

Project Report

1. Project report cover page

Title of project: Academic archetypes: understanding the experience of being an academic in Australian universities

Amount of funding awarded: \$ 9,766.86

Project leader/ team members: Professor Helen Partridge and Dr Kate Davis

2. Project Overview

The project used in depth interviews to establish archetypes of academics working in Australian universities. Archetypes can help academic development units in Australia's universities to determine priorities and goals without bias or assumptions. The archetypes can be used to inform the design and delivery of resources, products and services that support Academics in their teaching practice and provide professional learning opportunities related to learning and teaching.

The project commenced in June 2020 and was completed in October 2021. A Research Assistant was appointed to assist with data collection. The project included interviews with 20 academics working in Australian universities; 1 interview was excluded for not meeting the participant criteria. The 19 participants came from 14 institutions, a range of disciplines (i.e. education, health, built environment, psychology, information systems and media and communications), and employment status (i.e. casual, part time, fully time, contract, ongoing). Participants were mostly females 15 in total), with an average age of 47.7. Participants were recruited via professional e-lists and e-newsletters and via the research team's professional networks and social media spaces. All interviews were conducted by the Research Assistant, with interview conducted via the web conferencing software Zoom. All sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. As the lead institution, human ethics approval was obtained by Deakin University (H19REA008).

The two research leads worked collaboratively in analysing data using a variant of Braun and Clark's thematic analysis approach (2006). To present the salient themes and participant narratives, the researchers chose to explore the findings as archetypes. Often used in the field of usability user experience, developing personas from the narrative interview data provides a compelling way for academic developers to understand academics' professional learning. The researchers utilized the steps to create personas described on the United States Usability resources web site (Personas, 2021)

The researchers exchanged ideas and conferred about the archetypes throughout the analysis phase. There were constant comparisons and considerations of the 20 participants' interview transcripts and recordings. The archetypes were distilled down to represent the unique needs and behaviours of the participants (i.e. academics). The archetypes depict the collective experiences of the participants in regard to the phenomena of being an academic in an Australian university. Participants will see different parts of their experiences in the different archetypes. It is not intended that one participant's narrative will be allocated to one archetype.

3. Project Outcomes

Overarching themes

The aim of the project was to produce a set of archetypes, however, in undertaking the analysis to inform the archetypes, the researchers identified a number of key themes across the data that provide useful context for the archetypes.

- Overworked and overwhelmed

Across the interviews, there was a clear sense that participants were struggling with workload. A majority of participants routinely worked long hours, including weekends, and many felt there was a demand for them to be '24/7 academics'. While the pandemic heightened this experience, it is a larger problem predated the pandemic.

- Unclear career development goals and pathways

Many of the participants found it hard to articulate what career success meant or what their longer term goals are. This may in part be due to their workloads, which often have them focused on the here and now rather than looking to the future. Many of the participants indicated they are not particularly motivated by promotion, however, at the same time, many of these same participants articulated that they were frustrated that they had not been promoted or that there is not a clear pathway to promotion.

- The teaching / research divide

There was a strong sense that teaching and research are not seen as equal and that teaching is undervalued. Discussion of research revolved around:

- Promotion: Participants articulated that they need to find time to focus on research in order to be promoted. They also indicated they had not been promoted because they had not focused enough on their research. Some felt they had shouldered the load of teaching, allowing colleagues to be 'superstar researchers'.
- Workload: Participants indicated they did not have sufficient time to spend on research.
- Desire (perhaps thwarted) for a research career: Some participants (particularly the 'Just in time learners') had or have a desire for a research career that they have been unable to fulfil.

There was a strong sense of dissatisfaction that universities are set up to favour and reward research performance over teaching.

- Impact of the pandemic

The pandemic primarily impacted on ways of working and made it more difficult to put boundaries around the day while working from home. There was no real sense that the pandemic had a significant impact on their experience overall, unless the participant was in a leadership role or taught something that relies on face-to-face learning experiences. Redundancies and restructures were starting to impact on workload or anticipated to impact on workload at the time the interviews were conducted.

- Lack of interest in formal professional development

Most participants expressed dissatisfaction with or a lack of interest in formal professional development such as is commonly offered by academic development or central learning and teaching units. They expressed a preference for just in time professional development, in addition to opportunities for collegial, informal learning through conversation, community and idea sharing. A number of participants were critical of the PD provided by central learning and teaching units, which did not meet their needs.

- Need for professional development outside learning and teaching

When asked about priorities for PD, very few participants raised topics in teaching and learning. However, some articulated weaknesses in areas such as assessment, feedback or curriculum design, or made comments that suggested a need for PD in this space. This might speak to a lack of self-awareness about areas for development in this space, however, it also speaks to a pressing need for PD in other areas that impact directly on learning and teaching.

Participants expressed an interest in and need for PD related to their disciplinary knowledge, including current industry practice, university processes and systems, and time management. Certainly, the articulated need to develop time management skills aligns with the sense of overwhelm prevalent amongst a majority of participants.

Archetypes

The outcome from this project is a set of archetypes based on user experience personas and behavioural archetypes that describe different 'types' of academics at Australian universities with a particular focus on their professional learning and teaching and learning support needs. The four preliminary archetypes that were articulated in this project are:

- **The Lifelong Learner**

The lifelong learner is a committed and passionate teacher. They may have won a teaching award, worked in a central learning and teaching unit (currently or in the past), report achieving high teaching satisfaction scores, or held an administrative role that speaks to teaching expertise. They are a self-sufficient, self-motivated learner who has taken charge of their professional development. They are intrinsically motivated to learn by curiosity, a desire to be challenged, and a sense of personal responsibility to keep developing. Their curiosity drives them to spend time on learning outside of work and they may not see this as time spent working. They are reflective and take time to reflect on and understand their teaching practice. Their professional development is driven by personal interest and can be opportunistic in the sense they are guided by the opportunities available to them rather than by planning. While they are committed to ongoing learning, they are also comfortable with learning at the point of need. They are self-sufficient in their learning and may be reluctant to ask for help because of a sense of personal responsibility and capability. They are proficient with technology and may even consider themselves a trail blazer but may feel they don't fully understand how to apply technologies to achieve learning outcomes. The COVID context may have presented a challenge to them in this regard, but they were proactive in trying to develop their understanding.

The lifelong learner has built a career in teaching and learning because it is their passion. A strong desire to enable students to succeed and provide them with a quality learning and teaching experience may result in overworking or compromising other aspects of their role, such as research. They don't have time (or a desire) for formal professional development and may struggle to carve out dedicated time for professional learning but an innate curiosity and belief in the idea of lifelong learning means they are constantly learning, if not with intentionality around the subject matter. They are quite independent in their learning.

- **The Relational Learner**

The relational learner has a strong preference for learning in informal settings and primarily through conversation with colleagues. They prefer this coaching for a number of reasons, including:

- a sense that the formal professional development available to them is inadequate, poor quality, not focused on their needs, and even patronising
- a lack of time to participate in formal professional development
- a belief that learning by observing others' practice and discussing topics in teaching and learning is the best way to learn
- they are burnt out and need the networking to reignite their passion.

They value the relationships they have with their colleagues, which may include colleagues they have worked with for a very long time. Relational learners who don't work in a collaborative team environment feel isolated.

They are motivated by connecting with other people, including students and colleagues. They are also motivated by external validation in terms of recognition that they are doing a good job. They are intrinsically motivated by a sense that they are enabling others' success. They are committed teachers who enjoy teaching and supporting students.

Early career relational learners are focused on a balanced career – they want to develop as both a teacher and a researcher. Mid and late career relational learners are largely in teaching-focused roles or a role in which teaching gets more attention than research. During the semester, relational learners are very focused on their teaching and may find it difficult to find time for research.

They are not interested in attending workshops or completing online courses. They value networking, particularly beyond their school and also beyond their institution. They enjoy seminars and showcases that focus on others' experiences and practices where there is an opportunity to ask questions and engage in dialogue. They want opportunities to learn through conversation. For mid to late career teachers, networking and dialogue are critical for maintaining their passion and drive, as well as keeping current. Early career social learners value mentoring and peer review and express an interest in team teaching as a professional development exercise.

They may have had poor experiences of PD run by learning and teaching units. Some feel that it isn't worth engaging with the learning and teaching unit.

- **The Coach**

The coach is an expert teacher who focuses just as much on others' learning as they do own their own. Their expertise in teaching and learning stems from considerable experience, a background or current role in academic development, experience with course leadership, having held (or currently holding) a leadership role in teaching and learning. They have a strong understanding of pedagogy and core teaching and learning functions like curriculum and assessment design. It should be noted that not all academic developers are coaches in that some academic developers articulate weaknesses in learning and teaching functions. They are highly motivated by making a difference to student learning, either directly through their teaching, or indirectly through supporting other academics. They also value being respected by their peers and being the person that everyone goes to for advice. They define success beyond the day-to-day as helping others to succeed.

Their role is heavily focused on learning and teaching, and they have sought this out because it is their passion. In terms of their academic profile, they are stronger on teaching than research but they are research-active in their discipline or through scholarship of teaching and learning. They may be frustrated by being overlooked for promotion due to having invested heavily in teaching over research.

Their approach to technology use in their teaching is centered around pedagogy first or understanding how technology can assist with achieving learning outcomes. They are generally confident and capable users of technology.

They have a high workload and their administrative or leadership responsibilities may contribute to a feeling of overwhelm. The most significant barriers to learning are not having time for professional learning, and a tendency to focus on others' professional learning rather than their own.

Their approach to professional learning is grounded in their own teaching practice. They are highly reflective and introspective, which plays a key role in their professional learning. They are active scholars of teaching and learning and would like to spend more time on this. They also see engaging with the evidence base around teaching and learning as a key professional learning activity because they want to be evidence based teachers.

It should be noted that not all coaches are academic developers, and not all academic developers are coaches.

- **The Just in Time Learner**

The just in time learner has pursued a career in teaching and learning because a research career was not right for them. They may lack the drive they perceive as necessary to forge a research career, they perceive they are not 'good enough' at research to have a research career, or a research career did not offer them enough job security. They may be pursuing a career in teaching and learning because they feel it will require less effort than a research career.

They are generally able to maintain boundaries between work and their personal life. They have interests outside of work that are important to them. They tend not to work outside of business hours or the hours that they set as their work hours. They avoid working weekends unless there is a critical deadline.

They tend to be passionate about their discipline rather than about teaching and learning. While they may have 'defaulted' into a career that is more focused on teaching and learning, and may not be motivated to achieve career goals as a teacher, they are nonetheless keen to do a good job and for their students to have a good experience, and they care about student experience.

They may be resistant to changing their teaching practice because the effort does not always pay off in terms of longevity of the changes due to changes in institutional policies and norms. They are frustrated by navigating policy, procedure and administration around teaching. Efficiency and time management are key concerns (even more so than for the other archetypes).

They prefer to self-manage their professional development and like to work things out for themselves at the time of need. They might be reluctant to ask for help, preferring to independently seek out the information they need. They need ready access to concise information and resources to help them efficiently address their learning needs.

The preliminary archetypes developed in this project can be used to inform the design and delivery of programs, products and services that support academics in their teaching practice and provide professional learning opportunities related to teaching and learning. The archetypes can help academic developers focus on user centeredness by developing a deeper understanding and empathy for the user. All of these factors can contribute to a better experience for academics in their professional learning and increase the usability of services and products offered by academic developers. In turn, this has the potential to impact on quality learning and teaching in universities.

The outcome from this project will be relevant to CAULLT members, higher education policy makers and administrators, academics, as well as providers of educational support services including libraries and academic development.

The preliminary findings were presented at the CAULLT Conference Members event held on 29th October 2021. The findings will be further refined and developed in full. The final findings will be published via a higher education journal such as Higher Education Research and Development.

4. Budget

Item	Funded	Actual Expenditure
Research Assistant	\$8,516.86	\$7,442.86
Transcription Services	\$1,250.00	\$2,324.00
TOTAL	\$9,766.86	\$9,766.86

5. Recommendations emerging or Key learnings

The preliminary archetypes developed in this project can be used to inform the design and delivery of professional learning, as well programs, products and services that support academics in their teaching practice. Grounded in the preliminary findings therefore, the following two key learnings or insights are provided:

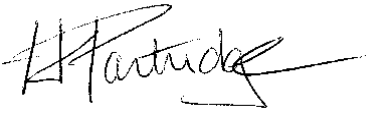
1. Professional learning should be holistic in approach. It needs to recognise that academics are people with complex lives, and that professional learning is as much a social-emotional experience as a cognitive one. To help academics develop as educators we need to adopt a holistic approach to professional learning that recognises academics are multifaceted individual's, embodying many roles and identifies, while balancing competing demands and priorities, in shifting and uncertain contexts. Professional learning therefore needs to have an equal and integrated focus on the professional teaching and learning skill and knowledge domain (i.e. learning design, educational technologies), personal (i.e. resilience, well-being) and career development (i.e. teaching and research nexus). Further research is needed to understand how best to embrace a holistic approach to the design and delivery of professional learning, including the programs, services and products that support academics in their teaching practice.
2. Professional learning should be relational in approach. It needs to provide academics opportunities to learn from peers through informal conversations and engagement. To help academics develop as educators we need to adopt an approach to professional learning that recognises that both teaching, and learning to teach, is a collaborative activity, that draws on the experience and expertise of a range of people. While formal training programs and workshops are still needed; the most powerful professional learning enables transdisciplinary practice by promoting relationships. It connects academics to others, strengthening communities and fostering belonging. Effective professional learning needs to be more than a series of seminars planned and delivered by a central learning and teaching unit. Further research is needed to understand how best to design and delivery professional learning from a relational lens.

5. References

Braun, Clark (2006) Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Personas. (2021). Usability.gov. Accessed February 14, 2021. <https://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/personas.html>.

Project Leader

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Signature	
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