Perceptions of Identity in Higher Education: Professional Services and Academic Staff

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate perceptions of professional identity within professional services staff in higher education. It considers if this identity is impacted by their relationships with academic staff. This research stems from my own feelings about my identity at work and how I view the relationships I have with academics.

There is significant research into academic identity but relatively little regarding that of professional services. It is only within the last twenty years that research into professional services as an occupational group has emerged.

The work was undertaken using a theoretical framework of Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998) and an interpretivist perspective in an attempt to understand the views of professional services and academic staff. Using a qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews with both professional services and academic participants, I gave a voice to both sides to understand the relationship between the two.

The findings from this study add to the limited knowledge around perceptions of professional identity by professional services and their relationships with academic staff. They also offer practice implications, including reducing perceived negative terminology and ensuring the visibility and value of professional services staff and the various roles and responsibilities they undertake. This includes more opportunities for developing 'third space' collaborative working.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This chapter sets up the context and research aims for the thesis. I will discuss the rationale for the research and the internal and external context of the higher education landscape. I will also explain the personal reasons for undertaking this study and provide an overview of the thesis chapters to aid the reader.

1.1 Motivation for the study

I began my career in higher education as a temporary member of professional services staff seventeen years ago after working for two years in further education. Over this time, I have worked at two universities in several different roles, within school, faculty, and central services. I am currently working in an academic school (September 2021).

I was drawn to the Doctor of Education (EdD) programme initially as I wanted to continue my education following on from my MA and MBA. My MBA project focused on female-only development training, and in particular, Advance HE's *Aurora* programme, which is aimed at women working in higher education. When I enrolled onto the EdD I believed that I would carry on this research topic, however that soon changed. The first assignment of the programme focused on professionalism. I explored my own professionalism and reflected on how I felt I was seen by my peers. Undertaking this research and being forced to look at myself within my professional context was eye-opening. During the taught element of the programme (Phase A), my supervisor noted my writing had a cathartic element to it. I was writing about how I saw myself as always less than academic staff, there to serve and assist them.

Throughout the taught element of the doctorate, each assignment brought me closer to understanding how working with academics positioned me within the sphere of influence of the school, or how I positioned myself. As I finished the second year of the doctorate programme, I took on a fifteen-month secondment within a central department, managing the events and conferences team. This role took me out of

the academic sphere and allowed me to gain skills in a completely different area. It also made me realise how much I enjoyed working in an academic school (despite my reflections on my identity and relationships with some academic staff) and when my secondment was over, I returned to the school into my current role as a research manager. This was a new role within the school and enabled me to work with research staff and PhD students. I am surrounded by staff who value research and the time it takes to achieve a doctorate.

This new role moves me into what Celia Whitchurch (2006) calls the 'third space' arena, a space that straddles both academic and professional services. This is explored in Chapter Two, as I review the literature on this topic. I currently co-lead a postgraduate module entitled 'Contemporary Professional Issues'. I am using the knowledge gained in my MBA and the research skills gained from the EdD programme to help the students understand how social media can impact on their research, how healthcare works across the public and private sectors and to understand how their research can impact low and middle-income countries. I work closely with the programme leader on the teaching and learning aspects of the programme alongside undertaking the administration and management of the research centre.

Throughout my career I have often felt less than, not as respected or afforded the same credibility, as my academic colleagues. When working in my first role within higher education, I worked in central services and had little or no contact with academics. This feeling of otherness became more obvious when I moved to my current institution and began working alongside academic staff from lecturers to heads of faculties. There could be many reasons why I feel this way. Being surrounded by several staff who I felt looked down on administrative colleagues and who at times were outright rude to them, began to impact my identity as a professional within higher education. I explored a lot of this during the taught element of the EdD.

This is a very personal thesis for me and has been emotive at times. Opening up and acknowledging feelings publicly can be quite exposing. To be honest about feeling less important than colleagues and craving validation brings with it a sense of embarrassment. I am uncomfortable with being so open with my feelings in a professional context. I have always attempted to keep my professional life separate from my emotions and writing about a desire for credibility is not something I am used to doing; however, it is important to be able to articulate how the ideas for this thesis began. It can also create uncomfortable silences when academics hear how professional services, myself included, feel about the relationship they have with academics and how this can impact their professional identity.

I have attempted to be reflexive throughout the thesis and have tried to acknowledge where my positionality may have affected a response or my thinking. Teusner (2016:88) argues that acknowledging positionality is important for the validity of the research:

> An important aspect to qualitative research is the ability of the researcher to identify, through reflexivity methods, the active role they play as part of the research project which can shape the nature of the process and the knowledge produced from it.

Bryman (2016:695) defines reflexivity as a:

> reflectiveness among social researchers about the implications, for the knowledge that they generate about the social world, their methods, values, biases, decisions, and mere presence in the very situation they investigate.

Undertaking research in my own institution is something I discuss in Chapter Three. I have been conscious throughout the research process to be as open as possible when reviewing my data and writing up the findings. My reflexiveness has also formed parts of my data as I discuss the findings from participants, both professional services and academics which I was surprised by. I have tried to be honest within this thesis about my personal experiences and how this has impacted my identity. I also acknowledge that all the interviewees have different priorities around work and their

identity, and these may not fit into the pre-conceived ideas that I had going into this research.

The reason behind this thesis is my desire to understand if other professional services staff within the school feel the same about their identity and academic relationships. I also acknowledge that I suffer from what Clance and Imes (1978) call 'Imposter Syndrome'. This manifests itself in me as feelings of not being deserving or clever enough to undertake both my job and this doctorate. Akerman (2020) argues that the feeling of being an imposter is increased by the feeling of invisibility and a lack of credibility. This research is an attempt to understand if other professional services staff members feel their identity is linked to their academic relationships. It is also an attempt to understand why I feel like my identity is tied to my relationship with academic staff.

1.2 External context

Higher education has faced huge changes and threats in the last fifty years. The Robbins Committee report of 1963 looked at the expansion of higher education and reported that anyone who wanted to, should be able to attend university, regardless of their background or financial status (Robbins, 1963). The report looked at the higher education system at the time it was written, before the massification of higher education, and when the academic staff to student ratio was 1:7.6 (ibid). To give an example of the current ratio, in my institution the ideal is 1:19. While the report called for the expansion of higher education, its authors could not have imagined the size of this growth over the next forty years. At the time of the report's publication there were 216,000 higher education students; by 1990, this had risen to over a million (Nixon, 1996) and by 2018/2019 there were 2,383,970 (*Higher Education Statistics Agency*, 2018). The increase in student numbers and higher education institutions brought with it increased funding and therefore more regulations and reporting on public spending (Brown et al., 2018). The Dearing Report (1997) called for the introduction of tuition fees to cover the increase in student numbers. *The*

Future of Higher Education White Paper (2003) argued for more access for students from a widening participation background along with the elusive 50% target for participation in higher education for 18-30 year olds.

The introduction of tuition fees and the subsequent increases to the current level of £9,250 (as of September 2021) created a market economy, both for students, who began to see themselves as consumers, but also institutions who were bidding for public funding, and industry involvement (Henkel, 2010). It also meant that universities became partly responsible for their own survival. Henkel (ibid:5) writes, 'Higher education, now carrying new burdens of responsibility for their futures, was increasingly impelled into markets and quasi-markets: for more selective and conditional public funding, for new sources of income'. Higher education institutions now became quasi-businesses with paying customers. Readings (1996:22) in his seminal text *The University in Ruins* writes:

> Quality is not the ultimate issue, but excellence soon will be, because it is the recognition that the university is not just *like* a corporation; it is a corporation. Students in the University of Excellence are not *like* customers; they *are* customers. [author emphasis]

While Readings is writing mainly about North American and European higher education in the 1990s, this consumerism within higher education is now embedded within the UK system. Readings (ibid:38-39) goes on to say that the decision to allow polytechnics to rebrand as universities in the early 1990s was based on a business model for expanding a market:

> The decision was not primarily motivated by concern for the content of what is taught in the universities or polytechnics … the sudden redenomination of polytechnics as universities is best understood as an *administrative* move: the breaking down of a barrier to circulation and to market expansion. [author emphasis]

This expansion did come with a caveat on student numbers due to the limit in government funding, until of course the rise of tuition fees.

When the student number cap in England was lifted in 2015/2016, it enabled universities to recruit more students and created a buyers' market for students who were now able, to some extent, to have more choice over where they wanted to study. The rise of neoliberalism within higher education is too large a topic to cover within this thesis, but it is important to recognise that by creating a marketised system this impacted on the structures, power dynamics and staff within institutions (Olssen and Peters, 2007). Murphy (2020:30) argues the underlying ideology was that 'competition, enabled via a marketized higher education context, would help drive up standards in universities, and deliver a more responsive and consumer orientated institution'. This, in turn, required a number of professional administrators to oversee a customer focused university.

Palfreyman and Warner (1996) argue that the massification and diversification of higher education had an obvious impact on staff. The traditional notion of administrative staff as subservient to academic staff slowly began to change and the role of professional services and higher education managers became more pivotal. I am not sure to what extent I agree with this idea as I feel there are still elements of subservience. Dearing (1997) explained that staff who did not teach had more opportunities in the diversified sector. However, it should be noted that Dearing (ibid) still referred to professional services staff as non-academics. This is a concept that I refer to throughout this thesis.

Changes to roles in professional services began to occur: they no longer played a subsidiary role but became a major part of university life and its structure. Brown et al. (2018) explain the diversification and plurality of roles that began to emerge included, teaching and learning, quality administrators, external relations, academic development, and research administrators to name a few. This diversification sat alongside an increase in both academic and professional services staff. The table

below shows the increase in professional services and academic staff numbers over the past fifteen years:

Academic Year	Professional Services Staff Numbers*	Academic Staff Numbers
2004/2005	185,650	160,655
2011/2012	196,860	181,385
2018/2019	222,885	217,065

Table 1 (HESA, 2020)

*Referred to by HESA as non-academic staff

It is not surprising there are more professional services staff within higher education than academic staff, given that the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) definition includes, managers, student services, administrative staff, caretakers and cleaners (*Higher Education Statistics Agency*, 2018). Although the difference in numbers is drawing closer, there is still much more research into academic staff than professional services. Bossu et al. (2018) argue even defining the term professional services has taken several years. This suggests that professional services staff are not seen as a research priority. Given that most research is undertaken by academic staff, it makes sense that they would focus on their own concerns, such as the changing identity of academia. Research into professional services is slowly increasing but it does not appear to be at the pace of research about academics and academia.

1.3 Internal context

This study is situated in a medium-sized university within the North West of England. I have worked at the institution for nine years. During this time there have been several large restructures that have moved the university from a faculty model, where several schools, quality assurance and research administration were housed under the faculty, to a school model. The quality assurance and research staff were then moved into central professional services and only school professional services staff remained. These staff support the students within the school and work with academics on assessment boards, student appeals, complaints, and student administration. During this time, several schools have merged to create (at the time

of writing) four large schools. It is within this context that professional services staff have faced a very uncertain time regarding their roles and long-term job security. Several rounds of voluntary redundancies have taken place and the number of school professional services staff has reduced over this time. This has had an impact on the workload of the school administration team and on the academic teams who feel they are now undertaking more administrative duties. During turbulent times, Degn (2018) argues, academics often see professional services staff as the face of managerialism and organisational change. It is frequently the academic managers of schools and faculties who are requesting the change, yet it is the professional services staff who must implement them. On reflection it would have been interesting to understand more from both the professional services staff and the academics about the impact of restructures on their identity, workload, and relationships.

I recently received an email from the Human Resources (HR) department in the university and it referred to non-academic staff and academic staff. I have a relationship with the person who sent the email and felt comfortable replying to them asking if they could use professional services staff in future. I explained using the term 'non-academic' could enhance the job-role divide and describing someone by what they are not can be detrimental to their professional identity. The response I received informed me that HESA used this terminology to measure the number of academic and non-academic staff in an institution and they did not feel it placed professional services lower than academics.

I had not mentioned hierarchy in my email, yet it appears the individual responding believes the academic/professional services divide refers to a hierarchical structure on which professional services staff are lower down in social status, within the university, compared to academics. Following this I received an Athena Swan questionnaire (a survey around gender equality) to complete which also described professional services staff as non-academic. Unfortunately, I did not challenge this at the time. I use these examples to demonstrate the language used in my institution which may add to the feeling of professional services staff being perceived as

subordinate to academics in the terminology used to describe them. Chapter Two covers this in more detail.

1.4 Research aims and questions

The aim of this research is to understand professional services staff perceptions around their professional identity and their relationships with academic staff. I also want to understand how academics perceive their relationships with professional services staff. I felt it was important to get the views of both groups. This case study is based in one academic school within a single university.

I hope that the application of the study will be replicated across the sector to understand more about professional services and their professional identity. I have discussed the range of professional services within higher education, but this study focuses on professional services staff who work closely with academic staff in student and programme administration in an academic school. It does not include central services such as HR, finance, marketing, or estates. I chose to focus on one academic school as I wanted a small in-depth study. I also wanted participants who work closely with academic staff on a daily basis, and I know this is not the case for some central professional services staff.

As I will discuss in the literature review (Chapter Two), there has been little research into professional services staff as an occupational group. The research questions relate to how professional services staff understand their professional identity and the impact their relationship with academic staff may have on their identity. My research questions are as follows:

- How do professional services staff perceive their professional identity?
- How is the identity of professional services staff impacted by their relationships with academics?
- How do academic staff view their relationships with professional services staff?

During the initial Phase B (thesis) process, I completed my research proposal (RD1) which stated my intended research aims and objectives. This document was then sent for academic review. One of the reviewers questioned why I was interviewing the same number of academics as administrators if the thesis was about professional services. In hindsight, this thesis is about both parties and the views on relationships that have come out of it. The final research question asks academics about their relationship with professional services. I felt it was important to get a sense from both groups regarding their relationships. It is not just about professional identity but also a study about the relationships between the two, mediated through a theoretical lens of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). This will be explored further in Chapter Three.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured very simply and is something I have been conscious of when working alongside my colleagues on the doctoral programme. During Phase A, the academic staff who spoke to the cohort talked about using experimental and innovative ways to present work. I know several of my peers are using videos, films, and artefacts to articulate their research. However, I have accepted that my thesis is more traditional, and a simple structure works for the topic.

I have attempted in this introductory chapter to contextualise the study, both from my own perspective and the external and internal environments. I have also articulated my research aims and questions. The following chapter considers the literature surrounding the research area of professional services. It covers the main themes that run through current research. It also explores where my research fits and fills a gap in knowledge and understanding around professional services staff and their relationships with academics. Chapter Three focuses on the methodology and methods employed in the study. I explain the theoretical framework of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) and explore the research approach and methods used. I also discuss the limitations of my approach and examine how important reflexivity is when researching in my own organisation.

The findings and discussion are presented together in Chapter Four. This was a conscious decision to help the reader understand both the outcomes of my research but also where they fit within the context of the literature discussed in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Five I summarise my research findings, explore the validity and limitations of my study, while also discussing the overall implications of my project for both the field of education studies and my own workplace. It also explores the possibility for small changes to be implemented within my own institution. The thesis ends with an exploration of my research journey and the impact that undertaking this study has had on me both personally and professionally.

Chapter 2. Review of the literature relating to the research topic

The introductory chapter gave an overview of the rationale for the research and the research aims alongside the context of the internal and external framework in which this study is grounded. The aim of this chapter is to review the literature surrounding professional services within higher education thematically. The themes discussed are important when focusing on the research aims of this study, which are to understand how professional services staff perceive their professional identity; how, if at all, their relationships with academic staff impact this identity; and how academics view their relationships with professional services. I offer an overview of the main discussions alongside demonstrating the gaps in current research that this study aims to fill. The literature reviewed relates to mostly qualitative studies that focus on professional services and to some extent academic staff. The following chapter will provide an overview of the theoretical framework this research is situated in and covers the research methodology and methods.

2.1 Relationships

There is little research regarding the relationship between academic and professional services staff within higher education. Much of what is available has been written from an academic perspective (Mcinnis, 1998; Allen-Collinson, 2006; Graham and Regan, 2016). The traditional notion of the divide between professional services and academics has been prevalent for many years (Coe and Heitner, 2013). Hobson et al. (2018) argue that academics feel professional services staff do not understand the pressures they face and can be critical of the role professional services undertake, while professional services staff feel that academic staff belittle their role from a perceived position of power. They state 'being a professional or an academic are both a role within a university, and an entrenched identity. These roles are also linked to strongly delineated and prescribed hierarchical relationships' (ibid:316). The silos in which both professional services and academics reside have been around for several years. It appears that a lack of understanding about the roles they both undertake contributes to this challenging relationship.

2.1.1 Difference

Eliot (1908) wrote one of the first books to discuss university administration. In this text he indicates how attractive becoming an academic was and how the burden of work fell to the academic administrator who seemingly enjoyed their work less. He advocates higher wages for administrative staff as they are not offered the same benefits given to those who teach:

> In general the administrative posts in a university are less attractive than the teaching posts, because they do not offer the satisfaction of literary or scientific attainment, the long uninterrupted vacations which teachers enjoy, or the pleasure of intimate, helpful intercourse with a stream of young men with high intellectual ambition. Accordingly, salaries for able and altruistic young men ought to be somewhat higher in administrative posts than they are for men of corresponding age and merit in teaching posts.
>
> (Eliot, ibid:15)

Over a hundred years later, I would argue, times have changed, not least because higher education is no longer limited to just one gender. From my own experience and time in higher education, while most academics still produce research, the stress on both professional services and academics has increased. However, there are still some perceived benefits in being a member of academic staff over those allocated to professional services staff. Whitchurch (2010a:173) writes 'staff without academic contracts may not have the same rights as their academic colleagues in relation to, for instance, intellectual property or study leave'. In spite of her acknowledgement of some of the differences in benefits, Whitchurch (ibid) largely glosses over this difference between professional services and academics and does not examine how this can impact the identity of professional services staff. Allen-Collinson (2007:297) also mentions pay and flexible working hours as benefits associated with academic staff and argues professional services staff are 'represented somewhat of an

underclass within their working environment, at least on dimensions such as pay and conditions, and flexibility of working hours'. Although there are professional services managers who lead departments and are paid well, there is no data to capture the level of salaries unlike academic salaries, which are documented by HESA (*Higher Education Statistics Agency*, 2018). This suggests a divide between the two and a lack of importance in understanding the impact of professional services' roles and salaries. What is also disheartening to me, is that HESA are no longer requiring higher education institutions to report and provide information on what they class as non-academic staff from the academic year 2019/2020 onwards (ibid). This adds to the invisibility of professional services staff and sends a message that they are not important or valuable to institutions. It seems they can be ignored when analysing statistical information on staffing within higher education.

What Eliot (1908) did touch on which remains the same, is the lack of acknowledgement for the work administrative staff undertake. This lack of appreciation can cause concern for professional services staff (Mcinnis, 1998; Seyd, 2000). Gray's (2015) research found school professional services staff are valued by academic staff, this contrasts with central university professional services, where there is less appreciation and more frustration. Gray's (ibid) research indicates academics appreciate their professional services colleagues, at least those who work with them in a school. Yet Mcinnis (1998) and Seyd (2000) state the same professional services staff do not feel appreciated. There appears to be a divide between thought and action.

2.1.2 Recognition of roles

A major contributor to the strained relationship between academics and professional services seems to be a lack of recognition and the latter's seeming invisibility. Szekeres (2004:20) argues in her paper entitled *The Invisible Workers* 'the commonly held view of the administrator as secretary who is at the beck and call of academics … does not capture the complexity of their roles today, the skills required, or the difficulty of where they sit in the organisation'. Over ten years later, not much

appears to have altered, Hobson et al. (2018:316) write ‘academics can be impatient, critical and sometimes contemptuous of the work undertaken by professional staff’. Graham and Regan (2016) agree that professional services staff can feel undervalued but suggest that these feelings are diminishing as the relationships improve between professional services and academics. There appears to be little change in relationships from Szekeres (2004) paper to the later papers of Graham and Regan (2016) and Hobson et al. (2018). This seems to indicate that the change of pace is slow in acknowledging the work undertaken by professional services staff and the recognition of it by academic staff.

While aiming for the same outcomes of successful degree completion, research funding and high student satisfaction, Szekeres (2011) reports this lack of recognition can mean working separately instead of together to achieve these goals. Academics appear to be focused on their specific research area and teaching. Their loyalties lie with their academic area while professional services staff may lean more towards student experience and attainment, than the expansion of knowledge (Seyd, 2000). Feather (2015:327) argues ‘unlike academics, administrators are not specialists in many of the fields that academics are leaders in due to the scholarship or research they undertake on their own chosen subject area’. Feather (ibid) appears to be saying that academics are more important as they create knowledge. I am conscious this is my interpretation of the statement. Again, this comes back to one of the reasons I want to undertake this research, to examine if these feelings are mine alone or shared by other professional services staff.

Seyd (2000) argues that the identity of academic staff is connected to their subject area and is nominally associated with professional titles. In contrast, Seyd (ibid) believes the identity of professional services staff lies with their institution, or their department. This links to Billot's (2010) paper which states that academics can feel challenged when their titles and/or positions of expertise are being questioned, it can feel as if their own professional sense of worth is being threatened. This can be the case when student achievement targets are poor or they have not been able to produce research outputs due to limited time. Billot (ibid:714) argues ‘as institutions

strategise to meet increased competition and changed expectations, academic staff will have to modify their role'. As academic autonomy is threatened, Szekeres (2004) argues this can lead to professional services staff taking the brunt of academic frustration and adds to the lack of value and visibility that professional services resent. These arguments demonstrate an example of why a divide between the two exists. The different priorities of both groups give rise to tensions and this can impact on the behaviour of staff, both professional services and academics.

The frustration that academics feel being challenged and bound to rules and regulations enforced by professional services can lead to this frustration being taken out on the same professional services staff (Allen-Collinson, 2006). As the number of professional services staff grows in the UK (Table 1.) academics can feel their identity being threatened and their work and effort less appreciated (Degn, 2018). Deem (1998:51) writes:

> academics – particularly those in disciplines where they are accustomed to working as autonomous individuals – do not necessarily respond warmly to attempts to erode that autonomy.

Feather (2015) agrees, and argues it is the rise of senior managers across all professional services departments who are responsible for reducing academic autonomy and ensuring conformity with policies derived from the corporatisation of higher education. This frustration then in turn impacts the relationship between professional services and academic staff. Although it is often external agencies such as the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency who are requesting the data, it is the professional services staff who are perceived to be the ones expecting academics to provide it. The misattribution of blame can be seen in this context.

2.1.3 Bureaucratic changes

During the Thatcher government, the 1980s saw higher education increase its managerialist and bureaucratic approach to running institutions, as well as the rise

of the neo-liberal institution, alongside a corresponding rise in administration and management roles (Allen-Collinson, 2006). Radice (2013:407) argues the changes in higher education began with the 'economic, social and political transformations that constituted the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s'. Radice (ibid:408) goes on to state how these changes introduced:

> a particular combination of Stalinist hierarchical control and the so-called free market, in which the values, structures and processes of private sector management are imposed upon the public sector … Meanwhile, the purpose of the university has changed from the education of the elites in business, politics, culture, and the professions to the provision of marketable skills and research outputs to the 'knowledge economy'.

The government requirements for targets, measurements and quality impacts created standardised practices in terms of reporting and an increasing level of bureaucracy that fell on to management (both professional services and academic) to implement (Nixon, 1996; Blaschke et al., 2014). Collini (2012) argues the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a period of expansion without the associated funding, and efficiency became important within higher education. As the higher education sector evolved into a business model and student numbers, targets and research funding increased, academic staff saw their autonomy reduced and administrative roles and management increased (Jones et al., 2012). Readings (1996:36) argues the Thatcher government rewarded those universities with high performance indicators 'this was of course understood as an encouragement to such departments to pull themselves up by their bootstraps'. This appeared to be a threat to funding if performance improvements were not made.

Academics believed their roles were becoming more about meeting targets and administrative work, which encroached on research time and academic identity (Gray, 2015; Degn, 2018; Hobson et al., 2018). When writing about additional metrics being demanded by the UK government, Deem and Baird (2020:218) write, 'UK academics will have less time on their hands to set their own agendas, research or

otherwise'. McCann et al. (2020:434) passionately argue that higher education is becoming 'increasingly autocratic'. They liken it figuratively to the Soviet Union; 'It is ironic … that political control in universities – the nerve centres of the knowledge economy – would become so severe that parallels are drawn with abusive, dishonest, and discredited Soviet management structures' (ibid:434). Rowland's (2008) research indicates that the increase in control being exerted over academic staff with regard to the above has created a culture of compliance which academic staff may distrust. Davis et al. (2016) argue that when professional services staff help implement managerialist policies and monitoring which academics must adhere to, this can fracture the relationship between academic and professional services as well as between professional services staff and their managers, as everyone tries to comply with regulations. This may be part of the reason professional services staff feel unappreciated. There can be a lack of understanding on both sides about the pressures faced by those professional services and academic staff.

2.1.4 School and central professional services

Workload or perceived workload is also a factor in academic and professional services relationships. Gray's (2015) research in Australia found that 82% of academic staff believed their workload was lower due to local (school) professional staff support but that figure reduced to 44% when asked the same question about central professional services. While Gray (ibid) does not elaborate on definitions of local and central, his findings demonstrate an overwhelming majority of academic staff (94%) had confidence in the capabilities of local professional services staff who seemed to understand the pressure academics face. Yet despite Gray's (ibid) findings, Allen-Collinson (2006) argues professional services staff still feel a level of invisibility and a lack of appreciation. It would appear there is a lack of acknowledgement of the value of professional services staff and their work.

From my own experience, there is a marked difference working in an academic school and working in a central professional services environment. Having taken a fifteen-month secondment into a central services department during my EdD, I have more

understanding of this. Academic staff work closely, and in my opinion (for the most part) respectfully, with school administrative staff. They have built up their own relationships, they know the students and the processes and work collaboratively to ensure a student goes from registering on the right programme to passing their assessments and receiving their degree classifications. Yet despite this close working relationship, Mcinnis (1998) argues, there still appears to be a level of frustration on behalf of school professional services staff in how they are treated by their academic colleagues.

2.1.5 Summary

Relationships are complicated between professional services staff and academic staff. As demonstrated, there are a number of factors that can impact the strength of the relationship, including role perception and bureaucratic challenges. The perceived divide and relationships between academics and professional services has been discussed, but while there have been several previous studies focused on the divide between academics and professional services, little has been written about the impact this divide has on professional identity. This study attempts to fill this gap and add to the knowledge and understanding about the importance of the relationships between the two.

2.2 The third space

The concept of the 'third space' has been around for a number of years. Bhabha (2004:2) used the term to describe 'the overlap and displacement of domains of difference'. He describes the space as a place that moves away from singular concepts and calls it an 'in-between spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood' (ibid:2). By enabling hybrid identities to emerge, challenges to the norm appear which allow 'new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (ibid:2). Bhaba argues that the third space can challenge cultural norms by being 'neither the one nor the other' (ibid:37). However, this difference and 'otherness' must be acknowledged to claim its space.

He argues the 'intervention of the Third Space of enunciation … challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenizing' (ibid:54). This links to the idea of challenging the traditional notion of the academic and the administrator. Veles and Carter (2016) describe the third space within higher education as a place where professional services staff and academics work collaboratively together.

The change to the limited literature surrounding the identity of professional services staff in recent years has focused on the rise of the third space professional. The idea of the third space professional in higher education took shape through Whitchurch's research in the early 2000s, and she has written prolifically on the new hybrid staff member (Whitchurch, 2004, 2006, 2008a, 2009b, 2012, 2018).

Whitchurch's research into third space and 'blended professionals' has been very influential within the limited canon of literature around professional services (Bossu et al., 2018). Whitchurch's work (2008a, 2008b, 2017) on the structures and boundaries of professional staff led to the idea of 'bounded', 'cross-bounded' and 'unbounded' working, the extent to which a person has agency when working on projects or areas with academic staff or within an institution. Examples of projects within my institution where academics and professionals services work in conjunction with each other include student induction projects, assessment improvements and retention developments. Whitchurch goes on to state, 'in this space, the concept of administrative service has become reoriented towards one of partnership with academic colleagues and the multiple constituencies with whom institutions interact.' (2008b:378). Although there is partnership working on projects at my institution, outside these projects the status quo of academic and professional services roles remains.

The third space professional's identity is 'described in terms of the spaces they occupy, the knowledges they develop, the relationships they form, and the legitimacies and sources authority that they develop' (Whitchurch, 2017:4). Whitchurch goes on to say that their identity creates the authority and credibility with which they are perceived (ibid). I now identify with and reside in a third space

sphere when I moved into my current role in September 2019. In particular, the idea of a blended professional resonates with me. Whitchurch (2012) describes the third space professional as someone who integrates academic and professional knowledge, is involved in academic debates and is acquiring academic credentials. This is where I feel I am situated at present. The idea of the third space is one that has been used to describe a space that does not fit into the traditional dualism of academia and administration, an area that is not easily accessible or visible on an organisational chart (ibid). I am a prime example of this, my contract sits within the professional services area, yet I am the only professional services member of staff within my institution (that I am aware of) who is managed by an academic.

2.2.1 Who are they?

The early writings of Whitchurch (2006, 2008a, 2008b) talked about third space professionals as those who worked mainly on projects, across disciplines with academic staff. This has now evolved into acknowledging third space professionals exist outside specific projects and timelines. The recent book by Bossu and Brown, (2018) entitled *Professional Support Staff in Higher Education* contains a whole section on third space identity. While each chapter has a different focus, it appears that there is still an identity crisis around third space professionals with Silvey et al. (2018:52) stating 'crossing divides within universities can be a challenging task for third space professionals'. In Gray's (2015) research, he found that academic staff struggled to find examples of professional services working in academic spaces who could be termed as third space professionals. Conversely, academic staff who are working within the third space are perceived to be 'failed academics' (ibid:551). I have found little research into academics who work in the third space, and little evidence of examples of such. However, academic managers who are involved in administration such as target setting and retention work, are stepping into that space.

Educational and academic developers are the main third space professionals covered in Bossu and Brown's book (2018). This is understandable given that

educational/academic developers work alongside academics on teaching, learning and improving pedagogical practices (Bath and Smith, 2004). In fact, Bath and Smith (ibid) argue academic developers are academics by the nature of their work. Within my current institution, they also teach academics on the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice, which illustrates Bath and Smith's arguments (ibid). However, this does leave a gap in the literature about where other third space professionals sit within institutions and how they perceive their identity. This thesis attempts to fill the gap in literature by both my own point of view as a third space professional but also interviewing PSS2 who is a technician and working across both the academic and professional services space.

2.2.2 A response to change?

As the higher education market changes, so too do the demands on the workforce and the third space professional is a response to the transformation of the sector (Veles and Carter, 2016), as professional services staff move across institutional boundaries, from traditional school and student services functions to work on different projects and partnerships. Whitchurch (2009b:407) asserts the traditional career path of the university administrator or academic can be enmeshed to create the blended professional and argues 'identities [are] drawn from both professional and academic domains'. This new hybrid staff member renegotiates the traditional space occupied by either/or and brings together elements of each to create a new professional third space. There is a sense of idealism behind Whitchurch's arguments on third space professionals. From my experience within higher education, the academic developer is one of the very few roles that can be articulated and situated within the third space. Although Johnson et al.'s (2018) research into educational developers argues there is still a debate across the profession about where they sit within the higher education community.

The career path of administrative staff in higher education is no longer a linear trajectory, staff will move across departments, take on secondments and look across institutions and the sector for different roles (Whitchurch, 2009a; Veles et al., 2019).

When moving into third space roles there can be a loss of identity. A feeling of not belonging to either academic or professional services groups (Whitchurch, 2009b; Veles and Carter, 2016). Akerman (2020:127-128) argues 'third space professional staff (and administrators more generally) struggle to access the knowledge, qualifications and experience necessary to continue their career trajectories'. Berman and Pitman (2010) argue professional services staff who have a research background can move into this third space by their qualifications alone. They found staff who have doctorate level qualifications believed it gave them a level of credibility not attained by those without this level of education. One interviewee commented 'the PhD interestingly has given me enormous validity as a manager – it is like I can be trusted more to have a better understanding of the academics' position and needs within the school' (ibid:165). This is echoed by Allen-Collinson's (2007) work on research administrators. One of her participants stated, 'I don't think academics would take me seriously if I didn't have one [a doctorate] because it's part of being on the same level as them… being seen as a serious, qualified person' (ibid:303). The idea of appearing academically credible is one of the reasons I began the EdD programme.

This links to the concept of 'human capital'. Becker (1993:17) argues 'education and training are the most important investments in human capital'. While human resources theory is not in scope here, it appears that along with legitimacy, qualifications also give rise to the increase in human capital and value. Becker (ibid) argues the more highly qualified a person is, the more they will earn and contribute to the economy and their profession. The academic pedigree bestowed on Allen-Collinson's (2007) research subject can be seen in this context. Their increased human capital has given them a sense of credibility.

I identify with Allen-Collinson's (2007) and Berman and Pitman's (2010) research subjects, as working in higher education, particularly in research management, I hope my doctorate will give me the level of respect I feel is awarded to those with this title. This feeling of educational endorsement is echoed in Allen-Collinson's (2006) earlier work on research administrators who felt they were stepping into a dual space, or

the third space, where they are both administrators and managers alongside taking on academic responsibilities. Allen-Collinson's (ibid) research subjects also echo my hope that higher level qualifications will ensure a sense of validity and credibility from my academic colleagues.

2.2.3 Where are they?

The divisions between academic and professional services staff are blurring for hybrid, or blended professionals and their identity is in flux as they adapt to the changing needs of the sector (Whitchurch, 2009b). I would argue however, there is a limited number of staff who could be classed as third space professionals. Many university staff are residing in the area assigned to them by their job role, professional services or academic. As universities adapt and reconfigure their structures, professionals from outside the sector who specialise in finance, marketing, IT and HR are moving into higher education (Middlehurst, 2010). They bring with them private sector experience, expectations, and different management and leadership styles which disrupt the status quo. The corporatisation of education as students become consumers, and targets and costings become ever more important, creates the need for evolving roles and for academics and professional services to work together.

Stoltenkamp et al. (2017) argue third space practitioners cannot just fit into any project as part of a process or to help the academic/administrative divide. It must be a combined desire to see joint working with specific outcomes and achievements. Creating this type of modular working allows professionals to navigate their own way around a project (Whitchurch, 2018). The use of long and short term project work, outreach, secondments, exchanges and professional development can all help professional services staff move into third space arenas and broaden themselves as a blended professional (Whitchurch, 2009a). This has personally worked for me as my experience working in both school and central services on projects and secondments has helped me move into my current third space role.

Despite the increasing amount of literature on third space professionals there seems to be few areas where professional services staff are moving into the third space as evidenced in Gray's (2015) research. Academic developers and research managers, myself included, are part of this space but from my personal experience there still seems to be a fixed space for academic staff and one for professional services staff. As higher education moves further into a business model this may change, and the hybrid professional could become more prominent across institutions.

2.2.4 Summary

Although Bhabha, (2004) has been using the term 'third space' for many years to describe those outside traditional and historical subject positions, the use of this concept within the context of higher education is a relatively recent development. As a result, there still appears to be a lack of understanding about the roles this hybrid professional undertakes. This research looks at the third space from my perspective as a third space professional. I am attempting to navigate the path between being a professional services member of staff and having academic responsibilities. I am yet to understand how achieving this doctorate will impact on my professional identity. The EdD programme and this thesis are an attempt to help me understand how I see my current position and how I move forward within higher education as a third space professional.

2.3 Professionalism

The concept of professionalism and professionals could be the basis for a whole thesis. I felt it was important to include a brief outline of ideas around professional services staff and the concepts and ideas surrounding professionalism within higher education.

2.3.1 Definitions of professionalism

Professionalism has been re-defined over centuries since the term was first used regarding the clergy in Europe in the mid nineteenth century (Cheng, 2009). In 1964 Harold Wilensky published an article in the American Journal of Sociology entitled *The Professionalization of Everyone* (Wilensky, 2016). This article describes the struggles that workers have to be viewed as professionals. The concept of professionalisation in this context is the occupational struggle to be recognised and consolidated into professions with a recognisable identity (Nixon, 1996; Neal and Morgan, 2016). This identity can be created for an individual as part of their role or created by the individual within the parameters of their job (Evans, 2008). Evans goes on to state that professionalism is based around the requirements of a person's profession, not necessarily just a role (ibid). Freidson (2001) argues that professionalism stems from the ideologies of expertise whereas Boyt et al. (2001) espouse professionalism as the attitudes and behaviours exhibited by employees. They argue society expects a certain type of behaviour from members of professions in order to function (ibid). Evans (2008:29) sums up this argument eloquently, arguing there are several layers to professionalism and its enactments; 'Thus one may, for example, distinguish between: professionalism that is *demanded* or *requested*… professionalism that is *prescribed*… and professionalism that is *enacted*' [author emphasis]. What I believe Evans (ibid) is saying with this example, is that professionalism within education comes in different forms, both in terms of behaviour, expectations and exampling. Evans' (2013) paper follows this up and adds a new dimension to the argument around professionalism within education which demonstrates the changes in professionalism from her earlier paper and promotes accountability and performance indicators. This is evidenced within the university sector and within my institution by the reliance on performance metrics and league tables. Both professional services and academics are responsible for improving those metrics.

2.3.2 Professionalism within education

Professionalism within education is changing (Svensson, 2006; Evetts, 2011). Yet the struggle to be recognised as a professional is still ongoing in higher education administration today (Whitchurch, 2006, 2008a). The term professional in relation to professional services staff has evolved over the last twenty years (Nixon, 1996; Whitchurch, 2006; Sebalj et al., 2012). As mentioned above (2.2), when discussing the third space, the corporatisation of higher education has meant a change in the staff profile within the sector and in the UK. Professional services staff have outnumbered academics for several years (Table 1. Introduction). Szekeres (2011) and Bossu et al. (2018) argue the professionalisation of traditional clerical and secretarial services to professional administrators has occurred over the last twenty years alongside the shift within universities to a business model. It is within this context that professional services staff are not just responding to management demands for bureaucratic regulatory requirements but also creating a student experience (Whitchurch, 2018). This can be as part of a school administration team which helps students understand their assessment regulations, leading a student services requirement or supporting student study skills. Professional services staff are an integral part of the university structure. They manage the student journey from recruitment to graduation and university administration is a profession alongside academia.

2.3.3 Professionalising professional services

There is an attempt to professionalise higher education administration through the creation of a professional body, The Association of University Administrators (AUA). It offers membership levels up to Fellow and has an academic postgraduate qualification to give members an opportunity to certify their knowledge and skills. Whitchurch (2006) argues the AUA offers a sense of belonging to administrative staff across the sector. I have been a member for over fifteen years, and a Fellow for over six, recently winning member of the year (2019/2020), and am aware of the opportunities the organisation can offer, including national conferences and chances

to network with peers. However, this does not mean I am not aware of its limitations. Lewis (2014) argues that the AUA is the avenue in which to promote professional behaviours and facilitate a working relationship with academics, which Lewis (ibid:48) refers to as 'Academic Empathy'. I feel this is a somewhat naïve view of both the AUA and its members. In many spaces within my institution, the AUA is seen as an organisation for staff who have management responsibilities and are on comparatively higher grades than most traditional academic administrators in schools and central services. Lewis (ibid) does not state how the AUA should facilitate this academic empathy and while he is clear that he is a supporter of the AUA, he does not elaborate further apart from to say, with which I agree, that the AUA does give a professional body organisation to higher education professionals. However, there is a question as to how effective the AUA is at achieving its aims to help professionalise higher education administration, particularly if it is seen by some as a body for managers rather than all professional services. The AUA has recently undertaken a study on the future of higher education professionals (AUA, 2020). One of the research findings from this study was that over 90% of professional services staff respondents felt their role was going to change in the next five years and support for the redefining of roles and the increased number of non-traditional roles was important (ibid). While the survey does not elaborate on the redefining of roles, I believe more third space roles will emerge in the future.

2.3.4 Higher education professionals

The literature around professionalism within higher education often refers to what I would classify as higher level administrators or managers (Kallenberg, 2015; Linquist, 2018; Whitchurch, 2018). Kallenberg's (2015) research into academic and professional services split third space professionals into two distinct groups, academic middle managers, and educational administrators. Kallenberg (ibid:17) looked at the influence each had within their role and argues 'the academic middle manager experiences more influence than the educational administrator on all processes. The educational administrator could therefore be considered as an assistant to the academic middle manager'. While Kallenberg has differentiated the

academic manager from the professional services administrator, even though he classes both of them as third space professionals, he has also pointed out that it is the academic manager who carries the most power. Lewis (2014) also refers to higher education professionals as those who have some form of management responsibilities and a specialised knowledge. I believe that all staff who work within higher education are higher education professionals, from the estates staff to the Registrar and Chief Operating Officer and it is a disservice to staff within an institution to insinuate only those who manage are professionals.

It is specifically the discussion of professionalism as it relates to all aspects of professional services staff, and not just managerial staff, that is sorely lacking. Szekeres (2004) paper demonstrates a lack of research into administrative staff. Her subsequent 2011 paper discusses the increase of research within this area. While Szekeres establishes a growth around professional services research, much of the research that has thus far been produced focuses on the role of middle and senior management (Szekeres, 2011). Today, that trend continues, as most staff without managerial responsibilities remain invisible to contemporary researchers.

2.3.5 Summary

While my research aims do not explicitly focus on professionalism within higher education, this thesis does attempt to understand the notion of professional identity which links to how professional services are both perceived and perceive themselves. I have also consciously chosen to focus my research on professional services staff who are not high-level managers but constitute the university grades 2-7. This links back to there being a lack of literature around professional services staff who are not high-level departmental managers, and this research will go some way to filling this gap. Professional services staff at grade 7 and above are classed as academic-related within my institution. I mention this as staff at this level get additional benefits than those on lower grades including a different pension scheme and additional annual leave. While it is usual in all businesses for staff to be paid differently based on their role and responsibilities, the contractual differences could add to the divide, not just

between professional services and academics but also between the different levels of professional services.

2.4 Nomenclature

My research focuses on higher education administrators who are under the umbrella term of professional services. The HESA definition also classes other occupations under this term including trades people and caring and leisure occupations (HESA, 2018). In this thesis, the term professional services is used to describe staff who are working in student facing services.

When interrogating the data, HESA (2018) break down the non-academic figures into further classifications and this demonstrates the breadth of professional services roles. However, frustratingly, they do not explain what is meant by each categorisation:

Managers, directors, and senior officials
Professional occupations
Associate professional and technical occupations
Administrative and secretarial occupations
Skilled trades occupations
Caring, leisure and other service occupations
Sales and customer service occupations
Process, plant, and machine operatives
Elementary occupations

Table 2 – HESA Non-Academic Staff Classification

2.4.1 Historical naming conventions

The naming convention for professional services staff has changed over the years and 'professional services' is the current favoured terminology used in the higher education sector (Lauwerys, 2008; Whitchurch, 2008b; Hogan, 2014; Shepherd,

2017). Some institutions use 'professional support' or 'professional support services' (Wallace and Marchant, 2011; Sebalj et al., 2012). In Australia, a sector wide consultation resulted in all universities using the term 'professional staff' (Bossu et al., 2018). The AUA has kept the more old-fashioned 'university administrator' in the name of the association but refers to higher education professionals on its website (AUA, 2016). Understandably, a professional body cannot keep changing its name to keep up with societal changes but given 'professional services' is now recognised as an umbrella term for all staff who work in university administration, then perhaps it is time for the association to think about amending the name.

The use of professional services or professional support is now common across a lot of the sector (Sebalj et al., 2012; Jones, 2018; Szekeres and Heywood, 2018). Within the overarching term of professional services there are numerous roles and titles from administrator to manager, technician to assistant as evidenced by Table 2.

2.4.2 Connotations?

Whitchurch (2006) argues the use of professional services can still have connotations of being a service area, there to meet the needs of others. I would argue that both professional services and academic staff are there to service the needs of their students, within reason, given that students now see themselves as customers paying for a service.

The term 'support' indicates that professional services staff work at universities to provide support. However, there is still the question as to who they are supporting: the students, academics, or the university. This can be misleading to both professional services staff and academics. The view of professional services staff as a secretary who is there to undertake the administrative work of an academic is no longer viable (Szekeres, 2004). The change in nomenclature is an attempt to demonstrate this. Given the rise in research into the third space sphere, Whitchurch (2018) argues that the terminology and definitions of professional services and academics may soon become outdated. However, I would argue that the history and

identity tied up with academics and their space is, in my opinion, too entrenched to alleviate itself of its naming convention.

The term 'non-academic' is used consistently in higher education to define staff who do not teach, this can include programme administrators, HR and finance staff, cleaners, porters and technicians (Conway, 2000; Gornitzka and Larsen, 2004; Sebalj et al., 2012). De Sousa (2018) states 'one might argue that the reason the term non-academic is used is because of the breadth of types of staff that operate in HE, and that it's just easier to say over any other term' (online). He then goes on to say though, given the diverse range of staff, this is lazy labelling. 'Othering' professional services staff as outside the norm echoes the work of Brekhus (2008) and Allen-Collinson (2009) who argue that 'othering' and using the label 'non' can be associated with exclusion and the 'norm' being perceived as the privileged group. Brekhus (2008) uses the marked/unmarked framework to demonstrate othering. He argues it is useful as a way of 'expressing the asymmetrical relationship between identities … and those identities that are treated as distinct from the norm' (ibid:1062). Brekhus (ibid) references Allen-Collinson's (2006) work to illustrate how this framework can be used not only for race, class and gender but also for occupational groups, such as staff within higher education. Professional services staff are seen as the other to the normative academic staff who are often at the forefront of an institution.

Both Szekeres (2011) and Sebalj et al. (2012) agree that defining staff as what they are not can lead to negative implications, frustration and identity issues. Gornall (1999) argues this can also be seen as a class issue, 'the distinctions are telling reflections of the British class system, implying as they do unequal value and differences in perceived status' (ibid:44). The perceptions on how academics and professional services staff are different is obvious when using the generic terms of each group. By using naming conventions that denigrate the importance of the role professional services play within an institution, it can devalue that contribution. According to Simpson and Fitzgerald, (2014) the idea of being 'less than' suggests that professional services staff do not have as valuable a contribution to make as academic staff to the university.

Melling's (2018) research into job titles found that even the terms administrators and coordinators were contested by professional services staff as they did not accurately portray their role and undervalued their contribution. Although the term non-academic is becoming less common in the UK (Sebalj et al., 2012), a 2016 paper from a South African University uses the term to describe all staff who are not academics (Davis et al., 2016). While international terminology is not the purview of this paper, it is interesting to note that nomenclature is different across the globe for professional services. The most similar countries to the UK in terms of university structures and terminology are The United States of America and Australia (Whitchurch, 2009b). As mentioned, Australia has changed its terminology to reflect the modern professional services structures within the country (Bossu et al., 2018). The United States has a very different structure and nomenclature for its professional administration staff that reflects a more blended approach to administration and academia with the two often mixing. In the case of the USA, senior management are often referred to as 'academic administrators' (Whitchurch, 2009b; Bossu et al., 2018).

2.4.3 'Other' professional services

Gornall (1999) and Simpson and Fitzgerald (2014) argue the nomenclature changes to professional services has differentiated the work of student administration from HR and finance and those who work in general student facing services such as programme administration and student services. While HR and finance staff are still referred to as professional services within my current university, it appears that they may think of themselves as separate to professional university administrators. As a member of the AUA, a professional body which represents university administrators and managers across the UK and worldwide, I speak to different departments across the university about the benefits of membership. It is interesting that all professional services who have a 'profession' such as HR, finance, marketing, and estates, are not interested in joining the AUA as they align themselves with their professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA). The professional services

staff who work in HR and finance see themselves as HR and finance professionals who happen to work in higher education as opposed to someone like me who sees myself as a professional higher education manager.

2.4.4 Summary

Nomenclature within higher education appears important to professional services staff according to previous studies on the changing dynamics of professional services. Nomenclature has played a key role in delineating workplace identities. This research will attempt to understand if the terminology used within higher education has an impact on the professional identity of professional services staff. The findings will add to the debate around the use of 'non-academic' and aim to influence naming conventions within my own institution.

2.5 Identity

Identity is a complex topic. Hall (1996:4) writes 'identities are constructed within, and not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices'. It is within the world of higher education that I am attempting to understand more about professional identities. The following chapter will discuss Holland et al.'s (1998) work on identity formation and situate it within the context of higher education.

There has been much written about academic identity within the world of higher education (Henkel, 2005, 2010; Winter, 2009; Billot, 2010; Trede et al., 2012; White et al., 2014; Feather, 2015) but it is only over the past few years that more research has been produced about professional services identity within the sector (Whitchurch, 2006, 2008a; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2010; Lewis, 2014; Linquist, 2018; Akerman, 2020). Whitchurch is one of the most prolific researchers on the identities and changing roles of professional services within higher education (Whitchurch, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2018).

Over the past fifteen years there has been a shift from looking at the work that professional services staff undertake and how it services academics and the institution, to how professional services themselves are becoming a more clearly defined workforce and are also moving from specific and defined roles to more blended professionals. Botterill (2018:91) writes 'staff span organisational boundaries and work in blended capacities'. Brown et al. (2018) add to this argument by describing the various roles that professional services now undertake, including IT, academic support and student recruitment and marketing. Within my current institution, some roles have elements of all these areas.

Professional services staff are now expected to work across different areas. Jones (2018:231) argues that 'what has been created is a complexity of parallel lines of authority (for academic and administrative and professional staff) with little change in position'. The changes in higher education over the past thirty years, (as mentioned in the Introduction), have led to an identity crisis for many of the professionals who work in the sector (Henkel, 2010). The traditional academic identities are breaking down as academic boundaries are dissolving and restructures and respacing of staff takes place (Henkel, ibid). Whitchurch (2008b, 2009b, 2012) argues that new spaces and professional boundaries are being created, which are changing the nature of existing staff roles, to create blended professionals who merge the traditional academic and professional services roles.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter (2.2), while there is an increase in literature focusing on the changes to professional services and the move into a third space area, this is not the reality for many university professional services staff, including those in my current institution, and my peers across the sector. From my experience, professional services staff still feel like their identity is based around university administration work. They rarely get involved with projects (through lack of opportunity) with academics or work in areas where there are opportunities to become a more blended professional. Again, I think much of this has to do with the level at which administrative staff are working. In higher levels of management there appears to be more opportunities to work across the university, but there seems to

be limited scope to undertake work in mixed teams of both professional services and academics.

While academic staff have a loyalty and identity around their subject area, professional services staff identities are related to their specific roles, such as student administration, HR or finance, many of which have their own professional body, creating a sense of cohesion (Whitchurch, 2010b). The additional identification for staff also centres around their location within the university. Whitchurch (2006) argues central services staff have more affinity with the university and see themselves as professional administrators, while school staff see themselves as academic administration. This idea resonates with me as over the past nine years within my institution I have undertaken three different roles, school manager, head of events and conferences (fifteen-month secondment) and research manager. These roles have been based in a school, a central services department, and a research space within a school. My identity has changed alongside these roles. Within a school, I was much more aligned with the school requirements and demands, often seeing central services as responsible for perceived failures. Within the events role, there was often blame placed on school professional services staff for not adhering to deadlines etc. and within my current role as research manager, there can be frustration with both the school and central services.

2.5.1 Relationships and identity

Given the literature around the identity of professional services staff (Whitchurch, 2006, 2007, 2012; Henkel, 2010; Szekeres, 2011; Hobson et al., 2018) it is surprising there has not been more research into how the working relationship between academic staff and professional services can effect this identity. Mcinnis (1998) noted that there has been little systematic research into university professional services staff. While Mcinnis' paper was published over twenty years ago, the increase has not been on the scale of research into academic identity. The early work focusing on professional identities began in the mid-2000s and focused on professionalising administrators through development and skills (Whitchurch, 2017).

As a result, this thesis is an attempt to rectify this omission and add to the current research around professional services staff relationships with academics and the impact this can have on their professional identity. As mentioned, much of the research relating to professional identity within higher education, relates to academic identity (Hatcher et al., 1999; Henkel, 2005; Billot, 2010; Trede et al., 2012; Tomkins and Nicholds, 2017). Trede et al. (2012) undertook a literature review of professional identity development within higher education and focused purely on academic staff. Papers such as this are important but when focused on one element of higher education, i.e. those who teach and research, this can theoretially lead to a lack of focus on other areas such as professional services staff. One element that seems consistent across the literature is the idea that within the constant restructuring of universities, (all interviewees in my case study had just been through a recent restructure) the support and working relationship individuals have with others is an influencing factor on their identity (Winter, 2009; White et al., 2014). I hope to add to this work by understanding a little bit more about identity within the working relationships of professional services and academics.

2.5.2 Imposter syndrome

The idea of the 'imposter phenomenon' is something with which I connect because it refers to 'an internal experience of intellectual phoniness' (Clance and Imes, 1978:241). In the case of women, the imposter phenomenon often appears as 'a strong belief that they are not intelligent; in fact they are convinced that they have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise' (ibid:241). This resonates with me as my career in higher education started by accident, and while I feel I want to spend the rest of my working life in the sector, I have no real ambition to reach a certain level. I believe I am in the position I am in today by accident and being in the right place at the right time. At no point do I put it down to the skills and knowledge I have built up over my time in the sector. Being rejected for a senior role a year ago indicated to me I had not achieved enough and was not intelligent or experienced enough to warrant such a position at that level.

The concept of imposter syndrome is prevalent within higher education and professional services staff can be more affected by this due to the idea that administration is generalised and can be given to anyone (Parkman, 2016). This feeling of being replaceable (although not the only manifestation of imposter syndrome) is discomforting and as many higher education institutions are in flux, it can be difficult to picture a long-term career and create a professional identity within the sector. Clance and Imes, (1978) argue it is also predominantly a phenomenon which impacts women.

There is little research into imposter syndrome specifically within higher education (Parkman, 2016; Akerman, 2020) but what is available suggests both academics and professional services staff can suffer from feelings of unworthiness and invisibility. Akerman (2020) suggests that third space professionals often feel invisible across their institution due to the diverse and sometimes transitory nature of their work. Veles et al. (2019) argue the opposite and refer to the increase in literature surrounding the third space to demonstrate how increasingly common third space professionals are within the higher education sphere. This is not something that I have witnessed in my current institution and I agree with Akerman (2020) whose research indicates very little acknowledgement of this area within higher education establishments.

This is not to say that only third space professional staff feel a sense of imposter syndrome, or that all academics or professional services staff do, however, it is important to acknowledge that a sense of invisibility can impact the professional identity of those staff that suffer from this phenomenon, myself included.

2.5.3 Summary

Identity is many faceted and I have attempted to demonstrate the dearth of literature regarding professional services staff and their identity. What has been published does not focus on the impact academic relationships can have on professional services staff identity.

I mentioned imposter syndrome as this is something I suffer from. Given the scarcity of literature surrounding this concept and professional services, I wonder if this is common among professional services staff. I recently presented some of this research at the AUA conference in March 2021 and several professional services staff contacted me after the session to say that the idea resonated with them. While this research does not focus on imposter syndrome it is something that needs further investigation. I wanted to mention it in this review of the literature as a concept I am aware of and which may impact some of my participants.

2.6 Chapter summary

By considering the themes in the literature, I have attempted to set the foundation and situate my study within the context of current debates regarding professional services staff. The areas outlined within this chapter demonstrate the focus of research into professional services. I have highlighted what I perceive to be the gaps within this literature; the lack of focus on how relationships with academic staff impact the professional identity of professional services staff, the limited focus on anyone outside academic developers as third space professionals and the impact of naming conventions on professional identity. The aim of this research is to understand how professional services staff perceive their professional identity and how, if at all, their relationship with academic staff impacts this identity. This will help add knowledge to the current literature around professional services.

The literature identified in this chapter links to the academic work that has been undertaken into professional services. This chapter provides the framework within which my empirical data can be considered. The following chapter will outline my theoretical framework of figured worlds by using Holland et al.'s (1998) text *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds.* This gives a novel theoretical lens through which to view the relationship between professional services staff and academics. I consider the theoretical underpinning for the basis of this study and detail my methodological approach. This then leads onto Chapter Four, which thematically analyses the data and refers to the literature and context I have discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3. Methodological approach

This chapter describes the theoretical perspectives within which I situate my research. It then describes the methodological approach I took, including the design of the research, the methods I used and how the data was analysed. I also offer some potential issues and limitations with the methodological choices I have made.

3.1 Theoretical perspective

I am interested in the way in which higher education and my own institution functions as several different worlds merge and clash. The academic world, the world in which professional services staff reside and the overlapping of these are my focus. I chose to utilise what Holland et al. (1998) call 'figured worlds' as a conceptual framework in which to investigate the sociocultural concepts of space, self-authoring, and identity in practice.

3.1.1 Figured worlds

Holland et al. (1998:52) describe figured worlds as:

> A socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others.

The culturally constructed world of academia is historical, and identities have been developed over a long period of time. However, I would suggest that these identities are constantly in flux due to the ever-changing nature of academia. Holland intimates that identities have been established during the evolution of higher education, and argues 'in the world of academia, being verbally aggressive may be a sign of high status and position' (ibid:131). While this statement can be considered a generalisation, identities of both academic and professional services staff have developed organically as the system evolved. For Holland 'identities are enacted and

produced, and individuals take up positions in accordance with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference, and entitlement, social affiliation and distance' (ibid:127). If the identities of professional services and academic staff are positioned in terms of power dynamics, is this why I perceive professional services to be both in a different figured world, but also below the academic figured world in terms of hierarchy?

Christie et al. (2020:204) describe figured worlds as a way to engage with the socially constructed worlds in which we find ourselves:

> Figured Worlds is a socio-cultural theory that seeks to create a model for analysis and interpretation of social worlds that engages with how individuals and collectives respond to their cultural and material circumstances.

The concept of figured worlds allows me to understand where I fit in the figured worlds of higher education, in particular within my institution, and how I can navigate my position within these worlds.

Holland et al.'s (1998) concept of figured worlds and identity-making can be used to explore the constructed world of higher education and the identities of those who reside in this space, they argue; 'People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are' (ibid:3). This statement is pertinent to me in my work environment as I attempt to negotiate a professional identity. I believe I have the autonomy to make decisions, but then my role can be undermined by academics who dismiss what I advise. Does this mean I have false autonomy, or does it confirm what I suspect that, my opinions are perceived to be less valid when it comes to academic decisions? As Holland et al. (ibid:41) state:

> Figured worlds are socially organised and reproduced; they are like activities in the usual, institutional sense. They divide and relate participants (almost as roles), and they depend

> upon the interaction and the intersubjectivity for perpetuation.

My role as a member of professional services both literally and figuratively separates me from the figured world of academia and as a result I see myself as separate, although I work within it and across it. It is this sense of straddling two worlds that can create uncertainty about where I belong.

The figured world of higher education, where Hobson et al. (2018) state academics are perceived to reside in ivory towers and professional services do not understand their academic priorities, can be seen in this context. While I believe I have created my own identity in the nine years I have been at my present institution, I feel that I have been constrained by the figured world of higher education and the hierarchy it has created within its culture. However, Williams (2011:132) argues 'social spaces can allow or even require … a means to challenge – or even create anew'. He appears to be saying that worlds can create space to challenge the social norms and self-created rules. I hope to do this by pushing at the professional services boundaries within that figured world.

Holland et al. (1998) use Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' and 'field' to explore the power structures and figured worlds within large organisations, such as universities. Bourdieu (1998:81) argues the habitus is a:

> socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world – a field – and which structures the perception of that world as well as actions in that world.

Holland et al. (1998:57-58) explain 'imagined acts, courses and places of action, actors, and even the whole figured world take on an element of rank and status according to this relational hierarchy'. This links to the traditional notion of the academic and professional services divide and hierarchy. Rowlands (2018:1824) uses Bourdieu's ideas on capital to differentiate between academic staff and university management 'Bourdieu uses academic capital to describe the power wielded by

senior management within universities, which he contrasts with intellectual capital generated and possessed by practising academics'. Using this argument, professional services staff (who are not senior managers) are perceived to be lacking in both academic and intellectual capital and therefore unable to move into an academic or management space. Crossley (2014) in his work on Bourdieu and social spaces argues a lack of capital divides society, or in this case the socially constructed world of higher education. Holland et al. (1998) also use the theories of Bakhtin and Vygotsky to illustrate their arguments over the social construction of figured worlds.

By engaging with the dialogic and developmental framework of Bakhtin and Vygotsky respectively, Holland et al. (ibid) aim to build upon and move beyond two central approaches – the culturalist and the constructivist – to understand people's actions and possibilities. The culturalist position sees behaviour as something that follows the culturally constructed world which surrounds us, the constructivist believes language and behaviour is related to the status, power, and positionality one has and is surrounded by (ibid). Bakhtin's idea of 'dialogism', whereby we as individuals hold several ideas and perspectives and the interactions of these, puts both culturalist and constructivist ideas into this framework (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland et al., 1998). Bakhtin uses the concept of 'dialogism' to explore language as an interplay of both the subject's own voice and that of other's, meaning language cannot be individualistic and all utterances and actions have meaning. He uses the term 'double-voiced' to explain our internal dialogue, 'the ambiguity of double-voiced discourse is internally dialogized, fraught with dialogue … what is more, double-voicedness is never exhausted in these dialogues' (Bakhtin, 1981:330). I am interpreting Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism to mean that the language we use, and our voice is never our own, it is made up of those around us, whose ideas, and thoughts we internalise, albeit subconsciously at times. This links to Holland et al.'s (1998) concept of figured worlds, whereby we build a part of our identity based on the social and cultural positions in the figured worlds within which we operate. Vygotsky's use of semiotic mediation also interests Holland et al. (ibid), in terms of how this mediation assigns meaning to an object. An example of this is seen in higher education. By assigning a title of academic or administrator to a person, they become affiliated with the historic

construct of the title and expected behaviour. All job roles have titles and assumed identities which are associated with those titles. These titles are not transhistorical, rather they become part of an evolving scope of meaning and significance that slowly changes as they are passed on to each new generation of workers in higher education.

3.1.1.1 Identity

Figured worlds revolve around identity and the formation of the many identities we are assigned by others and ourselves. Social constructivism, within which identity is a construct formed between people and subject to social, historical and cultural factors, is an important part of the many figured worlds that inhabit education (Holland et al., 1998; Robinson, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Urrieta, 2007a; Choudry and Williams, 2017).

Holland et al.'s (1998) text concentrates on identity and how we come to understand ourselves through the different worlds in which we reside, whether at work, at home, with friends or family. It also focuses on how we relate to ourselves and others both within and outside of the figured worlds in which we live. Holland et al. (ibid) describe identity as a concept that combines a personal world with cultural and social space. It is how we as individuals become involved in the world around us, create new relationships, and move around the worlds we inhabit.

Positional identity relates to the mundane and power relations in day-to-day activity (ibid). The idea of identity and positionality within figured worlds appeals as it fits within the world of higher education and is used within educational research (Hatt, 2007; Urrieta, 2007b; Solomon et al., 2016; Bennett et al., 2017). Looking at identity through the lens of figured worlds enables me as a researcher to try and understand how the relationship professional services staff have with academic staff (who inhabit a different figured world) may impact their identity. An identity that has, in part, been socially constructed for professional services staff before they start at an institution.

Gray (2015) argues the nomenclature around professional services within higher education appears to matter more to professional services staff than academics, who have a clear sense of their professional identity. Although as someone who now straddles an academic and professional services role, there are elements to my current position which are outside this social construction. It is the professional services aspect that I feel 'othered' by and perhaps more so as I am working alongside academic staff daily. Again, this desire to be part of the academic sphere is a perception on my part to be integrated into the academic world, but I am not an academic. While I have some academic duties, such as leading a module and being a personal tutor, I am on a professional services contract and work primarily as a research manager.

The frustration of this 'otherness' is something I believe is important. As discussed in the literature review (2.4), nomenclature matters to staff and describing someone by what they are not can have an impact on their identity. Particularly when I and other colleagues hold similar or higher qualifications than some academic staff. I think this is one of the reasons I strive to have the title of 'Doctor', so I am recognised by academics as one of them but also, so I have the ability to move across into a different figured world if I desire, one I believe I already straddle. If I want to move further into the world of academia, I need to obtain academic credibility. I am still not sure what academic acknowledgment of my doctorate will look like or if I will be viewed any differently by them, but I think I will see myself as having more academic standing with an academic title in front of my name.

I believe I have created my own identity in the nine years I have been at my present institution. Holland et al. (1998:5) describe identity as 'important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds and new ways of being'. They use the idea of 'improvisation' to demonstrate the agency their subjects have, regardless of the situation; 'Even within grossly asymmetrical power relations, the powerful participants rarely control the weaker so completely that the latter's ability to improvise resistance becomes irrelevant' (ibid:277). While I am not comparing myself to living in a caste system as some of Holland et al.'s (ibid) subjects are, higher

education seems to have a hierarchicial structure. Perhaps my improvisation to gain more agency within this system is to undertake a doctorate and hope that this will give me more confidence in my identity as a third space professional.

While the ideas behind this thesis began from my own identity crisis, the aim is to understand to what extent my figured world is shared by others in my own professional context, i.e. professional services staff within the school. I want to understand from where they derive their professional identity and what impacts it.

Straddling both worlds has made me question my current identity and how I see myself as a third space professional. However as Williams (2011) argues these worlds can create space to challenge the social norm and self-created rules, and begin to self-author a different type of identity. This thesis goes someway in helping me do this.

3.2 Methodological approach

I am drawn to the interpretivist framework as it will enable me to understand my participants' perspectives through the interpretation of their experiences and reality. Interpretivism takes a specific ontological and epistemological stance. By asserting my preference for the interpretivist paradigm, I am viewing my research through a specific ontological (constructivism) and epistemological (interpretivism) standpoint. Bryman (2016:29) explains:

> Constructionism is an ontological position … that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are constantly being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena are not only produced through social interactions but are in a constant state of revision.

Morrison (2002:19) states, 'For an interpretivist there cannot be an objective reality which exists irrespective of the meanings human beings bring to it'. Interpretivism argues that there is not one truth and reality is subjective and interpreted by

individuals dependent on their circumstances, backgrounds and experiences (Lather, 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (2000b:21) write about the multiple types of interpretivist paradigms, including constructivism, which fits with how I view my research ontologically and epistemologically:

> The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures.

The interpretative paradigm of research is where I feel most comfortable and is used often in social science research (Bryman, 2016). It also links well with the theoretical framework of figured worlds, as it gives what Geertz (2001:311) refers to as 'an interpretive… search of meaning'. I want to understand more about the relationship between professional services and academics and how this represents (or not) my interpretations and experiences.

The interpretivist paradigm traditionally uses qualitative research methods to discover the views and experiences of the research participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000a; Punch, 2016). It seeks to understand the subject's own experiences, actions and lived situations (Weaver and Olson, 2006; Cohen et al., 2011). This understanding then enables the researcher to consider their behaviour and action because of these experiences (Hay, 2011; Punch, 2016). Punch (ibid) argues the ontological and epistemological viewpoint of the researcher determines their choice of paradigm alongside how they approach and conduct their research.

There is an argument that interpretivism can be extremely subjective. The researcher has to acknowledge the difficulty in this and accept that the research is interpreting the actor's purpose, situation and voice (Schwandt, 2000). I am overtly aware that I am carrying out insider research. I need to be conscious at all times of my positionality, that of my research subject and the potential of contamination of data.

When thinking about the type of research I wanted to undertake, I was always aware of my preference for qualitative research methods and being able to ask questions to try and understand a subject's point of view and thoughts about a topic. This links to my preference for an interpretivist approach. To understand the experiences of others, I believe qualitative research can be used to give participants a voice in which to articulate their experiences and their interpretations of them. I undertook qualitative research for my MBA, and this worked well when attempting to understand how my participants felt about their role within an institution. Miller and Glassner (2016:52) state, qualitative research, in particular interviews, helps 'provide access to social worlds, as evidence of 'what happens' within them and of how individuals make sense of themselves, their experiences and their social world'. The idea of understanding the world around us and our position within it links back to using figured worlds as a theoretical framework for my research.

3.2.1 Reflexivity

Undertaking and examining research and practice in an organisation where I work can have challenges. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) explore the concerns that can arise both from the researcher and the organisational perspective, including a distance required from researcher to subject. I have been part of the organisation for nine years. I know many of the academic and professional services staff and I am aware of the staff who are resistant to research-driven change and those who will embrace it. I know who will want to work with me to help improve the staff experience and those who will look out for their own interests and not want to engage with something that may challenge their status quo.

I believe I am what Greene (2014:2) refers to as 'researcher and researched'. As an insider researcher, I am researching within my own institution about an area I am part of, and which impacts me. Although there can be challenges in researching within your own organisation, Chavez (2008) argues that it can come with advantages such as insider knowledge, ease of access and insight into language. This section

demonstrates my acknowledgement of the issues of insider research and how I have attempted to minimise bias and ensure validity.

I have benefited from the relationships I have with my participants, both in terms of access but also with the confidence it has given me in undertaking interviews with people I know. Although I was apprehensive at first about possible asymmetrical power dynamics within the interviews with academics, I did not feel this was the case and all the interviews were conducted within what I believe to be standard interviewer/interviewee relationships, I do not feel my positionality or that of the participant was a concern.

The challenge with interviewing can be the bias that a researcher has which can be evidenced in the questions being asked (Wragg, 2002). In fact, contamination can start, as Holstein and Gubrium (2016) state with the interview setting, and choice of participants. As a result, Holstein and Gubrium (ibid:79) continue, an interviewer needs to 'carefully consider what is said in relation to how, where, when and by whom narratives are conveyed, and to what end'. However, this does not mean that insider research is invalid through bias or prejudice but that it must be acknowledged. Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (2001:30) famously stated:

> I have never been impressed by the argument that, as complete objectivity is impossible in these matters (as, it is, of course), one might as well let one's sentiments run loose. As Robert Solow has remarked, that is like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer.

By acknowledging I am part of the organisation and an insider, this enabled me to have some distance in terms of the questions. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) state that a researcher needs to acknowledge their position and how close they are to the research and subjects. Failure to acknowledge one's position may result in an assumption of knowledge and a lack of questioning participants. I have also attempted to acknowledge the range of views portrayed by my participants. This is important as Cohen et al. (2011:540) state:

> Since data and interpretation are unavoidably combined (the double hermeneutic), the subjective views of the researcher may lead him or her being over selective, unrepresentative, and unfair… in the choice of data and interpretation placed on them.

As a professional services member of staff, it is important that I choose narratives that evidence the whole range of responses and opinions, even when I may not agree with them or they do not lend themselves to the current research.

I am very conscious of being an insider researcher. I am asking questions of both professional services and academics from a school that I work in and who all know me. They could perceive my research as already biased due to the fact I am a member of professional services and am undertaking interviews around the professional identity of professional services staff. Gibbs' (2008) discusses reactivity and the influence the researcher, a question or even body language could have on a participant. He goes on to argue that participants may respond to questions 'based on how they want to see themselves' (ibid:695). In the case of this research, it could also be that participants answered questions based on how they wanted to be perceived by a member of professional services, or by someone they work alongside. Teusner (2016) states that with a clear methodology and clarity regarding how data is collected and analysed, validity concerns can be alleviated. In this chapter I have attempted to be clear on all my processes to justify the choices I have made and acknowledge my positionality.

Concerns over the role and control of an interviewer has increased the focus on the voice of the interviewee and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Chavez, 2008). Chavez (2008:474) believes 'a researcher is co-participant as she/he positions her-/himself in relation to participants, and participants position themselves in relation to how a researcher is perceived or behaves'. During the interviews I attempted to make sure I was not reactive to anything the interviewees said in an attempt not to influence them. Buscatto (2016) argues that insider research can be rigorous and systematic, she believes that by

being reflexive, the researcher acknowledges they are part of the world they are studying. I addressed this concern by acknowledging my position to all my interview participants. I explained that while I am a member of professional services, the interview was relating to their experiences with academics/professional services and my positionality should not be a factor in what they wanted to say or how they felt. I also made it clear that the interview was confidential, and no one would be named or identified within the thesis. I emphasised confidentiality not just around names of participants but also around any views or opinions that were shared. I had to have the complete trust of my participants to get honest responses from them. I offered them the option to review the transcription to ensure I conveyed their views accurately, although no one took me up on the offer. With these actions I have attempted to limit the reactivity of all participants, although I acknowledge it is impossible to reduce it entirely.

As I am interested in how the relationship with academics impacts the identity of professional services staff, it may be that some academics did not want to be seen in a negative light and may have only presented positive ideas of professional services staff. I was conscious of this during questioning, although on reflection when analysing the data this did not seem to be an issue. I was also conscious during the analysis to not just identify responses and themes that would validate my thoughts going into this research, namely, that academic staff did not have a high opinion of professional services and the relationship between the two parties could be improved.

3.2.2 Case study

The use of a case study was based on focusing my research questions on a school within a particular institution. While all higher education institutions are structured slightly differently, they encompass schools, departments, or faculties in which academics teach, and professional services undertake the administration. There is also an element of centralised professional services administration. I would like to assume the findings of this research might offer insights to the situation across the

sector. Yin (2018) argues case studies are useful when trying to understand a social phenomenon, why such a phenomenon exists, and are used extensively in educational research. Writing on research methodology examines how case studies can be undertaken to explore contested and complex areas of social phenomena even though the research may be situated in a wider social context (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2018). Given that I wanted to focus on understanding and exploring experiences and interactions, rather than measuring or quantifying them, case studies are a tool that allow open questions and the chance to gather rich data to gain an in-depth understanding within a limited context (Stake, 2000; Bassey, 2002; Yin, 2018). Using a case study to examine the concept and social construction of the academic/professional services relationship that has developed over the years to understand a small aspect of it (professional identity) will hopefully help staff work together in a more collegiate way.

There are limitations to case study research as there are with all forms of research. While there are questions raised over the ability to generalise from a case study (Cohen et al., 2011; Bryman, 2016), Yin (2018) states that although it is not simple, the case study should be replicable and the findings may be used, in the same way that experiments are, to lead to the generalisation of theory. Yin (ibid) uses the term 'analytic generalisation' to argue the value of case study research. He describes analytic generalisation as a concept which identifies a case study as 'the opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles' (ibid:38). He argues further research and theoretical concepts can use case study research and add to it; 'studies are likely to strive for generalizable findings or lessons learned – that is, analytic generalizations – that go beyond the setting for a specific case' (ibid:38). I feel making a generalisation based on the outcome of one case study with limited participants could be questionable. However, higher education has many similar traits, and case study research could lead, in this context, to the broadening of a general theory or to offer others involved in this field insights into the phenomenon under scrutiny. In this case the relations between professional services and academic staff in higher education.

3.3 Methods

Interviewing is one of the oldest research techniques in the social sciences and is useful in education to understand more about relationships (Wragg, 2002). Charles Booth in 1886 developed social interviewing and ethnographic observations as a way to understand the social and economic conditions of people living in London (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Interviews are a valuable research method to understand what Cohen et al. (2011) believe are participant's interpretations of the world in which they occupy. We currently live in what Fontana and Frey (2000) refer to as an interview society, where interviews as qualitative research are not passive activities gaining information from one person to another but an active interaction which creates contextual based results. They (ibid:646) argue that interviewing is now common among qualitative and quantitative researchers as both:

> tend to rely on the interview as the basic method of data gathering, whether the purpose is to obtain a rich in-depth experiential account of an event … or to garner a simple point on a scale of 2-10 dimensions.

Miller and Glassner (2016) believe interviewing has the ability to explore experiences and phenomena in depth, and to obtain data which allows the researcher an improved understanding of these experiences. They argue the narratives which emerge from interviews are situated in social (figured) worlds which exist outside of the interview itself (ibid). By undertaking qualitative interviews, I hoped to get a sense of the figured worlds within which the participants reside, and their feelings about their position and relationships. Qualitative interviews usually involve a small number of participants and an informal pattern of questioning. Interviewers usually have a prepared set of questions to use as a guide and try to encourage interviewees to speak personally about their experiences (Silverman, 2013).

I felt it was important to speak to staff in the school to get their personal experiences. I did not want to use questionnaires as the richness of the personal experience can be lost in completing a form. It does not give opportunities to prompt further to

understand more about a situation and how a person felt. I also believe people feel more comfortable and are more honest when sitting down with an interviewer. It enables them to understand the reasoning behind the research and how this may benefit themselves as well as the researcher. This is also why I chose not to use focus groups. I wanted interview participants to feel comfortable in being honest and not feel pressure to respond in a certain way or be swayed by other participants.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

There are different types of interview formats. Structured interviews can be useful when the researcher is aware of what they do not need to know and is able to frame questions that will supply the required knowledge. Unstructured interviews, however, are useful when the researcher is not aware of what they do not know and relies on respondents to fill this knowledge gap (Cohen et al., 2011). McIntosh and Morse (2015) argue that there is a level of quantification with a semi-structured interview, by asking the same questions in the same order, it has a structure that can be quantified. However, semi-structured interviews can also be used in the interpretivist paradigm, where the interviewee is the knower, the one with the knowledge that the researcher wants to understand and expand on (ibid). Wragg (2002) believes semi-structured interviews are favoured by most educational researchers as it gives participants the opportunity to answer questions freely but also gives a sense of structure to prevent moving away from the interview topic in an unhelpful way. Regardless of a sense of structure or order in which interviews are constructed and administered, Holstein and Gubrium (2016) argue that there is an interactional exchange between the interviewer and interviewee which creates what they term an 'active' interview. This active, interactional format needs to be factored in when analysing the data. The semi-structured nature of my interviews, and the ability for my participants to expand the discussion, created an active interview which gave me insight into their thoughts and ideas. It also enabled them to ask questions of me which gave me an opportunity to explain more about my research. I did this following the interview to not add bias into their responses.

I chose to use semi-structured interviews, so I had a base with which to start the conversation, but it was open enough to lead into different areas depending on the interviewee. I also brought prompts into the interview in case an interviewee struggled with a question or I wanted to get more information from them. The interview questions are attached in Appendices C and D.

3.4 Research design

From the start of this journey, I always knew I wanted to conduct interviews to understand more about how professional services staff viewed themselves and their relationships with academics. It was suggested in the review of my research proposal to look at the number of professional services colleagues I interviewed and the number of academic staff. I had originally suggested the same number of both, and one reviewer felt that as the study focused on professional services staff, they should be the dominant number of participants with academics being the minority. This is something I considered, but I felt the academic input was just as important to understanding their view of professional services.

In designing the interview questions, I felt it was important to refer to my original research aims, to understand how professional services staff perceive their professional identity and how, if at all, their relationship with academic staff impacts this identity. I was also interested in understanding how academic staff felt about their relationship with professional services. My interview questions had to enable me to answer my research objectives and give me enough data to be able to understand the relationship between academics and professional services staff within the school. Silverman (2013) argues that researchers should not directly ask their research questions to participants, as this can lead to data analysis which just reports what the interviewees have stated. I understand this argument, but in my research having interviewees respond to my research questions meant I was able to analyse the data to understand to what extent, if any, the relationship between professional services and academics had an impact on their professional identity. Although on reflection, as discussed later (4.1.3) some of these questions could have

been leading. The interview questions also led to themes and data I was not expecting so the design of the research worked as intended.

I used convenience sampling to access participants. Convenience sampling is defined as accessing those participants available and easily accessible to the researcher (Wragg, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011). I sent an email to the school I work in to explain my research and request participants. What I found interesting was I had a larger response to my request from academics than professional services. Although I can theorise several reasons for this, academic frustrations with professional services, wanting to help someone they know and an interest in research, professional services staff being too busy, I have no concrete evidence of the reasons behind the response rates. I had to put another call out to professional services staff to make up the numbers. As a result of this, I interviewed all five professional services staff who responded to my request and I had a limited choice in terms of the academic staff I interviewed. Part of this choice was based on the fact I wanted a range of positions, time at the institution and gender. Perhaps subconsciously I was also aware of who were strong characters and whom I knew would give me varied opinions and rich data. I want to acknowledge this choice as part of the reflexivity of my positionality. I worked with all the academics and professional services staff from 2012 to 2018 and have some awareness about their relationships with each other.

The table below illustrates the details of the staff I interviewed. It does not exactly align with the gender make up of professional services staff and academic staff in higher education. According to HESA (2021), in the academic year 2019/2020, 46% of academic staff were female and 62% of professional services staff were female. The professional services data is caveated by HESA, as in the academic year 2019/2020 it was not compulsory to return staff data on professional services staff (as mentioned in 2.1.1), and of 197 providers, only 131 returned information on professional services, so the HESA figures should be interpreted with caution.

Job Title	Academic/Professional Services	Time at Institution	Gender	Identifier
Placements Manager	Professional Services	16 years	Male	PSS1
Technician	Professional Services	5 years	Male	PSS2
Programme Assistant	Professional Services	3 years	Female	PSS3
Programme Administrator	Professional Services	15 years	Female	PSS4
Programme Administrator	Professional Services	16 years	Female	PSS5
Associate Dean	Academic	21 years	Male	ACC1
Senior Lecturer	Academic	14 years	Female	ACC2
Lecturer	Academic	4 years	Female	ACC3
Head of Department	Academic	5 years	Female	ACC4
Senior Research Fellow	Academic	9 years	Female	ACC5

Table 3 Participant Details

Data triangulation refers to using multiple methods, sources or data checking to ensure data validity (Carter et al., 2014; Miles and Huberman, 2014). Bryman, (2016:697) defines it as 'the use of more than one method or source of data … so that findings may be cross-checked'. There was an element of data triangulation in the choice of academic participants, in the sense that I wanted a variety of participants to gain a broader understanding of feelings about professional services. Again, with the professional services staff, although I was limited by the number who responded to the request, I managed to get a diverse cross section from the school. By including both professional services staff and academic staff within my interviews, I am triangulating perspectives from different groups of university employees to tease out their figured worlds, which enables me as a researcher to see how they align or differ from each other's perspectives and my own. This gives a unique perspective and one that is rarely covered in the literature, where only one of the occupational groups is used as a research subject.

I also went back to several participants to clarify points when transcribing the interviews to ensure I had interpreted their meaning correctly. Miles and Huberman (2014) state there are several kinds of triangulation, including the data source, the method, the researcher, and the theory. In this context there has been triangulation

as the data sources (interviewees) had similar responses in many of their answers, meaning interviewing was an appropriate way to find out their thoughts. There is also a link between some of their views and that of the literature, again demonstrating a confirmation of findings.

3.4.1 Potential issues with the research design

When I first began the EdD in September 2016, I was working as a school manager. This role was the link between professional services support and academic delivery. The relationships I had and witnessed are the reason I wanted to focus on the relations between professional services staff and academics. In May 2018 I decided to take a secondment into a central services department, which ultimately lasted fifteen months. It took me out of an academic environment but also moved me away from being part of a school professional services unit as well and that pivotal relationship I value with academic staff. In September 2019 I moved back into the school to work as a research manager, working closely with academic staff on the delivery of a new doctoral programme.

I mention this as I interviewed staff who knew me in my previous school manager role and some of whom I line managed. I was clear in the interview they were to view me as a researcher and not as a member of the school. To try and create a sense of distance, I interviewed all the professional services staff in a room located separately to their office to create a sense of neutrality. It was also flagged to me in my ethics review that I needed to have in place the ability to report (confidentially) any concerns or issues that may arise. With the academic staff, I offered to interview them where they felt most comfortable, for all but one of them, this was in their office.

By speaking to all participants about my research (within reason, to not influence outcomes), the reason for interviewing and asking them to read the participant information and complete the consent form (Appendices A and B), I hoped this established from the beginning a sense of a researcher/participant dynamic. There

were no overt concerns from any of the interviewees regarding my previous position or my current role within the school.

3.5 Data analysis

Methods for analysing data need to be transparent, systematic and robust to ensure the validity of the data, findings and recommendations (Punch, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). Analysing data from interviews can be difficult, from listening and scrutinising the pauses and inflections, to conscious and unconscious bias. In fact, all forms of qualitative research can be seen as having validity concerns, interview data in particular can be subject to the researchers' choice of inclusion or exclusion in their piece of work (Cohen et al., 2011; Miles et al., 2014). By acknowledging and accepting I have conscious and unconscious bias around this personal subject, I need to be clear about the data included as part of the research findings. Reducing huge transcripts into themes and concepts to be able to understand what is emerging from them is time-consuming but important to ensure there is clarity around the specific themes.

By coding and thematically analysing the data I ensured I aimed for a full understanding of the themes emerging from the data I collected and how this related to my research questions. As Braun and Clarke (2006:79) state 'thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data… it describes your data set in (rich) detail'. They go on to say that themes can be determined in several ways. Using Braun and Clarke's (ibid) six point framework, I detail below (3.5.1) how I analysed the interview data.

As I reviewed my themes, it became clear that several were highlighted as the interviewees answered the research questions, for example, the idea of the divide between professional services and academics. This is what Braun and Clarke (ibid:84) refer to as a deductive "theoretical' thematic analysis'. They argue this form of theoretical analysis is used when coding for specific research questions. While this was the initial approach, several themes emerged as a result of our discussions,

including relationships with central services staff and frustration at career progression.

There are criticisms around using coding though. The context can be lost, as can the narrative flow when it is broken up into particular codes (Bryman, 2016). This can be particularly challenging, as narratives are often a source of rich data and can contain several themes that are pertinent to the research questions. I was also aware of the interpretation with which I analysed each interview. The subject positionality is important in terms of the balance of language and power (Fairclough, 2001). Fairclough (ibid) highlights Foucault's work on socially constructed discourse which links into the figured world theory of positionality, that we are both the author and product of our words. I have mentioned reflexivity above (3.2.3) and being conscious of my choices and positionality as an insider researcher. Halliday (2002:51) states 'meaning cannot be reported in a way that is independent of the observer because she or he has to understand what is being said and this implicates them in the subject of their research'. In developing my coding and analysis I considered alternative interpretations of the data in acknowledging my own positionality and possible agendas. By recognising my choices and being aware of potential bias, I am limiting the impact this may have on this thesis.

The aim of the study is not to develop a new theory per se but to add to the limited work that is out there in relation to academic and professional services relationships. As a practitioner it is also to take the findings back into the university to try and improve the everyday working relationships between the two groups.

3.5.1 Interview data

As mentioned, I used a version of Braun and Clarke's (2006:87) framework of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Once each interview had been transcribed, which I completed to help start engaging with the data, I began by reading each transcript to get a sense of what each interviewee was saying. I then began to code each transcript by hand, using coloured markers and notes. Rapley (2016) advocates this way as it allows the researcher to get messy, scribble, annotate and highlight across pages, while using computers to code limits this. I decided to code the professional services transcripts first. Once I had coded and marked up the first one, when moving onto the second one, it became clear more codes and themes were emerging. I began to go back to each transcript as I moved onto each new one as additional codes were emerging. This process was replicated with the academic transcripts. Cohen et al. (2011:600) argue the data analysis technique, constant comparison, ensures data saturation and the 'process resonates with the methodological notion of triangulation'. As the interviews were semi-structured under broad headings, this gave me an outline under which the data could be organised initially and how the data pertained to my research questions.

While I have used the word code above to explain my actions, I did not use specific codes when going through the transcripts. I used the words and phrases used by the participants. Charmaz (2006:42) refers to this as 'in vivo' coding, it is helpful in maintaining the voice of the participant by using their words as codes. This is also where I deviated slightly from the Braun and Clarke (2006) process. I found this easier as it became apparent where I could see themes, similarities, and differences emerging through each transcript. Once coded I created a table in which I could easily see the themes and sub-themes that had emerged. A sample of the coded table is attached as Appendix E. As part of the writing up process I ensured I kept referring to the data and themes and questioned my interpretations.

3.6 Reliability and validity

As stated in this chapter, this research is a case study based on understanding more about the identity of professional services staff within higher education. It is not to

create new theories or hypotheses. The intended outcome is to add to the debate around professional services, to suggest ways of improving working relationships between professional services staff and academics and improve the visibility of professional services staff within the institution.

I have discussed reflexivity and participant reactivity throughout this chapter as I described the methodology and methods I used. I acknowledged that my positionality could jeopardise the reliability and validity of the research. As a result, I put in place strategies (reasons for interviewing, consent discussions) to ensure staff were aware I was speaking to them as a researcher, not as a member of professional services (although I understand it is hard to remove my role from a participant's mind).

3.6.1 Limitations of the research

As mentioned above, this research was a case study in a single institution with a limited number of professional services and academic participants. Although the findings may not be representative of professional services working across the sector, they do offer an insight into the views surrounding identity and align with some of the research literature outlined in Chapter Two. As mentioned in the literature review (2.3.4) much of the research into professional services focuses on higher level administrators and managers. My findings, discussed in the following chapter, demonstrate that some of the struggles faced by those managers are also faced by staff working closely with academics and students at a lower level. However, as a case study, further research would be required to see how far these findings were representative across the sector.

3.7 Ethics

This study went through Manchester Metropolitan University's ethics committee. As mentioned above (3.4.1) I was very clear with all the participants that the interviews were confidential, both in terms of any staff members that were mentioned but also

any views that were shared. I interviewed all staff individually so they were free to express any thoughts and opinions without concern over how these could be perceived. Although I interviewed staff I had previously line managed, these managerial relationships ended in 2018 and I asked them to view me as a researcher and assume I had little knowledge about their current working practices and relationships. I also want to acknowledge that the interview question on perceptions of identity could have been leading, and in hindsight they should have been phrased slightly differently to ask about what impacts the identity of professional services staff, not if academic staff had an impact on their identity.

I have mentioned above (3.3.1) the concerns over ensuring there was an avenue for both me and the participants to report any concerns that were raised during the interviews. I also ensured I had approval from my own institution to conduct the research, this was requested at the start of Phase A and the thesis phase.

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined my theoretical framework of figured worlds and the construction of identity. It has explored my methodological standpoint and illustrated the methods I used when undertaking this study. I have also acknowledged the limitations of the research design and the ethical considerations that were undertaken. The following chapter presents the findings and discussion of the main themes that emerged from the study. It illustrates how the framework of figured worlds complements these findings to explore identity and the figured worlds of higher education.

Chapter 4. Findings and discussion

This chapter focuses on my research findings, my interpretation and discussion of the findings and how this relates to current published research. This research is not only an attempt to understand the perceptions of professional identity in professional services staff, the relationship between professional services and academics, and the impact this can have, but also to situate myself within this research. It is a long chapter, and I have broken it down into sections to both aid the reader and ensure I have covered the main areas of the research findings.

I conclude this chapter with a summary of the findings and discuss how these add to the limited research already undertaken. Understanding more about the identity of professional services and academic relationships from both perspectives is novel within this field. Applying a theoretical figured world lens over it adds to the originality of my research.

As a reminder to the reader, my research questions are as follows:

- How do professional services staff perceive their professional identity?
- How is the identity of professional services staff impacted by their relationships with academics?
- How do academic staff view their relationships with professional services?

4.1 Perceptions of professional identity

The addition to the literature surrounding the identity of professional services staff in recent years has focused on the rise of the third space professional. The third space professional works across and with professional services and academic staff (see 2.2 for further details). Whitchurch (2012) describes the blended professional as one who manages the duality of working and belonging both within and outside the academic sphere. Looking at myself through Whitchurch's lens of a blended professional, I can see how this label fits. Much of my current role is managing doctoral students and working closely with academic staff. It is my responsibility to ensure the programmes we run meet the learning outcomes and quality measures. I

have a voice within the academic team and co-lead a module relating to some of my research interests and qualifications. Working alongside academics in a research management role has given me some confidence when working in an academic environment. My identity has shifted during this doctorate programme, which is why I am interested in how other professional services staff perceive their identity.

4.1.1 Professional services

There was a mixed reaction from both professional services staff and academics around professional identity, how professional services describe their professional identity and the extent to which it impacts their relationships with academics. From the interviews with professional services participants there was a sense of ambivalence regarding their professional identity. It is not something they have thought about and it took some prompting to try to get them to think about how they would define it and what it meant to them:

> Oh gosh, I haven't really given it a lot of thought, I come into work and I provide … I don't really have an identity as such (PSS3)

> As in? (PSS5)

Later in this chapter I discuss the idea of choosing a career in higher education (4.4.5) and I believe this ambivalence can be related to their career choice, or lack thereof. They do not see themselves as professional administrators as most of the professional services staff are in their role by chance. They have never been asked to think about their identity, what it means to them or how they see themselves within their working environment. PSS4 had mixed views on her identity:

> I mean I have a, my professional identity, I am a fixer, that is what I am, that's my job, I'm a fixer but I am not an actual administrator because I am not organised. I am winging it. I'm not, some people are just super aren't they, it's just really them, whatever. I'm sort of more creative and disorganised.

> I mean I get things done… I quite like fixing things. I like to get things sorted but I am not a natural administrator. So, my professional identity is, how on earth did I end up doing this. (PSS4)

PSS4's response was interesting as she clearly has a perception of her professional identity but somehow felt it was not the correct one that should be associated with her role. This relates to Holland et al.'s (1998) notion of identity and figured worlds, I have used this reference before, but I want to emphasise it again here; 'People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves, and then try to act as though they are who they say they are' (ibid:3). PSS4 understands what is expected of a professional university administrator but accepts she does not meet the identity expected within the figured world of university administration, despite the fact she has been working within this sphere for over fifteen years. PSS4 goes on later to say that she has been stopped from doing tasks she had previously enjoyed:

> I am very fond of writing stuff, and I used to love doing minutes. I just like making chaos of something into something beautiful. Unfortunately, that role is seriously diminishing. I am just getting more and more upset because originally minutes used to be full, formal, each point would have a number, it was just beautiful, then they ditched that and it was just minutes with headings which I also liked, last year they brought in bullet points. I am destroyed and I am not allowed to do academic misconduct panels anymore and I used to love doing the record of consideration and all that. I can't do that anymore. (PSS4)

The fact that PSS4 feels like the parts of the role she enjoys are diminishing also appears to impact her professional identity. This echoes Graham and Regan's (2016) research which found that professional services staff who were prevented from undertaking their role due to processes and systems were more likely to become frustrated and lack motivation. They are being forced into areas they no longer enjoy working on, reducing their agency within their daily workload. Holland et al. (1998) use Vygotsky's analogy of tying a knot in a handkerchief as a reminder of something as a mediating device. They explain 'A typical mediating device is constructed by the assigning of meaning to an object or behaviour' (ibid:36). PSS4's identity is linked to

her mediating device, which in this case is minute taking. It is a cultural practice that she is used to, much like the act of the knot-tying, a signifier that means something to the owner of the handkerchief but in PSS4's case to the figured world of academic administration. By removing the minute taking from PSS4's role, this part of her practice and identity is diminished and her role and identity are impacted. The implication that PSS4 links her professional identity to her job role is not surprising as it is part of her figured world. Taking away the elements that give her the most satisfaction is clearly a source of frustration and appears to be impacting her identity as an administrator.

PSS1 felt his time in his role had given him a strong professional identity:

> I think I have a very defined professional identity because of the time that I have been here and the knowledge that I have, the work that I have done over the last fifteen years and, people know me, I know people. (PSS1)

By being in a role for several years and having built up those contacts, PSS1 felt this gave him a defined professional identity, meaning he was the person that could be relied on to help and give advice. PSS1 sees himself as the anchoring factor within his department, and externally, which gives him confidence in his identity:

> Because of the specialist role that I have and the time that I have been here I think I have got a fairly strong professional identity within the school, Greater Manchester, the North West. Generally, in most meetings that I go to I know everyone there and I'm the only person that knows everyone there. (PSS1)

PSS1's positional identity is related to his confidence in the work he does, the time he has been in the role and the relationships he has, not only with those inside the institution, but those outside it. PSS1 has identified his position relative to those around him and his agency is defined by this position within the space. While PSS1 does not appear to have the education capital Bourdieu (1984:74) describes as 'educational hierarchy' whereby a person can rise up through their academic

qualifications, he has developed a form of cultural capital based on his knowledge and experience.

Bourdieu (ibid:73) argues 'although the educational system, by its monopoly of certification, governs the conversion of inherited cultural capital into educational capital, it does not have a monopoly on the production of cultural capital'. What I believe Bourdieu is saying here, is that educational certification brings with it a certain level of cultural capital. This is part of the reason I am studying for a doctorate, so I can be recognised as having the capital that I believe will come when I have the EdD. However, to utilise the educational capital that comes with the EdD, I will have to be able to demonstrate it to others, for example, by updating my email signature, otherwise certification alone does not allow others to recognise my qualifications. Bourdieu also appears to be saying that cultural capital does not have to be attained by qualifications alone. Although it is difficult to surmise from an interview where PSS1's cultural capital comes from (it could be his life outside his work) it appears he is confident in the identity that has partly been gained through his longevity and experience in his role.

The cultural capital that PSS1 has achieved allows him to work alongside academics and professionals without a sense of inferiority that some professional services staff may feel. When first putting together the list of participants for interviews, I would have assigned PSS1 to the standard professional services sphere. Having undertaken more reading of the literature around third space professionals and gained a better insight into the role PSS1 undertakes, I am convinced that PSS1 is operating within the third space. His role as placements manager, which is incredibly specialised, means he is dealing with academics and students regularly, both in terms of work but also advising academic staff on processes. He speaks to students on behalf of academic staff in a gate-keeper role particularly when academics may not want to have a difficult conversation with a student:

> One of the big frustrations is the 'go and speak to [XXX]' in that they, it feels like they use, not just in placements but in

> all aspects of programme administration, it feels like they use professional services as the bad cop. (PSS1)

The knowledge that PSS1 possesses and the space this allows him, both within the institution but also outside, across the North West as placements manager, links to the ideas that Whitchurch (2017) discusses when she refers to professional knowledge and sphere of influence. Whitchurch (ibid:4) when describing third space professionals writes 'Their credibility and indeed authenticity derives from these sources of identity, and in particular their ability to cope with ambiguities that derive from their positioning'. I am not sure this is how PSS1 would describe himself and he seems comfortable within his figured world of professional services but as the third space comes to be more accepted within higher education, I would see the role being recognised as such.

PSS5 defined her identity in terms of how she felt she had performed in her role; it links to the value of her work:

> I think, I feel good at the end of the day if I feel like I have done something that is worthwhile, so I feel like I have got quite a lot done in one day. I feel good that I have come in and made a difference in that day especially if I have helped somebody or if somebody is stuck or lost, I can direct them. Obviously, every day isn't like that, some days you'll go home and think I've done absolutely nothing today and feel rubbish. (PSS5)

The invisibility of professional services staff can link to this perceived lack of value, their work is not seen as important as that of academic staff. Szekeres (2011:684) writes 'they still find themselves treated as the poor relations of the university system, representing an underclass in terms of pay, conditions and flexibility'. Simpson and Fitzgerald, (2014:1929) add to this by arguing 'the work of professional staff is frequently labelled as 'non-academic' and not immediately seen as contributing to the core tasks and activities of the university'. Being helpful and feeling valued is important to PSS5's identity but it feels like she needs that work to be acknowledged. It is important to PSS5 that she can make a difference in her role.

PSS2 sees his identity within the third space, an area that overlaps both academic and administrative worlds, which is somewhere he is comfortable inhabiting:

> I definitely enjoy being a bit of each to be honest I've always been a finger in every pie sort of person. I like having involvement in lots of different research projects, I like being involved in the student's education so yeah, I probably do identify as somewhere in the middle between professional services and academic staff at the moment. (PSS2)

Akerman (2020) argues the third space is not recognised within the sector by those who do not inhabit it, leading to institutional blindness. I further would argue it is not always recognised by those who inhabit it. On the few occasions I mentioned the third space concept to the professional services participants, this concept was unknown to them although it did resonate with PSS2, mainly because he could see himself straddling both worlds. The difficulty faced by PSS2 is the pull of administrative line management with day-to-day tasks being given by academic staff and all related to student learning or research. PSS2 has created a space for self-authoring his own figured world by being able to straddle both a professional services and academic role, albeit under a professional services contract. This appears to give him job satisfaction and a varied experience.

4.1.2 Just an administrator

Being seen as just an administrator plays a part in professional services staff being able to define their identity:

> I think it is obviously quite hard to think we are just administrators which I think is the general perception of people but obviously there is quite a lot involved in the job role… I do see us as very important to the university and the way that programmes run. If we weren't here, I think they would be very stuck. (PSS5)

PSS5 appears to be frustrated at how her role is perceived. This can lead to a negative identity and a justification for the role she undertakes. Each time a professional service interviewee used the term 'just an administrator', I challenged them on it and asked why they used the word 'just' to describe themselves and what they do:

> I mean I guess there is the aspect of are… there is the aspect of you know, what is your role within the department, are you contributing. (PSS2)

> When people say what do you do? I, in fact I bumped into someone the other day and they were sort of asking what do you do, 'are you a teacher' and I went 'no, I do admin in the office' and that's it, it's that just an admin thing isn't it, it's just admin, no I am not an academic. (PSS4)

When questioned on the use of the word 'just' PSS4 stated it related to an incident with an academic staff member:

> We had a meeting once years ago with, I can't remember who said it but one of the senior academic management team referred to us in a meeting as just admin so it's like a joke, but it's not is it, do you know what I mean? (PSS4)

The idea that some academic staff use the term 'just' to describe the role of professional services in front of those professional services staff has had an impact on the terminology used by PSS4. While she appears to see it as a joke on the surface, it has had an impact as she recognises it is not a laughing matter for her role to be reduced to 'just'. By minimising the role that professional services undertake, academics can be seen as having an impact on how professional services staff perceive their role and their identity.

PSS5 also related the term 'just' to the assumed perception of others regarding her role:

> I think it is obviously quite hard to sort of think we are just administrators which I think is the general perception of people but obviously there is quite a lot involved in the job role. (PSS5)

I asked PSS5 to elaborate on this as earlier in the interview, she mentioned seeing herself as an important part of the university, and using the term 'just' does not give this impression:

> I think that is probably the way some people kind of make you feel sometimes or sometimes if you have not had a particularly great week you kind of feel like that. I think I feel like that sometimes when I am sort of, like you said, explain what I do to people, it's quite hard and in the end, I just end up saying 'oh it's just administration' cause it's easier… but then I also do think we are obviously needed cause there are so many of us across the university doing what we need to do to keep it going. The reason that I want to do this qualification is so I can do something more and progress more, so I feel better when I come home at the end of the day like I have actually done something and sort of made a difference while I have been at work. (PSS5)

There is clearly a tension and frustration with both PSS4 and PSS5 about how they are perceived by others. They feel their roles are viewed as unimportant and insignificant, but both also realise their roles are required within the university. The idea of 'othering' professional services by the term 'non-academic' as defined in the literature review (2.4) and 'just' indicates a perceived power imbalance created by intellectual capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Moore, 2014; Rowlands, 2018). Allen-Collinson (2006:272) writes; 'This default or negative definition, that is defining persons by what they are not, was felt to denigrate and deny research administrators' specialist skills and subject expertise and to result in a lack of respect for their abilities'. The idea that their identity is less than an academics by default of their position within the university and the role they undertake is disheartening, particularly when professional services staff can be as qualified as academic staff (4.4.1). Bourdieu, (1984:74) describes those with education/intellectual capital as having easier entry into the (figured) world of society, 'the possessors of strong education capital who have also inherited strong cultural capital, and so enjoy a dual title to cultural nobility'. The same can also be said for academia. As discussed later in the chapter (4.4.2) academics felt it was important in their role to have doctoral level qualifications to demonstrate not only their ability to teach and research but also for

career progression. It appears that PSS5 is undertaking a qualification to help her progress her career and build up her educational capital. It feels like she wants to be seen and see herself as more than 'just' an administrator.

4.1.3 Academic relationships and identity

One of the main research questions throughout this study was to understand to what extent professional services staff felt their relationships with academic staff impacted their professional identity, if at all. I thought perhaps, due to my own relationships and professional identity, that their identity would be more tied up with the academic relationship. It does not appear to be as important as I see it in myself and my working relationships or in the limited literature on this subject (2.1). For PSS1:

> Individual interactions, not really that much because I have been here longer than most of them and done this longer than most of them. (PSS1)

PSS1, as previously mentioned (4.1.1) appears to have strong confidence in his role and his identity that can come with time in and knowledge of the role. PSS1 identifies with his role as much as academic colleagues identify with their subject knowledge. His specialist role as placements manager, gives shape to this confident identity. It seems that the third space that PSS1 has created for himself within the figured worlds of administration and academia has developed over time from the social encounters and (academic) actors within those encounters who seek PSS1 out for advice. However, despite this confidence, PSS1 articulated that he felt frustrated on a personal level with a negative interaction with an academic:

> Not my professional identity, maybe on a personal level because you always kind of reflect on things and you focus on the negative more than the positive so it's a personal thing rather than a professional identity. It's like I could have handled that better, that's on a personal level. (PSS1)

Despite the fact PSS1 stated his professional identity is not impacted by a difficult conversation, there is still an impact. It does cause him to reflect on his actions.

For PSS2, who is deep within a third space role as a technician, academics play a larger part in his identity formation:

> I would say they do quite a lot for me because I spend a lot of my time around academic staff, you know certainly, the work that I am doing is very much on their terms, it's not going down to professional services and working for them it's working for the academics. At the same time, they don't treat me like I am working for them, I'm working with them, so they promote a very collegiate view of everything. That's not to say I don't see myself as a technician when I'm working with them, I do. They don't have tech skills and I do but I'd say they push the more academic side of the identity and I see it more as helping to provide a service as well so I've got that part of me that says 'yes I'm working with them' but at the same time I need to make sure this service is doing what it should be as well (PSS2)

Like me, the relationship with academics is more important to PSS2 as someone who works closely with them. PSS2 stresses that although he is a member of professional services, the academic staff do not treat him as someone different to themselves. He is part of the team and they push the academic side of him. PSS2 articulates that he possesses expertise that academics do not necessarily possess, and they appear to value the contribution PSS2 brings to the team. It appears PSS2 is able to mediate his identity across the boundaries of his role. He sees the benefit of being in both figured worlds and he benefits from academic expertise as they in turn benefit from his skills and experience. This close working relationship can give rise to imposter syndrome, staff feel like they are not on the same level as academics or are not perceived to be (Akerman, 2020). Though this does not appear to be the case with PSS2. He is aware of his position as a technician but also benefits from the academic push that the academic staff give him. In my current role I am also benefitting from the push the academic staff I work with are giving me. By giving me academic responsibilities and encouraging me with undertaking this doctorate, my identity, like PSS2 is linked to

the relationships I have with my academic colleagues. What I need to reflect on is the benefits academic staff receive by working with me and my professional services colleagues.

My interest in professional identity arose through feelings of being an imposter. If I am feeling like this, are others? However, it does not seem like all professional services are. For example, PSS4 states:

> I don't think the academics staff shape my identity, I think the nature of the role sort of does because as I say it has changed … it's much more customer-focused, keeping students happy, it's all about keeping the students happy, keeping them here so the nature of the role has changed so in a way I am losing the bits I like and the bits I don't like I am having to do more of but that is the university's changing requirements really changes the role not my relationship with the academics. (PSS4)

For PSS4 who, as previously mentioned (4.1.1), has been affected by changes in the role she undertakes, her identity is tied up in the role she performs, not necessarily the academics she works with. Laskovsky and O'Donnell (2018) argue that data is now becoming the main source of truth for university administrators, and as PSS4 talks about her role changing, much of this is now to do with data. There is more emphasis on student attendance and retention and, as such, this change in role has affected her identity. As these changes take place, the identity of staff evolves. PSS4 spoke about having parts of her job taken from her, leaving her with the elements she does not enjoy and the impact this has on her professional identity. What is not clear here, is if the frustration PSS4 feels is entirely due to the change in her role, or how this may be perceived by academic staff. On reflection, this is something I should have pushed further, to understand the impact of the changes to her job on her identity.

Changes to current job requirements can cause staff to question their role and autonomy within their sphere of influence (Lewis, 2014). Lewis (ibid) also argues that professional services staff who have a deep understanding of academic work feel

more confident in engaging with academics as equals and have a stronger professional identity. This is not something that has been evident in my research. All the professional services staff I have interviewed appear to have no doubt around their capabilities within their role, nor a lack of understanding around the academic requirements. It is the nature of the role that appears to impact their identity, or at least for PSS4 and PSS5.

As mentioned, in terms of the research question there is an impact on professional identity for some staff when there is a difficult relationship with academic staff, but this is only a small part of their identity. PSS5 was the one who was most affected by relationships particularly when there was a negative interaction:

> I think an example when we're doing exam board scheduling, obviously it takes a while to get everything prepped. Once everything is scheduled, it's scheduled and then they just turn around and go 'well can you not just change it'. It's like, no, it can't just be done like that. They don't see the importance of our role, they just think, just change it. I think it's the way sort of they make you feel sometimes. You don't feel as important. I think that sort of doesn't help but then obviously you can have better weeks when you feel really good. (PSS5)

Being valued and having their role recognised is important for the professional services staff I spoke to and to a lesser extent their relationship with academics plays a part in this. However, it appears to be individualistic and role dependent, although PSS5 seems to have a more fractious relationship with academic staff. This is at odds with my initial thoughts going into this research as I had assumed, like me, academic relationships would have more of an impact on their identity than it appears to. Whereas I do not feel like my job role has an impact on my identity, the professional services staff seem to. I am not sure if this is because, like PSS1, I am very confident in my role but less confident in how I am perceived by academic staff. This in turn impacts on my professional identity.

Individual interactions with academics can influence how professional services staff feel about their role and identity. This echoes Allen-Collinson's (2009:946) research, which found individual interactions with academic staff can cause tension, 'interviewees stressed the context-dependency of exclusionary practices in that by no means all academics engaged in such treatment, and even those who sometimes did at times would be more inclusive'. Although the interactions may be context dependent as PSS5 points out, in terms of exam boards, these negative interactions had an impact on her and the value she felt others placed on her role.

On reflection asking professional services staff if their relationship with academics impacted their identity was a leading question and should have been phrased differently. Asking them if there was anything that impacted on their identity would have been a more appropriate question. This also goes for the equivalent question that was asked to academic staff.

4.1.4 Academics and identity

I wanted to understand to what extent academics felt their relationships with professional services staff impacted the identity of professional service staff. I felt this would give some insight into the relationship between the two and how it could be improved. The academic staff I spoke to had a similar response to some of the professional services staff. Individual relationships are important, but there was also an acknowledgement that professional services could be perceived as less important to the institution than academic staff. This of course could impact on their identity. ACC2 stated:

> I think if there are people going around like me in the beginning not understanding what they are doing and thinking they're doing something entirely different it probably doesn't make them feel very nice at all. I think in the same way that, it's reciprocal isn't it, when you don't feel understood it has a negative effect on you, how you feel about what you are doing and how you feel about the person that is misunderstanding you. (ACC2)

ACC2 had started the interview talking about her early view on professional services staff (4.3.1) and how it had taken some years to understand their role and what their part in the university was. There is an acknowledgement here this might influence the identity of professional services staff. Tensions of day-to-day working and not understanding the roles of professional services can cause problems within working relationships (Whitchurch, 2010a). Szekeres (2011:684) writes 'no matter how close professionals work with academics, they are still often seen as the 'minions of management''. As Szekeres points out in her research on professional services, (2004, 2006, 2011; Szekeres and Heywood, 2018) the lack of understanding regarding professional services roles, plus the feeling of them cascading down managerial requests can have a detrimental effect on the relationship and therefore identity. The example used above by PSS5 (4.1.3) about the rescheduling of assessment boards is an example of academic staff not understanding the role and pressure that professional services can feel. As PSS5 states, it can make them feel less important than academic staff.

The term 'respect' was used frequently by academics discussing professional services. ACC3 admits she is more likely to give respect to those she knows and works closely with. During the interviews with professional services staff, there was no indication they were not feeling respected or did not feel respected by their academic colleagues, so it is interesting to hear academics feel professional services staff are not respected. However, some of the behaviour professional service staff discussed, particularly the example above (4.1.3) from PSS5 regarding exam board scheduling, would indicate a lack of respectful behaviour and a lack of consideration for the ways in which professional services staff must maintain administrative arrangements. I feel this goes deeper into the academic/professional services divide, which is discussed later in this chapter (4.3.3):

> I think they understand you do respect them and you're grateful, actually I do always find with those that I know I'm more likely when they've done something or, I've asked them for something and they've got back to me I'm usually ah,

> thank you, you're a star or thanks very much for doing that so hopefully I think there's that mutual respect there. (ACC3)

> It's a shame that the professional services are sometimes not, I don't know if the word is respected is right, but not looked at, you know what I was saying about this circle and the academics just being a small part of that and I think it's often they're just missed and they are really integral to the whole student journey and it is just missed and I don't personally like that but it's really hard to break down those. (ACC4)

> I think it's important to be respected for the roles we do and that's not just for professional staff or academic staff. (ACC5)

It is evident that there is an understanding from academic staff that professional services can often be seen as secondary to academics but there is also an acknowledgement individuals can have very different relationships based on who they work with and how they get along with different staff members. Part of this is based on a school or central service relationship and the location of those individuals. This will be analysed later in the chapter (4.3.5).

4.1.5 Summary

Professional identity is a term that is not always clear to professional services and is not as important to professional services within this case study as I perceived it to be. It relates to the work they undertake and the relationships they have with individual academics around them. Being valued and getting recognition for the work they do can improve the self-perception of professional services and there is an acknowledgement of this by academic staff. Individual interactions are important for both professional services staff and academics and negative relationships may impact on both parties.

The agency which gives professional services staff their identity is based on their socially constructed figured world, (Holland et al., 1998) where the spheres of academic and professional services bump along next to each other but do not seem to merge together. Their role in working with (for) academic staff has some impact

on the identity of professional services staff. Individual interactions, both positive and negative, contribute to their individual and collective identities alongside the institutional structures and demands the university places upon them. Henkel (2010:10) argues higher education is in flux with restructures which create new spaces for working:

> As staff in higher education, whatever their formal designation, find themselves moving between different working spaces, tasks, roles, and reference groups, it is more plausible that they will construct and reconstruct how they define their identities over time, and perhaps simultaneously.

The identities of both academic and professional services staff will adapt and change as their working sphere does and this appears to be the case with PSS4 as her role is changing, albeit not in a positive way. It is becoming clear how important the work they undertake is to professional services staff. It also appears that how this work is perceived by academic staff can impact on how professional services staff view their own professional identity.

4.2 Nomenclature and identity

This section focuses on the concept of nomenclature and how professional services and academics feel about the term 'non-academic'. This leads on from the use of the phrase 'just an administrator' by professional services, discussed in the above section on Professional Identity (4.1.2). I asked all participants the same question in relation to this topic, specifically their thoughts on the term 'non-academic', a term often used to describe anyone who does not teach or research. While this section is based specifically around a question, this became important in terms of the different responses and how the term impacts identity. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue using questions as themes constitutes lazy data analysis, as no analysis has been conducted, the researcher just pulls together the answers to a question and labels it a theme. I acknowledge this, but I wanted to highlight the responses in terms of both the different ways the term is interpreted, but also the indifference to which the

professional services staff felt about it, which is at odds with my own personal view and that of the literature.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study focuses on professional services who work specifically in academic administration. I am aware that different universities may classify staff who work outside this arena differently, but this research focuses on school professional services staff. This is the same for academic staff. I have clarified the roles my participants undertake (3.3) but there are now different types of academic contracts and naming conventions including teaching and learning interns and research assistants who are not covered within this research but to whom 'non-academic' could apply.

4.2.1 Perceptions of the term 'non-academic' by professional services staff

As discussed in the literature review (2.4), the reframing of professional services definitions has been ongoing from the mid-2000s. The use of non-academic, support staff, ancillary and administrators is now declining across the UK, the US and Australia (Whitchurch, 2017; Bossu et al., 2018). This could be linked to the increasing corporatisation of higher education in the twenty first century (Collini, 2012) or the recognition of the diverse range of titles once used across the sector (Whitchurch, 2017). The literature (2.4) appears to be referring to staff in higher education administration roles, not cleaners, or porters etc. and the focus of this research is on the academic administrator. HESA (*Higher Education Statistics Agency*, 2018) still refers to all staff who are not classed as academic as non-academic. It appears there are different definitions even within that term to the different types of role within this over-arching label (see Table 2).

Given the changing definitions and being conscious of the reframing of professional services, out of all the answers that came from my research questions and interviews, the topic of nomenclature and naming conventions is the one that surprised me the most. This is an area I am passionate about and have challenged staff on several occasions for using the term non-academic to describe any staff member who does

not teach, or research as discussed in the Introduction (1.3). This is one of the reasons I asked the question, as I am interested in how other professional services staff felt about the term.

The professional services staff that I spoke to had differing views on the terminology, but three of the respondents were indifferent about it:

> I personally don't have an issue with it. (PSS1)

> It doesn't offend me in any way… It has to be snappy, and you can understand it quick so that doesn't bother me because, you know, I'm not academic, we are not academic. (PSS4)

PSS3 had not heard the term being used before but again did not have strong feelings regarding it:

> I am not offended by it… It's just, ok it's like non-academic but then I don't see why, I am not ashamed of being in admin and I don't see why we can't just be called administrators, but I recognise that it's a very, very broad sort of field. (PSS3)

It is interesting that PSS3 had not heard of the term before despite the fact it is used by the university sector in certain surveys etc. Although as a part-time member of staff who has been with the institution for just over three years it had clearly not resonated with her. However, given the amount of research I have undertaken as part of this doctorate, I must acknowledge that I consciously search out the term when reading and I can understand why others would be oblivious to it. This reflexivity links to my identity as someone who strives to be accepted in the academic world and is therefore sensitive to terms that clearly define me as an outsider and in a negative undertone.

While three of the respondents were indifferent when referred to as non-academics, several research papers have found that even the term 'administrator' is contested within higher education. Hogan (2014) argues that the term should be valued within

higher education. Melling's (2018) research found that some professional services staff are unhappy with the title 'administrator' as it is too broad and does not define to outsiders the kind of work they undertake. This links back to the above section (4.1.2) and PSS5's comment about being 'just an administrator' and the frustration with the label as she felt it did not cover the depth and breadth of the role she undertakes. In fact, it is only PSS5 who felt that 'non-academic' was a negative way to describe her role:

> I think, it would obviously be better to use the person's job role so to refer to us as professional services instead of non-academics. I think it kind of makes you feel less important because the word non is quite negative, whereas professional services makes you feel more of a team so we're a professional services team, we're sort of separate to the academic members of staff but we're just as important, we're still a team. (PSS5)

This idea of being less than and othered links to the work of a number of researchers including Conway (2000), Lauwerys (2002) Szekeres (2004, 2011), Wallace and Marchant (2011) Sebalj et al. (2012) and De Sousa (2018). Sebalj et al. (2012:463) writes of the 'forgotten workforce' and De Sousa (2018) argues it is lazy terminology to describe a diverse range of people and roles. Hall (1997) uses Bakhtin (1981) to illustrate the concept of othering, and how the other is needed as dialogue is created between two or more speakers, but does not belong to either. Therefore, there must be an 'other' to create meaning. By terming staff who do not teach to be non-academic, difference is created and therefore 'othering' is vital to this meaning.

The UK government commissioned The Dearing Report (1997) to focus on the future of higher education. While using the term non-academic, it reported on how vital professional services staff were in the support and guidance of students during their time at university. In 2012 HESA moved higher level professional services staff who had previously been referred to as non-academic professionals into a category with academic staff entitled higher education professionals (HESA, 2018; Baltaru, 2019). However, they still define non-academic staff as those that do not have an academic

employment function. They include managers, student welfare workers, secretaries, caretakers and cleaners (HESA, 2018). By claiming this term as a definition, this is encouraging researchers and institutions to use non-academic as the norm when writing about professional services staff.

While I understand this is an easy way to describe a varied range of staff, it does not help move the nomenclature forward to recognise the diverse range of staff who sit under this umbrella and use the term professional services. However, I must acknowledge that outside the world of higher education, there are many occupational groups with one naming convention when there are many different categories within it, doctors are one example, teachers are another. I think that as someone who works in and is researching higher education, I can see the vast difference in the roles that professional services cover, but outside the sector it is an easy way to identify staff.

The figured world of higher education seems to have limited opportunities for professional services staff to start the process of self-authoring and positioning their identity outside that which has been allocated for them. PSS2, who although a member of professional services, has career ambitions to become an academic, has already started the process of self-authoring by distinguishing academics who teach from those who research, which in his opinion is the highest position an academic can reach. He argues one can be a researcher without teaching:

> I suppose not teaching wouldn't necessarily classify you as a non-academic, obviously you can be involved in lots and lots of research and do no teaching but the pinnacle I suppose many people would say of academia would be a position in which you could do lots of research and no teaching. (PSS2)

The idea of academic staff being more concerned with research is backed up by Deem (2010:42), who writes that 'Academics, particularly those in research-intensive universities, tend to enjoy their research more than some of their other activities'. It

is no surprise that PSS2 believes research is more important than teaching to academic staff, particularly given the money it can bring into an institution.

When governmental agencies have defined professional services in a certain way, it is difficult to get those within power to view them as anything else. Allen-Collinson (2006), when writing about research administrators, states:

> In the case of academic staff, it can be argued that the power imbalance generated by their generally greater academic capital (Bourdieu, 1984:272) and academic credibility enabled them to define as 'other' and 'non-academic', the research administrators.

Although Allen-Collinson was writing about research administrators, this can be applied to all professional services staff. Although, I am not sure it is fair for Allen-Collinson to blame only academic staff for othering professional services staff when the terminology is also generated by government organisations. I accept this naming convention is perpetuated within institutions, and not just by academic staff but in my case by Human Resources (see Introduction, 1.3).

PSS2, who I have described (4.1) as a third-space professional, technician and tutor, and therefore straddling both the academic and professional services figured worlds, could see how 'non-academic' could be useful from an institutional level. He felt it did not capture those research-intensive staff (such as ACC5 who is a senior research fellow) or roles like his that covered both areas:

> I can see how that would be a useful distinction from a university level, but I am not sure it would capture those kind of higher end researchers or even necessarily, potentially people like me who, you know, would my one to one teaching support count as teaching and therefore make me an academic or would it be that that's not considered teaching in which case, I'm a non-academic. (PSS2)

The argument put forward by PSS2 regarding non-academic not encompassing researchers was based around my specific question of describing the term as

someone who does not teach. In subsequent interviews, I altered this to 'does not teach or research' to try and differentiate what I would class as traditional academic staff and professional services. This discussion about differentiation prompted me to ask PSS2 for his definition of an academic which was quite difficult for him to articulate:

> An academic, for me certainly, an academic does involve doing research and trying to be at the forefront of you know, developing knowledge… So, there is a kind of cultural expectation for us that [XXX] academics should be doing research, for me academia has always been about being involved in the research, doing something new, asking new questions, coming up with new methods to solve problems. So, I think there's for me the crucial aspect of academia is probably a novelty, that you are doing something that is new and different and hopefully useful. (PSS2)

PSS2's language is interesting, despite being a member of professional services, he uses the term 'us' to describe an academic, yet also admitted that in the standard definition, he is classed as non-academic. This is where the identity of staff who straddle two roles within a third space becomes dis-jointed. It feels like PSS2 is held within professional services by a job description and line management structure, but his heart and career path are with the academic side. PSS2 is attempting to break down the barriers between the two worlds by redefining his own identity despite his current position and job description. Feather's (2015) response to Lewis's (2014) paper on academic identity was clear about the difference between the two: 'administrators are not academics, they do not teach students, which is one of the defining factors of an academic' (Feather, 2015:326). This definition does not consider third space staff such as myself or PSS2 but remains a prevailing view, that only academic staff, by definition teach students and anyone outside that category is therefore non-academic.

Identity is linked to the words that one uses to describe oneself and how they are relative to the figured world in which one resides (Holland et al., 1998). By PSS2 straddling both worlds this can cause confusion and the naming conventions here are important as they can describe identity and value. Bakhtin (1986:87) writes, 'when

we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form'. In other words, what Bakhtin is arguing is that language cannot be neutral. We are always influenced by our upbringing, and those who surround us, in terms of the words we use but also how we interpret words spoken to us. The use of the term 'third space' has not yet permeated the figured world of higher education, outside of research, to an extent that is used in the same context as professional services or academic. Until there is more understanding and use of third space, those who inhabit that space will be placed in the more accepted space of academic or professional services and according to Bakhtin's (ibid) argument those terms come with historic connotations and meanings.

The term 'non-academic' assigns meaning to someone who does not teach or research in its simplest form. Research indicates it is taken as an insult by professional services staff (see 2.4) within higher education because of the identity it assigns to someone being termed 'non'. They are being described by what they are not and therefore outside the figured world of academia. Someone like myself and PSS2 inhabit the world of professional services, by nature of an employment contract and we may always be othered within the academic world. Holland et al. (1998:68) use the example of an alcoholic to demonstrate the change of identity when labelled in a certain manner:

> If a drinker does accept the label of alcoholic as applying to himself and accepts and acts on the identity of an alcoholic, this transformation of identity, from a drinking non-alcoholic (normal drinker) to an alcoholic, requires a radical reinterpretation of who he is, of self.

I have accepted the label of professional services, despite my current role not being typical within the professional services sphere, and by trying to reidentify myself as a third space professional, I need to reinterpret myself as Holland (ibid) indicates. However, as the third space is not currently a familiar concept within higher education this reinterpretation must take place within the identity of a professional

services staff member which can be challenging especially when working with academic staff.

The traditional boundaries between academic and professional services are breaking down in certain areas, leaving staff searching for a clearer identity (Whitchurch, 2018). But where they are not, for example in school programme administration, where three of the five professional services participants work, this idea of being 'less than' does not seem to permeate, with the exception of PSS5. Personally, the phrase resonates with me and, like PSS2, being part of the third space and straddling both the world of academia and of professional services, being described by what I am not seems unfair.

The use of the term does not seem to affect the professional identity of professional services staff. Given the range of sources (Conway, 2000; Lauwerys, 2002; Szekeres, 2004, 2011; Wallace and Marchant, 2011; Sebalj et al., 2012; De Sousa, 2018) in the literature review (2.4) who argue naming conventions are an important part of the identity of professional services, I am surprised by the responses I received from professional services staff. This surprise comes from both my own personal feelings on the term 'non-academic' and the literature. It may be that the use of it within the institution is so rare, it is not a term they think about or have a strong opinion on, given that PSS3 had not heard of the phrase, this may be a possibility. It is difficult to surmise from a small sample, but the makeup of the participants is reflective of the makeup of the school professional services, so as a case study it could be assumed this indifference was school wide, and perhaps institutional.

4.2.2 Perceptions of the term 'non-academic' by academic staff

The academic staff who took part in the interviews had much stronger views on the term 'non-academic' and were more adamant in their aversion to it:

> I wouldn't say it's a very complimentary term. (ACC1)

> I always think defining someone by what they are not is a ridiculous way of defining somebody, define by what they are. (ACC2)

> I think it's simply ridiculous. (ACC5)

As someone who dislikes the term, it is good to hear the academic staff interviewed also objected to it. It could be argued that academic staff (and I generalise at this point) are consciously or unconsciously complicit in the continued use of the expression by using the term within their research.

Again, I must consider my insider research standpoint, as a member of professional services who has been in the school for nine years. The academic staff know who I am and what my substantive role was for many years (I changed roles in the school in September 2019). The difficulty with insider research is the tendency to assume and misread a participants intentions, particularly as the subject matter is one close to my heart (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). However, I must take the academic staff's responses at face value and assume they are as uncomfortable with the term as I am. This links to the methodological issue of 'reactivity'. A concept which can affect the validity of research as a response can be impacted by the positionality of the interviewer and the question being asked (Gibb, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011). As a novice researcher I need to be aware of this when undertaking further research.

4.2.3 Naming conventions

Two of the academic staff did not like the term 'academic'. For them, the established notions of terminology and outdated practices of defining staff by their generic roles seems old-fashioned and historic, even though it is a traditional part of the figured world and nomenclature of higher education:

> The phrase 'academic' is a little bit strange as well though, but that's historical as well, but I don't really like the phrase 'academic/ non-academic'. (ACC4)

> I think words are just as important as deeds. It's important that we need to review the terminology we use in academia or higher education and we are all professionals we should all be called professional staff and you might be on a teaching and learning [pathway] or you might be administrative but that's another thing, but people shouldn't be labelled as academic, non-academic or support staff. (ACC5)

It is the figured world of higher education that has perpetuated the naming conventions for both academic and professional services staff and the assumptions that are societally wrapped around these identities by the names they have been assigned. Urrieta (2007b:121) argues 'in figured worlds people are ordered and ranked and power is distributed'. The naming convention of labelling professional services as non-academic could reduce their power by describing them by what they are not. However, the idea of figured worlds as a constantly negotiated space (Holland et al., 1998; Hill et al., 2015) means that someone such as myself, who now resides within a third space role, could move around these pre-conceived notions and naming conventions of academic and professional services spheres, from one to another and reside within both. Holland et al. (1998:171) use Bakhtin's 'Dialogism' to explain how we can author ourselves, within the space that we occupy and the language that constrains the space, 'the author works within, or at least against, a set of constraints that are also a set of possibilities for utterance'. While I have minimal space to move around and change my identity, I understand the space is limited for self-authoring due to the historical nomenclature claimed by higher education.

The diagram below illustrates where I see myself moving as a third space professional, both within the burgeoning third space figured world that is slowly being created and the historic academic and professional services worlds. This is how I see my self-authored self:

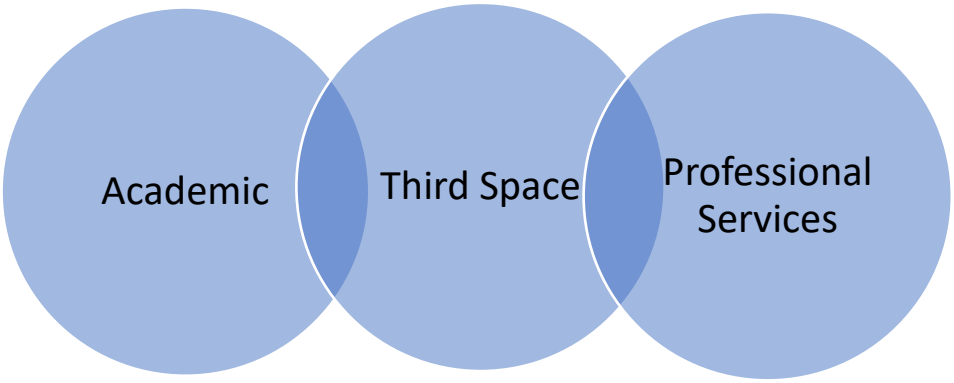

Figure 1 Venn Diagram – Third Space Model

4.2.4 Summary

Being described by what you are not resonates with me for several reasons. It makes me feel like I am less than and others me in a way that differentiates me from academic staff, confines me into my own figured world and can prohibit access to move across into the world of academia. Despite the fact I am studying for a doctorate and am working as a third space professional, working on academic modules, with research intensive staff, I feel inhibited to move fully into the academic world. Negative naming conventions such as 'non-academic' links to the idea of invisible staff and can affect the identity of professional services (Szekeres, 2004; Wallace and Marchant, 2011; Sebalj et al., 2012; Akerman, 2020). As stated by PSS5, 'it makes you feel less important'. Sebalj's et al. (2012) study into nomenclature within the Australian higher education sector illustrated that non-academic and general staff were the least preferred titles, reiterating PSS5's point. The term 'non-academic' was described by Sebalj et al.'s (ibid:466) recipients as 'divisive and negative' and again the term 'othering' was used as well as the potential to increase the academic/professional services divide. Simpson and Fitzgerald (2014) argue it also gives the impression that non-academic staff do not contribute to the teaching and learning, or student support which is undertaken by staff within the university. This otherness does not serve a purpose.

Current research into professional services is identifying the use of 'professional' in describing university administration roles as noted in the literature review (2.4), but the pace is slow. In an article published in October 2018, Dan de Sousa (2018) argues that it appears to still be commonplace for the higher education sector to call professional services staff non-academics. 'I've even once heard a vice chancellor, giving a talk to a room full of people saying you are not failed academics' (De Sousa, ibid:online). The pace at which the change is taking place is demonstrated by Szekeres, who in her 2004 paper alluded to a change of terminology due to the professionalisation of professional services workload but in 2011 noted that ''non-academic', 'support', 'allied', and 'assistant' nomenclatures still abound and many staff in these positions feel denigrated by these terms' (Szekeres, 2011:684).

The professional services responses to the questions surprised me as three of the interviewees had no strong feeling about the term when describing their role. The responses from the academic staff are what I would have expected from the professional services staff. I am not surprised by the academics' answer as this was an interview based on their perceptions of professional services staff. This refers to the concept of reactivity I mentioned earlier in this section (4.2.2). Gibb (2008:online) argues reactivity could cause respondents to 'respond to questions based on how they wish to see themselves'. I think, in hindsight, it may have been a leading question, asking someone their perception of a term that has clear negative connotations about a group of people they work closely with, was almost certainly going to initiate a negative response, particularly when being asked by a professional services member of staff.

4.3 Relationships

This section discusses the relationships between professional services and academic staff and the idea of the divide between the two groups. Although this was mentioned in an earlier section (4.1.3) I want to explore this further and understand more about the relationships between the two areas. It links to two of the main research questions I wanted to focus on; how the relationship between the two

parties may impact the professional identity of professional services staff and how academics perceive their relationships with professional services. It focuses primarily on school professional services staff, but the relationship with central services staff, for example HR, finance and marketing is also discussed, mainly from an academic point of view.

4.3.1 Professional services relationships with academics

Professional services staff have very different relationships with academic staff depending on with whom they work and in what capacity. The relationships are based on how they work together and how they communicate with each other. Participants PSS 2,3,4, and 5 sit within the school, and work primarily with specific academic departments so their responses were based on those relationships. PSS1 works with academics across the school in his role as placements manager, so his responses were more generic. PSS1 believes he has a good relationship with academic staff:

> Generally good, I think, obviously my role is very specialised, and it is an important part of the university or the school and I have been here a long time, so I think all those things go together. (PSS1)

This goes back to the confidence shown by PSS1 earlier in the chapter (4.1.1). Being a member of staff for several years and having a powerful sense of self and identity, PSS1 believes he has a good relationship with academic staff and is confident in his role. He understands the importance of his role, and this appears to be reflected onto academic staff who recognise this confidence. They require his services and expertise; therefore, a beneficial relationship emerges. Having strong relationships and a clear identity contradicts research by Szekeres (2004) and Allen-Collinson (2006) who state professional services staff feel invisible working within higher education.

However, professional services staff who work with academics directly on student administration show similarities with the research mentioned above (Szekeres, 2004; Allen-Collinson, 2006). The relationships can be described as fractious and again, certain individuals and in some cases, teams are responsible for the difficulties that professional services staff feel. According to PSS4:

> It's different with different individuals but more importantly with different groups of individuals, cause some teams are lovely and friendly and treat you like part of their team and obviously understand and appreciate what you do. Especially if they really hate doing admin and they're great and then certain other teams have got this superiority thing going on and they can be rude, and they can be awful. I think different individuals would not be like that if there wasn't a culture of it within that department because where there isn't a culture of it, they are pretty much all lovely. (PSS4)

The individualistic and context dependent fractious relations PSS4 describes are echoed by Allen-Collinson (2009:946) in her research who states, 'as with all occupational (and more general) social contexts, there are positive and negative dimensions to work relationships'. Mcinnis (1998) argues professional services staff felt academic staff' attitudes were detrimental to their relationships and over 75% of those interviewed in his research, (both professional services and academic staff) felt the relationship between professional services and academic staff was negative. It is important to note that what Mcinnis (ibid) does not articulate is the individualistic relationship between professional services and academic staff. Instead, he simply argues that his participants felt that the relationship was negative.

The idea that departments can behave in a certain way towards professional services staff is interesting. This links to what Holland et al. (1998) term 'self-authoring'. They argue, using Bakhtin, that the words we use are not just our own, 'the author, in everyday life as in artistic work, creates by orchestration, by arranging overheard elements, themes and forms' (ibid:171). This would indicate there is limited room within the departments PSS4 is talking about to self-author. The language the academic staff use when interacting with PSS4 seems to have been internalised.

While discussing authors, Bakhtin (1981:299) argues that the 'author does not speak in a given language … but he speaks, as it were, through a language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates'. In other words, language, and in this case the nomenclature of professional service staff is something that materialises and then is ventriloquised by their professional shared world. This shared language then permeates through to new academic staff members who then perpetuate the challenging relationship the department has with professional services staff, or at least the ones that PSS4 works with.

One of the academic staff interviewed took some time to understand the role of professional services and admits that this could have affected her relationship with them:

> Well, when I started here, [XXX] was in that, it was your kind of role and I remember one day finding out she had a Master's degree and I couldn't understand why she needed one like I truly could not understand. I think that's because where I came from in the NHS, admin managers were not what they are here and it took me a really long time to understand that, like a really long time and probably really didn't understand it until I started working more closely with admin managers. (ACC2)

If academic staff arrive in a department and are surrounded by a lack of clarity of the role of professional services it may cause confusion, especially given the number and range of roles that professional services now encompass. Academic administrators who are not managers and who do not have perceived managerial power can appear to be those enforcing the rules and therefore appear to be making an academics' role more difficult.

What is obvious is that relationships are determined by both academic teams and individuals:

> I'd say it's quite mixed depending on who they are. So, with some academics I get on really well with and I've got a really

> good relationship whereas if I need something, I know who I can go to and same, they can come to me. I know if something needs doing who to go to get it done properly and then I've got the relationship with some academics where I've probably got a good relationship with them but I know they are probably not the best people to go to for certain things and there is obviously the few that you find unapproachable and people don't really have much relationship with apart from the odd 'can you do this' or 'can you sort this out'. So, it is very mixed. (PSS5)

> It doesn't seem to be one or two it seems to be departments. Like you have got your [XXX] and [XXX] who've got this awful superiority thing going on and then you've got [XXX] and [XXX] who are lovely. Treat you like a human being, come and have a chat, you know, invite you to their do's. It's very odd. (PSS4)

There are positive relationships which take place between academics and professional services staff, yet it is the negative ones that prompted the most conversation during the interviews. All three staff (PSS3, 4 and 5) who work in academic administration directly with academics had a story of a poor relationship. PSS3 noted that generally she had good relationships with academic staff:

> Pretty good actually, yeah, pretty good. (PSS3)

However, she also commented on a conversation she overheard with two academics who were talking about professional services staff:

> The one time I've seen it laid bare was, two academics were really slating the admin staff and it was really horrible to listen to because I knew how much pressure the admin staff were under, not those particular individuals but just as an example that you know it's not because they weren't doing things fast enough deliberately, it's just they really, really couldn't. The gist of it was they were stupid, they were ineffective, they were incompetent, they're slow. (PSS3)

PSS3 felt personally offended by hearing this type of negative comment. It can be frustrating for both professional services and academics when everyone is busy and

unaware of the others workload. Not understanding the role that professional services undertake is discussed later in this chapter (4.4) but what PSS3 is talking about in this situation also reiterates the comments by PSS4 and PSS5 above. The idea that individuals can be rude and abrupt to professional services, and by academics discussing their feelings with each other, this behaviour may perpetuate itself throughout an area. This is not to say that professional services do not criticise academic staff, but in this study, this was not mentioned in the interviews.

The figured world of academia has its own discourse and part of this is an opinion on staff, whoever they are. It will not be shared by all who inhabit this world, but it is passed on through dialogue. New additions to this world are enveloped into it with shared resources and language (White et al., 2014). Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' can be referenced here, the 'socialised body' (Bourdieu, 1998:81) he refers to is demonstrated. The sharing of language links to the localised figured world. Holland et al. (1998) reference Bourdieu's (1977) work on Algerian peasants to illustrate the localised figured world, positional identity and symbolic capital, where honour is given to those of a higher credence. Although higher education is not necessarily relevant for Algerian peasants, it demonstrates the way in which localised figured worlds carry on traditions and how social positionality is important.

Our identity is created partially through the way we are seen by others. Bakhtin writes, 'in the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's'. (1981:345). What Bakhtin is trying to get us to acknowledge is that we see ourselves partly as others see us. Dialogism means we are constantly blending others' words and ideas with our own and we often take on the roles and dialogue used by others. Another example of this was given by PSS4:

> I seriously think that they, some of them think we sit around all day doing nothing, we once had a phone call … the academic thought she had put it on hold and she hadn't and [XXX] could hear her in the background going 'they do nothing down there', really slagging us off, they do, they think we do nothing. (PSS4)

The example by PSS4 of overhearing academics criticising professional services appears to be a source of frustration for her. However, by resisting the authoritative discourse of this academic staff member's figured world, PSS4 is attempting to self-author her own space and reject this view. As Bakhtin writes:

> All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day, and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (1981:293)

The language used by the academic staff member regarding professional services is exemplified in Bakhtin's quote. They appear to have internalised the perceptions of professional services staff from the academic figured world and are now perpetuating that view to others. By PSS4 attempting to reject the premise of the language used by the academic, she is creating a space to author herself, away from the 'internally persuasive discourse' (Bakhtin, 1981:345) this academic staff member has used. Holland et al. (1998:183) argue the space for self-authoring is important for identity creation; 'A Bakhtinian "space of authoring"' is then very much a particular "zone of proximal development," and one that is extremely important in an explication of the development of identities'. As professional services may be the brunt of academic frustration, it is important that they are able to find the space to reflect on their value and attempt to reject the internalisation of this negative rhetoric. It is also important to recognise here that while PSS3 and PSS4 talked about overhearing academic staff criticising professional services staff, these appear to be one off incidents. The academic staff views within this research are positive about professional services and further in this section (4.3.4), both ACC3 and ACC4 talk about the positive relationships they have with some professional services staff. Again, this appears to exemplify a space for authoring where the discourse from others who may have negative views on professional services has not infiltrated the figured worlds of ACC3 and ACC4 and they articulate a constructive relationship with professional services.

4.3.2 Relationships as a third space professional

When asked about his relationships with staff, PSS2, who works in a third space role, straddling both academic and professional services, focused on his relationships with central services, as opposed to academic staff or school professional services. I will discuss this further in this chapter (4.3.5) about academic relationships with central services, but PSS2 was the only professional services member of staff who discussed central services. PSS2 commented on his relationships with professional services from what could echo an academic point of view i.e., he discussed his relationships and shortcomings with central services and did not mention academic staff. The only difference between his answer and that of academics was the fact he did not mention school professional services, just central, although he did acknowledge he felt like he was straddling an academic and professional services' role:

> it's weird straddling somewhere in the middle, there is kind of these two buckets on either side that neatly, supposedly neatly encapsulate the large variety of people, when in reality there's probably not that much separation. (PSS2)

PSS2 struggles to deal with central services, much like academic staff do, and while he mentioned he did not feel there was much separation between the two roles he encompasses, it feels like there is, as he discusses his relationship with central services and the frustration he can feel. PSS2 seems to be attempting to create a space of self-authoring around his dual identities but is being held back by the figured world of central professional services, albeit a different figured world to the one he straddles in the school. PSS2 is angry at the barriers he feels IT services put in his way when he wants to undertake research, which he sees as one of the primary goals of his identity and job role:

> If I am angry and if I'm on email you might get less pleasant emails and they can be jarring. I have had it myself with IT who are probably the people I end up at loggerheads with, just because we've got these almost kind of competing goals in what we are trying to do. Their aim is to keep the networks secure etc. mine is to do something new and interesting and

> that usually involves doing something that makes the network less secure so the fact that there is this big separation in between us makes it really hard to communicate sometimes in a way that is nice. (PSS2)

It is this frustration that PSS2 demonstrates which academic staff also illustrate when talking about relationships with central services. Central services are perceived to be a barrier in preventing pedagogy and innovation which causes this frustration. 'The centre' appears as a faceless entity watching over the workings of those within the school, particularly felt by academic staff. It is a vivid example of Foucault's panoptic view (1991). The idea of being watched and therefore ensuring compliance with the centre's rules and regulations. Foucault describes it as 'a privileged place… for analysing with completed certainty… the director may spy on all the employees that he has under his orders' (ibid:204). PSS2 cannot identify himself within the professional services sphere in this context, for it is professional services that he feels is preventing him from undertaking research towards his PhD.

As a third space professional, while I am not undertaking research across the whole institution, I can understand why PSS2 has so much frustration with central services. I have struggled to get what I need from them when setting up the new research centre, even though this was a very prestigious and lucrative development for the university. This frustration has come from a point of wanting to make sure the staff and students involved transitioned into the new centre smoothly and with ease. It was difficult for central services to understand why we required the tools and equipment I requested. On the other hand, having had a fifteen-month secondment within central services during my time on the EdD, (as mentioned in the Introduction), I can see it from a different point of view, where standards and quality assurance must be met. The figured world of central services has different priorities to that of a school and this tension causes frustration. The shifting boundaries between academic roles and administration are increasing both within the UK and internationally (Allen-Collinson, 2009). The relationship between academic schools, third space professionals, and central university services is one that requires much

more research to understand the challenges and the potential resolutions which could be implemented.

4.3.3 Professional services/academic divide

As noted in the literature review (2.1) the last twenty years has seen a rise in research evidence relating to a divide between professional services and academic staff (Mcinnis, 1998; Seyd, 2000; Szekeres, 2004; Whitchurch, 2006, 2010a; Gray, 2015; Hobson et al., 2018). Mcinnis (1998:162) referenced the idea of professional services being the 'poor relation' and not worthy of research or scholarship. Wallace and Marchant (2011) in their research on gender, linked the divide to organisational theory, academics are the business and professional services are indirectly linked to the business. Wallace and Marchant (ibid) seem to be stating that professional services staff appear on the periphery of higher education and are therefore not seen as important or experts, unlike academic staff. They are not a core part of the university and are perceived as less valuable.

The divide appears to be socially constructed, created through differing views, and siloed working. It perpetuates itself through the continued idea that professional services are in the shadow of academic staff and not perceived as equals in terms of their contribution or value.

4.3.3.1 Professional services views on the divide

It is not my intention to challenge the concept of a divide, but I wanted to understand if both professional services and academic staff felt the historical notion of a division was still valid and if so, to what extent they felt this was something they witnessed regularly.

PSS1 felt that professional services, contractually, were not given the same benefits as academic staff, thereby contributing to a divide between the two:

> On a basic level they get more annual leave than us, they're generally kind of better paid than us, that's like levels I suppose. (PSS1)

While the professional services staff I interviewed were all on lower salaries than lecturing staff, across the university there are several senior professional services managers who have higher salaries than academic staff (excluding Professors and academic managers). The salaries that PSS1 discusses seem to be subjective to his position.

Academic staff have advantages that professional services staff do not (within my institution), not only when it comes to additional annual leave, which can be up to twelve days annually more than professional services but also study leave. As mentioned in the literature review (2.1.1), this is echoed by Whitchurch's (2010a:173) research:

> Where professional staff and faculty work side by side in a department … staff without academic contracts may not have the same rights as their academic colleagues in relation to, for instance, intellectual property rights or study leave.

In the university I work for, when an academic staff member takes up a PhD, they are allocated a day a week, or the equivalent time, as study leave. As a member of professional services, I do not get the same allowance. I have studied in my own time during the five years this doctorate has taken. I understand a PhD may be a requirement for an academic and therefore, the university should allocate the time, but as a senior professional services member of staff who works alongside academic colleagues, particularly now, in my current third space research role, I believe the same courtesy should be offered to me and others to give a sense of equity. Interestingly, PSS5 is studying an apprenticeship through the university at degree level and the programme requires one day a week study time, which has been allocated. This is an example of how professional services study time can be accommodated without disruption to the service but how it is also given to a staff member who is undertaking a programme that benefits the university i.e., spending

the apprenticeship levy internally. I have been lucky in having line managers who understand the importance of further study and have allowed me time off to study when needed, but for professional services this should not be on an individual ad hoc basis when there is a policy in place for academic staff.

The lack of development for professional services staff was noted by two of the professional service interviewees:

> It is lacking here for professional services. Development is really, really, poor, it's really poor. To have one thing, project management apprenticeships, that's dire. (PSS3)

The professional services staff who have been at the university several years i.e., more than seven, all commented on how they had undertaken quite a bit of training in their time in their role. PSS3 has only been at the university for three years and the lack of training appears to be an issue. As mentioned earlier, to use up the university's apprenticeship levy, professional services staff can be offered apprenticeships that lead to a degree, these are very limited in subject areas. PSS3 is a part-time member of staff who wanted to undertake, and was willing to pay for (as she knew she would not get funding), a part-time Master's degree at the university. PSS3 asked to move her hours around to attend the class and this request was rejected. The frustration she felt was palpable:

> 'I want to do a Master's and I want to do it here as this is my university'. 'Really sorry we can't spare you for two afternoons a week'. 'But I could come in on the Tuesday and then I would essentially be working for free'. 'No' 'But I want to give you money, I want to give you money and in exchange you're actually getting the best out of me, I bring the skills that I get from doing the Master's to my role, what's wrong with you'. (PSS3)

As someone who works alongside academic staff and sees their workload allocation reduced for study time (which is often funded study) it is understandably demoralising for PSS3 when she can see academic staff getting study time, albeit for

a qualification related to their role. I would suggest it is the unfairness of the situation that contributes to the concept of the professional services/academic divide. As the university would not lose out on any of PSS3's time, her frustration appears reasonable.

The lack of development for professional services staff was reiterated by PSS1, who mentioned how much training he had undertaken when he first started but was concerned for those who had recently joined the university:

> If I was starting out now, then I think there would be a lack of the university's training. (PSS1)

The way the university undertakes training has now changed, so where there used to be face to face programmes that were often certificated, it is now much more online or not available at all. Some of this is due to budgetary concerns, which are facing much of higher education, but the university is phasing in a 'University Academic' career pathway, which navigates the career path and development of academic staff. There has been huge amount of hype around this project and staff are being asked to reference it within their annual performance reviews. There is no equivalent for professional services staff and alongside the lack of development felt by them, there is little evidence of a commitment to the career of professional services. It is within this context the gulf between the two spheres is still felt heavily by professional services staff, particularly when there is such a blatant divide between the two for development and career progression. However, PSS4 argued the divide is narrowing:

> I think the divide between academic and admin isn't as great as it used to be, there was an absolute definite. (PSS4)

PSS4 goes on to say how things have changed during her time in higher education:

> There is still some of that about, but then you have got the ones coming through who are bucking the trend, who don't. It's a social thing though isn't it; society always has layers. It's what human beings do isn't it, we put things in boxes, and we have hierarchies and if you're not careful you get stuck in it and play to the role that you think you have been given. I

> don't take it personally, I am what I am, they are what they are. I like them as a person, I admire what they do, it's not easy, I am not sure they admire what we do, some do, some don't but they don't understand what we do. And to be honest they don't care what we do as long as we make their lives easier. (PSS4)

What PSS4 has described here is the figured world of higher education from the perspective of a member of professional services staff. While the divide is being reduced in her opinion, it is still there in the hierarchy of higher education, which places academics above professional services staff. PSS4's statement again indicates the individualistic nature of the relationships between the two parties. PSS4 believes professional services staff are there to make the working lives of academics easier. If this is the case then there will be a divide between the two as one is there to serve the other, to give them space to do their job. While PSS4 indicates she believes the divide is reducing, it will always be there as the figured worlds are separated by what PSS4 refers to as layers.

Hobson et al. (2018:317) argue 'academic culture often positions professional staff as peripheral to the main business of the university'. This is possibly a key element of the figured world of higher education, they see themselves as the most important part of an institution. Mcinnis (2010:147) writes 'academic faculty have long claimed special privileges and status as autonomous professionals within their institution and society in general'. I do not agree that the divide is created purely by academic staff, I think naming conventions and the importance placed on academic development by institutions add to the divide, it is unfair to just blame academics. The idea that the culture of higher education perpetuates and continues the notion of a professional services/academic divide is a demonstration of the way figured worlds are formed. Holland et al. (1998:49) writes:

> People have the propensity to be drawn to, recruited for, and formed in these worlds, and to become active in and passionate about them. People's identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically in these "as if" worlds.

As staff within higher education get drawn into the cultures that exist and the identities created, it can be difficult to change perceived notions of the divide. Identities within these worlds become entrenched by those who reside in them. Although, given that improvements appear to be marginal, it is interesting to think what it would take to bridge the gap that some professional services and academic staff believe exist.

4.3.3.2 Academic views on the divide

Academic staff had differing views on the divide between the two spheres, and even whether the divide exists. ACC5 was adamant that it did and had witnessed it at several institutions:

> Sadly yes, I see that and not just in this institute … I think there is kind of tensions and mostly from my point of view the academic staff do not appreciate how difficult the workload of professional staff is and they tend to, academic staff tend to think they are the main, almost breadwinners, and professional staff are there to support them so they should be at their beck and call but they actually, professional staff tend to serve the whole school or sometimes university and they can't just be always as responsive. So, I think there is sometimes almost competing interests, like, not understanding each other's roles. (ACC5)

All five professional services staff interviewed commented on the fact they felt academics did not understand what they did and what their role encompassed so it is interesting to see an academic member of staff echo this sentiment. If the lack of mutual understanding has an impact on the divide between the two, this seems a reasonable suggestion to take forward as an outcome of this study to the university management in an attempt to bridge this gap. However, this argument is difficult to put forward when other academic staff interviewed were more ambiguous in their thoughts:

> Yes and no. I think for the ones you know face to face there isn't because you are working as a team and you've all got the

> same goal to support your students. So, as I say with [XXX] and people who support our Master's, I don't think there is but when it's people on the end of an email, people that you don't know then I think there is. (ACC3)

ACC3's argument about the relationship depending on distance and teamwork is covered later in the chapter (4.3.6) but it echoes the sentiments of the professional services staff when talking about their relationships with academic staff. Knowing who you are working with and the demands on time for both parties goes some way to creating a beneficial relationship and reducing the divide between the two. ACC2 and ACC4 had completely different views on if the divide was a real concept:

> I do think there is a divide. (ACC2)

> I don't think there is. (ACC4)

ACC4 goes on to say that, while she personally does not think there is a divide between the two parties, she could see how this perception was possible. Working at a Director level for a period enabled her to see how academic needs are always put first:

> I do get the feeling that there is this historical divide and potentially there is with some people. I think you do get the feeling that there is tension sometimes. I can certainly see why, because I think sometimes especially when I did go to certain meetings when I was interim director, there is a lot of talk about academic this, academic that, academic that. You do think, 'well, what about professional services?' so a lot of decisions are taken and talked about, about the development of academics but you think 'what about everybody else, though?' (ACC4)

The idea that only academic staff are considered in decision-making goes back to my earlier point about an academic career pathway and the perceived importance of ensuring academic staff are considered first before professional services. This divide can be articulated by keeping the figured worlds separate and only allowing those deemed credible with entrance into this protected sphere. When Holland et al. (1998) discuss what they call characters in figured worlds, they state; 'A figured world

is peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on and orientations toward it' (ibid:51). In the world of higher education this equates to roles and job titles and the hierarchy of universities. As the figured world of higher education appears to be orientated towards academic priorities first, it is understandable that professional services staff can feel frustrated.

Although ACC4 feels professional services staff are often forgotten about in senior management meetings, ACC2 sees it quite differently:

> The divide I feel personally now in respecting everybody's role is that I think, and you'll probably laugh because you'll think it's the opposite way round, I think admin staff are better looked after in the university than academic staff in terms of having their boundaries protected, not at your level as I think you're subject to the same kind of, but you know, [XXX], [XXX] and the staff at that level are able to say no and when that happens to you as an academic multiple times, so I can be thinking, right ok, so this is right, what I need to do is know about finance, admissions, processes, FECs, I need to know a little bit about everything because it is no one else's job taking minutes of a meeting and it has to be done and it falls to me, so that's where I think, for me, the divide sits. (ACC2)

It appears that ACC2 is frustrated as her agency dissipates and is replaced by a feeling of powerlessness as professional services become empowered to say no to additional work that then must be picked up by academic staff. The autonomy that academics are used to is being picked at and reduced by what they see as managerial forces. Whitchurch (2010) argues professional services managers enforcing quality and retention metrics can take away the independence academic staff are used to and create a divide and an othering of academic staff. They are no longer seen as the reason for an institution's existence but have been reduced to taking on what they see as administration, a role that is clearly marked out for professional services staff. As ACC2 reasons, if professional services cannot/will not do it then it is only the academics left who can. Both Henkel (2005) and Billot (2010), in their research into

academic identity, suggest that academics are being asked to respond to changes in the university landscape that impact their autonomy and academic freedom. They note that, while frustrated, academics in general are adapting to this change, albeit with a level of annoyance, as demonstrated by ACC2.

As a manager who implemented some of the changes ACC2 refers to, I can understand the frustration of having to pick up work that is deemed to be administrative work. However, what ACC2 and academics who complain about the increased level of administration may not realise is that, in my experience, when an institution is in financial difficulty or needs to save money, it is nearly always the professional services staff who are offered redundancy. Their work can only be allocated to the staff remaining, so in some cases it has to be picked up by academic staff. However, in the recent coronavirus pandemic it is fixed term academics and those on research contracts who have found themselves being let go or their contracts not extended (McKie, 2020). Again, this has been a money-saving mechanism within the higher education sector and will impact the workload of both professional services and academic staff.

4.3.4 Academic relationships with school professional services

I wanted to report the relationships between academics and school professional services separately. There is a significant difference in the way academic staff describe their relationships with school professional services and central professional services. There has been very little research on the relationship between academics and central services and this is an area which needs to be explored further. When asked about their relationships with school professional services, the five academics interviewed all mentioned positive relationships and several reiterated how close they were, again, like the professional services staff, specific individuals were mentioned as well as teams of staff:

> School, I think it's good because I think people know how you are, the way you work, and you know how the people work

> so it's a bit more of a family whereas externally it's not. (ACC1)

> School staff, I think we have a really great relationship with people like [XXX], [XXX] and [XXX]. I think we've great relationships with them. (ACC3)

> I literally speak to them all on a daily basis. I mean with school and the person I deal with in that role, literally I'm either on the phone or emailing her like every single day. I could not do without that person; the whole department would not run without that person therefore everything wouldn't happen. (ACC4)

This evidence of a number of positive relationships challenges research by Seyd (2000) who argues that relationships between the two may be strained due to some academic staff believing that professional services are attempting to manage them and impose bureaucratic systems and processes on them which impede on their research time. However (Seyd, 2000:36) does illustrate areas of commonality including a 'commitment to excellence and professionalism and to the aims and purposes of higher education'. Seyd's (ibid) argument enforcing administrative processes on academic staff does link to ACC2's point (4.3.3.2) relating to professional services staff being able to refuse to undertake work which then gets passed onto academic staff. Lewis (2014) argues the rise of the neoliberal management within higher education has changed the status of both professional services staff and academics, perhaps de-professionalising the latter. Feather (2015) counteracts this by stating Lewis is demanding greater administrative control over academic staff and points out that the two groups are very different from each other. The argument between the two is demonstrative of the whole relationship and divide between the two spheres and why the identities of the two appear to belong in separate figured worlds within higher education. Whitchurch (2012:4) summarises the debate:

> There has been … a tendency for both academic and professional services to see the other as more powerful, and themselves as marginalised. This sense of exclusion, together

> with perceptions of fragmentation and de-professionalisation, has contributed to a binary view of academic and non-academic activities, roles, and identities.

The responses from academics indicate a positive working relationship, one that is familial and in constant contact. Perhaps this is how the relationships moving forward will start to improve. Holland et al.'s (1998) research into Nepalese women and the constraints on their gender, identifies how they were able to author new identities and a new sense of self by the art of song. They used the lyrics to challenge current practice and discourse. Both academics and professional services staff could benefit from space to understand their identity and their perceived collective identity to help author more productive ways of working (where required) and improve their current relationships. I accept this is an idealistic view. I imagine trying to find the time to navigate relationships and understand roles is challenging in a climate where everyone appears to feel overworked. I do not think it would be high on a priority list for either occupational group.

ACC2 felt slightly more ambivalent regarding working relationships:

> On a personal level, I think it's alright, I don't know what they would say about me. From my point of view, it's good. I think I know who I think does a great job, a good job and sometimes is a bit hit and miss and work with that accordingly sometimes that's a bit frustrating but there is always a way round. I feel like I respect what they do and why they are doing it and therefore, and also the pressures on them as well. So, I think once you've got that you can work with it can't you? (ACC2)

As mentioned earlier (4.3.3.2), ACC2 appears frustrated at the amount of additional administration that she needs to undertake because of restructures and the power of professional services staff to say no to a task. However, ACC2 also echoes the sentiments of both professional services staff and academic staff, who argued that most relationships were based on their personal experience with an individual and their capabilities and attitudes.

4.3.5 Academic relationships with central professional services

Where the relationship becomes more fractious is between central services and academic staff and again, I wanted to make the distinction between the two groups of professional services staff. What I mean by central services are those departments who work with academic staff on areas outside school student administration (this is slightly more complicated as there are central elements of student administration). Departments such as HR, finance, marketing, and student records are areas where most academics must have some involvement, but these staff are both physically distanced and outside of the school's remit of control. For ACC5 there appears to be a closer relationship with staff who she knows and is located near, similarly for ACC2. With a faceless and nameless email address there is not the opportunity to get to know the professional services staff they work with. Both appear to be reasons why academic staff struggle with their relationships within these areas:

> I think it's sometimes really difficult to understand the boundaries of who is central, who is school-based, and I tend to go with who I need to contact, but yes, if it is school-based you tend to work more closely with those people and their dedicated team whereas central based staff are sometimes unattainable, you know, you send emails and there's maybe three staff looking after the whole school. You don't have the same level of relationship when you can ask for favours or speed something up and they're under a lot of pressure. (ACC5)

> For me I like to know the people who I am dealing with by email and I just don't feel we do but there's also the constant change, the staff change, people coming into roles and they might not know that job role or they might not have been taught the same as the previous person so there's just differences there. (ACC2)

Both ACC2 and ACC5 struggle with not having a relationship with central services staff, this includes staffing issues and the use of generic email addresses which are depersonalised. As mentioned earlier in the chapter (4.3.2) by PSS2, central services are considered a hinderance and blocker to academics in trying to progress their

work. ACC1 expresses clear frustration when talking about the service he receives from HR and ACC3 feels similar about the central research office:

> HR are just shocking because they distance themselves and they're almost like an external consultancy, I might as well just pay an external consultant because they don't represent you as the school. (ACC1)

> You email people within the doctoral school or your PGR support staff member, they don't always get back to you, or the student emails and you feel as supervisors you're having to do things twice. (ACC3)

The feelings echoed above are reiterated by Gray (2015) in his research on what Australian academics think about professional services staff. Gray (ibid) found that academics who work directly with local level professional services staff, who I refer to as school professional services, believed their workload was lower due to the services provided by this group of staff, which is reiterated by ACC5. However, he also found that central services were fixed in a culture of managerialism and increased the bureaucracy for academic staff. While ACC1 and ACC3 are frustrated at the service they receive from central services, they seem to forget that central services departments are attempting to respond to the needs of staff across the whole institution. Again, communication about roles and workloads may go some way to helping improve the relationships.

The divide between academics and central professional services was not echoed by school professional services, but this could be because the term professional services covers both central and school, so they think of themselves as one unit. Although again, from working with school professional services, I am aware of a level of frustration that can occur when dealing with central services, but not to the extent the academics felt. It appears the figured worlds of academic staff and school professional services merge when discussing central services and the central services figured world is othered by its demands and in some cases its perceived ineptitude, or lack of responsiveness. When faced with dealing with central services, academics

change their positional identity and appear to create a figured world which encompasses themselves and school professional services. When the questions relate to school professional services, the ones they work closely with, while the majority still maintain their stance of the value of them, they see themselves as distanced from them by the nature of being an academic and therefore back in their own figured world outside that of the professional services world.

4.3.6 Location

One area I was surprised to see come up so often with academic staff was about the physical location of the professional services staff they needed to work with. Historically academics and professional services were in the same building. As part of a restructure, the professional services teams were reassigned to sit within a different building, although on the same campus. A large majority of academic staff were left without direct access to the professional staff they worked with. This has clearly strained the relationships, particularly with central professional services who used to be housed within the school for several days a week and are now a significant distance away:

> I miss that person who knew everyone in your department or area and would deal with certain things and now … you just don't always know where to go. Maybe cause its location, everything has been centralised you don't have somebody within your own teams to deal with everything. So, I can understand why things are centralised you know budget-wise and trying to streamline everything but there's also that personable element of it that I sort of miss. (ACC3)

There is an acknowledgement here by ACC3 that budget constraints caused the centralisation and supposed efficiencies of centralising and moving staff, but this has also caused academic staff to change the ways in which they work, which in turn has meant a level of frustration:

> There was a time when the professional services were based at the school in the same building, and I could just pop in and

> see someone, and it makes a huge difference to speak face to face or drop a document or same for the student's experience as well. When even school-based staff have moved to sort of the other side of the campus that personal contact is lacking. (ACC5)

Moving both central and school staff, has created a distance both physically and emotionally for academic staff. This is echoed by professional services staff:

> At the minute we work in a different building, you've got that geographical distance … the admin is physically away from the academic team so you're not socialising with them in the workspace cause you're in a completely different part of the building so you're geographically separate. (PSS4)

> I think it's obviously very noticeable that since we have moved offices to a different building, that we don't see a lot of members of staff very often, whereas we used to see some on a weekly basis and that helps build that relationship up. Whereas now everything is either done by email or by phone, so no one kind of pops in and says, 'can you do this?' and while they're there you're kind of having a bit of a chat. People would nip down into the office and you would see people a lot more than we do now so it's quite difficult. I'd say it hasn't hindered how well we do our jobs, but it's probably hindered the relationships between sort of professional services and academic members of staff. (PSS5)

The wish for both parties to remain both physically and emotionally close together indicates a desire for a sense of collegiality. Although it does not appear to be always recognised by professional services, both parties acknowledged that physical closeness can bring with it an improved relationship and sense of worth, particularly for professional services staff. Whitchurch (2018) argues that the location of activities and staffing creates tension and a sense of ownership for both central and professional services staff. Whitchurch (ibid:14-15) uses the example of educational developers to illustrate her point:

> The co-location of educational developers in a central unit can help to create a community of practice in which they can share experience. On the other hand, it can also lead to a sense by academic colleagues that they would prefer to have

> their “own” academic developer locally in a school or department, in the belief that such an arrangement leads to a better understanding of disciplinary needs.

This desire for academic staff to have professional services located in a school has been highlighted within this research and echoed by the school professional services staff. However, like Whitchurch (ibid) indicates, the sense of ownership over professional services can also arise. There is frustration by academic staff that the professional services staff they see as having belonged in the school are now centralised. Management decisions on locating professional services staff away from academics has hindered relationship building on both sides. If staff do not have the opportunities to see each other and have those personal encounters, how can relationships improve?

Given the recent pandemic, the shift to home working and the potential for permanent flexible working, there will be more research needed into how these new working arrangements impact the relationships between the two groups. From a personal point of view, using technology to communicate appears to impact on relationships, and particularly what can be classed as ‘water cooler’ conversations. The discussions that take place in corridors and kitchens can be very useful and this is lost when working virtually.

4.3.7 Summary

The relationship between professional services and academic staff appears to be complex, individualistic, often based around location and department, and vital to ensure staff members within a university are working towards the goals of the institution. It sounds simple but in reality, relationships are complicated and messy, and differ with each person, whether this be an academic or a professional services member of staff.

This section has illustrated how relationships between academic staff and professional services are very much based on an individual’s role and staff within

their sphere. There is however a marked difference between the way academic staff perceive their local, school professional services staff and central services staff. What appears to be the main issue with the latter is the often nameless, faceless service that is provided through generic email addresses. Without a known member of professional services to advise academic staff, someone with whom they have a personal relationship, they do not always know who to ask or receive a timely and helpful response when they do.

The professional services staff who were interviewed did discuss negative relationships and the impact it can have on them. They also talked about the positive ones and I have attempted to recognise this within the discussion. For the most part academic staff felt they had a good relationship with school professional services staff, yet this is not always recognised by professional services. There still appears to be a divide between the two in how they perceive each other, and in the development opportunities awarded to the two groups. The increasing physical distance between them in the school has not helped alleviate this problem. Individual interactions can cause frustration, but it does not appear to have much of a negative impact on how professional services staff perceived their professional identity which was reiterated earlier in the chapter (4.1.5). It is the relationship academics have with central professional services which needs to be explored further to understand both sides of this discussion.

As a third space professional who works across the boundaries of both academia and university administration, what has been discussed on both sides regarding relationships and location has resonance for me. In my previous roles within the university (that I described in detail in the Introduction) I was a professional services manager who was located directly with my staff. Now as a research manager, I am located with the students I am responsible for and the academic staff I work with. The professional services staff who manage the programme administration are in a different building and I do understand the frustration felt by academics.

The nature of the relationships between the two groups does not surprise me and this reflects my experience with academic staff. I have both positive and negative relationships with academic staff, although, like PSS4 some of the more fractious ones are based in one team, again indicating a specific internalised figured world. There appears to be less in the literature regarding individual relationships but more research into occupational groups, for example Allen-Collinson's, (2007, 2009) work on research administrators, and it is an area that needs more focus.

Being a third space professional comes with challenging tensions. I see myself as being part of this challenge as I use this research to understand the relationship between professional services and academics but also how I see myself as being located within both figured worlds and at times a figured world on my own.

4.4 Roles and qualifications

I have worked in higher education for over seventeen years and worked in a number of roles across central and professional services alongside academic staff. It seems to me that both professional services and academics have a misunderstanding or at least a lack of clarity about what the other party does in terms of the job role, workload, and additional responsibilities. I wanted to understand how professional services staff felt their role was viewed by academics and what, if any, impact this had on their professional identity. I also discuss academic qualifications and career progression for both professional services and academic staff.

In the taught element of the EdD programme, I focused on the reasoning behind wanting to study for a Doctorate as a member of professional services. I reflected that qualifications are to me, required to teach at a university and are part of the reason that academics and professional services are distinguished from each other. I am interested to understand how relevant the interviewees felt their qualifications were to their current role.

On a personal level, I am not sure how important my qualifications are to my position. I have three degrees, one undergraduate and two postgraduate. However, the two postgraduate qualifications were studied part-time and because of my desire to study, not necessarily to improve my career prospects. My first Master's was in women's literature, not hugely conducive to a career in higher education administration. On reflection, I can see that the skills I have gained from my educational experience though, have helped me within my role, albeit not directly to progress.

Given my experience working with academic staff I am interested in how academics and professional services perceive each other and the roles they undertake. This perception of role and the importance of work can link to the identity of staff and the value they feel.

4.4.1 Professional services qualifications

There were varying levels of qualifications for the five professional services staff members I interviewed. Four of them have degrees and PSS5 is working towards her degree via the apprenticeship route the university is offering. Alongside a degree, PSS2 also has a Master's degree and is working towards a PhD. Currently a technician working alongside academic staff, PSS2 is a third space professional who aspires to become an academic. This route is one that the previous role holder took, and who is now an academic member of staff so there is a precedent in this area. PSS2 stated that having both academic and vocational experience was important for his role and to help him reach his goal of a career in academia:

> I would say that for my role there is an aspect of both so certainly having the academic qualifications are important in the applications of the more vocational knowledge that I have, so it's a combination of having vocational skills and the specific academic knowledge to apply it. (PSS2)

What can be identified in PSS2's response is that his academic qualifications help him in his role, and this is not the case for the other professional services staff.

For PSS1 there was a tenuous link in terms of how his degree had helped him in his role:

> Only in a generic kind of sense, in that degrees help you kind of manage information. There is no direct link between my education and my work. (PSS1)

For PSS4, as mentioned earlier in the chapter (4.1.1) she enjoys writing and thinks her degree has helped her in that sense or 'it used to'. During several internal restructures, PSS4 felt that many of the tasks she used to enjoy as part of her role have been taken from her, and as a result, she sees her degree (English and American Literature) as redundant now her ability to create a crafted set of minutes has been removed. Her sense of identity has changed as she is prevented from doing what she used to love and changed her day-to-day experience. I have used this quote earlier in the chapter (4.1.1), but I want to repeat it here as it evidences PSS4's lack of agency:

> Unfortunately, that role is seriously diminishing. I am just getting more and more upset because originally minutes used to be full, formal, each point would have a number, it was just beautiful, then they ditched that and it was just minutes with headings which I also liked, last year they brought in bullet points. I am destroyed. (PSS4)

As roles change for professional services within higher education, and processes are streamlined, where does this leave the staff who enjoyed these roles and feel that the skills that they have worked hard to acquire over the years, are now being wasted? The limited identities articulated appear to be linked to the roles they undertake and these may need to be reconstructed around their new duties, and then deconstructed when these duties are changed again (Henkel, 2010). The figured world of university administration is therefore constantly in flux as changes are implemented and professional services staff must reposition themselves within their space to conform to a new way of working. As the 'other' within the world of higher education, the professional services staff member is expected to accept these changes and assume different ways of working regardless of how this impacts their

identity. They follow the expectations of both senior managers and academic staff which keep them in their sphere, despite the skills and qualifications they hold. I can see an argument where this concept could apply to academics, in terms of structure and bureaucratic changes. However, I would argue that the difference between professional services and academics within this area, is that despite changes, academics still impart their subject knowledge to students and their role as a lecturer/researcher is not likely to be too dramatically altered by structural changes.

Allen-Collinson's (2006, 2009) work into research managers picked up on the fact that those who work closely with academic staff in a research environment, as I do, felt they would be taken more seriously within academia if they held higher level qualifications. One respondent undertook a part-time Master's purely 'because I needed to flag up an academic pedigree' (2006:277). This is backed up by Berman and Pitman (2010) and Ryttberg and Geschwind (2017) whose research into professional services staff in Australia and Sweden, found those staff who work closely with academic staff, particularly in research, felt that having a doctoral level qualification gave them more legitimacy (in the eyes of the academic) to be in that position.

It also raises the question of status within higher education. Are you perceived as having a higher level of status, the more qualifications you have and how would both professional services and academic staff know the level of qualification each possesses? If the respondent above is taking a Master's degree just for the recognition, does the content and act of learning not matter? It appears, given the work by Collinson, (2006), Berman and Pitman, (2010) and Ryttberg and Geschwind, (2017) that more research needs to be undertaken within this area to understand how qualifications and the perception of education relates to the relationship between professional services staff and academic staff.

I have touched on this in the Introduction, but one of the reasons I pushed myself to undertake this EdD, was to get this type of recognition. To demonstrate that I was good enough to work alongside academic staff and to be recognised as such by them.

However, there is also a personal and wider value to the learning I have undertaken and an interest in more than just a qualification. I must acknowledge that not all professional services staff feel this desire to achieve a certain level of qualification to be recognised. Both PSS2 and PSS5 are undertaking further qualifications to help with their career but it is only PSS2 who wants to move into an academic sphere. The remaining three professional services staff gave no indication that they needed additional qualifications to gain more respect or to justify their role. Although not all professional services staff feel this way, there is evidence that having a doctoral level qualification, particularly, when working in research management does bring with it a sense of recognition by academic staff. One of Allen-Collinson's (2009:948) research subjects stated 'having to write a PhD clearly does teach you to write clearly but it's more useful on the other side, dealing with people and being seen as a serious, qualified person'. This is part of what I hope to get from having a doctorate level qualification, recognition that I deserve to be in my current position working with and alongside research staff and students.

ACC1, who I have worked alongside for over eight years, mentioned the perception of being 'less than' an academic in his interview:

> Sometimes I wonder what professional staff think of academic staff and I wonder sometimes the reason why you are doing a doctorate is to be seen on a more level playing field because I think they must feel that they are perceived as a bit inferior, substandard. (ACC1)

ACC1's argument about inferiority is echoed by one of Berman and Pitman's (2010:165) research subjects who stated the result of the PhD gave them validity in the eyes of the academics:

> I have no doubt that I would be very much less effective in representing the School's business/financial priorities if I did not hold a PhD; not because the degree confers any special expertise in these matters but because it provides a measure of protection against being sidelined on issues characterised as 'matters for academic judgement'.

This acknowledgement by ACC1 of inferiority echoes the professional services frustrations at the way they are perceived by academics. However, none of the interviewees mentioned this inferiority was due to their level of education, so within the context of this study, this seems to be a personal issue for me. I want to validate my worth by having the title of Doctor. Although I have not spent five years undertaking this research just for a title, it is an important part of the reason I have spent time away from family and friends. To have a recognised qualification that comes with the historic title of Doctor is something I have been striving for. I have spent a lot of time thinking and writing about this through Phase A of the EdD and have spoken openly with my Director of Studies about this topic. I also acknowledge I will still suffer from imposter syndrome once my EdD is completed. Academic staff, as demonstrated by ACC1, can see how professional services staff feel othered and outside the figured world of academia but my research indicates this is due to the relationships between the two parties, not academic qualifications.

4.4.2 Academic staff qualifications

Of the five academic staff I interviewed, four were educated to PhD level, but only one (ACC3) of those four had completed what I would term a classic education route i.e., undergraduate degree, postgraduate degree, and PhD, all in succession with little time between the degrees. ACC1 and ACC4 had undertaken their PhDs while working full time in their respective fields, ACC1 in academia and ACC4 in a professional setting. ACC5 had undertaken a degree and career in a different field before re-training and undertaking her PhD full time, funded by a studentship. These different types of educational pathways are similar to those discussed by professional services, there does not seem to be a clear route for educational qualifications.

There were differing views in how their qualifications had benefitted their roles, ACC1, ACC3 and ACC5 were clear that a doctorate level qualification was required for them to progress with their career:

> So, it's not helped me from a theoretical and analytical perspective. It's helped me in that I've reached the ceiling that I think you need to get if you want to be a manager in the university as in you've got to be a doctor. (ACC1)

> So, you sort of need that PhD to move on, but I don't feel I've done anything to move on. (ACC3)

> It was made very clear to me that I can't progress my career unless I got my PhD, so I was kind of reminded every day. (ACC5)

Interestingly, only ACC4 talked about it helping her with supporting students:

> In supporting the student in their research, it definitely has, and I think it developed me as a person. (ACC4)

Given that the main role of most academic staff is to teach students, it is interesting that only one of the academics who holds a PhD discussed how it helped impact their students. The rest talked about how it benefitted them personally and professionally, in terms of their career progression. When asked about qualifications, ACC2, who has a subject level Master's and a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (PGCAP), felt that it was the PG Cert which was of most benefit as it helped in her pedagogical process:

> I think having gone through the process of a Master's, understanding what Master's level work is, obviously makes it easier to teach and mark at Master's level. I do think the content of the PGCAP was useful, was relevant and did change some of my practice. So, the Master's in professional development was useful as an academic exercise I think, the PGCAP was more practically useful. (ACC2)

ACC2 has found her academic qualification beneficial to her teaching practice, and therefore to her students, yet does not feel she would benefit from undertaking a doctorate level qualification. This would indicate that perhaps ACC2 sees higher

degrees in terms of learning and application and less a form of professional advancement:

> I don't feel I need a doctorate at this point, I don't feel I need any subject-specific training. (ACC2)

This contrasts with ACC1, ACC3 and ACC5 who felt a PhD was vital for them to progress with their career. ACC2 is a leader within her department and was acting head for a year so not having a doctorate did not hold her back.

Feather (2015) argues that an academic holding the minimum of a Master's degree is deemed to be eminent in their field. Given the fact I have two Master's in two completely different subjects, I would disagree with this. While I am knowledgeable in each subject, I would not say this classes me as eminent in either field or gives me a sense of academic identity. I understand that Feather (ibid) is trying to make a point about how academics must be qualified to teach but intimating a Master's degree makes one an expert in their field is something I would disagree with. I would argue as Billot (2010) does, that academic identity is bound by the practices, language and organisational belief that they have in common with each other. It is these elements, plus the recognition of structure, process, and tradition, that help form the figured world of academia. However, Feather's (2015) assumption that academic staff will hold at least a Master's level qualification can be assumed to be correct (although again, does not create eminence), and therefore is an additional part of academic identity and its figured world.

In talking about qualifications with ACC1, we discussed how he thought to be a manager required you to have a doctoral-level qualification. I questioned whether this was an academic or professional services manager:

> I don't think it is as important for professional services, but it would certainly be a benefit, not for the fact that I think it would enhance you in your skills to be able to do the job I just think it is the credibility that it affords, that it would give you. (ACC1)

This links to Allen-Collinson's (2007:303) research on professional services staff who work in research administration. She argues:

> Most research administrators considered that their role would be rendered much more difficult without the possession of considerable academic capital (Bourdieu, 1988), not only for functional reasons, but they also suspected that without a degree, even a doctorate, they would encounter credibility problems.

As I have mentioned throughout this thesis, undertaking a doctorate was a way for me to gain academic credibility and hearing ACC1 state the same, in some way, validates my personal thoughts in terms of the perception of professional services. Without having a level of qualification similar to that of academics, I believe I cannot achieve the same standing that they have, and this is echoed by the findings of Allen-Collinson (2006, 2007). However, as has become clear throughout my data analysis, the findings from this research illustrate that this is a personal issue and the professional services staff I have interviewed do not feel that additional qualifications will validate their identity or help them in their current role. While this is at odds with my ideas going into this research and that of the literature, it is pleasantly surprising that other professional services staff do not appear to have the same complex that I have.

There are very few professional services roles that require a doctorate level qualification. In Berman and Pitman's (2010) research, their sample of professional services roles from across Australian institutions found only one example (research officer) where a PhD was a requirement. Given this, it is not surprising Boud et al. (2018) found that although studying a professional doctorate benefits the student personally, there is less evidence of the benefit to the organisation. Berman and Pitman (2010:166) although writing over ten years ago believe 'the value of a PhD for professional staff in the higher education sector seems to be unrecognised'. When a doctorate is not a requirement of a role, there is a need to justify a rationale to undertake this level of study when the benefits are more difficult to identify and articulate. This can hinder professional services staff asking for funding or study time.

I was lucky my head of school was happy to support my request to register for the EdD and could see the benefit of the research in the long term.

ACC2 was frank in her confusion over why professional services would benefit from a higher-level qualification, until she understood the role further, as mentioned earlier (4.3.1). It is this misunderstanding of the role that prompts frustration from professional services staff, if academics do not know what their role is, how can they understand the benefits of the qualifications that they hold? Having two Master's degrees has improved my writing, organisation, and research skills, all of which benefit me in the roles I have undertaken. ACC2 did not articulate that she valued the staff anymore once she found out about their qualifications, however, she did concede that higher education administration was a profession, something she had not been aware of before:

> So now I see, I look at people like yourself and [XXX] and [XXX] and I just think, it's just a completely different job, it's a profession in its own right but I didn't think that at the beginning. I didn't know what it was. (ACC2)

Academic staff felt the qualifications they held were important to their role, either for progression or to help in their pedagogical practice. It was only ACC1 who seemed to understand how a higher-level qualification would benefit professional services staff in terms of recognition and credibility.

4.4.3 Professional services perceptions on how academics view their role

When talking about academic understandings and perceptions of the role of professional services staff and what they did on a day-to-day basis, the responses were telling. PSS1 was sure that academics did not understand his role:

> Getting down to a granular level, no they don't. I think the overall thing is that they are glad somebody does it but it's not them. I think they know that it is a lot of work and they know that it is stressful, and they know it produces a lot of

> problems, issues and they are glad that somebody else can sort it out. (PSS1)

Here there is an acknowledgement that, while academic staff may not know the full remit of PSS1's role, they are glad they do not have to do it. There is an awareness of the difficulties and pressures of the role. This perception comes from the fact PSS1 has a role that works closely with academic staff and it is clear to him that academics understand how difficult the role can be. This relates to PSS1's professional identity, as mentioned earlier in the chapter (4.1.1). His confidence in his role and third space sphere, enables him to be self-assured in both his work and how it is perceived by others.

This is similar for PSS2, who again resides in the third space working across both academic and professional services:

> Problem-solver, there is an amount of problem-solver, there has had to be some jigging of expectations over the last couple of years away from kind of what ITS's job should actually be and actually trying to get some separation there between the different roles that are there and determining responsibility. (PSS2)

PSS2's view, much like PSS1, is that he is seen as a problem-solver, someone to bridge the divide, in this case between central services and the academics. However, being perceived as a problem solver does not come without its own issues, as PSS2 explains, a lot of this problem-solving and making pedagogic practices easier for academics comes at a cost in terms of time and his own research. Being part of a small team brings challenges, but it also enabled PSS2 to sit down with the academic team and discuss his frustrations but also where efficiencies can be made:

> I complained a lot over the last year that it can be really hard to get time when I can actually sit down and work on projects… because someone is knocking on your door every twenty minutes or every hour looking for some kind of support which I have to give but at the same time it obviously does mean that things don't get done. So we have actually

> made some changes to the way we are working in [XXX] to block out periods of time that are actually, should help us to work on those aspects of the work … there's kind of a tension between the short term solving problems, keeping the place running and the longer term: what we would like to do as a directorate, what we would like to as a university, what we would like to produce, yeah, there is definitely some tension there. (PSS2)

The nature of being a technician within the university and its structure brings with it these tensions. Working with academics but being part of the professional services structure can be frustrating as PSS2 illustrates. Botterill (2018:103) argues that technicians can be seen as 'servants or experts' and PSS2 argued this across his interview. Alongside wanting to be viewed as an expert and undertaking his PhD, he needs to ensure that academic staff have the right equipment and space to undertake teaching which is what he is employed to do. This tension is clearly frustrating at times but at least PSS2 has the confidence to negotiate time and space to undertake his own research. One of the outcomes of this research would be to look at how technicians across the institution, and those who want to move into an academic role, are being supported. There appears to be a need for the university to look at third space professionals, like myself, and PSS2. Akerman (2020) suggests that institutions need to recognise third space professionals as a positive resource and provide policies and contracts which reflect the value of the roles. As there appears to be a limited number of third space professionals across the institution, it is vital that we as a group have a voice and are recognised as being distinct from professional services and academics by the nature of both the role but also where we sit and work structurally. By third space working occupying its own figured world, while straddling the other two, there is a need to start the process of self-authoring and identity creating to make sure we are not subsumed into a professional services figured world but are recognised as different with specific development needs, as articulated by PSS2.

The feedback on role perceptions was markedly different for the three programme administration staff. They felt academic staff did not understand what their role comprised of or the work they undertake:

> I think it depends who you ask, I think on the whole, they perceive the role to be the administration, whatever that means of a programme to be delivered. (PSS3)

> To do whatever they want basically, probably (laughs). (PSS5)

> People don't understand what our role is, it is definitely seen as an inferior job to an academic. (PSS4)

This sense of 'othering' that I discussed earlier in the chapter around nomenclature (4.2) appears again here. There is a sense of despondency from the three participants, that their roles are not understood, or more importantly, valued. Having started out at the university as a school manager, I know how hard the programme administration team work and it is disheartening to hear them speak about the lack of esteem in which they feel their roles are held. There is a sense of invisibility and lack of appreciation that is not only echoed by the professional services team but also in the literature (Mcinnis, 1998; Szekeres, 2004; Allen-Collinson, 2006). Bourdieu's ideas around fields (of power) and academic capital are visible here (Bourdieu, 1984; Holland et al., 1998; Choudry and Williams, 2017). The professional services figured world appears to me, to be perceived and positioned as less than that of the academic space. Allen-Collinson (2006:272) contends that academics are 'placed well above research administrators in the power structure'. I would argue that this is all professional services staff, not just the research administrators in Allen-Collinson's (ibid) research. The hierarchy is felt by those professional services staff who work with academics on programme administration as PSS4 demonstrates.

Holland et al. (1998:59) argue that 'lived worlds are organised around positions of status and influence … and the cultural narratives that posit particular sorts of characters and their dealings within one another'. While this is true of the worlds within higher education, professional services staff have understandably different

identities and observations of their role and how others see it. The perceptions of PSS1 and PSS2 are markedly different to that of PSS3, PSS4 and PSS5 due to their diverse roles. Working in programme administration as PSS3, PSS4 and PSS5 do, brings with it challenges that are different to those working in other areas of the school and they have an alternative idea of how academics perceive their role.

However, when asked to articulate how they explain their role to strangers, the programme administration staff struggled with this question:

> I am not admin for the academics but I'm not admin for students either. I am admin for the programme itself. (PSS3)

> I struggle with this every time someone says, 'what do you do?'. Even my dad says, 'I don't know what you do'. I usually just say it is student support based cause they don't understand anything else. I usually just say I work in student support, supporting the students throughout their journey while they are in higher education. (PSS5)

If the staff themselves struggle to articulate what they do, whether this is because their job is so varied, or that an outsider to higher education would not understand it, it may not seem surprising that academic staff could struggle to define the roles of the professional services staff they work with.

4.4.4 What do academics think the role of professional services is?

While much has been written about academic identity (see Chapter Two) and some research has been undertaken about the role and identity of administrative staff within higher education as evidenced throughout this thesis, there has been little research into the perceptions of professional services staff by academics in the UK. More recent research into professional services has focused on third space professionals and the work that bridges administration and academia (Whitchurch, 2017, 2018; Bossu and Brown, 2018; Botterill, 2018; Linquist, 2018). While the professional services workforce is evolving, my career and current role is evidence of

this, I am interested in what academics think the role of professional services is and their perceptions of that. I believe this is an area that requires more understanding in a hope to improve the relationship.

It seemed that some of the academics interviewed struggled to articulate their thoughts about the role of professional services without wanting to diminish what they do. I also felt that as an insider researcher my role as a professional services staff member had an impact on their responses. This relates to the issue of reactivity (4.2.2). While reactivity can link to the validity of outcomes, where I have had concerns about my perceived positionality, I have attempted to highlight it to acknowledge my awareness.

Some were almost apologetic about their descriptions and I felt, at times that, I had to make them feel comfortable with their thoughts:

> I don't know, to help run the university and support people, well, yes to support the university with their specific roles within their departments, so ethics deals with ethics, you've got the academic support that deal with the day-to-day lecturing side and the students, so, I don't know I can't answer that question. I find that quite difficult, without sounding patronising. (ACC3)
>
> that's fine, sound patronising, you're just being honest … There is no wrong answer. (Researcher)
>
> Without saying, they're there to support the academic staff, because I don't really… because I think we should all work together and I've always been one of these people that you, you get to know everyone. But I suppose in a nutshell yes there is professional services we quite often call them academic support, support staff, administrators. (ACC3)
>
> There is no wrong answer. (Researcher)
>
> I know, I don't want to sound elitist. (ACC3)

This section of dialogue illustrates the concern ACC3 felt at being asked about the role of professional services and was almost apologetic for her answer. There are parts of a professional services role that do involve supporting the academic team, and the professional services participants acknowledged this and did not appear to feel patronised by this part of their day to day working. It was the expectations from academics that caused a level of frustration, not the support and assistance they required. ACC3 was not the only academic who used the term 'support':

> I think it's hard when you try to say they are here to support us, because I think it's a lot more than that, because that sounds like you're just there to support us doing our job and actually it isn't about that, cause actually we could be there to support you doing your job… It's about us all working together, so I don't actually think the word to 'support' us is right, but that's sometimes how I feel. That might not be the right word to say… Because I do often go, 'help, help me, I need this, help me' but yeah, it's just about that circle. We all have to work together to make the university work and I think the academics role is a very small role in that and I think when you look at it in like a little circle, the professional services often form a wider part of that circle than the academics. I think that's missed sometimes as well when you often think about who forms all the professional services. (ACC4)

> I had a team of three people who were working to support the postgraduate research directorate and they play an essential role in supporting the students and staff both supervisory teams and students. (ACC5)

Again, there is an apologetic nature to the use of the word 'support', but alongside this is an acknowledgement that the work professional services undertake goes further than just supporting the academic staff. From a professional services standpoint, it is nice to hear ACC4 acknowledge the work that both professional services and academics do to ensure the university works as expected. It is also heartening to hear an academic staff member acknowledge the various roles professional services play and how they can be overlooked in favour of academic

staff. It appears that ACC2 thinks professional services have a large amount of autonomy and she acknowledges the important role they play within the university:

> I think the professional services staff run the school. So, I think their role is to keep the kind of operational elements of, all the different elements of the school rolling along and, in some cases, review and develop and improve them. I don't think the professional services staff's objectives in many ways are different to an academic objective in that we all want to get the business done and done well and to a standard that keeps us all in a job and keeps money coming into the organisation. I think we go about it in different ways, sometimes I do think there is a lot of misunderstanding on both sides but yeah, I think they keep the wheels on the cart. (ACC2)

The responses from the academic staff echo those found by Gray (2015) in his research into academic views on professional services within Australian institutions. He discovered that local, and by this I would assert similar to programme administration within schools, professional services staff help lower the workload of academics and they did not associate them with the bureaucracy created by professional services managers. Gray (ibid) also found that academic staff looked to central services for increasing their workload and demands, this is echoed in the findings within this chapter (4.3). However, ACC1 argues that it is only senior professional services managers who are empowered to make changes and suggest different and improved ways of working:

> I would say some people are empowered but only in very senior professional services roles, not anything lower, I have never encountered anyone really who has been able to suggest changes to a structural process. (ACC1)

It is these professional services managers, whether based in the school or centrally, that are the ones who implement change which academics feel negatively impact them. Although this change can often emanate from academic managers, it is the local professional services staff that can feel the brunt of frustration from academics, perhaps because they are closer to them and feel a lack of appreciation for the work

that they do (Mcinnis, 1998). I feel the breadth of professional services within such a small case study demonstrates the diversity of staff, the relationships with academics and the complexity of these worlds.

All departments, academic, school professional services and central services must work together to ensure the smooth running of the institution and ensure an outstanding student experience, without this higher education would not function. Yet given the level of frustration felt by professional services staff, why do they stay?

4.4.5 Professional services choice to work in higher education and career progression

The route into a career in higher education for professional services staff was varied. PSS3 and PSS5 were purely looking for a job and fell into academic administration, while PSS1 and PSS4 were looking for roles that they felt were worthwhile and helped others:

> Fell into it, I needed a job, it seemed the logical thing to do. A job was available, I went for it and I got it. (PSS3)

> I had relatives that worked here so I was just looking around, trying to move out of travel into something else and just fell into it. (PSS5)

> I wanted to do something that mattered, so when the job came up in [XXX] [department], admin in [XXX], it ticked both boxes, education and training the next generation of health professionals. It just felt like I was doing something worthwhile, so that is how I ended up in education. (PSS4)

> It was a fairly conscious decision to go into maybe education or something, because when I was younger, the defining thing for me was, I didn't want a job where the end point was money, so… that's just what happened. (PSS1)

This is how many professional services staff end up working in higher education, it is rarely a career choice (Lewis, 2014; Regan and Graham, 2018). Although interestingly

when moving to a new house several years ago, I found an old careers form from my time at university in the late 1990s. It had used an algorithm based on my interests and deemed that a career in administration, particularly higher education would be suitable employment. I started off as a temporary member of staff and have spent the last seventeen years working in higher education. This echoes Lewis's (2014) and Regan and Graham's (2018) research, that while many people do not choose or even know about a career in higher education administration, once in, many of those remain in the sector for years. From a personal point of view, a career in higher education not only offers benefits such as a steady pension, generous annual leave, and sickness benefits but (I also think) it is a sector that is constantly evolving giving opportunities for moving roles and institutions like the NHS.

It is only PSS2 who actively chose a career in higher education specifically to carry on with his education:

> I was very specifically looking for a job in higher education. I was looking for a route to pursue a PhD and opted to go that route over the other job offers I had at the time. (PSS2)

PSS2 is clear on his career goals and followed up that plan by choosing to work in an environment that would offer him both academic experience but also an opportunity to research and undertake a PhD. This is quite a unique situation in my experience, but one that was attractive to PSS2 to carry on with his career aspirations.

Despite having frustrations with their job roles, how they are seen by academic staff and the difficult relationships that can occur, several of the professional services staff interviewed did not see themselves leaving the institution or higher education soon:

> I love this job. It's had its ups and downs … but I really love this job, I really enjoy it, I really enjoy working here. (PSS3)

> I think I would like to do something different and move about, but I enjoy working in higher education, I enjoy working here. So, I think once I have completed my degree I

> would like to move up and stay but maybe do something a bit different. (PSS5)

Both PSS2 and PSS5 spoke of wanting to progress their careers within higher education. It may be easier for PSS2 who has more of a defined career path ahead with options in which way to take his career. For PSS5, she is waiting to complete her degree but then has the added challenge of waiting for suitable jobs to be advertised within the institution and then go through the competitive application process.

Conversely, PSS1 had little interest in progressing but was concerned for others, like PSS5, as he felt there was little career progression for professional services staff within the university:

> It's like you look across this school and we've got loads of 6's [level of staff] and some of them are really good and really talented, but there is no way for them to progress, or there's no real way for them to give them aspects or to build up their CV. So, once you're in a 6, you're stuck… But, like I say, there's 6's in here that you could see going to be those 8's at the centre of the university, but there doesn't seem to be anyway to progress them. (PSS1)

It seems that PSS1 is concerned for his peers about their progression as he does not see a route through for staff to reach a more senior position. This can be particularly frustrating as the number of more senior positions reduces the higher up the organisational chart, so where there are opportunities, these are limited.

As mentioned, when talking about the academic/professional services divide (4.3.3) the university has recently created an academic career path structure with several routes into research and teaching and learning. There is nothing similar for professional services and this is where PSS1's frustration lies. He believes there are staff with great skill sets who are stuck with no progression. There is a danger they will look for work elsewhere and the university can lose talented individuals, particularly when there are a high number of institutions in the North West where opportunities can arise. This links to Szekeres and Heywood's (2018) research on

professional services managers. They found that half of those interviewed could not identify career progression opportunities and were looking out for other roles. Duncan (2014:39) states 'as support services have become more professional, the likelihood of moving around from one role to another and simultaneously climbing the promotion ladder has diminished'. This is something that resonates with me. I have been at the university over nine years and while I have had several different roles, in terms of positionality, it remains static, I am at the same level as when I first arrived. As a group of eight school managers who started at the same time, three have left, four of us remain at the same level and one has had a promotion. These statistics are bleak for the future development of professional services. One of the reasons I chose to undertake a doctorate is to widen my career opportunities. It is important that professional services staff are recognised and valued for the role they undertake, failure to do so can mean losing excellent staff.

4.4.6 Summary

Qualifications do not seem to be important to the three (PSS1, PSS3, PSS4) professional services staff who appear to have ended up in higher education administration by chance. Their qualifications have helped them in the acquisition of specific skills relevant to their current responsibilities. However, their daily tasks at work appear unrelated to the subject matter of their degrees. The academics interviewed suggested a PhD was important for their career progression not necessarily their job role. ACC2 is the anomaly to this, as she has created a successful career as an academic without a PhD.

PSS5 is pursuing a degree with the aim of career progression but it is not clear if the roles she desires require a degree. From my own experience most professional services administration roles that are advertised by the university require a degree. A degree is a barometer of a level of education, but it may not give an applicant the skills required for a specific role. The value of a degree has been pushed repeatedly onto society, creating a knowledge industry (Collini, 2012) so it is not surprising that

universities require staff to have one, or that PSS5 feels like she needs one to progress.

It is only PSS2, like the academic staff, who felt his qualifications were important to the role he undertakes and the career progression that he plans. Again, as a third space professional I understand this and while mine was not a conscious choice to undertake a career in higher education, it is the sector I see myself remaining in. It is also one where I feel that to widen my options for future progression a doctorate is required, as evidenced by three of the academic staff.

Lewis (2014) argues that academic colleagues are more empathetic to professional services staff who have higher academic qualifications, as he believes academics see this as an indication of understanding academic thinking and the teaching and learning process. I disagree with this and would argue that academic staff and professional services relationships are based on interpersonal skills and an ability to understand each other. What has emerged from the data is that relationships are beneficial to both when they communicate well and genuinely appreciate each other but is not based around qualification level. This appears at odds with Lewis's (ibid) argument.

The perception of roles is something that could improve the relationship between the two. As professional services staff felt their roles were not understood, the academics interviewed struggled to articulate the role of professional services and were uncomfortable using the word support. While there is an element of support in the work professional services staff undertake, they also work closely with central student administration and the students themselves, something that was not acknowledged by the academic staff. Understanding the complexity of professional services roles may also help improve their professional identity as they are recognised for the variety of work they undertake. I also think there is a lack of knowledge about an academic's role and the multiple strands that many academics need to work on. Understanding these may help to improve the working relationship.

4.5 Chapter summary

The research findings in this chapter illustrate a complicated relationship between professional services and academics but one that has the potential to be improved. Professional services staff are confident in the role they undertake and while this is not always understood by academic staff, I would argue that in most sectors there is a lack of clarity about roles that are undertaken by other people. Although the majority are not able to articulate or define their professional identity, what is important to their identity is being recognised and valued for their work by the academic staff they work alongside.

This is a part of the study which surprised me. I had assumed, like me, that professional services staff could articulate their professional identity and it may be linked to their relationship with academics. Although I think it is a positive that professional services staff are not reliant on academic staff for (self)-validation, this is at odds with the literature which indicates academic staff may have a negative effect on how professional services staff perceive their roles (Seyd, 2000; Graham and Regan, 2016).

The terminology assigned to them is not that important and the interviewees appeared proud to work in academic administration. Again, I was surprised by the lack of concern over being described as 'non-academic'. Other than one professional services member of staff, the other professional services were nonplussed about the terminology. Yet the literature states that this negative labelling is a source of frustration for professional services staff (Conway, 2000; Melling, 2018). As mentioned, Szekeres (2011) argues more research is undertaken with professional services managers, and as this thesis focused on professional services staff members on the front line of student administration, I do wonder whether this has an impact on the ambivalence of their identity and naming conventions.

It seems academic staff value the work undertaken by professional services and while they feel uncomfortable using the word support, they acknowledge they need this

support. The relationship is seen as important to academic staff and perceived to be positive.

Where the disconnect appears is the fact that negative individual interactions can taint the relationships for professional services. It was acknowledged by the professional services staff during the interviews that a few academic staff can make them feel inferior and not valued. However, there were also examples of positive relationships and interactions. It appears that the negative ones are more prominent when talking about relationships. Despite the frustration felt at times, the professional services staff interviewed enjoyed their roles and wanted to remain in higher education for the foreseeable future.

This research adds to the limited canon on professional services already published and considers both academic and professional services views on identity and relationships. Using the theoretical lens of Holland et al.'s (1998) perspectives on identity forming and how this is influenced by social constructions and cultural models, I have attempted to locate the identity of professional services within the socially constructed figured world of higher education.

In the concluding chapter I will answer the original research questions, offer potential solutions on how the relationships between the two parties could be improved alongside suggestions for further research. I will also examine the limitations of this study and reflect on my doctoral journey.

Chapter 5. Conclusions

This final chapter offers an overview of the study and summarises the main findings in relation to the original research questions. I will discuss how the findings can improve my own practice and suggest ways in which the university could implement small changes to demonstrate a commitment to improving the relationship between both professional services and academic staff. I shall consider my methodological approach plus discuss the limitations of my research alongside considering directions for future research. I will conclude with reflections on my development through this doctoral journey and how my identity has evolved.

5.1 Answering the research questions

The aim of this research was to understand how professional services staff perceived their professional identity and their relationships with academic staff. I also wanted to understand how academics felt about their relationship with professional services staff. As mentioned in Chapter Two, there has been little research into professional services staff as an occupational group, but even less on their identity and the impact of academic relationships on this identity. Unsurprisingly there is not a simple answer to the research questions:

- How do professional services staff perceive their professional identity?
- How is the identity of professional services staff impacted by their relationships with academics?
- How do academic staff view their relationships with professional services?

All the participants worked in different roles, had different backgrounds and views. As a result, it was not surprising it was difficult to aggregate definitions of professional services staff identity and if their relationships with academics impacted this identity.

5.1.1 Professional identity

The first research question on perceptions of identity was a difficult question for the professional services staff to answer and I acknowledge that there is not a clear response to this question. There was a lack of clarity from two of the professional services staff when I asked about their professional identity. It was not a concept they had thought about before but when pressed, they had varied responses. The two professional services participants (PSS1 and PSS2) who were able to define their identity, are examples of third space professionals (those who work across the boundaries of professional services and academic staff). They were also both male, and while gender is not covered within this thesis, it is an area that could be explored in further research to understand the impact gender may have on identity. Both PSS1 and PSS2 felt they had a strong professional identity. This appeared to stem from a confidence in their role and strong working relationships with the academic staff with whom they interacted. The remaining three (female) professional services staff were hesitant in describing their identity. When pushed, one of the participants in this study felt that she did not have a professional identity. The other two related it to their performance in their role and in one case what she achieved daily. Again, it is not clear if gender impacted the lack of professional identity. This may be linked to Clance and Imes' (1978) work on imposter syndrome which is discussed in the literature review (2.5.2). Clance and Imes (ibid:241) argue that some women who experience imposter syndrome 'do not experience an internal sense of success'. This could relate to the percevied lack of identity evidenced by the female professional services staff but more research into this area is required to make any substantive associations.

There was not a great deal of description about their professional identity from the professional services participants, but the way several described themselves as 'just administrators' raises a question about their identity and the value they place thereon. When challenged on this term, the responses suggested a struggle to define what they contributed to their role and the university but also how they felt they were perceived. This perception of being 'just an administrator' from at least one of

the participants has been exasperated by academic comments about the value of the role. This is echoed in Graham and Regan's (2016:602) research, they argue that professional services staff felt 'academic colleagues were more highly valued by those in a senior position'. Frustration and criticism within all roles are to be expected but given the historic divide between academics and professional services, this feeling of being 'less than' prevails with the participants who work with academics on school administration. It was not as obvious with PSS1 and PSS2 who work as a placements manager and technician respectively.

Holland et al. (1998:vii) argue that identities are constantly in flux and believe 'if they are being lived … they happen in social practice'. I felt that the professional services staff were not overtly aware of their professional identity, and although Holland et al. (ibid) state identities are constructed within our own environment, the professional services staff do not seem aware of their own identities. Those interviewed appeared accepting of their roles and while frustrated, did not want to leave their figured world of higher education. In fact, they would all like to remain in higher education, although, the promotion opportunities appear to be limited.

Literature on nomenclature (evidenced in the literature review 2.4) indicates that being referred to as 'non-academics' can be trying for professional services staff and add to the feeling of frustration at not being recognised for the role they undertake. This in turn can have a negative impact on professional identity. Holland et al. (1998:26) argue 'when we speak we afford subject positions to one another'. I believe the use of 'non-academic' positions professional services as 'less than' academic staff. The professional services participants did not, overall, feel this way. This was surprising to me, as I feel very strongly about the term. However, the respondents felt it was a way to describe themselves as a group, and while one argued that it was not an ideal term, they could all understand the need to differentiate between the two groups (professional services and academics) and felt this term achieved this. It appears this label did not have an impact on their identity and one participant claimed they were proud to be an administrator and recognised that as a broad term for a wide variety of jobs, non-academic is a useful label. What

was interesting is that the academic participants were much more vocal in their disdain for the term. They felt it was an absurd way to describe a member of professional services, while two felt that labelling groups with the terms 'academic' and 'non-academic' was not conducive to being perceived as equal.

These findings are inconsistent with my own personal experience and the limited literature which indicates professional services staff identity can be impacted by their relationship with academic staff (Mcinnis, 1998; Allen-Collinson, 2006). Although negative interactions can have an effect, I was surprised at how little thought and interest the professional services staff interviewed had given to their professional identity. As it is important to me, I had naively assumed it would be important to them, but perhaps I need to reflect on why I feel so attached to my identity being determined by academic staff and their perception of me.

While professional identity was hard to define and articulate for professional services staff, the impact of their relationships with academic staff was far easier for them to elaborate on.

5.1.2 Professional identity and academic relationships

The research and interviews with professional services participants demonstrated that negative relationships with academic staff were mostly based around individuals in an academic team. There were several examples of great relationships given by professional services, but as expected, it was the negative ones that prompted the most discussion. It was not the relationship between the two groups that had the most impact on professional identity but the roles that professional services undertake and the changes to those as higher education evolved.

There was a mixed response regarding identity and relationships. Where one participant (PSS1) felt he had a strong professional identity, the relationships with academic staff did not impact on this identity, he did however reflect on the fact that a negative interaction could leave him frustrated on a personal level, in terms of how

he handled that interaction. For the other professional services staff there was an acknowledgement that both a relationship and their role impact their identity. Frustration at how their role is perceived and a lack of understanding by academics of the pressures that professional services face caused negative feelings. The persistent changes in the higher education sector and the nature of the student as customer has affected the roles that professional services undertake and for PSS4, this has caused a level of upset and annoyance around the changes and removal of the parts of her job she enjoyed. Like PSS4, Graham and Regan's (2016:603) research found that professional services staff became frustrated by changes to job roles:

> If the participants were inhibited from performing their job role to their own satisfaction, they became frustrated and demotivated. 'Policies', 'processes' and 'systems' were cited as inhibiting their ability to 'do a good job'.

The divide between professional services staff and academics had an impact on the identity of professional services staff. Most professional services and academics acknowledged the divide between the two groups. The most obvious difference between the two was the lack of training and development given to professional services, particularly now the academic career pathway is being established for academic career progression. This gave rise to a level of frustration and a feeling of being 'less than'. This links to the work of Simpson and Fitzgerald (2014:1939) who argue 'universities are relentless sites of exclusion and elitism'. This was also acknowledged by several academic staff who spoke of a culture of academic staff being the more important occupational group and professional services not being considered when decisions are made. In my experience these decisions can include increasing academic staff numbers as student numbers increase without the equivalent rise in professional services staff and internal restructures and office moves without consultation. Interestingly, one member of academic staff felt it was now professional services staff who held all the power and could dictate the roles they would undertake. There is a need to explore this area further alongside the rise of the marketisation of the higher education institution. This marketisation places bureaucratic demands and reporting requirements on both academics and

professional services and adds to the feeling by academics of the demise of their academic autonomy.

During my time in education, I have witnessed difficult relationships and feelings of academic advantage in certain areas, so this did not come as a surprise. It also reflects the literature on the topic, in terms of professional services often being invisible (Szekeres, 2004; Akerman, 2020). The introduction of clear career progression and development pathways for professional services may help with this feeling of invisibility but it would also benefit the institution by upskilling current staff in areas such as leadership development. The higher education sector needs to value all its staff to get the best from them. Acknowledging the importance of different roles and overtly trying to improve relationships should help improve staff perceptions of differences and help break down barriers.

5.1.3 Academic staff relationships with professional services

Overall, academic staff felt they had a good relationship with school professional services. By school, this means the staff they deal with regularly regarding the students they teach. They felt they could rely on them and one participant called them 'family'. Only one participant echoed the professional services view that relationships were individualistic. The same academic also felt that relationships were performance-based.

The idea of individualised and performance-based relationships is something I have witnessed at my current institution, and I would imagine across higher education. Academic staff have a lot of pressure on them, and it makes sense that they rely on the professional services staff who they know can deliver results. It maybe that academics are used to working in a critical environment, particularly research-intensive academic staff, and the criticism they receive and often give in their research environment may impact (perhaps unconsciously) how they deal with their professional services colleagues.

There is a clear value in having positive relationships for academics with school professional services staff. The academic staff indicated that knowing who they could count on to help them was extremely valuable. They also acknowledged that saying 'thank you' goes some way to demonstrate their appreciation but conversely admitted that professional services staff may not feel respected in their role. Although academics felt the relationship was positive overall, they struggled to articulate the role of professional services. A number used the word 'support' yet appeared to be almost embarrassed about it, as they seemed to be aware that professional services do more than that but could not articulate what that was. There was an acknowledgement that there was a large element of teamwork between the two groups.

There was more articulation of difficult relationships with central professional services. HR, IT services, and research support were cited as areas where academics felt frustrated by nameless inboxes and a lack of response. There was frustration over the lack of personal relationships and not being able to speak to someone they knew would help. The large central services departments appear at odds with the small school professional services team with whom the academics work closely. The literature discussed in Chapter Two evidences this difficult relationship. Gray's (2015) research articulates the stronger relationship between school professional services and academics and the often difficult one between academic staff and central professional services.

The data indicated there was a better relationship between professional services and academic staff when they were co-located together, and this could be a way to improve the relationships with central professional services. Several academic staff and professional services staff members mentioned the frustration at not being located together and PSS5 stated it had hindered her relationship with academic staff. Being able to speak to a colleague face to face brings with it benefits to both groups of staff.

5.1.4 Summary

Overall, it was difficult for most of the professional services staff to define and articulate their professional identity and I do not feel this question was answered sufficiently well to give a clear outcome. When pushed it was related more to the roles they undertake, and less about their relationships with academic staff. Although all the professional services staff interviewed appeared at times frustrated at the expectations put on them by the academic staff they worked with.

In contrast, the academic staff that took part in this research articulated positive relationships with professional services staff. Although they struggled to understand the breadth of the roles undertaken by school professional services, they seemed to value the work they undertake. Academic frustration was aimed at central professional services who were perceived to be ineffectual at times.

Using Holland et al. (1998) as a theoretical framework enabled me to view higher education as several socially constructed worlds, framed by the language and actions of the players within these worlds. Holland et al. (ibid:279) explore how agency is created in figured worlds:

> Agency lies in the improvisations that people create in response to particular situations … They opportunistically use whatever is at hand to affect their position in the cultural game in the experience of which they have formed these sets of dispositions.

What I believe Holland et al. (ibid) are stating here, is that we respond to our circumstances and react to the situations around us. The responses from professional services towards academic staff are based on their perception of how they believe they are viewed and at times treated. Their agency, or lack thereof, is created and perpetuated by their surroundings and the language used by both the academics and the professional services themselves.

The figured world framework has allowed me to see the relationships between professional services and academics as both historic concepts, steeped in language that permeates staff who join these worlds, but also as a place for self-authoring where staff are able to reject the prescribed associations of their roles.

5.2 Reflections on figured worlds as a theoretical framework

Using figured worlds as a theoretical framework was a useful way to understand identity construction in a particular setting, in this case higher education. That is not to say there are no other ways to understand the concepts of professional identity within professional services staff but using figured worlds to look at the two groups of professional services and academic staff to understand their relationships was a useful lens with which to view identity and relationships.

Goffman's (2007) concept of the 'total institution' could have been used as an alternative theoretical framework. Goffman (2007:11) argues:

> A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life.

By describing an institution as a world in which the participants become enmeshed in their environment and work together within this world, Goffman appears to indicate a lack of control and agency as workers have little choice in their activities. 'Each phase of the member's daily activity is carried out in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same things together' (ibid:17). This is where I see Goffman's ideas of an institution as more restrictive than Holland et al's. (1998) and it is Holland et al's. (ibid) ideas on identity that were more appropriate to understanding the perceptions of professional identity by professional services and academic staff.

However, in using figured worlds as a framework to focus on professional identity I have assumed that identity was important to the professional services staff I interviewed and it was a construct they could articulate which could be viewed through the lens of the work of Holland et al. (ibid). In hindsight perhaps I thought there would be an obvious agency that professional services could articulate which would be seen in how they interacted with their figured world, and although there was to some extent, it was not as evident as I had thought it would be. There are also many parts that make up the identity of a person and as I place a lot of emphasis on my professional identity, I believed that others would too, meaning the identity the professional services staff constructed as part of their figured world was not as strong in their world of work, as it may be in the other worlds they reside in outside of higher education. I think it is important to acknowledge that the power of figured worlds lays in bringing together and synthesising ideas from key thinkers such as Vygotsky , Bakhtin and Bourdieu, which helps its multidimensionality.

Skinner et al. (2001:no pagination) argue that in order to use figured worlds as a conceptual framework 'one must have substantial knowledge of the figured world(s) invoked by the narrative'. There are a number of works that use narrative analysis while employing figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998; Solomon et al., 2016; Bennett et al., 2017) to ensure they capture what is articulated by each participant. However, by undertaking this form of analysis I felt this would have limited the number of participants I interviewed, and I wanted to get a cross-sample of roles and experiences from across the school. Using thematic analysis gave me a way to understand different experiences and explore the various concepts that came from the interviews and the data.

Urrieta (2007a:111) argues that one of the main critiques of figured worlds is that the concept is 'not defined in a concise and concrete way and thus is applied inconsistently by different researchers'. However, he then goes onto to state that figured worlds 'cannot be reduced to one simple, content-specific definition' (ibid:112). It is a very multifaceted framework and I feel I have only scratched the surface of the complex ideas that Holland et al. (1998) discuss. Urrieta (2007a:112)

does go on to argue that while there are criticisms of using figured worlds as a framework for research it a useful 'concept in studying identity, agency, and contexts in education'. While Urrieta (ibid) discusses the fact that figured worlds is not used in its entirety by researchers, he does not elaborate on why this is the case. As mentioned, it may be that this is due to the multi-layered ideas that Holland et al. (1998) utilise when analysing the different scenarios they present to discuss identity formation and construction.

5.3 Implications of the research

The research findings indicate there is a lack of awareness around the concept of professional identity for professional services staff and that the participants overall did not evidence a strong collective professional identity. This implies more work needs to be undertaken by the university to signal the importance of professional services and the roles they undertake so they feel more valued. I also must acknowledge that their professional identity may not be as important to them as it is to me.

Reflexively I can see how my identity at work is central to my self-worth. Not all professional services staff feel like this. Their identity could be tied up in their personal life and their interests outside their role. They do not feel the need to develop a strong identity and their role supports what fulfils them outside work. While it is important that professional services staff receive recognition for their roles, it will not be the case that all professional services staff feel the need to develop a strong professional identity.

Relationships with academic staff can have an impact on how professional services view the roles they undertake. Negative interactions can make them feel inferior and the divide between the two groups can exacerbate this. Although academic staff state their relationship with school professional services is good overall, there is obviously a disconnect as professional services staff do not always feel the same. This communication problem needs addressing. Enhancing the relationship between the

two and a clearer understanding of the roles they undertake and the pressures they face may go some way to improving the day-to-day interactions. The historical notion of the divide between the two is a concept that appears to be ingrained into the figured world of those who work within higher education. However, providing similar benefits and development opportunities would indicate an attempt by the institution to recognise the unevenness of the current situation.

There is a clear craving in some professional services staff for promotion and development, but they see this within the setting of their current institution. The frustration lies with the lack of opportunity for professional services development. While PSS5 is undertaking a degree, it is in the form of an apprenticeship and is being offered to help the university spend their apprenticeship levy. The lack of funding for development has been evidenced by PSS3 and what is on offer internally is not reflective of what the professional services staff want to see. Given the recent creation of a career pathway for academics, there needs to be more time and thought given to the career development of professional services.

One of the outcomes from this research that I would like to see is deans of schools and professional services managers investigating how negative relationships can be improved, through discussions with both parties. It appears clear positive relationships benefit professional services and academics alike. It could help improve their professional identity and give a sense of value to professional services.

There also needs to be a recognition that the responsibility for ensuring all professional services staff are acknowledged and included in institutional wide discussions on changes to roles, structures and development opportunities, rests with the senior leadership team of the university. Including this in documents such as university strategic plans and equality, diversity and inclusion plans should mean that the concerns raised within this thesis on lack of development and the impact of restructures are addressed, or at least considered. By adding this into high level documents I would hope this would give a sense of appreciation about the impact major changes can have on professional services at all levels across the institution.

While deans and head of professional services can have an impact on relationships and look at how location and roles are working in practice, it is an institutional responsibility to acknowledge that half of the workforce are professional services staff and need to be considered alongside academic staff when decisions that may impact them are discussed and taken.

Despite the frustration and impact that negative relationships can have on professional services staff, there is no desire amongst any of the staff interviewed to want to leave higher education. Overall, despite many entering higher education by accident, they appear to enjoy their jobs and working within the sector. This links to research by Lewis (2014:47) on the 'accidental administrator', which applies to most of the professional services staff. They did not seek a career in higher education but enjoy it and intend to remain in it for the foreseeable future. This should not mean they are taken for granted, as some feel now, but acknowledged as an important part of the institution and recognised as such.

5.4 Third space professionals

The aims of this research were not focused on third space professionals; however, it has become apparent that more thought needs to be given to the growing number of these types of roles within the institution. As someone who occupies this space and who is attempting to self-author an identity within both a professional services and academic arena, there appears to be little evidence of a space within which I can develop. Although the literature (2.2) is growing about the roles and identities of third space professionals, the room to expand a career within this space is limited. However, Bakhtin (1981:348) writes 'one's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse'. I assume this to mean that while the third space is a relatively recent concept in higher education, the socially constructed limitations on professional services and academics spheres will eventually relax allowing the third space professional to claim a space within the figured world of higher education.

Both PSS1 and PSS2 appear to me to be third space professionals. They work across academic and professional services boundaries. However, PSS2 sees his progression as a career in academia and PSS1 does not see a route in which he can progress, although he also intimated, he was not interested in progression. Despite PSS1 not wanting progression, he was concerned for those who do, as he felt the opportunity for career development was limited.

Although I have suggested the university needs to look at development opportunities for professional services staff, they also need to think about where staff members like myself, technicians, academic developers, and others who straddle a third space role can evolve. There is no easy answer to this as evidenced by Gray (2015) who argues that the sector seems to be struggling to understand where third space professionals can fit. Working alongside academic staff on projects and secondments in collaborative working environments can be beneficial and should be encouraged but, in terms of career progression, there is more research needed to understand the longer-term impact on these new professionals.

5.5 Contribution

This research seeks to extend and add to the current literature that focuses on professional services staff within higher education. It complements the limited research into professional services staff, their identity and relationships with academic staff with a unique focus using the lens of Holland et al.'s (1998) seminal work *Identity and Agency in Figured Worlds* as a theoretical framework. It gave me the opportunity to understand how identity is a social construct created by both ourselves, those around us, our capital, and the figured worlds we occupy. The framework is particularly useful when focusing on professional services and academics as the divide between the two is evident in the worlds in which they exist. Attempting to move from one into another is challenging and straddling the two as a third space professional can be frustrating as neither can feel comfortable.

The research findings identify similarities to current research surrounding the frustration and, at times, inferiority professional services staff can feel, as well as the different relationships academics have with school and central services (Mcinnis, 1998; Seyd, 2000; Gray, 2015). It also highlights the differences, particularly surrounding the nomenclature of professional services. With professional services participants in this study being mostly nonplussed about the terminology used to describe them, academic staff had much stronger feelings towards naming conventions. It adds an additional view to current literature by including both professional services and academics into a study on identity and relationships.

5.5.1 Disseminating the research

Sharing this research is important as it can help increase the visibility of professional services, particularly when there is so much research focused on academic staff. I hope to sit down with senior managers within my institution to discuss the findings and look at ways we can improve the relationships and the feelings of frustration by both academic and professional services staff. I also feel any changes to working patterns post-pandemic need to be considered and reflected upon as these may impact relationships and communications between teams.

I have presented my research at several postgraduate research conferences and the Association of University Administrator conferences, including one in South Africa during Phase A of the EdD programme in May 2017. I hope to continue presenting at this annual conference to evidence my final research findings. I published my final Phase A paper which focused on my identity as a professional services member of staff undertaking a professional doctorate. During this study, I have identified several additional journals where I could publish this research. I think it would be useful to publish a shortened version of the study but also focus papers more specifically on each of the main themes in the findings. There is also the potential to publish in methodological journals focusing on the qualitative element of my research and the complexity of using figured worlds as a theoretical lens.

5.6 Further research

The case study focused specifically on professional services staff who work in an academic school. The differences identified between central, and school based professional services staff necessitate a look into how contemporary forms of bureaucracy operate in modern higher education. Further research is also required to understand more about the professional identity of centrally based professional services and their relationships with academic staff. There is also more understanding required around central services who see themselves as third-space professionals, such as academic developers. As there appears to be third space professionals who reside in both school and central services, this brings with it challenges in how they define themselves and the support they are offered. It would be insightful to investigate their career trajectory. There is limited research and longitudinal study of this area, not surprising given the seemingly small number of staff who occupy this type of space.

As universities are constantly in flux (Whitchurch, 2009b) and restructures are becoming the norm, there needs to be a closer look at the impact these changes are having on professional services and academic staff identity and their relationships. As mentioned by PSS4, changes to her role have not been positive and she feels she is doing less and less of the work she previously enjoyed. It would be useful to get feedback from both staff groups about their roles and the stresses on them during the academic year to look at how working could together and understanding more about the pressures they face can improve how professional services staff and academic staff work together.

There is some research into professional services staff who work in research administration (Allen-Collinson, 2006, 2007, 2009; Ryttberg and Geschwind, 2017) but it is sparse in other areas. Additional research could begin to break down occupational groups within professional services to understand and compare different experiences. Additionally, it would be helpful to carry out similar research

in a cross-section of institutions within the sector to explore how identity and relationships are experienced.

There also needs to be more research into identity and gender within higher education, particularly around professional services staff. The findings indicate that the male professional services participants evidenced a stronger professional identity than the female ones, and it is not clear if this is role or gender related so further investigation into this area could help clarify these findings.

As Parkman (2016) and Akerman (2020) discuss there is little research into imposter syndrome in higher education and additional research in this area would evidence how widespread it may be. Given the feedback I have had when presenting my work at AUA conferences, it does appear that the concept resonates with a number of professional services staff.

Given the range of qualifications for both academic and professional staff, further study into the impact of this on relationships would be useful. As mentioned by PSS2, when she first found out that a professional services staff member had a postgraduate degree, this surprised her but understanding more about the role made her see how academic administration is a career and profession which enabled her to see how a higher degree may be beneficial.

As mentioned in the section above (5.5.1), the new change to hybrid working which looks to continue for an undetermined period will also impact the relationships and identity of both professional services and academic staff. While physical location was perceived as a barrier to positive relationships, working offsite and remotely may also impact how staff work together and there needs to be consideration given to this. Given some staff may not have met each other in person for a number of months, the impact of this will need to be studied to see the effects on staff.

5.7 Reflections on my research journey

This research journey began five years ago, when I started the EdD believing I would focus on women's development programmes within higher education. Being asked to consider and focus on my own professionalism in the first Phase A assignment made me think about my own identity and how I position myself at work as a professional services manager with multiple competing challenges. The following assignments added to my confusion about why being seen as 'less than' or my perception as being perceived as 'less than' by academics and academic managers bothered me so much. This research journey has been an attempt to understand how and why I feel like this but also if other professional services within the school also had these feelings.

I have discovered that it is not just professional services that can feel frustrated and at times invisible. Academic staff have frustrations, not just with professional services, but with their careers and the limits they feel are imposed on them in terms of research time and administrative requirements. The neoliberal university and the increase in marketisation, profit and students as consumers has put pressure on all staff who work within institutions and this pressure can result in fractured relationships. It does not appear to be personal, but it can be department wide.

This research journey has equipped me with skills in reading, writing, and understanding methodologies, and theoretical frameworks which I struggled with at the start of Phase A. Being surrounded by educators and teachers on the first day over five years ago felt daunting. Not understanding Foucault, Zizek or Lacan felt like I was back at work, feeling 'less than' and not part of an academic group. However, it took time to understand how to read different philosophers and accept that Lacan will always be something of a mystery to me. As a novice researcher my role from here is to grow in confidence and keep expanding my knowledge by reading, presenting, and publishing.

I do not see myself graduating from this doctorate programme and shedding myself of all the feelings of being on the outside of academia. The next steps in my career are yet to be determined. I have enjoyed working in research and having a doctorate will give me the credibility I desire. I do wonder if I should cross into the figured world of academia and look for academic roles. Regardless of the path I decide to take, the experience and development from this EdD has given me confidence in my abilities and to be less concerned with how I see myself compared to others, as everyone has their own insecurities.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Participant information sheet

Appendix B – Participant consent form

Appendix C – Professional services interview questions

Appendix D – Academic staff interview questions

Appendix E – Sample of the coded table

Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet

Them and Us: To what extent is the identity of Professional Services Staff shaped by their relationship with their academic colleagues? A case study of an academic school

1. Invitation to research

My name is Joanne Caldwell and I work at the University of Salford. I am undertaking a Doctorate in Education at Manchester Metropolitan University. My research project will examine the professional identity of Professional Services Staff (PSS) within a university in the northwest of England. It will focus on how PSS define their professional identity and how, if at all, their relationship with academic staff shape their identity. While focusing on the professional identity of PSS it will aim to determine how academic staff view the role of PSS within the institution.

2. Why have I been invited?

You have been invited as you responded to the call for participants, either academic or professional services and have kindly volunteered your time.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which we will give to you. We will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

4. What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to a series of questions in a semi-structured interview about your professional identity and relationship with academic and professional services staff. The interview will be recorded, and I will then transcribe the interview. The interview will take between 30 – 60 minutes and once transcribed you can review the manuscript. You will only take part in one interview.

5. Are there any risks if I participate?

There are no obvious risks, and all interviews will take place on university premises.

6. Are there any advantages if I participate?

There are no direct advantages, but this research will help understand more about the professional identity of professional services staff and how their relationship with academic staff affects this identity. The findings could help build staff relationships.

7. What will happen with the data I provide?

When you agree to participate in this research, we will collect from you personally-identifiable information.

The Manchester Metropolitan University ('the University') is the Data Controller in respect of this research and any personal data that you provide as a research participant.

The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and manages personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

We collect personal data as part of this research (such as name, telephone numbers or age). As a public authority acting in the public interest, we rely upon the 'public task' lawful basis. When we collect special category data (such as medical information or ethnicity) we rely upon the research and archiving purposes in the public interest lawful basis.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained.

We will not share your personal data collected in this form with any third parties.

If your data is shared this will be under the terms of a Research Collaboration Agreement which defines use and agrees confidentiality and information security provisions. It is the University's policy to only publish anonymised data unless you have given your explicit written consent to be identified in the research. **The University never sells personal data to third parties.**

We will only retain your personal data for as long as is necessary to achieve the research purpose. The data will be stored on a personal drive and USB that only I can access and passworded as an extra security measure. It will be disposed of after three years in a secure manner. The thesis will protect the interviewee's identity by not disclosing their name and amending their job role so they cannot be recognised e.g. Using academic and PSS instead of Lecturer in Physio and Programme Administrator. Only the researcher will be aware of who has undertaken an interview.

For further information about use of your personal data and your data protection rights please see the University's Data Protection Pages.

8. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be included in the thesis and a conference presentation and journal article may occur. All data will remain anonymous.

9. Who has reviewed this research project?

The research project has been reviewed by Dr Matthew Carlin, and Dr Dominic Griffiths who are supervisors on the project. Two independent academics have reviewed the proposal and it has undergone ethical review through MMU's ethical process and committee.

10. Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

For general questions please contact the researcher;

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If you have any concerns regarding the personal data collected from you, our Data Protection Officer can be contacted using the legal@mmu.ac.uk e-mail address, by calling 0161 247 3331 or in writing to: Data Protection Officer, Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH. You also have a right to lodge a complaint in respect of the processing of your personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office as the supervisory authority. Please see: https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

Appendix B

Interviewee Name:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **Them and Us: To what extent is the identity of Professional Services Staff shaped by their relationship with their academic colleagues? A case study of an academic school**

Name of Researcher: **Joanne Caldwell**

Please initial all boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 8th February 2019 (version 2) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐

3. I understand that the data obtained will not be shared and will be anonymised in the thesis and any further publications ☐

4. I understand that the researcher is carrying out this research as part of a doctoral programme and not in her capacity as an employee of the University of Salford ☐

5. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature

Appendix C

Professional Services Interview Questions

Introduction

Thanks for attending

You have already had a copy of the participant information sheet and if you are happy to continue can you please sign the consent form.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. If you would like to have a copy of the transcript, please let me know. Are you also happy for me to come back to you following transcription if I have any queries about something that was said?

Everything that is said within the interview is anonymous and confidential. I am interested in your honest opinions about your experiences.

Biography

1. Can you tell me about your Education and work history
2. How has your highest qualification helped you in your current role
3. What additional training would you like, if any, to help with your role
4. How did you end up working in HE – planned, fell into it

Current Position

5. What is your current job title and time in role?
6. What are your day to day duties in the role you undertake?
7. How close is it to job description?
8. When you think about the next stages of your career, do you see yourself remaining in HE and why?

Professional Identity

9. How would you describe your role to someone outside the sector?
10. Why did you choose that particular terminology (probe deeper depending on words used)
11. How would you describe your relationship with academic colleagues?
12. What do you think academic colleagues think about your and your colleagues roles (what do they think your job is)
13. Do you think there is a divide between academics and PSS and reasons for this answer
14. How would you describe your professional identity (help with definition if required)

Definition – How you see yourself – your purpose and beliefs, what motivates you and how your experiences define you?

15. How do you feel your relationships and interactions with academic staff shape your professional identity?

16. What are your thoughts on the term "non-academic" to describe any staff member who doesn't teach?

Conclusion

17. Is there anything else you would like to cover that we have not already done so?

Prompts

Can you go into a bit more detail about this please

Give me an example to illustrate your point

How did you feel about that

Can you tell me more about this please

Appendix D

ACADEMIC QUESTIONS

Introduction

Thanks for attending

You have already had a copy of the participant information sheet and if you are happy to continue can you please sign the consent form.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. If you would like to have a copy of the transcript, please let me know. Are you also happy for me to come back to you following transcription if I have any queries about something that was said?

Everything that is said within the interview is anonymous and confidential. I am interested in your honest opinions about your experiences.

Biography

1. Can you tell me about your Education and work history
2. How has your highest qualification helped you in your current role
3. What additional training would you like, if any, to help with your role – Follow up, are you aware of training available for professional services staff
4. How did you end up working in HE – planned, fell into it

Current Position

5. Current job title and time in role
6. Describe the role you undertake
7. Do you work with professional services staff as part of your role and if so can you tell me in what context

Relationship with PSS

8. What do you think the role of professional services staff is
9. How would you describe your relationship with professional services staff – separate the question between central and school staff
10. What would you say the differences were between central and school staff and would you say you have a different opinion of both?
11. Do you think there is a divide between academics and PSS and reasons for this answer

12. To what extent do you think your relationship with professional services staff affects their professional identity
13. what are your thoughts on the term "non-academic" to describe any staff member who doesn't teach?

Conclusion

14. Is there anything else you would like to cover that we have not already done so?

Prompts

Can you go into a bit more detail about this please

Give me an example to illustrate your point

How did you feel about that

Can you tell me more about this please

Appendix E

Sample of data analysis table

Theme/Sub-themes	Comment	Who
Qualifications - does it help in role	I think it will do as obviously I need this to get onto the level five degree which will help me progress either here or elsewhere, cause it's an overall management degree it will help me is sort of quite a lot of different areas.	PSS5
Training - lack of	If I was starting out now then I think that would be a lack of the university's training.	PSS1
Role - Choice to go into HE	I had relatives that worked here so I was just looking around, trying to move out of travel into something else and just fell into it.	PSS5
Role - Progression	I enjoy working in HE, I enjoy working here. So I think once I have completed my degree I would like to move up and stay but maybe do something a bit different.	PSS5
Role - Do Academics understand it	Getting down to like a granular level, no they don't. Err, I think the overall thing is that they are glad somebody does it but it's not them. And they are glad like, I think they know that it is a lot of work and they know that it is really stressful and they know like it produces a lot of problems, issues and they are glad that somebody else can sort it out	PSS1
Relationships - with academics	It's different with different individuals but more importantly with different groups of individuals, cause some teams are lovely and friendly and treat you like part of their team and obviously understand and appreciate what you do. Right, especially if they really hate doing admin right and they're great and then certain other teams have got this superiority thing going on and they can be rude and they can be awful. I think different individuals would not be like that if there wasn't a culture of it within that department because where there isn't a culture of it, they are pretty much all lovely.	PSS4
PSS/Academic divide - roles	Because we have got different job roles and different kind of like pressures err, like and I think, there is a lot more stress about things like the NSS from academics then there is from professional services.	PSS1
PSS/Academic divide - roles/career progression	So it seems there's a very kind of defined process from moving from lecturer to senior lecturer to reader to professor to whatever to whatever err and that's a very kind of defined process and it feels like people can be on a career path in	PSS1

	academics or academia and there isn't anything similar for administrative staff.	
Professional Identity	Because of the specialist role that I have and like the time that I have been here I think I have got a fairly strong professional identity within the school, Greater Manchester, the North West.	PSS1
Professional Identity	Oh gosh, I haven't really given it a lot of thought, I come into work and I provide, I try to do things as quickly as possible, which has been difficult lately cause we are really short-staffed and all of us are doing the jobs of several team members. Erm, I think I am valued, I think I am valued. I enjoy it, I enjoy the work. I think that's it really. I don't really have an identity as such, I suppose, only because I don't really think of it that way if that makes sense.	PSS3
Professional Identity - Third Space	I'd say they push the more academic side of the identity and I see it more as helping to provide a service as well so I've got that part of me that says 'yes I'm working with them but at the same time I need to make sure this service is doing what it should be as well.	PSS2
Professional Identity - academic relationship shape identity	Individual interactions, not really that much cause like I have been here longer than most of them and done this longer than most of them. Overall obviously it is a really kind of like important relationship because we're both doing that kind of work.	PSS1
Nomenclature - non-academic	I think, it would obviously be better to use the person's job role so to kind of refer to as professional services instead of non-academics. I think it kind of makes you feel less important because the word non is quite negative whereas professional services makes you feel sort of quite, more of a team so we're a professional services team, we're here to, we're sort of separate to the academic members of staff but we're just as important, we're still a team whereas I think if you sort of say academics and then non-academics it's just kind of bunching us all together as non-academics rather than saying, your this and then you've got somebody else doing something else. I think it would be better to not use that term and people's actual umbrella of their jobs, so say professional services for all the programme support.	PSS5
Career Progression	Erm, the people you have to deal with, I don't really, I don't think I've got the correct kind of temperament or skillset to go higher and deal with that kind of level.	PSS1

Qualifications - does it help in role	Well I have only recently got it so I'm not sure yet as I don't feel any different I just feel I've not stopped since I got it so I just seem to have got more work. So you sort of need that PhD to move on but I don't feel I've done anything to move on.	ACC3
Role - Choice to go into HE	It was a direct result from doing my PhD. So as I was completing my PhD a job, a lecturer job came up here and my, the person who was supervising my PhD made me aware of the role that was coming up.	ACC3
Role - Frustrations	We certainly don't have enough of those right people in the job we need about four of the people and I think that's a massive issue and it keeps being flagged up, I've flagged it up a million times and it's just nothing and I know there's a review going on but you know it's horrific the lack of people doing those jobs is quite frightening.	ACC4
PSS - What is their purpose	It's a profession in its own right but I didn't think that at the beginning I didn't know what it was.	ACC2
Relationships - School PSS - location	We're always on the end of the phone and things. I quite often walk over and see them and like I say I think it's better to know people so I'd rather go over and see them, I sort of miss having everyone down at the faculty office in this building.	ACC3
Relationships - Central PSS	There is certainly distance between the external professional services and the schools.	ACC1
PSS/Academic Divide - School/Central/Location	It's not always the same person that emails you back, yeah, so even like with travel you deal with a different person every time and it's just a generic email address and things, erm, it's just not knowing who you're dealing with cause you're just so far away from them and you don't meet, and staff turn over as well.	ACC3
PSS/Academic divide - individuals	I think it's more about personality then exploitation really and that's the disappointing side of it but if you did ask those people to do the jobs themselves, they either wouldn't get done, or wouldn't get done properly.	ACC1
Nomenclature - non-academic	I always think defining someone by what they are not is a ridiculous way of defining somebody, define by what they are.	ACC2