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Presenter Details: Stop all the clocks: Narratives of independence, interdependence, and resistance in digital teaching when the everyday is every day.
Abstract Text:

This study offers an account of HE business and law teachers' responses to increased ambiguities and anxieties provoked during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Respondents chronicled the abrupt transition to online-only teaching and learning during the early weeks of pandemic lockdown, using a mix of self-chosen photographs and other images, and accompanying narratives. These reflective accounts uncovered a series of emotionally heightened reactions, identity challenges, and new independencies to enforced autonomies from a lack of institutional direction and communication at this time. Whilst pre-pandemic, institutional and sector manoeuvres, and encroaching authoritarianism (McCann et al, 2020) were producing diminishing terms and conditions and increased precarity for those in digital teaching roles, (Collins et al, 2020), the lockdown period offered a pause in expected workplace relations. Widespread confusion accompanying an abrupt breakdown of routines and role definitions led to a vacuum in management presence alongside both an intensification of workload and temporary emancipation from expected performance metrics. Consequences of this 'absence of leadership' (Cai et al 2021:392) and workplace extremity in other public-facing sectors has already been reported on from early pandemic research outputs, such as healthcare (Ford et al, 2022) and retail (Cai et al, 2021). The research process undertook a content analysis of responses to three themes recommended to our participants as starting points: 'precarity and security', 'time' and 'communication'. We asked them to describe emotional rather than operational aspects of transition to a complete shift to online rather than blended workplace. Accompanying images were used by participants as a focal point for the changes to everyday teaching encounters that had value to them. We found early pandemic conditions (March – May 2020) produced a liminal state (Turner, 1982) at the micro level of teaching interactions. Individuals became separated from their regular lives. They entered a newly ambiguous state, freed from well-worn customs, regulations, and management control measures, before in due time being reaggregated into new, hybrid teaching roles as longer-term outcomes of the crisis. Multiple and conflicting communications from the institution offered opportunities to individual academics who took student learning into their own hands, producing a wide range of narratives ranging from fear and doubt to new self-determination and a growth mindset. Our early conclusions are pointing to intense and emotive phases of work producing positive impacts on work identity as well as negative. We observed the mitigation of psychological impact on those respondents who both kept busy during the lockdown period and who took control in their online learning classrooms, filtering and translating myriad communications to provide a clear voice for students. Learnings taken include the importance of continuing to nurture the positive aspects of identity, such as autonomy and responsibility, are not diluted. We also noted, like Czarniawska and Mazza (2003:272) before us, that although the pandemic threw up major challenges and difficulties for those teaching in the digital sphere, that liminal state also resulted in 'a sense of freedom', a 'possibility of creation' and shared sense of community with fellow teachers and learners during this time.