

Hybridity in Higher Education: Positive Transformation?

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Hybrid working models within higher education (HE) can be interpreted in various ways. We are at a pivotal time in Higher Education, following a period of difficulty with a global pandemic and lockdowns. In this new way of working, the HE environment has an opportunity to enhance practice by embracing hybrid working models in which staff can work together, to fulfil their roles, through a combination of face-to-face and virtual approaches. This approach will allow HEIs to develop agility and flexibility and focus on practices that benefit individual's needs, as well as wider institutional needs.

Bournemouth University embraces a FUSION model where staff (both academic and professional) are encouraged to practice considering education, research and professional practice as integral parts of their role. This provides a novel opportunity for everyone within the university to embrace a culture of continuous improvement. What is more, it enables individuals to develop their knowledge and professional expertise. Each individual has a different way of being 'fused' and can cater what they consider each of the aspects of FUSION to fit their role, with the support from their line manager.

As part of this change, there is also an opportunity to embrace interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity has highlighted the importance of developing meaningful interactions between disciplines and discussing how individuals can work together with a shared goal. This includes embracing and respecting the different forms of expertise that staff members from different areas of the institution can bring. Interdisciplinarity creates new avenues through creativity and innovation. Interdisciplinary collaboration has also been shown to be more successful at problem solving than when studied within only one discipline, through the use of a diverse range of perspectives, skill sets and interpretations.

Developments within HE around hybrid working are likely to see initiatives in which students are also taught across a number of disciplines. In this instance it is important to consider the varying skills and knowledge that students from multiple disciplines possess and that there will be a need to build a curriculum that can support a variety of needs. In this increasingly flexible and complex environment, collaboration take on a more valuable role in HE, creating these hybrid communities, doing hybrid work, using hybrid practices. We propose that HE institutions should not focus on academic disciplines alone. In fact, working collaboratively between academics and professional members of staff enhances and positively impacts organisational culture. By professional members of staff also engaging in research and education within their own job roles, whilst collaborating with academics to enhance the student experience, a more consistent approach can be achieved. What is more, this way of working and being helps cohesiveness and collaboration whilst empowering individuals as important members of the team.

Mindful collaboration and purposeful communication between staff, where everyone feels listened to and able to speak up without fear of judgement, enables critical discussions and the development of common themes across the work, as well as a positive culture within the team. One important aspect of this way of working is to have a responsive and effective use of communication strategies across disciplines and job roles, to facilitate and enhance collaboration and ensuring that barriers are minimised.

This includes giving meaningful feedback and encouraging the sharing of ideas and opinions, to enable staff members to work collaboratively and ensure coordination and consensus-based decision making. The collaborative process results in a high level of integration, producing improved scholarly engagement. It can also enhance job satisfaction, staff morale and a sense of belonging. Successful teams collaborate with a clear set of ground rules and with an open and

honest peer review process. Thus, teams need to recognise that working towards a common goal can be more valuable than working alone.

One of the ideas we have integrated and embedded into our HE culture is the notion of practicing with an embodied relational understanding (ERU). Stemming from research we have carried out whilst looking at positive organisational approaches, ERU means to practice with our head (the knowledge we have and gain within our role), hand (the way we do things, our way of being) and heart (our emotions and the meaningful relationships we develop). We see this as only possible if individuals feel they can be themselves at work and if we foster environments where authenticity, transparency, openness and genuineness are celebrated as key aspects of developing hybrid ways of working

Working spaces where kindness, a positive mindset signal our attitudes and behaviours. This humanising approach to practicing can have a positive impact on our organisational culture, those around us and ourselves. It makes our environments inclusive by celebrating diversity, inspiring learning and as HE institutions which advance knowledge, enriching society and why not, making a positive impact on the world. At our university, to illustrate this idea, we created a picture depicting head, hand and heart as threads forming a plaid where each part is inseparable and by being intertwined becoming stronger, as a way to signal how if we do that we deliver excellence in every aspect of our provision. This, we feel, can only but strengthen hybrid ways of working.

Whichever hybrid way of working is embraced, by individuals bringing their own expertise and perspective as well as their whole self into their practice, a culture fostering creativity and innovation can be developed.