

The Blended Professional in Academia: bringing them further

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Structure of the talk

- 1- Motivation, introduction
- 2- Context: Why blended professionals in academia?
- 3- Case study: summary of findings
- 4- What next? Final remarks and discussion

Motivation



Policy Context

NL	UK	IT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collective intelligence• 3rd/4th generation universities• Impact agenda• Job market	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• UKRI• HERB• REF/impact agenda• Global and industrial challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on third mission• Impact agenda becoming more relevant• Entrepreneurship and setting up a new culture for it



What role for blended “skills”?

Theoretical Context

- Concept of “blended-ness”
- Mixed backgrounds and tasks – forced to choose?
- Recognition
- Unique contribution to HEIs

“Blended are those who continue to have an academic and professional interest in their area of activity (so they may keep doing their own research into these and related issues)” (Whitchurch, 2008).

“Blended are those who do not feel to belong either to the academic or to the professional community, so they are more likely to belong to a third space category of HR in today’s universities” (Carvalho et al, 2015).

Case Study

Tilburg (NL)	LSE (UK)	UniBo (IT)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Next generation• Entrepreneurial• Set targets and academic work loads• Policy influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research excellence• Width and breadth of SSH• Policy influence• Global outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehensive university, all subjects equally matter• Setting up an entrepreneurial ecosystem• Investing both on EU and third mission activities



What role for blended “skills”?

Case study: research questions

To understand the concept of the Blended Professional (BP) in academia; with a focus on our own institutions.

- How do BPs see their **identity**?
- Do they experience **freedom or control** in their daily jobs?
- Who are their **peers**?
- Are these BPs able to do (**reflection on**) **reflection in action**?

Respondents' characteristics

Institution	Respondents	Roles	Interview settings
Tilburg	Targeted, Intercollegiate BP group. 4F, 1M.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 senior admin • 3/5 academics • 2/5 central • 3 first generation 	Face-to-face
LSE	Targeted 5F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 senior/1 early stage/3 upper mid-level • 4/5 central offices • 4 first generation 	4 face-to-face 1 phone
UniBo	Targeted 4F, 1M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 senior admin (1 has just joined from a local office) • 1 early stage • Central division (ARIC) • 4 first generation 	Face-to-face

Case study: Tilburg University (1/2)

Identity: 4 see themselves as administrative, one as academic

*"I see myself more as an administrator, but I bring in content. My academic background is important: this [university] is my habitat"
(Resp #2).*

Freedom/control: lots of freedom but also loneliness and vulnerability

"I should report to the vice dean of research, but it is free what I do" (Resp #4).

Case Study: Tilburg University (2/2)

Peers: mixed academic and administrative. Key word: open mind

"I have made colleague-friends within admin and research both. I am not hierarchy or class oriented" (Resp #4).

Reflection in action: strong sense of unique contribution, lacking recognition, wish of engaging in research

"I could be a good sparring partner for researchers, especially for vice deans of research, but I am not addressed in that manner" (Resp #3).

Case Study: LSE (1/2)

Identity: 4/5 see their roles highly linked to academic sphere; 1 sees it operational.

“I think we experience tensions around our identity and how we see ourselves” (Resp #1).

Freedom/control: overall freedom but limitations due to external factors

“Often they [academics] see me as an agent of the government’s agenda” (Resp #2).

Case Study: LSE (2/2)

Peers: Silo effect of their roles and external communities.

“I always get invited to special events and projects” (Resp #4).

Reflection in action: unique contribution, lacking recognition, all engaged with research.

“I think I perform research everyday...I can't write or publish, but [you'd perform] under the radar” (Resp #2).

Case Study: Bologna (1/2)

Identity: 5 see themselves as admin/professionals; but neither pure professionals nor pure academics; so professional on occasion

“ ... since this is the community that has given me opportunities and overall a career” (Resp #4) AND “I say I belong to the professional community only on demand” (Resp #1)

Freedom/control: overall freedom; the right distance from the boss; determination to move boundaries; in real sense feeling BP

“ I feel as the person who should not say anything, but I keep having my say” (Resp #3)

Case Study: Bologna (2/2)

Peers: are only those within ARIC, not those in local offices; ARIC as the ideal workplace to get visibility and top reputation up; blended knowledge and language as distinctive

“I find my peers only in the Centre/ARIC” (Resp #4) + “I see myself different from those in local offices” (Resp #5) + “ARIC as the workplace to aspire to for blended profiles” (Resp #1).

Reflection in action: 1 still active in research, but not yet as reflection on reflection in action; but seminars on exploring the literature on research management have shown the existing and the way forward.

What next for BPs?

Tilburg: “My **analytical** way of working still helps me. [It is] an answer to current fact free politics” (Resp #1).

“We can combine content and process. We bring in the **substantive knowledge** that [management] is lacking” (Resp #5).

LSE: “BPs offer the **business side** to academic institutions” (Resp #3).

“[HEIs]..**no longer** need managers; but [they] need **leaders**” (Resp #4).

UniBo: “Writing and speaking in a **mixed language** is the added value” (Resp #4)

“It is the **blended knowledge** which helps in tricky situations (Resp #3)

Why/does this matter?



What next for us?

- Wish list?
- Views, Q&A



References

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