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# Workload Allocation Models in Academia: A Panopticon of Neoliberal Control or Tools for Resistance?

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## Abstract

Academic ‘labour’ within the Higher Education landscape is changing as universities are increasingly managed as business organisations. In the contemporary neoliberal academic context, departments and individuals are required to develop forms of accountability based on quantitative metrics regarding performance, budgets, human resource management and income generation. Drawing from Foucauldian theories of power, this article explores the contentious implementation of workload allocation models in the UK Higher Education sector not only as an illustration of a superimposed managerial tool of control but also as an instrument of resistance. This article suggests that in order to counteract the systematic failure of neoliberal academia at the individual and collective level, these performance management tools can be used as forms of empowerment and resistance. Further, it is recommended that these instruments are designed in a collaborative way to ensure fair and transparent allocations of tasks and responsibilities, and to avoid unmanageable workloads.

## Keywords

Resistance, panopticon, workload allocation models, neoliberal academia, Foucault

## The Changing Academic Landscape

Academic practices have changed considerably in the UK since the 1980s, whereby universities are increasingly being managed as business organisations (Sousa, de Nijs and Hendriks, 2010). These changes have been recently contextualized within the neoliberal discourse (Lund, 2020), the academic system becoming ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 2000; Strauß and Boncori, 2020), and the increasingly common use of technology as a work tool, an instrument of information sharing,

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and a form of control (Manley and Williams, 2019). Professional expectations and practices in the Higher Education context have been evolving towards a neoliberal model of performance management that has now become pervasive in the British educational context (Stevenson, 2017; Courtney, 2016). These neoliberal traits manifest themselves within the academic context through various principles and practices adapted from New Public Management (NPM) such as accountability, competitiveness, and performativity: a greater emphasis being placed on the development of more market-oriented recruitment practices; the requirement for many academics to publish in top-ranking journals, along with the procurement of non-government funding; and increased concern with matters related to cost saving and efficiency. Whilst this amplified accountability may have enhanced academic efficiency, the ability to monetise academic outputs and contribute to international rankings, research has questioned the sustainability of these globalized metrics of excellence and the related quality assumptions underpinning neoliberal frameworks that assess academic work and value (Mittleman, 2019). As such, we may want to focus on the intrinsic value of universities rather than mainly on the instrumentality of its provision for future benefit (Collini, 2012).

In the current academic system, research quality and educational excellence seem to have become denominated in numerical forms, and increasingly managed as a matter of data governance. Indeed, accountability – based on quantitative metrics – is a key concept within traditional private industry performance management systems that is now being commonly adopted in the public sector. In academia, this has also taken the form of university rankings for the quality of teaching and research, student satisfaction surveys, citation and impact metrics, quality rankings of academic publications, time management frameworks and stricter performance management processes (Hartmann, 2019). Departments, and more generally universities as a whole, have developed particular metric-focused forms of accountability with reference to human resource management and income generation in order to monitor efficiency and provide a quantification of the time spent on various teaching, research or administrative tasks (Clegg, 2015; Holman, 2000). Various types of workload allocation models (also informally called WAM) have been designed, proposed, or imposed (with or without liaison with the Unions) with the purpose of achieving a more effective management of people, time, and financial resources.

Changes in the availability of funding for Universities over the past decade have meant that in most cases the largest income stream for higher education level institutions comes from student fees and successful bids on research funding rather than government support. This has created a significant shift in the academic system towards competitive approaches and marketization for both individual academics and institutions as a whole (Barry et al., 2006). As such, the burden of responsibility to ensure financial sustainability and academic success is placed on universities at the organizational level, and then more specifically on individual academics, which is a process that contributes to the maintenance of inequality (Rottenberg, 2018). The heightening of attention paid to the relationship between competitiveness (Patomäki, 2019) and performance management processes in academic institutions can therefore be seen as linked to a wider managerial and entrepreneurial approaches in higher education (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000). Therefore, far from being locked away in an ivory tower, contemporary academics in the UK (in addition to their traditional roles as teachers, administrators, and researchers) are required to compete for external funding on behalf of their institutions (Wigger and Buch-Hansen, 2013), show the impact of their publications, engage in knowledge exchange activities within the local or international community, and contribute to widening participation

agendas or developing links with external organisations (this is also known as the ‘Third Mission’ of Universities, see Dobija et al., 2019).

Drawing from praxis stemming from this environment centered around neoliberal approaches, performance management and extreme accountability, we consider issues of power and resistance in academic labour. In line with Foucault’s (1991) idea of power – knowledge enacted in the everyday techniques and instruments of the workplace – this article explores power ‘at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary ... in its more regional and local forms and institutions’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 96), through the instrument used to manage people’s time, tasks and performance. Business-like managerial power is enacted within the academic professional context through the setting of targets, the achievements of certain percentages in student satisfaction, the publication of research in specific outputs located in particular journals, and rankings of excellence in teaching and research. However, workload allocation models are instrument of control that can also be used as a form of individual and group resistance to managerialism and control which can be interpreted as ‘more routinized, informal and often inconspicuous forms of resistance in everyday practice’ (Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 686).

Although this type of neoliberal approach to academia is increasingly present on a global basis (Muller-Camen and Salzgeber, 2005), we focus on the UK as an illustration of this climate. This article contributes to the study of academia as a contested situ of managerialism and neoliberal practices (see Izak, Kostera, and Zawadzki, 2017), whereby academic work is objectified into a commodity that uses management theory and practice to sustain employee control (Bauman et al. 2015; Jacques, 1996). In order to do so, we situate the discussion within the framework of power relations and control investigated through the lens of the Foucauldian concept of the panopticon. We apply this concept to the creation and use of workload allocation models. The article is structured as follows: in the first section we outline the literature on the increasingly neoliberal and managerial approach used in universities, and provide an exploration of our theoretical framework. We then highlight the tension in today’s academic practice between the need for transparency, equality and efficiency in using resources on the one hand, and the need for academic autonomy and manageable professional practices on the other. Based on the findings stemming from two UCU reports (2012, 2016), we reflect on the use of workload allocation models as an example of resistance to neoliberal academic managerialism. Although Keenoy (2005) suggests that over the past 15 years academics in the UK have grown so accustomed to academic audits that ‘there is nothing to “resist”’ (Keenoy 2005, p. 311), we contend that it is important to critically engage with mechanisms of ‘power and terror’ within the current corporate university, and to investigate how instruments of control can be used as loci of resistance at the individual and collective level.

## The Context of Neoliberal Academia

University governance is being experienced by academics as increasingly hierarchical and managerial in its nature, but also more controlling in its practice (McAlpine and Åkerlind, 2010). Managerialism in organisations has been defined as a shift in the locus of control (Fligstein, 1996), a change in patterns of professional dominance (Shenhav, 1999), and a mutation in the logic behind the identity of the firm (Thornton, 2004). Requirements imposed on its

departments by ‘the university’ or ‘management’ (embodied by the senior management team) are often perceived as top-down examples of managerialism and the exertion of power or control over a profession that has traditionally been considered in conflict with such approaches (Meek 2000; Warwick 2014). This approach seems in contrast with the notion of academic identity, especially since academia is often the point of arrival for those who have made a conscious career choice to avoid such corporate environments. Moreover, the neoliberal and new public management perspective is contested as a threat to the very existential purpose of universities. In addition, focusing in particular on the case of business schools, Martin Parker (2018) highlights how this neoliberal approach to education is applied not only to research and academic careers but also to teaching and the ‘consumption’ of education more broadly. Mittleman (2018, 2019), drawing from John Dewey (1902/1976), highlights the perils of ‘academic materialism’ and contends that, in contemporary academia, ‘the means have become the ends’ (2019, p. 708), as the shift of focus onto metrics has displaced the very purpose of academic institutions:

As they strive to be ‘world-class,’ higher education institutions are shifting away from their core missions of cultivating democratic citizenship, fostering critical thinking, and safeguarding academic freedom. A new form of utilitarianism is gaining ground, one that favors market power over academic values. It stresses rationalist thinking rather than other modes of reasoning, as in the arts, classical languages, history, and philosophy.

The hyper-focus on metrics and rankings, the imposed control on time and resources of teaching and research staff, and the perceived lack of autonomy and power over academic work can easily create nodes of resistance in a professional context that lends itself to high levels of critical engagement. This is also the case for other industries since – as per one of Foucault’s famous observations – ‘where there is power there is resistance’ (1990, p. 95). The tension between the need of transparency mirrored in data-driven monitoring processes and professional autonomy is also influenced by isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), which impact universities in three forms: coercive pressures (governmental regulations), normative pressures (regulatory bodies as accreditations and ranking agencies), and mimetic pressures (other Higher Education institutions). It has been found that those pressures impact and shape the performance measurement systems in Universities (Dobija et al., 2018). Although broadly framed as ‘resistance to managerialism,’ we suggest that academics actually resist a number of specific external and internal forms of power both at the individual and collective level: hierarchical power, bureaucratic and formalised practices, increased performance control, changes in work tasks that do not seem to be central to the profession, and intellectual and time constraints.

The implementation of strict managerial practices in academia can be considered under a broader phenomenon, often called New Public Management (NPM), whereby the public sector is influenced by techniques, behaviours and norms traditionally identified as pertaining to the private sector. Whilst highlighting the inconsistent practice of NPM throughout institutions for higher education, Chandler et al. (2004, p. 1054, citing Hood, 1995) identify

seven dimensions of change: greater disaggregation; enhanced competition; the use of management practices drawn from the private sector; greater stress on discipline and parsimony in resource use; a move towards more hands-on management; a concern for more

explicit and measurable standards of performance; and attempts to control according to pre-set output measures.

These have all become widespread traits of contemporary British academia, and in a number of institutions worldwide. Such forms of constraint and control can have lasting negative effects on academic staff. Research conducted by Anderson in Australia (see for instance Anderson et al., 2002; Anderson, 2008) highlights how similar changes in another academic context have caused a climate of anxiety. Early research by Kogan and Kogan (1983) also highlights how issues related to quality, productivity and performance assessment can put academics under an increasing amount of pressure.

Neoliberalism is linked to principles of New Public Management by its rooting of universities on the idea of high-performance, which results in a reification of academic cultures (Zawadzki, 2017). Within this context, forms of governance in Higher Education that had previously been based on collegiality and 'high trust' relationships are seen as being replaced by increasingly managerial hierarchical layers (Marginson and Considine, 2000) and the corresponding adoption of 'low trust' relations (Pilkington et al., 2001). This environment of low trust can result in stress and anxiety, the response to which, according to Fisher (1994), is linked to the level of control over one's work and the perception of one's ability to take action. Empirical studies of academic work in the UK highlight the increase of work stress (Chandler et al., 2002), work degradation (Bryson, 2004), and work intensification (Ogbonna and Harris, 2004). The need for hyper-performativity and subsequent time poverty in academic labour, coupled with top-down measures of performance evaluation and accountability, are likely to have a detrimental impact on employees' wellbeing and on their relationship with the University as their employer (Kallio et al., 2016; Ter Bogt and Scapens, 2012). Research shows that UK academic staff are finding it increasingly difficult to manage the demands of their jobs (Kinman and Jones, 2004; Baty, 2005).

## Panopticon: Control and Transparency

The neoliberal need for increased productivity is being closely monitored within universities and is often perceived by staff as an unnecessary tool of surveillance. Foucault (1980, p. 104) suggests that the more modern types of power are 'constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies or obligations distributed over time.' In this scenario, workload models that allocate hours or points to roles and tasks carried out by academic staff are seen as conceptually at odds with what used to be the very nature of academic work. The reductionist approach of the quantification and marketisation of academic labour (and by extension its value and quality) can contribute to feelings of alienation in the workplace, whilst it is useful to recognize that 'work is an element of life, and thus a necessarily social activity which includes the economic but is not reducible to it. This means that the production of alienated labour relations can be contested' (Kociatkiewicz, Kostera and Parker, 2020, p. 4). Mittleman (2019, p. 714) identifies five 'major threats that market-based reforms pose to the university ...: control mechanisms and diminishing reflexivity, misrule, numerical governance, the ethos of competitiveness, and the conventional organization of knowledge,' and he contends that a way to mitigate these risks is the strengthening of the democratic tradition of academic institutions. This article argues that resistance articulated through workload allocation models

can be a good starting point in the process of individual and collective resistance towards neoliberal approaches to academic labour, as the neoliberal allocation of 'loads' to specific roles and activities, recorded on to a workload allocation model, can also become a form of empowerment and a way to increase transparency in the allocation of work.

In a famous conversation with Barou and Perrot, Foucault (1980) explores Bentham's Panopticon as an architectural instrument of surveillance. In this building design initially used for prisons, a central tower with large windows is surrounded by a perimeter building in the shape of a ring, which is occupied by cells that run through the whole length of the building. In this manner, light coming from a window opening out onto the outside world shines through the cell and projects shadows of inmates that can be seen, and thus monitored, by those located in the central tower. This use of space and light means that those located in the middle can then potentially observe what happens in every single cell. Inmates cannot know at what point in time the gaze of surveillance will be on them, but the possibility is always there. This architectural form literally sheds light on people's behaviour to enhance transparency and accountability.

The panopticon can thus be taken as a metaphor for the current managerial system of surveillance in academia, and in particular for the use of workload allocation models. As highlighted by Foucault (1980), the exercise of power comes at a real, economic and political cost, which here can be enacted both individually and collectively. In a surveillance system of this type, power is exercised continuously in 'an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust' where 'the perfected form of surveillance consists in a summation of *malveillance*' (Foucault 1980, p. 158, emphasis in original). The academic panopticon can therefore be considered both a situ for hierarchical power dynamics that are imposed and/or contested, and a tool for academics and academic managers to foster professional disalienation and empowerment through transparency and collaboration. Although in Bentham's vision this instrument is used to reinforce control from the highest hierarchical power source, its binary gaze also implies that the observer in the tower is being observed. As such, while an employee's time is measured and monitored, and tasks are allocated within a workload allocation model, that person can also use the tool of surveillance to challenge inequality and preset standards.

Prasad and Prasad (1998, p. 227) stress how resistance in the workplace is not only practiced in the form of a large mobilization of workers but also in 'a multitude of less visible and often unplanned oppositional practices in the everyday world of organizations.' According to Foucauldian approaches, although resistance happens at the macro level of political and economic movement, it also involves informal "micro-politics" that can be interpreted as the 'constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of dominant discourses' which come into being as 'individuals confront, and reflect on, their own identity performance, recognizing contradictions and tensions and, in so doing, pervert and subtly shift meanings and understandings' (Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 687). Even though resistance can be looked at as 'a hegemonic struggle undertaken by social movements' which can be divided into 'four major resistance movements that engage with management: unions, organizational misbehaviour, civic movements and civic movement organizations' (Spicer and Böhm, 2007, p. 1667), it can also be investigated at a different inter-individual level. Scott's (1990, p. xii) concept of the 'hidden transcript' can be used to describe the discourse of a subordinated group that 'represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.' This is contrasted with the 'public transcript,' which is enacted through the open interaction between the dominant and subordinated (Scott, 1990, p. 2). The design and allocation of workloads negotiated at the individual and departmen-

tal level can be an example of this tension between the hidden/public transcript of resistance against neoliberal practices, managerial processes, and the university status quo. Scott (1990, p. 184) argues that this 'off-stage discourse of the powerless' should not be considered just as empty forms of resistance in contrast with the 'real' macro-level one, nor as a mere emotional valve to let off sentiments of dissatisfaction and frustration.

## The Neoliberal Academic Profile

The above-mentioned changes to the world of academia, together with the increasingly competitive market of education providers on a national and international basis, are molding personal work practices and identities (Barnett, 2000; Tight, 2000). In the UK, the performance of numerous academics on research and teaching contracts happens to be mostly judged against student satisfaction scores and research outputs that have become progressively challenging to publish. Scholarly quality and originality are now seemingly defined by rankings rather than collegiality and academic reason. The time needed to read, think, and write in order to produce excellent teaching and such high quality publications is increasingly diminished by the higher number of students (and related marking or advising), more demanding teaching allocations, grant applications, 'administrivia' (Currie, 1996), departmental or university-wide roles, committee membership, and other duties often unavoidable but not generally perceived as core to the academic identity (Grant and Sherrington, 2006).

In addition, student satisfaction surveys, conducted internally in the form of module evaluations and nationally at course or subject level, are often used as a tool to judge teaching quality. In the UK, student assessments of modules and teaching tend to be mostly conducted in the form of a quantitative survey with some optional qualitative open questions, regardless of the significant evidence collected from research showing how those (like other quantitative metrics used in performance management such as citation index and impact) are negatively biased towards women, staff with disabilities, foreign teachers and members of minority groups (see for instance Basow et al., 2006; Bavishi et al., 2010; Campbell et al., 2005; Mengel et al., 2017; Mountz et al. 2015). The language of teaching and learning has become gradually more transitional (e.g. 'You said, we did') and in many institutions, students are now seen as customers whose satisfaction must be achieved at all costs. Recent research in the UK (Jabbar et al., 2017; Nixon et al. 2016; Woodall et al. 2014) indicates that the introduction of tuition fees (and student loans) seems to have further instigated customer-like behaviour and transactional models of learning.

Knight and Trowler (2000, p. 110) argue that the intensification of work in academia has resulted in the reduction of 'the time, energy and mental space available' which is needed in order to improve the craft of teaching. What is measured through workload allocation models is not only the quality and number of final outputs but also inputs and processes involved in achieving the former. Zawadzki (2017) identifies three key side-effects related to performance management and corporate culturism in universities: panoptization, audit-mania, and ranking-mania. When the focus is shifted onto these effects articulated as desirable or essential outcomes rather than issues to be problematized, the neoliberal university creates hyper-conformity with regards to academic cultures, the type of knowledge produced in teaching and research, and an environment marked by individualization and competition.

We see staff resistance in this academic context as a form of critical intellectual engagement aimed at the rejection of imposed power struggles on ones' everyday professional identity and practice. Such resistance can take the collective form of strikes and industrial action, as it often has done in academia over the years, but also of more subterranean forms of individual resistance and group debates that refer to both practical matters and 'struggle over values – the ideological struggle' (Scott, 1985, p. 297). In agreement with Thomas and Davies (2005, pp. 683–84), this article maintains the importance of understanding such forms of practical and ideological resistance in order to shed light on how individuals come to reject the way neoliberal managerial discourses shape them 'at the level of identities and subjectivities.'

## Resisting Managerialism in Academia

Academics can resist managerial discourses and processes by drawing on a range of local practices and local forms of knowledge (Barry et al., 2001; Prichard and Willmott, 1997). Clegg and McAuley (2005, p. 23, based on McAuley, 2002) suggest four types of managerialism in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI): 1) the 'Corporate' HEI (well-managed institution with a top-down approach) 'with a high emphasis on the capabilities of managers at every level in the organisation and in all aspects of the organisation's life;' 2) the 'Strong Culture' HEI that 'has a strong understanding of what it is to be this HEI;' 3) the 'Arena' HEI whereby managers, academic staff, administrators and the infrastructure experts 'constitute the arena of interest in the way the HEI "should be run;"' and 4) the 'Communitarian' or 'Collegial' HEI where 'the academics are center stage in the organisation' and 'agree with one another (implicitly, as the psychological contract for working at the HEI) that they will work with each other whilst retaining their individual interest in teaching or research.' However, universities can have a combination of different approaches to management, and these can shift considerably with changes in top level senior managers and heads of department.

As suggested by Sousa, de Nijs, and Hendriks (2010, p. 1441) 'a particularly intriguing aspect is that, as in professional organizations in general, university research managers are usually drafted from the ranks of their own profession, suggesting a continuation of the principle of professional control, rather than a loss of autonomy.' It would appear that, in the transition from academics to managers, colleagues stop being considered 'academics' and become the 'them' on the other side of the fence – the disembodied 'management' or 'university', observers who put others under surveillance and are thus suddenly distinct from 'us.' This separation between academics who seek career progression via managerial/leadership roles and others who pursue education-oriented and research-focused pathways stresses the dichotomist discourse between managerialism and traditional academic perspectives. Very often these leadership roles (Head of School, Dean, Provost, Pro-Vice Chancellor, etc.) are covered by staff who are not trained as professional managers, so the 'others' become 'hybrids' when academic professionals are called to manage colleagues (Fitzgerald and Ferlie, 2000). The 'university' – in most cases directed and regulated by academic staff – then becomes an abstract organ of power and control, a neoliberal locus of disembodied and hegemonic power distinct from individual interests and collegial academic practices.

Managers and leaders in the Higher Education sector are mediators between the organisational, financial, administrative, and educational demands, on the one hand, and the flexibility



and time academics need for completing their research, teaching, and administrative work, on the other hand. A common practice within the UK Higher Education system is for academic managerial roles to rotate amongst members of staff and be in place for an average of one to three years. This process enhances the circulation of power, which is then linked to a role rather than a specific individual. While it would seem that workload allocation models can be used to impose control on people's work and efficiency within a more 'Arena' style of organization (such as, for instance, through the periodic requirement for staff in some higher education institutions to justify the number of hours spent on various academic-related activities during three randomly selected weeks per year), these can also be seen as a 'weapon' used by individual academics or managers to fence off unfair requests and attempts to overload staff with tasks and responsibilities. Going back to the concept of the 'observed observer' in the panopticon, we can understand power here as being not only in the hands of the university's leadership/management team, but in fact as 'something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain' and 'not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power' (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Workload allocation models can become a site of resistance from within the academic system when workloads are designed collectively, responsibilities are shifted away from the neoliberal individual, allocations are agreed in a collegiate manner, and access to each other's allocations is granted to all staff in a team or within the same department. Far from being powerless as subordinate passive subjects to managerialism, academics can exert both their individual and collective power to resist superimposed neoliberal targets, for instance through unionized action against pay cuts, pension cuts, and unfair changes to contracts.

## Workload Allocation Models

Far from being an isolated artefact, the use of superimposed workload allocation models is taken here as an illustration of the increased managerial and bureaucratic practices present in academia. Workload allocation models are typically a numerical representation of work based on the time or value that different types of academic and administrative tasks require. Whilst some attributes point overall to different responsibilities and roles, others have opted to include specific time allocations for teaching, preparation times, marking, administrative work, attendance at meetings, research, roles within the department, work carried out at university level, or external engagements. Other activities related to the academic profession – such as attendance at conferences or grant preparation and mentoring – may or may not be allocated a load. Soliman and Soliman (1997) identify a long list of tasks and roles carried out by academics. The number of points or hours allocated can vary greatly between institutions, and even amongst departments or schools within the same university.

One of the most controversial issues in relation to workload allocation models is their being based on subjective and unrealistic measurement of work tasks. These quantifications of academic work are abstract and approximate representations of reality that do not reflect actual work and the number of hours spent on tasks. Considerations related to the way tasks are measured are also intertwined with other themes, especially in relation to fairness and comparability, and in particular with the perceived 'real aim' of these instruments when used by 'management' (i.e. the senior management team of a university). At a higher level, the suitability of workload

allocation models for the quantification of work in the academic profession is in itself questioned as it is indeed very challenging to actually quantify academic work because of its very intellectual nature and the many variables which would influence the time or point allocation of tasks.

Even allowing for more detailed allocations – for instance those that take into account more nuanced academic experiences based on the seniority and experience of a member of staff, the level and readiness of students, the amount of time and effort generally needed to complete certain applications, and examples of citizenship – disagreements on quantifications of points or time are still likely to occur. For instance, differing opinions may be professed on whether it takes longer, or less effort, to teach or mark students at different levels, in different subjects, and in different group sizes. This type of incongruences and conflict would make a general institution-wide standard workload allocation model difficult to agree on. Where workload allocation models are deemed necessary, it is therefore important for contextual and subject specific matters to be taken into account. Also, the reductionist character of workload allocation models opens up concerns in terms of quality assurance, as those instruments do not seem to discriminate against how much time it would take to complete a task, or to do so well, since workload allocation models are focused on quantity rather than on quality of outputs.

In academia, the notion of how many hours one spends carrying out a task is highly variable, as people work, think, operate in different ways, and very little is quantifiable in such precise units as “hours.” How long does it take to write a lecture, prepare for a class, or mark an essay? How long does it take to think of an argument for a book, to write an evocative text, to design an inspiring session? Unlike other industries, academic work does not lend itself to strict time management as both teaching (e.g. marking, lesson preparation) and research (e.g. reading sources, coding data and writing) are often carried out after office hours. Anderson (2006, p. 581) suggests that the freedom of managing one’s own time and working hours is crucial in academic careers which are also characterized by a strong spillover of work activities during leisure time as ‘academics regularly work at night and at weekends, often subordinating their private and family lives for work’ (Currie, 1996; McInnis, 1999). Anderson (2006) also explains that the two principal factors contributing to academic dissatisfaction are work intensification and increased workloads. Further, Winter et al. (2000, p.287) report that ‘excessive time pressures’ and unrealistic expectations were ‘major issues’ for the respondents in their study.

The academic discourse employed in dissenting responses to workload allocation models is mostly underpinned by traditional concepts of the academic profession rooted in identity structures as opposed to managerial understandings of the university as an organisation. Although managed itself by academics, the institution in its (dis)embodied management form of a certain committee or steering group is mostly seen as idiosyncratic, whereby the quantitative monitoring of one’s workload appears to be at odds with the very nature of intellectual academic work. Performance and auditing methods have been used for many years in academia (Sousa, de Nijs, and Hendriks, 2010) and the Research Excellence Framework, the Teaching Excellence Framework, and the National Student Surveys conducted in the UK are prime examples of this system, in terms of education standards and outputs.

## *Instruments of Transparency and Equality*

On the other hand, the perceived benefits of using workload models focus not only on ensuring fairness and comparability of workload and roles amongst individuals but also on resisting hegemonic directives perceived as negative or even dangerous for staff. For instance, early career researchers might need more hours to create new modules, to learn about the institutional policies, processes, and procedures, and to adjust to the new environment, so their time can be protected by the allocation of extra hours for preparation of classes and the completion of mandatory training. Middle-managers can also take advantage of workload allocation models to ringfence departmental resources more effectively without overwhelming staff, and to consider contractual obligations. For instance, a transparent allocation of tasks and responsibilities could benefit people who work part time due to caring responsibility, health issues, or other commitments. Burgess, Lewis, and Mobbs (2003) considered equity, transparency, and alignment of individual academic work with departmental goals as crucial factors in the perception of workload effectiveness. Transparency in the allocation of roles, tasks, and responsibilities would also support the equality and inclusion agenda in giving visibility to the unfair allocation of pastoral and less significant roles to women or minority ethnic staff. Collective and collaborative decisions could foster trust relationships and limit *malveillance* within what has been termed 'the authoritarian turn' in academia (Hartmann, 2019; Mittleman, 2019). Workload allocation models could be used to shift responsibility from the individual to the institutional and systemic level, in order to achieve a fair distribution of work among colleagues, and to ensure that colleagues in specific intersectional positions are not discriminated against by being required to do more than their fair share of work.

## *Resistance to the Lack of Autonomy*

Resistance to neoliberal academic approaches is often linked to the need for autonomy, not only at the individual but also at the departmental and professional level. Some staff are more likely than others to feel obliged to accept certain workload allocations: precarious staff, those on probation, early career researchers, etc. Gleeson and Shain (1999) identified three types of 'compliers' amongst staff: those who are 'willing' (to respond positively to a managerial agenda in relation to workloads), the 'unwilling' ones (who reject this idea), and the 'strategic compliers' (who comply partially but still maintain a distance, whether personal or professional, from senior management). Departments, and more specifically departmental leadership teams, have the ability to understand the specific case of each member of staff, their needs, and what is required of them. Although departments embody the first level of line management, probation, and performance supervision, staff working in the department – including the head of department – seem in many cases to be perceived as distanced from 'management' (i.e. the faculty or college-level staff overseeing groups of departments, and the more top-level managerial positions in the institution).

Departments (or schools) may then become the main locus of both individual and collective resistance as they pivot between individual and group needs. Since each department is somewhat special in its own combination of staff, habitus, and historical formation, the 'one size fits all' approach to the design of workload allocation model is unlikely to be appropriate or to meet staff approval. Departments must obtain a level of independent judgement and authority in the design and implementation of workload allocation models as the need for transparency,

collegiality, cooperation, and inclusiveness in the writing and reviewing of workload models is paramount. Involving departmental staff in the design of instruments of workload measurements can increase both trust and 'buy-in,' but also reduce concerns of unfairness and unnecessary control. As departments or schools also often engage in different types of teaching or research, these needs have to be articulated while considering workload allocations. Hull (2006, p. 38) maintains that the use of workload models in academia is an example of the fact that 'the categorization and measurement of our work removes another aspect of our professional autonomy and hence reduces the possibilities for collegiality.' This type of collegiality, however, can in some cases be considered negatively as 'an essentially self-interested means of sustaining elitism and class-based inequality within higher education' (Hull, 2006, p. 39), and as such become a form of resistance rather than a traditional collegiate approach to work. Although the implementation of a workload model managed at the departmental level implies reduced control from the higher levels of university leadership, it seems likely to be perceived and managed more favorably by staff.

### *Stress and Well-Being*

Scholars worldwide report that academia has fallen victim of a neoliberal ideology within a globalized market economy (Deem et al., 2001; Izak et al., 2017). The increasing number of responsibilities, measurable outputs and expectations being mapped onto academic roles within this neoliberal context of higher education is deeply affecting staff wellbeing. In 2012, University College Union published a report on Higher Education staff stress by considering 'demands stressor' to measure the impact on people's wellbeing of conflicting demands, impossible deadlines, intense workload, a culture of long working hours and unrealistic time pressures. They found that in 2012 the levels of stress had worsened compared to four years before, and that academics (UCU members) were considerably more stressed than the British working population as a whole.

In addition, the staff survey conducted by UCU in the UK (2016) further highlights these pressures as staff reported working long hours and suffering from stress. This current trend is in line with early studies by Dua (1994, p. 59) on the nature and effects of stress in the university context, which indicated that a vast majority (82%) of respondents reports a high degree of stress in the workplace. Indeed, 'cuts, together with an increase in throughput, certainly intensified workloads and put staff under considerable stress' (Davies and Holloway, 1995, p. 11). According to the UCU report on workloads (2016), academic working across all disciplines are engaged in work tasks for an average of 50.9 hours per week, when the standard working week is recognised to be between 36.6 and 40 hours. Moreover, 12.8% of academic staff report working unreasonable, unsafe or excessive hours. This picture is even worse for early career academics and those with managerial responsibilities. This investigation of UCU members conducted specifically on workloads highlighted some rather concerning key findings: academic staff are working an average of more than two days unpaid leave every week; workloads are perceived as unmanageable and unsustainable; work involves increasingly more responsibility and administrative tasks that led to a widening of duties considered acceptable within their remit in addition to core research and teaching activities; student expectations have increased; professional and career development opportunities have decreased.

Existing research clearly shows that the management of workloads (or the lack thereof) has reached alarming proportions. Unmanageable workloads have been identified as a key stressor in today's academic environment which seems to be nurturing a 'culture of stress' (Kinman and Jone, 2003; Jabbar et al., 2017). Whilst universities are clearly required to focus on organizational survival and financial viability, this should not come to the expense of their workforce. This neoliberal approach to the provision of education and research in Higher Education aimed at reducing costs and increasing efficiency is proving harmful not only to staff but also to the provision of an excellent educational experience (Natale and Doran, 2012; Schapper and Mayson, 2004). The answer to this widespread wellbeing issue is likely to be in a long-term systemic change brought together by individual and collective resistance, as it cannot be found in tokenistic measures of 'quick wins.'

## Concluding Remarks

The matter of workload models remains complex in that these 'are clearly not just another manifestation of unnecessary and unpleasant managerialism, but neither can we consider them merely as benign tools for ensuring fairness' (Hull, 2006, p. 46). Some of the main issues identified in workload models are: subjectivity in the establishment of what constitutes academic work and how to measure it; the idea in itself of what is an appropriate or fair academic workload; the realistic allocation of time to various aspects, tasks, and roles, and the related implications in relation to quality; superimposed managerial practices of control and the need for effective use of resources. In a quest to enhance the efficiency of academic labour brought by reduced funding opportunities, workload model allocations and other instruments of neoliberal control are streamlining academic work (i.e. research, teaching, and other education-related tasks) into pre-conceived and taken for granted assumptions of what such work should include. Whilst accountability and performance management are not negative aims per se within a professional context, the superimposed normative understanding of what is to be considered valuable in academia (e.g. in terms of the allocation of time, resources, quality assessment, etc.) becomes detrimental and marginalizing when driven by neoliberal needs and approaches. At a deeper level, the neoliberal framework of work processes and performance management in contemporary Higher Education questions and undermines the nature of university work itself (Izak, Kostera, and Zawadzki, 2017). The proliferation of academic tasks and roles, and the need to measure these within workload allocation models, can become an obsessive filling of blanks (Höpfl, 1995), when those spaces are crucial to the academic profession (for example in terms of intellectual experimentation, knowledge creation and the development of collegiate relationships). Rather than fostering and enhancing performance, rigid managerial structures seem to have become barriers to work through and avoid in their rejection of ambiguities and in their need to box work, people, and what is valuable into frames that offer only an illusion of meaning (Höpfl, 1995).

While the use of workload allocation models may be necessary to ensure institutional survival in today's neoliberal academic context, it is how these are created, negotiated, and implemented that continues to raise concern. Individual control measures and performance criteria are rarely applicable and appropriate across different academic subjects and teams. Professional independence and autonomy are important for departments and individuals in choosing the most appropriate framework and typology of workload allocation models. Therefore, these instru-

ments must suit specific needs and practices without adopting a one-size-fits-all university-wide model. Ensuring a level of ownership in performance-related matters at the individual and collective level could contribute to what Kociatkiewicz, Kostera, and Parker (2020:1) have termed ‘the disalienation of work,’ which is far more in tune with academic collegiality as ‘a relationship to work based on assumptions concerning control and agency, aided by collective participatory mechanisms for identity construction and dialogical building of social relationships.’ Although establishing an average or general allocation system might be useful (e.g. benchmarking performance across the institution; allocation of central resources; requests for additional staffing; equal treatment across the organization), different disciplines or courses need to have flexibility in terms of inputs and processes.

Although workload allocation models may not be the only one solution to stress and excessive workloads in academia, we contend that these could effectively be used as both an individual strategy and a collective tool to i) resist the imposition of neoliberal marketized principles of organizing in academia, ii) empower staff to better manage their work, and iii) reject unfair, unequal, unhealthy, or unmanageable workloads that lead to stress, burnout, and decreased wellbeing. In order to do so, allocations of hours or points to different tasks, roles, and responsibilities must be realistic, transparent, and co-produced at different levels of the organization.

Workload allocation models can be seen both as an instrument to reinforce transparency and equal distribution of tasks and responsibilities, and as a form of academic panopticon used to monitor and control academic staff. In this context, resistance can be enacted at the individual and collective level against broader systemic structures. In Foucauldian terms, these nodes of resistance are interesting in the understanding of the exercise of power in ‘contextually specific practices, techniques, procedures, forms of knowledge and modes of rationality that are routinely deployed in attempts to shape the conduct of others’ (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994, pp. 174–5). It has been suggested that while academics face challenges that they might find difficult to cope with, they might not be very effective at resisting managerialism or tend to do so in a quiet way (Willmott, 1995; Prichard and Willmott, 1997). In 2001, Barry, Chandler, and Clark posed that academic resistance was often underplayed and that managerialism in higher education was not yet settled. It is suggested that in the current environment, ‘the increasing performance orientation is bound to clash with the traditional professional values of autonomy, collegialism and professionalism that academics embrace’ (Sousa, de Nijs, and Hendriks, 2010, p. 1441).

Furthermore, we argue that although workload models may be necessary in contemporary higher education institutions in order to achieve better transparency, equality, and the more effective use of resources, the benefits of such systems are lost without a degree of autonomy at departmental, school, and personal level. This autonomy speaks to the very nature of academic work that is premised on independent decision making, knowledge creation and intellectual experimentation, which could be annihilated by extreme forms of professional control and ‘para-professional’ approaches of waged labour (Cederström and Fleming, 2012). Universities, traditionally regarded as a form of social value and common good (Izak, Kostera and Zawadzki, 2017), seem to have become just another type of business. From a Foucauldian perspective, how academics deal with their performance management and workload models does not need to imply a passive reaction to changing circumstances in academia, but it concurrently involves individuals who actively monitor and help shape strategies of power that enable them to affect their work. As such, workload allocation models can be framed as one of the many processes of academic governmentality which reinforce compliance with the existing knowledge system, but

that can also be constructed as a site of resistance and challenge (Parker and Jary, 1995; Parker, 2018).

Further empirical research could provide richer understandings of how workloads are implemented and resisted at the individual, collective, and institutional level through the use of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection with academic staff at various professional levels and with different managerial roles and responsibilities. In addition, it would be interesting to draw a comparison among a number of universities in the UK and in other countries, and to ascertain whether the traditional purpose and value of university has been changed by the current neoliberal approaches. As noted by one of the reviewers for this article, if the neoliberal approach to academia is disjointed from the very nature of academic work and what universities are for, we need a better model relating the various 'resources' being consumed and the various 'products' being produced that would justify the neoliberal metrics being applied. In the absence of such a model, the vast expansion of university administration, its need for normative forms of labour control derived by traditional managerial praxis, and the consequent invention and implementation of new methods of surveillance and control, are clearly an instrumentation of power. Whilst this can be used as a form of empowerment through individual resistance against inequality and unmanageable workloads and can be enacted through collective agency via transparency and collaborative practices, it can also stifle academic creativity, the value of education, and knowledge creation.

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