



**Bournemouth
University**

‘Donning the Slow Professor’ at BU: A feminist action research project: reflections and conclusions

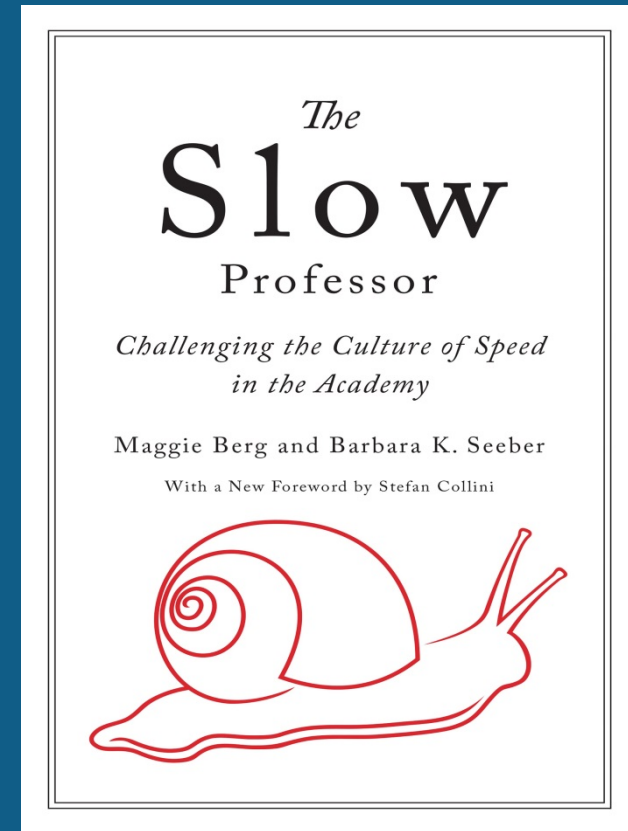
Professors Ann Hemingway & Sara Ashencaen Crabtree with co-researchers.

WAN international seminar 23 May 2018

First inspirations for the study

Seeber B.K. & Berg M. 2016 *Slow Professor* University of Toronto Press

“While slowness has been celebrated in architecture, urban life and personal relations, it has not yet found its way into education,” reads the book. “Yet, if there is one sector of society which should be cultivating deep thought, it is academic teachers. Corporatization has compromised academic life and sped up the clock. The administrative university is concerned. The administrative university is concerned above all with efficiency, resulting in a time crunch and making those of us subjected to it feel powerless.”



- The book was introduced to Sara by a colleague. It resonated with so many of our shared experiences of accelerated and harassed modern university life.
- Suddenly *someone else* was speaking about how *we were feeling*.

The study “Donning the Slow Professor” : a feminist action research pilot project’

- **Research Question:** What are the perceived benefits and barriers towards the adoption of Slow Professor principles for academic women in a modern corporate university following a period of trial adoption?
- **Methodology:** The pilot study uses a participatory action research approach (PAR) to explore how BU participants embed Slow Professorship approaches in their own working lives and chart that journey using logs/diaries and efficacy scales. Emerging qualitative developed will be analysed using a thematic approach
- **Duration** – originally 1 year but needed to be stretched to 2 - and still not finished!

Big thanks to our team of co-researchers

- Sue Sudbury, Anne Quinney, Maggie Hutchings, Luciana Esteves, Shelley Thompson, Helen Jacey, Anita Diaz, Peri Bradley, Jenny Hall, Michele Board, Anna Feigenbaum, Lorraine Brown, Vanessa Heaslip and Liz Norton) – All WAN members & from:
- Faculties of Health & Social Sciences
- Faculty of Management
- Faculty of Media & Communication
- Faculty of Science & Technology
- Centre for Excellence in Learning

Work and health is a well studied area - characteristics of work that are bad for our health:

- Because of changes in the occupational structure of post-industrial economies and the implementation of occupational health and safety regulations, many workers in wealthy societies escape the burden of most physical hazards at work, though repetitive strain and nonstandard work hours are broadly and increasingly relevant.
- However, contemporary workers in post-industrial and other economies face a variety of **psychosocial stressors** on the job. Examples of commonly-studied psychosocial stressors include job strain, job insecurity, and negative spill overs from work to other domains. Job strain is the combined experience of too little task control and high levels of demand with little workplace social support and has been associated with a range of health problems including psychiatric morbidity musculoskeletal symptoms and coronary heart disease.
- Other research shows that women in jobs with high job stress or low support from supervisors exhibit higher levels of fibrinogen, which is also linked to increased risk for cardiovascular disease.

New Economics Foundation: Wellbeing at Work a Review of the Literature 2014

http://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/71c1bb59a2ce151df7_8am6bqr2q.pdf

- Management behaviour seems to be highly important, with some management styles more successful than others at strengthening wellbeing at work (inspiration and motivation are key).
- Creating a safe working environment and a sense of the social value of the work of the organisation, may increase employees' feelings of job satisfaction.
- Good levels of job-fit and skill-use, and opportunities to develop new skills, can create high levels of employee satisfaction.
- Helping employees to take greater control over their work can lead to better performance and greater job satisfaction.
- Taking steps to improve relationships at work – with a particular focus on relationships between staff and managers – and encouraging positive feelings can improve both job and life satisfaction.
- Organisations can adopt certain approaches towards job security that help their staff achieve higher levels of job satisfaction.
- Working with employees to ensure they have a sense that their job is achievable can lead to greater job satisfaction, as well as higher levels of morale.

Back to corporate HE in the UK

- The context of our study is the corporatisation of UK Higher Education on the academic role and the common experience of academics feeling stretched by increasing demands on measurable productivity with fewer resources and far less time than formerly (Collini, 2012; Fureidi, 2017).
- The UCU survey (Kinman and Wray, 2013) reveals that three quarters of academic staff suffer from stress and over half of these respondents experienced very high levels of stress leading to mental health problems.



Identifying and testing our Slow Prof strategies

Lorraine: Restricting inner bully, risking candour, creating timelessness

Ann: giving myself thinking time. Prioritising supporting colleagues above artificial demands. People first!

Luciana: Looking at emails only twice a day. Multitasking really affects my concentration. Stop feeling guilty (a big issue for me).

Vanessa: Time to care: taking care of yourself, being more realistic, putting in Clear Days in diary, starting working at home more

Sara: Timelessness – regularly taking myself away from wifi. Doubling deadlines. Saying ‘no’ more often

Sue: Listen to myself more. Stop charging through the day ticking tasks off never ending lists. Accept my addition to the online world and embrace my imperfections.

Themes and reflections: Culture: speed & conformity



“The norm is fast not slow - and nothing challenges it”

- Compliance and surveillance culture: constant pressure to perform/respond, be seen to be/do...
 - Emails: protocols governing response but not respite
 - Continuous, sudden bureaucratic demands and mandatory attendance for training, managing risk at all cost
 - Institutional change for changes sake – requiring constant agility to adapt with fewer resources/support



“Risk averse - having to do ridiculous things because of the Uni’s risk aversion”

“Realising I can’t do anymore! And just remembering to breathe...”

- A sense that what is said to be valued is soon undervalued once undertaken
- The map followed does not lead to the destination expected
- Evaluation of academics reflects these institutional paradoxes

“Always putting my energies into the wrong things”

- The ideal academic is a distorted mirror, resembling no one. The carrot that can never be reached because it is apparently not meant to be.

“As an academic only place to get validation is outside of Uni. The impression here is that there is no value to you. Always malfunctioning”

“We are all kept in an uncertain, precarious space that we can't feel any belonging within. We all feel we don't fit”



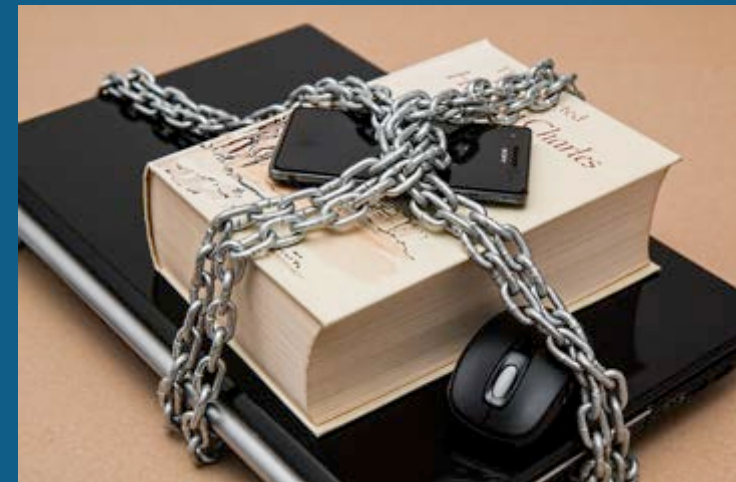
Anxiety and failure

- Corporatisation erodes academic individuality – leading to ‘holding line’ mentalities
- Criticality promoted in education but seen as threatening in academics – leading to inauthenticity in presentation of self (Goffman, 1959)
- Shifting terrains and measurements create (RD) Laingian ‘double bind’ dilemmas creating a pervading sense of anxiety and guilt - a sense of failure and isolation

“Experiences rubbished in meetings and I feel it is dangerous to rubbish women’s experiences”

“On an endless treadmill of meeting pointless demands”

“Feeling like a disorganised failure.. Who cares about the adulterated rubbish you are producing at the end of the academic sausage machine, because there is no time for scholarship”



- Most of us felt abject failures at trying to become Slow Professors
- We tried to accomplish things in 1 year (fast professors) but we needed so much longer to engage with the ideas let alone the practice

“Failed miserably!”

“I feel like Tantalus. I can *see* the grapes hanging there but can never quite *reach* them!”

- But our study did help to raise our consciousness
- We could now see where the problem lay and it was no longer internalized as just our individual pathological dysfunctions. We now see and speak in new ways

“How do we define success as slow professors?”

“What is going to benefit me as an academic today? *My priorities*”



- Some very powerful new things came out of this exercise – which by institutional standards might be regarded as at best equivocal in terms of standards of success

“What’s important is love and how you show it. The Slow Professor is very empowering internally for those around us” (colleagues, students, families, friends)

“Be kind. Don’t assume that others are thoughtless. They are in a world that doesn’t give them time to care. We are all surviving in a thoughtless world”

‘At last! I am finally moving to a place where I can begin my *real* work again’.

Thank you

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