeldon, whitty and van der Hoorrn (2023) would further describe the centralisation used to meet metrics as an instrument of symbolic violence by the dominant group in the university hierarchy.

A significant problem with such neoliberalism (and symbolic violence) relates to the further immiseration of HRM leading to a narrow focus on metrics and the market at the expense of wider stakeholders. The pressure of REF felt by many academics, but particularly gig academy workers due to precarity, lack of mutuality, and short-term contracts, include pressures to game the system through the production of short-term articles captured by REF (rather than more long-term), and to focus on research in larger fields of study which are more likely to be cited than specialist ground-breaking, innovative and high-risk research which may be of benefit to society. In this way the atomisation of gig academics has contributed to the emergence of a form of Taylorism in which casualised academics, as cogs in a neoliberal engine, produce research for the knowledge economy rather than public good research for the benefit of a sustainable society:

In this now quasi-official view of the University, research and teaching that do not serve business or wealth creation are seen as luxuries, and it is equally assumed that luxuries should not be funded from the public purse (Docherty 2012, cited in Desierto and De Maio 2020, 105).

Early career academics seeking to move from a short-term post to a 'permanent' (ongoing) post, tend to prioritise the need to make contributions that will be recognised within existing terms of reference ……The outcome of this …. is the production of 'conforming subjects' who, in adapting to continuous targets setting, fail to see academia as a place to develop originality and creativity. Academics come to adapt to the market for jobs and the performance management of those in jobs by avoiding intellectual risks (Cruickshank 2019, 349).

Within this neoliberal context HRM is seemingly immiserated in its privileging of government metrics and the market over wider stakeholders, reflected in gig academics prioritising TEF and REF over teaching and research not captured by these metrics. HR's role, rather than business partner or employee champion would appear to be reduced to one of 'handmaiden of efficiency' (Dundon and Rafferty 2016, 378):

The loss of professional autonomy with the requirement to comply with commercial sponsors and in line with the university's corporatist goals means academic work is limited. Diverse views are sacrificed as publications which are based on histories, focused on diversity, multiplicity and justice are often forgotten by scholars attempting to survive in current neoliberal contexts while present pedagogies are ruled by the neoliberal dominant goals of profit, competition and entrepreneurialism (Desierto and De Maio 2020, 150).

Such an immiserated HR emphasis on corporatist goals, competition and entrepreneurialism contrasts with the CIPD's regard for wider society, sustainable long-term objectives and corporate social responsibility; in short, a concern for adding value:

It is widely accepted that the traditional shareholder value approach to business is a central reason for the global economic crisis and numerous ethical and environmental disasters. The main criticism is that this model encourages managers to focus on putting the interests of shareholders above that of other stakeholder groups, in particular employees and wider society.

As a result, we have witnessed a widespread erosion of trust, a critical foundation of business (CIPD 2013, 5).

The CIPD view of adding value goes beyond the narrow focus on external targets to a broader view of the university as a public good, of benefit to a wider society. HRM, within this context, would be less focused on the market, and de-professionalising and de-politicising gig academics to meet targets and reduce costs, and more on facilitating teaching and research focused on the crises facing society today relating to climate change, shortages of food and water, increasing energy prices, obesity and banking (Busch 2017):

In particular, tensions have emerged between the potential for higher education to deliver public goods that have useful, societal or communal benefits…and an emergent view that prioritises successful marketisation and financialisation as the driving purpose of higher education as a business (Hall and Bowles 2016, 30).

Similarly, Aly *et. al*. (2022) argue for a change in corporate governance in HE from marketisation to social and civic responsibilities so that academics can challenge unequal social relations of power:

to achieve and maintain a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable democracy there is a need to reform corporate governance, …. treat higher education as an investment and not a cost, promote and protect academic freedom, reinstitute academic voice through collegial approaches to university decision-making, articulate principles of professionalism in academic practice as well as provide high quality research to government and civil society (Aly *et. al*., 2022, 361).

To address these wider issues would require a greater HR emphasis on relationships within the community and a focus on curriculum development, research and student relationships in line with the needs of society; in other words, a movement away from atomised agents focused on metrics towards the self as social and the idea of communities of scholars creating knowledge

(Busch 2017). Learning (in line with social cognitive theory) would not be individualised, but shaped by social participation of individuals within the learning environment, interacting with both the academic tasks of the classroom and the cognitive features of the individual student.

Such a focus on wider stakeholder would further be in line with the idealised CIPD behaviour of commercial drive in HR professionals, with its' focus on adding value for all stakeholders rather than self-responsibilising gig academics to meet targets:

> The heavy emphasis on centralised targets and audits disempowers and demotivates both front-line managers and employees. It has led to a public sector that is too often numerically overmanaged (too many managers and too much reliance on numbers) but qualitatively undermanaged (poorly trained managers and insufficient focus on the quality of delivery) (CIPD 2010 in CIPD 2012, 6)

Adding value, rather than being submissive to narrow boardroom interests and power structures, the CIPD suggests, should be about being business savvy to give HR the edge. This would involve HR practitioners committed to the behaviours of 'collaboration, curiosity and courage to challenge', a focus on 'purpose and impact' and 'leading with integrity' to meet the needs of wider society (CIPD 2012):

> The real danger in the public sector is to focus on the agendas of politicians, senior managers and leading stakeholders. This is often in tension with the stated purpose and objectives of the organisation itself. … Retaining our integrity in the face of such pressures is important in engaging employees, connecting with customers and recognising the needs of wider society. This also means challenging ourselves and our colleagues to improve their performance and contribution. It's probably the most difficult aspect of business savvy because it is bound up with issues of morals, trust and respect'(CIPD, 2012, 17).

To address the needs of all university stakeholders HR professionals might also reflect on the idealised CIPD behaviour of situational decision-making as it relates to short-term and long-term value creation, whether to focus on short-term REF and TEF measures or more long-term sustainable outcomes of benefit to wider society, and to reconsider the role of the Gig Academy within this context. A key consideration within this context, a CIPD report on ethical lenses suggests, is the handing down lens which argues:

> the long-term interests of people, organisations and society are more important than short-term gains. Workplace decisions should look to preserve the past and support the future interests of people, the business and the communities (CIPD 2015b, 18)

4. Implications for practice

There is a clear argument for HR practitioners in the Gig Academy, as discussed above, to more effectively challenge the values of neoliberalism through ethical professionalism to meet the needs of stakeholders beyond the education market. At present practice is seemingly in line with hegemonic normative models of HRM, based on autocratic unitarism (and hard HRM), which critics argue privilege short-term economic performance over workforce wellbeing and wider society (Hallée, Taskin and Vincent 2018). The resultant disconnect between what capital requires from HR (in terms of high performing work systems) and the paradoxical stepping back from investing in human capital and employment to reduce costs and increase profits (sometimes referred to as the disconnected Capitalism Thesis – Thomson, 2003) has led to precarity and job insecurity for gig academy workers.

To challenge the disconnected capitalism thesis, this paper argues, requires the identity of HR practitioners in the Gig Academy to move towards the consultative unitarist values and

behaviours of the CIPD, and away from the performative university, through cultural, rather than atomised and disaggregated HRM. The key issue for practice relates to whether to challenge or conform to university diktats regarding the use of Gig Academy workers in order to do the right thing in terms of adding value for all university stakeholders (CIPD 2012). Crucially HR practitioners, as guardians of university ethics, would need to reflect on how they might more effectively take on the responsibility of ethical stewardship (CIPD 2015b) in meeting competing interests amongst diverse stakeholders, including gig academics and, in particularly women and ethnic minority workers, but also students and the local and global community. This might involve a shift from practice as 'conformist innovator' to 'deviant motivator' in which practitioners, drawing on CIPD values/behaviours and ethical practice, challenge managerialism and TEF and REF metrics to focus on non-performative goals such as the wellbeing of employees, ethnic and gender diversity, longer term goals and the wider benefits of education (CIPD 2017). To achieve this the CIPD guides practitioners to:

- Create work that benefits all stakeholders.
- Build sustainable and ethical cultures.
- Identify with professional (rather than organisational) norms.
- Challenge unethical behaviour and culture (CIPD 2017b).

Such practice would require both higher-level political skills in HRM and the courage to challenge in line with the idealised CIPD behaviour of professional courage and influence:

> Having the courage to hold lines on ethics, morality and fairness; being on
> the side of good, virtuous and just outcomes, is vital for HR as a profession
> (CIPD 2021c: para. 6).

Through professional courage and influence (2021d) HR practitioners could argue for a more ethical, sustainable agenda, and for adding long-term value, rather than HR acting as a tool for senior management through the casualization of academics (Wright and Snell 2005). More

specifically, practice steeped in CIPD values, behaviours and identity rather than linked to the goals of the performative university alone (which is attractive because it provides professional power and status) would enable a language to emerge which issues in a new reality relating to how HRM is understood and experienced, adding value to the sector and ameliorating the current immiseration of HRM.

To support practitioners with these values, behaviour and identity the CIPD might also go further in the design of the professional map; more particularly by moving beyond a description of what HR practitioners should do in terms of behaviours to more specific guidance on how to reconcile the needs of diverse stakeholders through such behaviours; in other words a professional map which is 'less normative, apolitical, and prescriptive and more contextualised, integrative, and critical' (Davies 2017, 3) informed by:

> more explicit debates and visibility about the tensions HRD professionals experience in facilitating commercial and ethical behaviours. We call for greater synergies between the CIPD, university HRD academics, and HRD practitioners to highlight to a wider community how they support people and their progress for meaningful work and dignity in a context where life-long learning is critical to national competitive advantage and well-being (Davies, 2017, 2).

Conclusion

The key argument of this article is that the assumption of consultative unitarism underlying CIPD values and behaviours (that HR practice is good for both employer and employee) has been undermined in HR practice in the UK Higher Education sector by managerialist values driven by the HE market, which privilege the performative University at the expense of other stakeholders. The Gig Academy, integral to this neoliberal context, enables universities to meet the needs of the marketized university through pressure on de-politicized, atomised gig workers to teach and undertake research in line with NSS, TEF and REF metrics, at the expense of teaching and public good research for the benefit of a more sustainable society.

Most significantly atomisation of gig academics has challenged unitarist, culturalist HR practice based on the CIPD behaviours relating to ethical practice, valuing people and working inclusively. This lends some support to the argument of Dundon and Rafferty (2018), that 'HRM is at risk of intellectual and professional impoverishment because of a pro-market ontology' (Dundon and Rafferty, 2018, 377) focused on minimising costs for shareholders at the expense of wider stakeholders and longer-term sustainability for organisations, people and society.

A solution for HR professionals in Higher Education, this article argues, relates to the increased use of the idealised CIPD behaviour of professional courage and influence together with the CIPD behaviours of ethical practice, valuing people and working inclusively, to challenge both the gig academy and the underlying neoliberal and human capital theory values behind the atomisation and disaggregation of gig academy workers. To support HR practitioners in this endeavour the CIPD might develop the CIPD Professional map further so that it is less normative and competence-based and more useful in guiding HR practitioners on reconciling commercial and ethical behaviours.

Whilst CIPD behaviours could be asserted more effectively in the HE sector, and the CIPD could reform the CIPD professional map to address the needs of stakeholders, the key question remains as to the extent to which HR professionals in Higher Education have the necessary power to shift the dominant hegemonic normative model of HRM away from a short-term focus on performance to the wellbeing of gig academics and the needs of wider society. Higher-level political skills to ensure HRM is present in strategic decision-making would be required, and a commitment to shifting HRM practice from its current immiserated use as a management tool (for meeting short term metrics) to practice focused on sustainable longer-term objectives and

adding value for the benefit of all stakeholders, including atomized academics, through the

idealised CIPD behaviour of commercial drive.

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