

1 **Early Career Researchers and their quest in finding space amongst the**
2 **Professoriate to facilitate research collaboration: A qualitative case study**

3 Laura Roper, Bournemouth University, lroper@bournemouth.ac.uk

4 **Abstract**

5 **Background:** Using Hofstede's Power Distance Theory (1980), this article discusses
6 the high power distance perceived by Early Career Researchers (ECRs) within the
7 business school of a UK Higher Education Institution (HEI). The article examines ECR
8 interactions with the Professoriate, and how a high power distance can play a
9 significant part in inhibiting opportunities for developing networks for research
10 collaboration. ECRs often discuss a belief that, early in their research career, there is
11 an unwritten expectation that they will continue to conduct research projects with their
12 supervisory team and professoriate. This is undertaken with an understanding that it
13 will be the senior researcher who will receive the main acknowledgements and
14 benefits of the work produced, even if the ECR has undertaken the majority of the
15 research.

16 **Methods:** Following a series of interviews and focus groups with academic staff
17 across a range of roles, disciplines, and levels of experience, data was analysed using
18 inductive thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning across the dataset, and
19 structured through a framework approach.

20 **Findings:** Four themes were identified through the analysis: (1) Benefits of
21 collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate; (2) Limitations of
22 collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate; (3) Facilitators of
23 collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate; and (4) Barriers to
24 collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate.

25 **Conclusions:** It is recommended that HEIs foster a culture that values and supports
26 collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate, through informal
27 networking, effective communication, and mentorship.

28

29 **Keywords:** Early Career Researchers, Power Distance, Higher Education, Hierarchy,

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

Introduction

45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68

This article will focus on the opportunities for successful collaboration within the business school of a UK-based Higher Education Institution (HEI) setting for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and examine the impact of the perceived power distances between ECRs and senior researchers. The article will discuss how successful collaborative research can be dependent on the recognition and leveraging of the researcher's different strengths, with a focus on developing engagement and opportunities with senior researchers, such as the Professoriate (those holding the title of Associate Professor or Professor; Johnston et al., 2020).

Culture within a HEI setting is defined by Bess and Dee (2012) as being “a shared set of values, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the organisations behaviours” (p. 7). However, this definition does not acknowledge the competing priorities and beliefs seen within a HEI, as discussed by Kurland et al. (2010) who suggests that a loosely coupled system, such as a university, can contain several challenges due to a lack of shared values and beliefs across its divisional and hierarchical structure.

Gee (2012) suggests that barriers existing within a HEI's hierarchical culture can impact the sharing of knowledge dissemination. By breaking down these barriers, a collaborative HEI culture nurtures individual expertise and cultivates a more engaged working atmosphere. The significance of understanding how to navigate ECR and Professoriate relationships in research collaboration is further discussed by Gibbert et al. (2002), who discovered that knowledge-sharing practices led to improved understanding of future research opportunities, streamlined working processes, and increased institutional value through a broader reach. This notion aligns with Siemens

69 et al.'s (2014) findings, highlighting that successful collaboration hinges on the team's
70 ability to find common ground in terms of methodologies, research approaches,
71 language, and more. However, achieving this requires adaptability and a shared
72 commitment from all involved.

73 **Hofstede's Power Distance Theory**

74 Hofstede's Power Distance Theory (1980) offers valuable insights into the ways
75 that hierarchical cultural differences within a HEI can influence social interactions,
76 communication patterns, and organisational dynamics, which subsequently impacts
77 collaborative research.

78 Hofstede's theory focuses on a cultural dimension known as "power distance,"
79 which measures the extent to which individuals within a society or group accept and
80 expect power imbalances and hierarchical structures (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). Power
81 distance captures the extent to which a group's members tolerate and acknowledge
82 differences in power and authority. Groups with high power distance emphasise
83 hierarchical structures where individuals accept that power is unequally distributed,
84 and authority figures, such as the Professoriate, are viewed with respect and
85 deference. On the other hand, groups with low power distance prioritise equality and
86 consider power differentials as less acceptable (Hofstede, 1991).

87 Hofstede (1980) identified several key dimensions that characterise power
88 distance across different cultures. These include:

89 1. **Hierarchy and Authority:** High power distance cultures tend to emphasise
90 hierarchies, where authority figures hold substantial influence and decision-
91 making is centralised. In contrast, low power distance cultures promote
92 organisational structures that are participative in their decision-making. Within

93 HEIs, the structure of the organisation, with its centralised decision-making and
94 hierarchical approach (Mintzberg, 1979), is an environment with a high power
95 distance.

96 2. **Communication Patterns:** In high power distance cultures such as a HEI,
97 communication is often top-down, with information flowing from superiors to
98 subordinates. In contrast, low power distance cultures encourage open and
99 participatory communication, where individuals feel comfortable expressing
100 their opinions.

101 3. **Social Inequality:** High power distance cultures are more accepting of social
102 inequality and view it as a natural outcome of differing abilities. It is here that
103 we are likely to see a difference in attitude towards ECRs versus senior
104 researchers (Millar, 2013). In contrast, low power distance cultures strive for
105 more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

106 4. **Personal Autonomy:** High power distance cultures emphasise respect for
107 authority. Within a HEI, evidence suggests that there is a potential for an
108 environment in which senior researchers and the Professoriate are viewed as
109 deserving of authority and respect, whereas ECRs can be perceived as not yet
110 having earned that level of respect (Millar, 2013). In contrast, within low power
111 distance cultures, individuals are encouraged to voice their opinions and
112 exercise autonomy.

113 The theory has important implications for understanding how people perceive
114 authority, handle decision-making, and navigate interpersonal relationships in
115 various societal contexts (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010), and therefore is
116 likely to impact on collaborative research opportunities. However, whilst the theory
117 has significantly contributed to our understanding of cultural dynamics, it has also

118 faced critiques and refinements. Some argue that the theory oversimplifies
119 complex cultural realities and fails to capture the nuances of power dynamics within
120 subcultures. Additionally, advancements in globalisation, technology, and
121 multicultural interactions have led to the emergence of hybrid cultural behaviours
122 that might not neatly fit the high or low power distance categories (Venkateswaran
123 and Ojha, 2019).

124 Contemporary researchers have expanded upon Hofstede's work, incorporating
125 additional dimensions, and exploring how cultural norms interact with other factors
126 such as individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance (Venaik and Brewer,
127 2010). Despite these critiques, Hofstede's theory remains a foundational framework
128 for comprehending the influence of cultural values on power dynamics and
129 organisational behaviour (Venkateswaran and Ojha, 2019).

130 **Aim of the article**

131 By exploring the key dimensions of power distance, this article seeks to provide
132 valuable insights into the cultural underpinnings of social interactions and practices
133 which impact engagement between ECRs and the Professoriate. By identifying
134 potential facilitators and barriers of power distance, it may be possible to develop
135 measures to improve engagement and foster a more collaborative research
136 environment.

137

138 **Methods**

139 The purpose of this research was to conduct a qualitative case study examining
140 interactions between ECRs and senior researchers, such as the Professoriate. As part
141 of this, the single researcher aimed to establish an understanding of the practices that

142 can enable and inhibit ECR opportunities for collaboration with more senior
143 researchers.

144 This research was conducted from a relativist ontological perspective, positing
145 that reality is socially constructed through individual interactions within their social and
146 cultural environment (Geertz, 1973). Within this framework, there is no fixed reality;
147 instead, reality is subject to individual interpretation. Complementing this ontological
148 stance was the epistemological position of interpretivism. In this context, the research
149 aimed to explore how individuals make sense of the world and how these subjective
150 meanings shape their behaviours and interactions, emphasising the subjective nature
151 of knowledge and the importance of understanding human behaviour through
152 interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

153 **Participants and Recruitment**

154 Data was collected through one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and the use
155 of available ECR guidance material via the HEI in which the study was conducted (a
156 UK-based, post-1992 university). Interview and focus group participants were
157 recruited via an email invitation to the full body of academic staff from within the
158 business school. All participants held an academic position (teaching and research,
159 either part-time or full-time) within the faculty due to the research focus of the study.
160 Details of the participants, recruited using maximum variation sample (the selection of
161 participants that are purposefully as different from each other as possible), are detailed
162 in Table 1.

163 **Table 1: Participant Demographics**

Participant	Data Collection Methods	Role	Years of experience
-------------	----------------------------	------	---------------------

1	Interview	Senior Academic	10-14 years
2	Interview	Professor	20+ years
3	Interview	Academic	5-9 years
4	Interview	Senior Academic	5-9 years
5	Interview	Senior Academic	5-9 years
6	Interview	Academic	5-9 years
7	Interview	Senior Academic	0-4 years
8	Interview	Senior Leader	20+ years
9,10,11,12	Focus Group: Senior Staff Roles	9) Dept. Lead 10) Director 11) Senior Academic 12) Senior Academic	9) 15-19 years 10) 15-19 years 11) 20+ years 12) 10-14 years
13, 14, 15	Focus Group: Junior Staff Roles	13) Academic 14) Academic 15) Academic	13) 0-4 years 14) 0-4 years 15) 5-9 years

164

165 **Data Collection and Procedure**

166 Semi-structured interviews were held in order to gather detailed qualitative
167 responses. Interviews in qualitative research are essential for gaining in-depth insights
168 into participants' perspectives, experiences, and meanings, allowing researchers to
169 explore the complexity and richness of the studied phenomena. The use of a semi-
170 structured approach allows for flexibility in questioning if a participant raised a point of
171 interest that was not within the focus of the pre-planned questions (Salmons, 2012).
172 The eight interviews were carried out across a range of pay grades and levels of
173 experience, in order to ensure that a wide picture of ECR and senior researcher
174 interactions and opportunities were established.

175 Two focus groups (FGs) were also held, both containing participants from a
176 range of pay grades and levels of experience. FGs in qualitative research are valuable
177 for generating diverse perspectives, fostering group dynamics that can uncover shared
178 meanings, and providing a rich context for understanding complex social phenomena.
179 Stewart et al. (2007) also notes that the use of FGs to gather data is an efficient
180 approach when a researcher is faced with limited resources for qualitative data
181 collection. The emphasis of the FGs were to gather participants reflections on their
182 experiences as ECRs and, where applicable, their experiences as senior researchers
183 and members of the Professoriate, working with ECRs.

184 FGs were organised based on participant job roles within the HEI. One FG
185 comprised participants ranging from grades 6 to 8, which constitute more junior roles,
186 while the second FG included participants from grade 9 and above, who held
187 managerial or leadership positions. This structuring aimed to create an environment
188 in which participants felt comfortable expressing their views openly, as the absence of
189 direct supervisors or subordinates could encourage more candid responses, free from
190 concerns about potential consequences. Questions asked during the FGs mirrored
191 those asked during the one-to-one interviews to ensure consistency.

192 Respondents who participated in the research were supplied with a participant
193 information sheet and agreement form prior to participation, wherein they documented
194 their role, years of experience within the Higher Education Institution (HEI), and
195 subject discipline. All interviews and focus groups were conducted through Zoom.

196 **Data Analysis**

197 Inductive thematic analysis served as the methodological approach for
198 analysing the data derived from the interviews and focus group discussions. This

199 iterative and flexible approach, outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), enabled a
200 bottom-up exploration of the data, allowing themes to develop organically rather than
201 imposing preconceived categories. Through this inductive approach, the findings
202 contributed to a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon, offering valuable
203 insights into participants lived experience of power distance.

204 To establish a robust analytical structure, NVivo software was employed to
205 facilitate efficient coding and examination of the gathered data. This methodology
206 enabled the data to be systematically categorised based on recurring themes.

207 The data analysis framework encompassed four distinct stages (Hackett and
208 Strickland, 2018): data familiarisation; thematic framework construction; indexing and
209 sorting; mapping and interpretation.

210 ***Data Familiarisation***

211 Following each interview and focus group, transcripts were generated, and
212 pertinent content or themes were noted.

213 ***Thematic Framework Construction.***

214 Through a comprehensive review of responses from various data collection points,
215 several themes developed during the initial familiarisation phase:

- 216 1. Benefits of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate.
- 217 2. Limitations of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate.
- 218 3. Facilitators of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate.
- 219 4. Barriers to collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate.

220 Subsequently, these themes have been used for the focus of the research and the
221 discussion of results.

222 ***Indexing and Sorting***

223 The established coding scheme was applied to the interview and focus group
224 responses using NVivo, facilitating their organization for subsequent analysis.

225 By employing indexing and sorting techniques, the data was synthesised into a
226 table that effectively displayed overarching themes and individual feedback. This
227 enabled an overview of responses, simplifying the identification of patterns and the
228 comparison of theme-related feedback.

229 ***Mapping and Interpretation***

230 As discussed by Ritchie et al. (2010), this framework-based approach enables
231 researchers to deeply engage with their collected data, aiding the identification of
232 themes and developing patterns. By utilising both the data table and NVivo-driven
233 coding, it was possible to identify and examine the themes that appeared within the
234 collected data. Furthermore, relevant quotes were selected in order to illustrate these
235 developing themes. This approach also facilitated the recognition of contrasting
236 responses, allowing for more comprehensive analysis to examine any disparities.

237 **Ethics**

238 Ethical approval for this research was sought and obtained from the
239 researcher's institution before initiating the study. All subsequent phases of the
240 research strictly adhered to the ethical requirements set forth by the institution,
241 ensuring the integrity and compliance of the study with established ethical standards.

242

243

Results and Discussion

244 Results will be presented and discussed using the themes identified during the
 245 data analysis and development of the thematic framework, with a focus on the impact
 246 of the power distance dimensions identified (Hierarchy and Authority; Communication
 247 Patterns; Social Inequality; Personal Autonomy). As noted in Table 2, a number of
 248 sub-themes and areas of focus were also identified, which will be discussed in more
 249 detail in the following section.

250 **Table 2: Thematic Map**

Themes	Sub-themes/areas of focus identified
Benefits of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate	Collaborative research enhances productivity.
	Collaboration increases researcher's knowledge by introducing diverse theories and methodologies, as well as fostering an understanding of new subjects.
	Embracing a collaborative approach across a hierarchical structure fosters innovation within the work.
	No field of study should exist in isolation, given their interconnected nature.
Limitations of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate	Diminished autonomy.
	The competitive nature inherent in academic environments which can hamper open and collaborative communication.
	Senior team members taking credit for the work of ECRs within the team.
Facilitators of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate	Informal networking and social interactions.
	Line managers play a pivotal role in facilitating collaborative research through mentoring of ECRs.
	Effective communication practices (top-down, and bottom-up).

Barriers to collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate	High power distance between ECRs and The Professoriate.
---	---

251

252 **Benefits of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate**

253 All participants highlighted the advantages of collaborative research between
 254 ECRs and members of The Professoriate. Their responses revolved around four
 255 prominent sub-themes:

256 1. **Collaborative research enhances productivity.** This effect can be attributed
 257 to the availability of additional funding opportunities, a greater array of potential
 258 publishing outlets, and the distribution of tasks, which in turn saves time. As
 259 Participant 1 noted:

260 "The sum of the many is greater than the individual. Collaboration makes
 261 it easier to get access to different types of data and funding. A lot of
 262 funding today is only available for collaboration."

263 2. **Collaboration increases a researcher's knowledge** by introducing diverse
 264 theories and methodologies, as well as fostering an understanding of new
 265 subjects which may not have previously been considered. Both ECRs and the
 266 Professoriate can be introduced to new approaches and areas of focus that
 267 they may not have previously engaged with. Participant 2 noted that:

268 "It works well when at the start each person comes to the table with
 269 something new and each person is able to lead on one aspect of the
 270 project. You feed off each other's strengths and there is a friendly
 271 rivalry/peer pressure to get the work done."

272 3. Embracing a collaborative approach across a hierarchical structure **fosters**
273 **innovation within the work.** By amalgamating various ideas and
274 complementary areas of expertise, the scope of subject matter can be
275 significantly expanded. As Participant 4 noted,

276 “Working collaboratively is successful as it brings together different ideas on
277 the same subject matter. Research can be linked but can also be
278 approached very differently dependent on discipline and so we all learn from
279 one another.”

280 4. **A prevailing understanding exists that no field of study should exist in**
281 **isolation,** given their interconnected nature. Participant 3 emphasised this by
282 stating that “you cannot work in silos, everything is joined”. This viewpoint was
283 corroborated by Participant 10, who pointed out regarding their own academic
284 discipline,

285 “Marketing cannot be studied in isolation. Brands link to psychology
286 (perceptions etc) as well as economics.”

287 Nameth and Wheeler (2018) discussed their experiences of collaborating
288 across their respective disciplines to generate research. They pinpointed three
289 foundational assumptions that served as crucial facilitators of their successful
290 partnership: a readiness for learning, a shared commitment to collaborative learning,
291 and a perspective of each other as equals. Their work emphasised the necessity of
292 ensuring that the collaboration process was equally and mutually advantageous,
293 thereby honouring each other’s realms of expertise (Eisler, 2002). Nameth and
294 Wheeler (2018) assumed the role of critical friends, allowing them to seek further
295 clarification in various aspects of the work, ultimately refining pedagogical practices.

296 In doing so, they created an environment with a low power index with social equality,
297 open communication, and autonomy.

298 Collaborative research holds the potential to foster a sense of greater equity
299 and furnish ECRs with invaluable mentorship and role models (Burroughs, 2017).
300 Collaborative research affords ECRs, who might otherwise lack the means to embark
301 on new research, the support and development they require (Johnston et al., 2020).
302 The European Research Council (ERC) has also responded by offering grants for
303 “proposals of an interdisciplinary nature which transcend the boundaries between
304 different research fields” (ERC, 2011, p. 12). The underlying belief is that collaboration
305 bears the potential for yielding breakthroughs in knowledge and understanding,
306 nurturing innovation (Yegros-Yegros et al., 2015).

307 **Limitations of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate**

308 Research examining the drawbacks of collaborative research has shed light on
309 several concerns, including inadequate career structures for ECRs. These issues
310 often arise from an emphasis on teaching and focusing on PhD students, as well as
311 ECRs, experiencing low self-esteem (Millar, 2013).

312 Within Higher Education, there's a propensity for a sense of isolation to take
313 root, which hampers staff growth and obstructs the cultivation of collaborative working
314 methodologies (Trust et al., 2017). This is exacerbated by feedback indicating that
315 promotional prospects hinge on individual performance, seemingly fostering an insular
316 approach to work (O'Brien and Guiney, 2018). Consequently, this diminishes
317 opportunities for individuals to enhance their own expertise through learning from and
318 collaborating with peers. Johnston et al. (2020) assert that researchers forego crucial

319 developmental avenues when their perceived isolation inhibits engagement in
320 collaborative research.

321 Similar to the discussed benefits, the limitations associated with collaborative
322 research are categorised into three key sub-themes from the data:

323 1. **Diminished autonomy.** Some respondents expressed that when collaborating
324 within a research team, they experienced a lack of control or ownership over
325 the material. This lack of control could influence the trajectory and results of the
326 work in unintended ways and further increases the power distance due to the
327 loss of autonomy. For example, Participant 5 commented that in their
328 experience, the potential for inclusion in the Research Excellence Framework
329 (REF) could cause individuals to take control of the research.

330 “REF can encourage selfishness and joint work in the same HEI can only
331 be counted against one of the individuals involved.”

332 2. **The competitive nature inherent in academic environments** which can
333 hamper open and collaborative communication. As noted by Participant 11 that:

334 “The HEI does not reward collaboration work; it rewards individual
335 achievements.”

336 3. More **senior team members unjustly taking credit for the work of ECRs**
337 within the team. This inequality further increases the power distance between
338 ECRs and senior faculty members. Participant 13 notes that:

339 “People have different agendas. You have to work hard to try to align them
340 to find something that can be mutually beneficial.”

341

342 The second overarching area of focus identified by ECRs during the research,
343 was the lack of autonomy and hierarchical influences felt between ECRs and senior
344 researchers. This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that ECRs tend to
345 experience the negative aspects of this dynamic, while more seasoned staff may have
346 reached a career stage where these concerns are less relevant on an individual basis
347 (Millar, 2013; Siemens et al., 2014). Hofstede (1991) characterises this as

348 "The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and
349 organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed
350 unequally" (p. 28).

351 In essence, the ECRs interviewed felt that they were viewed as possessing less
352 influence within the hierarchy of a HEI. ECRs are also more likely to perceive and
353 endure this inequality, whereas senior staff may not identify as strongly with this divide.
354 The sentiment that ECRs perceive themselves as less influential than senior staff or
355 the Professoriate is encapsulated in the observations made by Participant 3 during the
356 interview:

357 "I have experienced having my ideas and my work taken and used by others
358 and not receiving any credit or acknowledgement for it. You have to manage
359 egos, especially for senior staff working with junior staff such as a professor
360 working with an ECR. Often as an ECR you feel you have to accept what the
361 Professor says."

362 In the academic environment, individuals are taught from an early stage to
363 scrutinise everything (Spendlove, 2007). It was interesting to note that from the data
364 gathered from members of the Professoriate, only one highlighted that they felt that
365 there could be an imbalance when ECRs collaborate with members of The

366 Professoriate. It was noted by Participant 2, a professor with 20+ years of experience
367 that,

368 "It is important to be able to review each other's work critically but from a
369 position where you recognise that you are not an expert in that area."

370 It is evident that work in this domain needs to encompass two primary
371 objectives: a) fostering and emboldening ECRs to challenge senior staff more
372 assertively, and b) encouraging senior staff to promote and facilitate environments
373 where ECRs can question without fear of reprisal. By pursuing these goals, the power
374 distance can be diminished, and collaborative work can thrive in a more collegial
375 manner.

376 **Facilitators of collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate**

377 Each of the researchers who participated in the interviews offered insights into
378 factors they believed could stimulate and facilitate collaborative research, based on
379 their own experiences. Informal and social avenues for research collaboration were
380 raised by most participants. This focus on an informal and social environment offers a
381 platform for staff to engage in unstructured discussions about various topics. These
382 informal dialogues serve as opportunities for the exchange of ideas and sharing of
383 best practices. Participant 2 underscored this during the interview:

384 "A lot of people are more productive with people they meet through events that
385 are organised. These are important and shouldn't be overlooked."

386 Participant 11 echoed this sentiment, stating,

387 “The most successful people have the best parties. Networking and
388 relationships are key, you have to invest time in developing networks and find
389 who you can work with. You need access to opportunities.”

390 An intriguing observation is that staff members with diverse levels of experience
391 and management responsibilities put forward identical recommendations. These
392 recommendations formed three sub-themes, all centred around cultivating a sense of
393 community and collaboration:

- 394 1. **Informal networking and social interactions.** Both internal and external
395 networking opportunities for ECRs received unanimous endorsement from
396 interviewees and focus group participants.
- 397 2. **Line managers playing a pivotal role in facilitating collaborative research**
398 through mentoring of ECRs, guiding towards relevant resources, and
399 establishing clear objectives.
- 400 3. **Effective communication practices** that are both top-down, and bottom-up.

401 These networks can be harnessed to encourage staff to connect and collaborate,
402 both within virtual and physical spheres. An expanding body of research suggests that
403 this is crucial for maintaining a sense of well-being within the ever evolving and
404 scrutinised environment of Higher Education (Bryman, 2007). Stodd (2020) advocates
405 for the development of the ‘Social Age’ and spaces for such community conversations,
406 deeming them essential for maintaining both formal and informal dialogue within
407 organisations.

408 The role of line managers is pivotal in encouraging collaborative research. When
409 hierarchical or power distance concerns arise among researchers, line managers are

410 essential for facilitating staff through guiding, mentoring (or facilitating mentoring
411 opportunities elsewhere), and setting objectives. Leimer (2009) asserts that:

412 "Institutional research professionals can contribute to institutional goals, even
413 transformation, by helping to foster a broader organizational view, operating as
414 a connector and facilitator of collaboration, and stimulating organizational
415 learning" (p. 86).

416 Line managers, as connectors, are especially vital for ECRs who may
417 experience high power distance. Participant 4 highlighted the significance of positive
418 leadership, stating,

419 "Deputy Head of Research encouraged me to speak to the professoriate during
420 a professoriate away day and discuss what it is that ECRs need in order to
421 collaborate with them successfully. This was a positive shift as it gave the ECRs
422 a voice."

423 This constructive leadership approach enabled Participant 4 to bridge the
424 power distance constructively early in their research career. An effective HEI is
425 founded on its collective actions, knowledge, values, and ideas. Consequently, line
426 managers' objectives should encompass the elimination of any barriers impeding
427 individuals and teams from taking appropriate actions (Finch et al., 2010).

428 **Barriers to collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate**

429 The high power distance perceived by ECRs significantly hampers the process
430 of collaborative research. Feedback collected from interviewed ECRs indicated a
431 prevailing belief that, early in their research careers, working with supervisory teams
432 and professors involves an understanding that the senior researcher will receive
433 acknowledgment and benefits from the resulting work, even if, as mentioned by

434 several participants, the ECR is the primary contributor. The insights of Participant 7
435 highlighted that as an ECR, it's expected that,

436 "You have to manage egos, especially for senior staff working with junior staff
437 such as a professor working with an ECR. Often as an ECR you feel you have
438 to accept what the Professor says."

439 This perception was echoed by Participant 13, where they noted,

440 "Sometimes people take advantage of you and so the research benefits them
441 and not you, especially earlier in your career."

442 This apparent inability in questioning senior researchers contradicts a
443 fundamental tenet often embraced in Higher Education, which encourages academics
444 to consistently challenge assumptions (Spendlove, 2007). When senior researchers
445 fail to foster an environment where junior members are encouraged to question,
446 debate, and assert their perspectives and neglect to ensure equitable distribution of
447 credit and recognition for work undertaken, it appears that they hinder the growth and
448 development of ECRs. Instead of perpetuating this hierarchical approach, it would
449 potentially yield greater benefits if senior researchers adopted a mentoring role,
450 promoting inquiry, debate, and striving to ensure fair acknowledgment of all team
451 members' contributions. This approach has demonstrated its potential to stimulate
452 innovation and enhance outcomes, making it a missed opportunity for the HEI
453 (Schweizer and He, 2018).

454 **Limitations of the current study**

455 During the process of conducting multiple interviews and FGs, there is a
456 potential risk of inadvertently constructing a collective narrative from the gathered
457 information, possibly neglecting individual narratives that deviate from the norm. To

458 address this concern, it was crucial to not only identify overarching themes but also to
459 acknowledge the significance of variations within each narrative (SAGE, 2012).
460 Additionally, there is the potential for interviews to yield contrived data, tailored to align
461 with the interviewee's preferences rather than offering an authentic representation of
462 their viewpoints (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011). To counteract this, data was collected
463 from multiple interview sources, thereby enhancing data comprehensiveness, and
464 enabling the detection of potential outliers.

465 A notable limitation when collecting data through FGs is the potential mismatch
466 between the FG's demographic composition and the broader population, leading to an
467 imbalance in the representation of grades and roles (Stewart et al., 2007). To mitigate
468 this limitation, the FGs were structured based on the current roles within the HEI. One
469 FG consisted of academic staff encompassing junior positions, while the second FG
470 comprised academic staff from senior positions. As the research was conducted within
471 one business school, with participants being familiar with one another, this approach
472 aimed to create an environment in which both groups of staff felt at ease providing
473 candid feedback. This approach aids in reducing concerns about potential judgment
474 or reprisal in the presence of line managers or subordinates.

475 **Conclusion**

476 This research has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of collaborative
477 research within HEIs. Challenges identified include concerns about straying from one's
478 core discipline, diminished autonomy, the competitive nature of academia, and the
479 potential for misattribution of credit within collaborative teams. The concept of power
480 distance has been observed as a significant barrier, with ECRs noting that they often
481 feel compelled to comply to the views of senior researchers. The research shows that

482 this hierarchical disparity can limit productive collaboration and inhibit the growth of
483 ECRs. In terms of barriers, the perception of power distance continues to be a
484 significant hindrance to collaborative research. This dynamic can result in unequal
485 recognition and benefits, especially for ECRs who may feel compelled to accept the
486 views of senior researchers. Furthermore, ineffective communication and an emphasis
487 on departmental success over interdisciplinary collaboration can stifle opportunities
488 for productive partnerships.

489 On the other hand, the benefits of collaborative research between ECRs and
490 the Professoriate are evident from the experiences shared by the participants.
491 Collaboration enables increased productivity through shared tasks, additional funding
492 opportunities, and fosters knowledge integration across disciplines. Such integration
493 leads to innovation and problem-solving capabilities that surpass the limits of individual
494 disciplines. Collaborative research offers a means to foster equity, provide mentorship,
495 and cultivate role models, especially for ECRs, contributing to their growth within the
496 academic sphere. The potential for breakthroughs and innovation through
497 interdisciplinary collaboration is also underscored.

498 The facilitators of collaborative research centre around fostering a sense of
499 community and collaboration within HEIs. Informal networking, social interactions,
500 supportive line managers, and effective communication practices are crucial factors
501 that contribute to successful collaboration. Line managers play a pivotal role in
502 encouraging and guiding collaborative efforts, particularly in mentoring ECRs and
503 directing them towards relevant resources. The importance of clear and transparent
504 communication strategies to enable successful collaboration has been emphasised.

505 In light of these findings, it is recommended that HEIs consider fostering a culture
506 that values and supports collaborative research between ECRs and the Professoriate.
507 This involves providing opportunities for informal networking such as research coffee
508 mornings, research speed-dating events, and writing retreats, all of which can facilitate
509 effective communication, and encourage mentoring relationships. Addressing power
510 distance concerns and ensuring equitable recognition for all contributors, regardless
511 of their career stage, is essential for promoting productive and innovative collaborative
512 research. Recommendations for developing a collaborative culture include:

- 513 1. Informal networking and social activities.
- 514 2. Enabling interdisciplinary co-creation of research through effective mentoring,
515 and goal setting within appraisals and departmental meetings.
- 516 3. Communication strategies, both formal and informal (e.g., newsletters, reports,
517 meetings, internal blog posts).

518 As part of this approach, it is recommended that further research is conducted to
519 examine the success of the proposed networking and mentorship approaches, across
520 institutions, and if there is evidence of a reduction in power distance related to this.

521 Overall, this research offers valuable insights into the complexities of collaborative
522 research within HEIs. By understanding the benefits, limitations, facilitators, and
523 barriers, institutions can work towards creating an environment that fosters successful
524 collaboration and empowers both ECRs and senior researchers to engage in
525 meaningful and impactful research endeavours.

526

527 **Biography:** Laura has a passion for humanistic leadership and developing social
528 identity in the higher education environment. With a background in Higher Education

529 quality assurance and project management, Laura has held a number of roles within
530 UK higher education, giving her a wide range of experience and insights into HE
531 processes. Laura's doctoral research focuses on staff social identity and seeking to
532 break down barriers between disciplines and hierarchical levels to promote improved
533 working practices through effective and meaningful communication.

534

535

References

536 Bess, J.L. and Dee, J.R. 2012. *Understanding college and university*
537 *organization: Theories for effective policy and practice*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

538 Bryman, A. 2007. Effective leadership in higher education: a literature review.
539 *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(6), pp.693–710

540 Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology.
541 *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101.

542 Burroughs, J. 2017. No uniform culture: Patterns of collaborative research in
543 the Humanities. *Libraries and the Academy*, 17(3), pp.507–527.

544 Charmaz, K. & Bryant, A. 2011. Grounded theory and credibility. *In: Silverman, D*
545 *(ed.) Qualitative research*. 3rd ed. SAGE.

546 Cresswell, J. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five*
547 *Approaches*. 3rd edition. London: Sage.

548 Dishman, C. and Stephan, K.2019.Destroying the silo: how breaking down
549 barriers can lead to proactive and co-operative researcher support, *Insights*, 32(32),
550 pp.1–6.

551 Dollinger, M. Lodge, J. and Coates, H. 2018, Co-creation in higher education:
552 towards a conceptual model, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 28(2), pp.210-
553 231.

554 Eisenberg, E. M. Johnson, Z. and Pieterse, W. 2015. 'Leveraging Social
555 Networks for Strategic Success', *International Journal of Business Communication*,
556 52(1), pp.143–154.

557 Eisler, R. 2002. The power of partnership: Seven relationships that will change
558 your life, Novato, CA: New World Library

559 Finch, A. Burrell, D. N. Walker, R., Rahim, E. and Dawson, M. 2010. Changing
560 the cultures of colleges and universities to make them more adaptive, *Review of*
561 *Higher Education and Self-Learning*, 3(7), pp.40–53.

562 Gee, J. P. 2012. Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional
563 schooling. Routledge.

564 Geertz, C. 1973. The interpretation of cultures (Vol. 5019). Basic books.

565 Gibbert, M. Leibold, M. and Probst, G. 2002. Five styles of customer knowledge
566 management, and how smart companies use them to create value, *European*
567 *Management Journal*, 20(5), pp.459–469.

568 Hofstede, G. 1980. Culture's consequences: International differences in work-
569 related values. Sage.

570 Hofstede, G. 1991. Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind.
571 Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival (Vol. 1). Software of the Mind.

572 Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. J. and Minkov, M. 2010. Cultures and organizations:
573 Software of the mind, third edition. McGraw-Hill.

574 Johnston, E. Burleigh, C. and Wilson, A. 2020, Interdisciplinary collaborative
575 research for professional academic development in higher education, *Higher Learning*
576 *Research Communication*, 10(1), pp.62–77

577 Kezar, A. & Eckel, P. 2002. The Effect of Institutional Culture on Change
578 Strategies in Higher Education, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(4), pp.435-460,

579 Kurland, N. B. Michaud, K. E. Best, M. Wohldmann, E. Cox, H. Pontikis, K. and
580 Vasishth, A. 2010. Overcoming silos: The role of an interdisciplinary course in shaping
581 a sustainability network. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 9(3),
582 pp.457-476.

583 Leimer, C. 2009. Taking a broader view: Using institutional research's natural
584 qualities for transformation, *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 143 pp.85–93.

585 Millar, M. 2013. Interdisciplinary research and the early career: The effect of
586 interdisciplinary dissertation research on career placement and publication
587 productivity of doctoral graduates in the sciences. *Research Policy*, 42(5), pp.1152–
588 1164.

589 Mintzberg, H. 1979. *The Structuring of Organisations: A synthesis of the*
590 *research*, Prentice Hall, London

591 Nameth, C. and Wheeler, K. 2018. Identifying the underlying assumptions of an
592 interdisciplinary collaboration on curriculum development, *Interdisciplinary Journal of*
593 *Partnership Studies*, 5(2)

594 O'Brien, T. & Guiney, D. 2018. *Staff wellbeing in higher education*, Education
595 Support Partnership, London.

596 Ritchie, J. Spencer, L. and O'Connor, W. 2010. *Carrying out qualitative*

597 analysis, In Ritchie J, Lewis J (Eds) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for*
598 *Social Science Students and Researchers*, Sage, London, 219-262.

599 Salmons, J. 2011. *Cases in online interview research*. SAGE Publications.

600 Schweizer, L. & He, J. 2018. Guiding Principles of Value Creation through
601 Collaborative Innovation in Pharmaceutical Research, *Drug Discovery Today*, 23(2),
602 pp.213–218,

603 Siemens, L. Liu, Y. and Smith, J. 2014. Mapping disciplinary differences and
604 equity of academic control to create a space for collaboration. *Canadian Journal of*
605 *Higher Education Revue*, 44(2), pp.49–67.

606 Stewart, D. W. Shamdasani, P. N. and Rook, D. W. 2007. *Focus groups:*
607 *Theory and practice*. SAGE.

608 Spendlove, M. 2007. Competencies for Effective Leadership in Higher
609 Educational, *International Journal of Educational Management*. 21(5) pp.407-417

610 Stodd, J. 2020. What Kind of Community Leader Will You Be? Available from:
611 <https://julianstoddordpress.com>

612 Trust, T. Carpenter, J. and Krutka, D. 2017. Moving beyond silos: professional
613 learning networks in higher education, *The Internet and Higher Education*, 35, pp.1-
614 11

615 Venaik, S. and Brewer, P. 2013. Critical Issues in The Hofstede and Globe
616 National Culture Models. *International Marketing Review* 30(5), pp.469–482

617 Venkateswaran, R. and Ojha, A. 2019. Abandon Hofstede-based research?
618 Not yet! A perspective from the philosophy of the social sciences, *Asia Pacific*
619 *Business Review*, 25(3), pp.413-434

620 Yegros-Yegros, A. Rafols, I. and D'Este, P. 2015. Does interdisciplinary
621 research lead to higher citation impact? the different effect of proximal and distal
622 interdisciplinarity. *PLoS ONE*, 10(8), pp.1–21.

623