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Self-care and entrepreneurism: An ethnography of soft skills development for higher education staff

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Introduction

The increasing emphasis on soft skills learning represents one of the foremost cultural shifts in continuing professional education (CPE) of the last half century (Kamin 2013), with programmes featuring these skills now an established component of staff development (Junrat et al. 2014; Kamin 2013; Schulz 2008). Soft skills training can change attitudes and behaviours (Schulz 2008), increase staff productivity and well-being (Kamin 2013; Schulz 2008), and offer solutions to contemporary workplace stresses (Dixon et al. 2011; Kyllonen 2013). Fundamental questions can be asked concerning the role of soft skills learning and development programmes (LDPs) in combining self-care with entrepreneurial goals and what this reveals about the emergence of new subjectivities within Higher Education (HE) and beyond (Binkley

2011). While subject to numerous evaluations, LDPs have rarely been explored critically and ethnographically. Soft skills training is big business; including motivational speaking and coaching it represents a $10 billion per year industry in the US alone (Marketdata Enterprises 2012).

To redress this knowledge gap, we draw on field data from an ethnographic study of staff LDPs within a UK university, and in particular on the career trajectories of staff and programme managers from both academic (AC) and corporate service (CS) sectors. Using social world theory (Clarke 1991; Strauss 1978) as a sensitising device, we consider the nature of the LDP 'social world,' highlight the use of 'self-care technologies' or as we term them, 'activities of the self.' We further propose the categories of 'career nomad,' 'reluctant entrepreneur,' and 'course hopper,' as typologies in a contemporary workplace.

Study context and terminology

The context in which this study was conducted is a UK university in which the authors work as academics. Our interest in the position that LDPs occupy in HE organisational culture arose from personal observations of the expansion of soft skills training in and beyond our own institution. While a decade ago the emphasis of staff development was on technical skills, an increasing number of courses and workshops are now offered under the umbrella of personal performance and development, covering 'soft skills' topics such as leadership coaching, time management, communication skills, resilience and mindfulness. There are many definitions of soft skills, but in the context of this study we consider them personal and professional attributes (including emotional regulation skills) believed to assist individuals in the pursuit of personal or team goals (Heckman and Kautz 2012; McGurk 2010). We

choose the term LDPs to distinguish this genre of face-to-face and relatively informal

learning programme from other well researched areas of professional education

(Floyd and Morrison 2014; Boud, Cressey and Docherty 2006) including portfolio

and e-learning (Fenwick 2004).

Socio-political context

The focus on soft skills programmes for staff has happened at a time of accelerating

change within organisations. Demands made in terms of skills sets and work mobility

for employees have changed significantly, a trend which many authorities attribute to

privatisation and other neoliberal policies of governments (Peters 2001 2012; Giroux

2002). Many blame neoliberalism for encouraging a free-market society in which

safety nets have been dismantled and employees treated as disposable (Boltanski and

Chiapello 2005; Sennett 1998). People are viewed either as commodities or producers

and consumers of them (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Sennett 1998). Foucault's

thesis on technologies of power suggests that powerful interests shape the life-worlds

of workers in a risk-oriented society. 'Homo œconomicus,' to use Foucault's term

(1989), has ceased to be one of two partners in the process of exchange and instead

must act as 'entrepreneur of the self' (Foucault 1989).

An alternative view of contemporary work-roles is that, like consumers,

employees now make autonomous and calculated choices (Du Gay 1996). The

destabilising of institutions has created a 'nomadic' workforce but one that now

exercises more reflective judgement over the decisions it makes (Beck and Beck-

Gernsheim 2002). Interpretations of career development such as the 'boundaryless'

career (Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom 2005) conceptualise modern careerists as

more concerned with individual than organisational goals (Cappelli 1999) measuring

their career success according to personal values (Briscoe et al. 2012). Those who choose to follow a 'boundaryless' career are subject to market forces and must repackage their knowledge and skills or acquire 'meta-competences,' (multiplicative variables of performance and productivity (Pereira 2013), if they are to remain mobile and marketable in a changing work environment (Briscoe et al. 2012).

Changing roles in higher education

Once providing a stable work environment, the UK HE sector has seen traditional governance arrangements gradually replaced by free market policies (Peters 2001) and staff consequently exposed to precarious careers and competition for shrinking resources (Ball 2015). As income generation becomes a preoccupation within the sector, universities must perform to tougher stakeholder-driven targets (Kolsaker 2008). The influence of 'new management' approaches to workforce development in universities has substantially increased (Floyd and Morrison 2014). CS divisions within universities worldwide have greatly expanded (Graham 2012; Whitchurch 2008), while a new genre of professional support staff, known as 'para-academics' (Macfarlane 2011) (including teaching and learning coordinators and research management staff) has emerged. Emphasis on individual self-governance (Brandsen, Boogers and Tops 2006) has paved the way for managers to assume more visionary roles, including coaching and developing employee skills in the organisation (Sennett 1998; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 81). At the same time, UK staff engagement surveys indicate low morale among university faculty staff members (Watson 2009), while academics have been portrayed as nurturing an increasingly 'fragile' sense of identity and insecurity (Knights and Clarke 2013) fuelled by constant change and high accountability (Ball 2015).

In these unsettled times, motivating, supporting and training academic and CS staff has become a priority for organisations' human resources (HR) divisions. In 2010, the HEFC Higher Education Workforce Framework (HEFCE 2010) emphasised the need for strategic workforce planning to become a key priority. A knock-on effect of this trend is the pressure on university human resources (HR) and learning and development departments to 'buy into' privately run soft skills courses and programmes. Staff training, development, and career management have changed from a 'nice to do' to a 'must do' in order for universities to gain a competitive advantage and meet staff and student expectations (Noe 2009).

Self-governance, reflexivity and 'technologies of self'

A prominent feature of contemporary staff development is its emphasis on self-care, delivered through practices associated with health and wellbeing. Historical accounts attest that self-technologies and self-reflexive practices have been central to religious and philosophical systems for thousands of years; however under neoliberalism they have appeared in new forms. As part of Foucault's thesis on power and governance, his attention in the 1970's turned towards 'technologies' of self (Foucault 1989; Foucault 2008); that is techniques that human beings use to understand themselves, and 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or, with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves' (Foucault 1989).

Since Foucault's later investigations the concept of self-care has greatly evolved, lending itself neatly to neo-liberalism's aim of producing autonomous individuals concerned with a more entrepreneurial form of self-cultivation (Hamann and John 2009). Psychology has participated in this authoritative exercise, by

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nurturing and directing individual striving in the most productive fashions (Rose 1998). As Rose notes, this includes the 'pedagogies of self-fulfilment' (Rose 1998, 7), which translate the enigmatic desires and dissatisfactions of the individual into ways of inspecting and working on him/herself in order to gain full personal and economic potential. Examples of such pedagogies abound in business psychology literature, based on notions such as emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996), resilience (Schneider, Lyons and Khazon, 2013), personal mastery (Senge et al. 1994) and other forms of positive subjectivities (Binkley 2011).

Subjectivity for Foucault constituted a person's ability to shape their own conduct and practices; it is a form of power that penetrates to the interior of the person (Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007), although arguably its limits are defined by the context in which such practices take place. For the purposes of this study, that context is soft skills learning and development for university staff.

Methodology

Ethnography was employed for this study to collect, collate and reflect on observations, interview data and subjective experience findings (Picker 2014). The ethnographic method has been widely used in organisations (Bishop and Waring 2016) and educational establishments (Alexander 1999; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000) to understand modern HE life (Iloh and Tierney 2013). Normally applied in a single setting (Goodson and Vassar 2011), its holistic, non-judgmental approach to institutional culture seemed fitting for this study. The lead researcher's ethnographic fieldwork included participant observation on selected courses, stakeholder discussions and one-to-one interviews with participants from a cross section of LDPs and work sectors in a UK university. Topics covered on LDPs

included leadership, personal and professional development, coaching and mentoring, mindfulness, resilience and an all-academic staff development residential. Table 1 lists the programmes attended by the lead researcher and/or discussed by participants in interviews.

[Insert Table1 about here]

Staff members who had recently attended soft skills programmes were contacted via email by an HR manager or the lead researcher with an information sheet, and invited to participate in this research. Some stakeholders leading and/or facilitating programmes also came forward to be interviewed. Participants were selected on the basis of having recently attended one or more LDPs in the University. Twenty-five semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted over a 9-month period. The final cohort consisted of 8 female and 1 male staff from the CS sector, 8 female and 4 male staff working in the academic (AC) sector, and 2 female and 2 male programme managers/facilitators. Some participants discussed several programmes. Interview questions focused on the following areas: work role and area; rationale for partaking in their chosen professional development activity; experiences of learning activities, benefits and shortcomings of courses; critical incidents and insights; and plans or strategies for utilising learning experiences within or outside work. Following each interview, interviews were transcribed verbatim, identifying details removed and participants invited to check transcripts for accuracy, and data stored on a password-protected computer.

Conceptual framework

We drew on social world theory (Clarke 1991; Strauss 1978) as a conceptual framework and sensitising device to guide our analysis (Bowen 2006). Social world

theory can be traced back to Herbert Mead (1934), Tamotsu Shibutani (1955) and others, but has been most extensively developed by Anselm Strauss (Strauss 1978) and Adele Clarke (1991), who regard it as applicable to both small and large social worlds and arenas, and as a means of understanding the complexities of human social organisation (Clarke 1991). Social worlds have subdivisions or sub-worlds, which constantly shift, organise and realign and are recognised as being highly fluid (Clarke 1991, 133). Activities within all social worlds include establishing and maintaining boundaries between those worlds and legitimising the world itself through a variety of claims- making activities (Clarke 1991). The political dimensions of social worlds include allocation, access to and deprivation of resources. Social world theory has been applied in different organisational contexts (Clarke 1991; Elkjaer and Huysman 2008; Strauss 1978), although no studies were found that used it in an HE setting. We viewed social world theory as potentially illuminating, and a useful means of interpreting actors' entry into and position within the 'LDP social world', the particular focus of this world and its relationship to larger and more powerful dimensions of sociopolitical and organisational culture operating around and directing it.

Data analysis

A modified version of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 2015) was used to systematically analyse data. In the first stages of analysis data from observations, interviews and stakeholder discussions were considered as separate elements, and read and re-read to discover variables (including categories and concepts) within them. A single NVivo file was created on which all data was stored, analysed holistically, and coded for patterns and themes. Throughout this process, personal

notes were recorded on a mobile device and theoretical memos were written by the

lead researcher (Strauss and Corbin 2015). To establish initial codes and develop

theory, the initial six interviews were coded manually using the stage-by-stage

process outlined above, following which all interviews were coded using NVivo

software. As concepts emerged or were discarded, further inductive coding (to

generate new theory) at open (tentative naming) and axial (relating codes/categories

to each other) coding of data was performed and linked to existing theory in the

literature, constantly referring back and forth between the data and evolving theory, to

ensure the latter remained grounded in the experiences and narratives of the research

participants (Strauss and Corbin 2015). As final codes emerged, data was repeatedly

scanned manually with help of NVivo, to check for missing or hidden codes or

concepts. While realising the limitations of such generalisations, in our findings and

analysis we have distinguished between corporate service (CS) and academic or

faculty staff (AC), although not between department positions, and age or gender only

where they seemed pertinent to the study themes.

Ethics

The host institution granted ethical approval. Participants were informed of the lead

researcher's role in advance, so that any objections could be expressed. A potential

dilemma of participant observation is the effect that the researcher's role as observer

could have on the situation (Robson 2000). After introducing [---]self as a researcher

to participants, the lead researcher explained the nature of the research, participated in

the various activities along with others, and used interpersonal skills to establish a

natural rapport with different group members (Robson 2000, 197).

Results

The following themes emerged from our analysis, which reflect both the nature of the LDP 'social world' (discretion and trust, performance and performance management) and the orientation of performers in this world ('career nomads' and 'reluctant entrepreneurs'; learning preferences; 'course hopping'; and personal and professional gains). We use these themes as headings to organise our narrative.

Discretion and trust

An attribute distinguishing LDPs from most other social arenas in and outside work is the deliberate merging of personal and professional domains. In order to achieve this effectively, most LDPs are held in locations away from usual workplaces, with the intention of engendering discretion and trust. Being away from the university culture and environment had, according to one participant, felt 'so much more liberal' and allowed for 'free dialogue.' The space to connect with others and be supported by work colleagues was seen as valuable by virtually all participants and managers interviewed. One female CS spoke about having 'a fantastic group . . . we got on right from the start. We shared very deeply about ourselves and cut through the superfluous quite quickly.' The usual hierarchy of the workplace was less apparent on LDPs; one male CS participant described how, despite being a younger member of staff on a leadership course, the way their group operated was very welcoming and democratic: 'There is none of this " I'm the director."'

LDPs are networking arenas, encouraging participants to forge relationships with staff from other divisions e.g. 'We had breakfast together this morning . . . we do intend to continue and we're trying to make the next date now.' In addition to the organised group activities, most LDPs allowed time for informal extra -curricular

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encounters, examples being eating lunch together or having a beer in the bar with fellow participants on a residential event. Personal/entrepreneurial conversations could sometimes lead to new collaboration. For example one academic (AC) recounted the germination of a new partnership or enterprise on an LDP: ' I remember the particular moment when me and my colleague pitched an idea . . . and they said, "Yes it's great! Put it forward, we'll support it."' Not everybody found these networking opportunities so productive however, e.g. one researcher considered meeting people from other universities of limited value if the rest of the cohort were working in different fields.

Despite the emphasis on group adherance to a confidentiality code, the open plan setting of some venues and the presence of managers left some participants feeling vulnerable or uncomfortable. This was particularly noted by CS staff, who had to work alongside management staff running or attending the programme. As one CS participant explained: 'However good your relationship is I don't know how you can speak freely, knowing your boss was running the event […], there must be a conflict of interest there somewhere.' In terms of expressing authentic views, some things were deemed 'safer to take outside.'

Performance and performance management

LDP social worlds are performative arenas, both in the dramaturgical sense and in the sense of being tools of performance management. In addition to engaging in solo and team performances, typically in the form of role-play and group presentations, participants watched presentations by facilitators and invited speakers (or 'role models'). Reactions to guest speakers were mixed: the younger CS staff interviewed found them inspiring, while the more mature or experienced AC and CS staff were

more critical of speakers' presentation styles and messages: e.g. 'There were some people I would describe as "primadonnas." I think they were quite keen on their stage, their space.' Also critiqued were some of what could be described as 'career athlete' (Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007) messages coming across. One female AC noted how her programme had included a high number of 'sporty achievers', another female AC criticised the 'masculinised' portrayal of women leaders while acknowledging that, 'It helped me realise that I don't need to change my values.'

In addition to their dramaturgical nuance, LDPs play a more explicit role in staff performance management. It was an institutional requirement that attendance on an LDP was recorded on a staff member's performance management record to be discussed and commented on by their line manager. Other performance management elements were included on some programmes: for instance on one leadership skills programme, CS staff undertook a formal group presentation to senior staff, several coaching sessions and a 360-review process requiring feedback from colleagues and line managers (Maylett 2009). These performance devices met with mixed responses, one CS participant appreciated the 'self-directed nature' of the 360-review, another found their coaching sessions to be a 'waste of time . . . I'm really interested in career progression, but it just didn't seem to go anywhere.'

'Career nomads' and 'reluctant entrepreneurs'

Strauss (1978) urges the social world researcher to focus on how people encounter, are introduced to, drawn into or get 'hooked' into social worlds, as this can help explain phenomena such as mobility, level of commitment, marginality and authenticity. Both AC and CS staff viewed their time on LDPs as an opportunity to focus on their career development; however perspectives on self and career path

varied according to the individual's work-role and place in the wider organisation. Unlike most academics interviewed, some CS staff had attended a programme partly to fulfil the expectations of their job description. Being recommended for a leadership course could feel quite an achievement: 'My line manager put me forward […] It's quite a popular programme, so it was quite flattering.' For the junior CS staff on time-limited contracts, attendance on an LDP was viewed as part of the job: 'I'm a get in, get out (person), doing what I need to do.' One CS participant explained their 'liminal' status in these terms: 'Even though you're embedded in the contract – you're always thinking of what the next step is where you will be going.' Another CS participant spoke of how a particular programme had been timely because they had 'a lot of frustrations . . . a desire to move on and not get stuck . . . to find a [new]career.' Due to their attitude and liminal work status, we have identified these types of participants as 'career nomads.'

ACs interviewed for this study expressed greater commitment to the organisation than CS staff, but more concerns about the future of their career within it. A high proportion of the ACs in this study had business backgrounds, or undertook external consultancy work, and their reviews on entrepreneurship may not be truly representative of academics in general. Most academics were, according to one female AC participant, very bad at self-marketing and self-promotion. But, sensing the neoliberal climate she explained, 'You must market and promote yourself, that's the world we are in.' Another female AC who attended a leadership course remarked how, '[o]ne does everything to be primed for any opportunities that come up […] As a professional you need to do that.' Some ACs, who had believed themselves or their colleagues to be under threat of redundancy, assumed a calculating attitude towards attending staff LDPs. One spoke about 'getting as much out of the University' – as

they could – 'that was my thought really.' Even though a particular LDP had been scheduled during their busiest semester, one AC had reasoned: 'I'm going to take space with this, and everything else can work around it […] to show that I am doing personal and professional development, and if I have to leave and get a job somewhere else.'

The number of CS staff voluntarily attending the LDPs we reviewed exceeded the AC staff. In the case of courses that spanned weeks or months, staff had to prioritise their different commitments e.g. 'In terms of "How does this help me in my academic professional journey?" I think that is just not apparent to academics' (AC). A male AC who had attended a coaching programme explained why they thought academics less likely to attend these types of LDPs: 'a lot of work is driven in a sense by 'academic testosterone' . . . it is very much based upon doing research, publishing your papers and books, standing there as the authority in front of students.' We call this group of AC staff with ambiguous feelings concerning entrepreneurism 'reluctant entrepreneurs.'

Learning preferences

Differences emerged between AC and CS staff concerning their receptivity to LDPs learning activities. The emphasis of these activities ranged from self-focused (e.g. psychometric testing, mindfulness, self reflection), through inter-personal (e.g. role play and games, group presentations) to work performance focused (e.g. 360-degree reviews). When discussing these activities, several ACs expressed a liking for group discussion and the creative, playful parts: 'You know, adults can play as well as children and I think that kind of playfulness is really good from the point of innovation and creativity.' CS staff on the other hand, were impressed by

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psychometric testing and similar tools: for instance one male CS participant described the Myers Briggs (McCrae and Costa 1989) psychometric test as 'perhaps one of the most useful tools that I discovered.'

ACs overall were more critical of the level and presentation of content of the courses they attended, and spoke of simplistic or out-of-date theories, 'death by PowerPoint,' and a lack of emphasis on research, e.g. 'I don't know if they thought "If we put a bunch of academics together it will be good enough."' One AC attending a leadership programme described the approach as 'All a bit idealistic. That we would be creating leaders we would like to see, leaders who respect other people, who are collegiate - not the political schemers that we know that leaders really are [laughs]. Programme facilitators and staff involved in the management of soft skills LDPs were, unsurprisingly, the most enthusiastic about their particular programme and its ethos, and during interviews recounted their own personal journeys into them. For example, a male programme leader (AC) explained how he had designed his particular leadership approach 'to dispel the "Great Man Myth"' prevalent on more traditional leadership programmes, while a female programme manager (CS) spoke of the personal advantages afforded to her by training and practising as a management coach:

> I just feel that my whole outlook has expanded since I've been coaching and since I started studying psychology. You know, your thinking, and your understanding of the way that other people think, changes and expands so much.

Course hopping

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During the fieldwork, the lead researcher became aware of the same faces appearing at some LDPs. Several AC and CS staff interviewed also spoke about taking part in a range of LDPs over the years, mostly in the field of self-care: 'I did a whole range of things, from time management to a men's development project, and change projects, all sorts of different offerings' (male AC). Because of their propensity to go from programme to programme, we have designated these people 'course hoppers.' Although the reasons for 'course hopping' and the attraction of particular LDPs were not fully explored in this study, issues concerning self-confidence, escaping the 'rat-race' and seeking a 'quiet space' were all given as reasons for attending self-care courses. One female AC explained it this way:

> I realised that I really enjoyed the quietening, especially during the academic year when things get a little bit hectic . . . (I chose) mindfulness and self-compassion, because I tend to self-disparage, and ruminate a lot. And although I did the resilience as well within university, I didn't think it was sufficient.

The therapy-like approach of some courses did not, however, suit everybody. One young CS participant described the personal development programme they attended as 'far too touch-feely' for their taste.

Personal and professional gains

When asked what they had gained from their time on an LDP, several participants commented that it had more to do with positive reinforcement of existing knowledge than learning anything new: 'I think it kind of reinforced what I knew already about

my management style' (female AC). Some participants spoke about how they had grown in self-confidence and self-efficacy through their experiences on a programme: 'I think it's just given me is a bit of confidence to say . . . that I can do something outside the course . . . and that maybe I need to stick up a bit more for myself' (female CS). One female AC felt that presenting to colleagues had given her a new sense of maturity: 'You know, I'm quite grown up. I can make those decisions for myself.' Another senior female AC described how, after attending a self-development course, she had decided to challenge her line manager about her workload allocation for the coming year: '[The course] helped me realise, "Do you know what? You're being taken for a ride here." . . . So to a certain extent, they paid money to send me on a course to realise that they're getting more out of me than they should be.'

While some participants emphasised self-realisations, others stressed the collective impact of LDPs. One female AC spoke lyrically about the 'energy' and 'synergy' on a large residential event. Another, male, AC described his broader vision of what was achievable within and beyond the organisation: 'These soft skills and such resources might help us to challenge the system, and create a new system which might service us all better as humanity.'

Discussion

Through their extensive development and application of social world theory, Strauss (1978) and Clarke (1991) identify features of social worlds as entities, including that social worlds are dynamic, have or are sub-worlds with political dimensions and that actors in social worlds are involved in the practices and ideologies of these worlds to different degrees (Strauss 1978, 123). As sub-worlds within a large institution, the social worlds of LDPs are complex arenas to study. Actors within these worlds arrive

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with different expectations and goals, interpret their time within these worlds diversely, and individually seek out ways to cope with the pressures of contemporary life, in this case those occurring in an HE institution. Our analysis revealed two particular types of performers, 'career nomads' and 'reluctant entrepreneurs.' In this section we first consider the functions of LDPs emerging from this study. We examine the 'career nomad' and 'reluctant entrepreneur' as players within the context of a liminal society and higher education culture driven by neoliberal directives. We then return to the LDP social world, and its function of promoting what we term, 'activities of the self.' Finally we consider the role of LDPs in advancing self-governance and reflexivity, but also question them as potentially diverting attention from political avenues for change.

As a form of continuing education with elements of work-integrated learning (Choy and Delahaye 2011), LDPs offer and fulfill some important practical and affective functions for their participants. First, they allow staff to engage in a range of reflexive, experiential learning activities which they can effectively apply in 'real world' contexts (Boud, Cressey, and Docherty 2006). The LDPs examined used a range of experiential learning tools and methods (Boud et al. 2006), such as discussion, case studies, role-play and group presentations to engage participants and promote creativity and fun (Hromek and Roffey 2009). Second, LDPs provide staff with opportunities to engage in networking activities in a relatively relaxed environment and to connect with others in and beyond their organisation and potentially develop healthier and more trusting relationships (Mezirow 1991; Hromek and Roffey 2009). In this study, the mixing of staff from different sectors was seen as generally a good thing, although the presence of managers could engender feelings of wariness or suspicion.

Third, the ability of LDPs to challenge learners (Choy and Delahaye 2011), and promote self-governance in an insecure work environment (Briscoe et al. 2012) was borne out by our study findings. Responses from participants suggested positive changes in self-worth and self-efficacy, but few changes in attitudes towards the organisation or society (Mezirow 1991). Finally, LDPs played a more overt role in staff performance management; being 'seen' by others to attend a programme could be as significant in terms of career progression as what was gained from it; e.g. 'To show that I am doing personal and professional development.'

'Career nomads,' 'reluctant entrepreneurs' and liminality

Participants on LDPs came from different sectors and social worlds, within and beyond the University, and thus had different interests and levels of investment in these worlds. In terms of level of personal investment to the organisation, the CS staff overall expressed shorter-term commitment than ACs, and generally viewed their time on an LDP as a chance to consider their next career move. This category of CS staff, which we call 'career nomads,' bears some resemblance to the boundaryless careerist described by Arthur and colleagues (Arthur et al. 2005); however their nomadism would appear to be less of a value choice than an economic necessity driven by neoliberal directives (Ball 2015). Rather we see our classification as resonating with other studies of liminality in modern organisations, such as Tempest and Starkey's study of work of contract workers (Tempest and Starkey 2004) and the liminality effects on learning across organisational divides. The term 'liminal' refers to an ambiguous or threshold state during which a person is 'betwixt and between' two cultural states (Turner 1969). With organisations constantly reconfiguring themselves, the modern employee could be described as being in a constant state of

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liminality (Szakolczai 2000) and uncertainty. One of the potential advantages of LDPs, from participants' point of view, is the space they afford in which to reflect on personal and professional priorities and consider career trajectories.

ACs, while expressing a greater commitment to their work role than CS staff, voiced disenchantment with the direction in which UK HE was heading. Concerns were expressed about the commodification of HE, with one AC lamenting the loss of the 'heart of higher education.' Nevertheless, ACs were also subject to liminality (including redundancy fears) and took advantage of opportunities to learn from others, forge entrepreneurial links and explore their options. Based on our findings we have described these staff as 'reluctant entrepreneurs.' The shifting back and forth pattern of career paths for university staff is a much-researched phenomenon: for example Whitchurch (2008) explores the shifting and blurring of boundaries of work roles within HE; Floyd and Dimmock (2011) reflect on how HE department heads are required to assume a range of personal and professional identities and to adopt and switch between them; while Lam (2011) considers how collaborative relationships between industries and universities build network career models between these two types of work settings. Our findings on career trajectories also bear resemblances to Knight and Clarke's (2013) study, in which academics suspected they were sacrificing their 'academic integrity' by 'careering' in the new managerial sense (869).

Activities of the self

During their time in the LDP social world, participants engaged in a range of interrelated activities connected to their self-care and self-development, which we call 'activities of the self.' Most programmes included some type of self-examination intervention, such as self-reflection, self-appraisal, personality assessment tests, and

so on. Some courses (such as mindfulness and compassion) had a decidedly self-improving purpose and participants who we describe as 'course hoppers' had attended a variety of such courses. Given these emphasis on self-governance, we consider that these activities of the self, such as we found on LDPs, align within Foucault's 'technologies of self' (Foucault 1989), but with contemporary nuances. As an emergent part of our analysis the motives behind 'course hopping' were not fully investigated but reasons discussed by attendees of self-care programmes included seeking a quiet mind, confidence issues and utopian ideals (e.g. 'to create a new system which might serve us all better as humanity') suggesting both a quest for personal happiness (Clarke 2011) and approaching people's lives as continuous 'projects,' which Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) and others (Binkley 2011; Dilts 2012) have equated with neoliberal subjectivities. This may offer a fruitful area for further study.

The idea that self-development requires not only scholarly learning but must be observed and practised through group interaction rituals is not unique to modern life (Foucault 1989). The concept of self-cultivation can be traced back to Confucius and others, and the belief that the individual plays a prominent role in creating the good sociopolitical order (Gardner 2014). The modern concept of self-care has, however, gone beyond the individual choice for self-advocacy to become a 'foundation science' (Denyes, Orem, and Bekel 2001) and a moral force in its own right (Van Gordon et al. 2016 ; Denyes et al. 2001). Society has become excessively, and some would say unhealthily (Taylor 1991; Lasch 1980), preoccupied with self, and those who wish to be identified as professional, entrepreneurial and resilient must be seen to 'do particular sorts of work on themselves' (Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007, 1). These forms of neoliberal subjectivities are reinforced by

positive psychology (Rose 1998) along with a persuasive therapy (Furedi 2004) and happiness 'industry' (Gunnell, Pimlott, and Motevalli 2004) which, by encouraging unrealistic personal goals, feeds performance related anxieties and creates a culture of 'career athleticism' (Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007). Indeed, the metaphor of 'professional development' itself can be critiqued for encouraging a process whereby skills' acquisition can slip into mere acquisitiveness (Boud and Hager 2012), therein devaluing its purpose.

Self-governance and reflexivity

On the other hand, Taylor warns us not to dismiss out of hand all modern attempts at self-fulfilment as some can act as a moral force for good (Taylor 1991). Many 'activities of the self' discussed in this study espouse an 'ethic of authenticity' and self-fulfillment, wherein finding yourself means getting in touch with yourself and differences between yourself and others (Taylor 1991). Practices such as mindfulness and resilience building have been associated with decreased anxiety (Dekeyser et al. 2008), increased wellbeing, and better quality of relationships (Goodman and Schorling 2012). Applied in a reflective way, self-governance practices, while operating within a free market system may also encourage people to question and look beyond traditional versions of knowledge, subjecting these to a thorough critique (Dilts 2011) thereby bringing about positive changes and innovations. At a local level these social and ethical discourses encourage healthy debates, help create a sense of common purpose, and even engender a kind of emotional solidarity between staff, which can guard against more flagrant and harmful aspects of self-entrepreneurialism and self-interest. However, while LDPs may help staff to feel their way through the workplace they also serve neoliberal agendas from which problems such as anxiety,

job insecurity and burnout can be said to arise. Rather than regarding them as panaceas for distress, LDPs might be better viewed as the soft hand in the unyielding fist of an increasingly entrepreneurial culture within HE.

Conclusions

LDPs offer examples of how neoliberalism 'unmakes' boundaries (Knudsen and Swedberg 2009) such as between work and 'time-out,' entrepreneurism and self-care, and in the process creates new opportunities but also contradictions and paradoxes. Depending on their motivation, job role and status, HE staff seek out and find ways to capitalise on self-improvement and careering opportunities, or cope with the stresses of modern work life, including through participating and performing in LDPs. While some academics may continue to resist identifying themselves with self care and self-entrepreneurial ideologies, participants from AC and CS sectors in this study overall accepted these new subjectivities and the necessity of operating as self-governors and self-entrepreneurs. CS staff in particular assumed a pragmatic approach to their liminal position in the organisation. Wedded to the individualistic policies of neoliberalism, LDPs provide staff with partial remedies to problems associated with these practices, such as staff isolation, job insecurity and performance anxiety, thus inhabiting a paradoxical normative position. These findings, and the configuration of salient categories of 'career nomad,' 'course hopper' and 'reluctant entrepreneur,' while not unique to this field, may add to existing theories about staff orientations and self-care practices and identity development in the modern workplace.

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Table 1: Main Courses and events attended and/or discussed in interviewees

Programmes discussed in interviews	Sector/ role of interviewees Corporate service (CS); academic (AC); facilitator/ manager (F)
A. Gender specific personal and professional development (PPD) course	**5 female (all CS)**
B. Leadership programme for women	**3 female (all AC)**
C. Mixed gender leadership programme	**1 male (CS), 2 female (CS)**
D. Coaching and mentoring course	**2 male (2 AC), 4 female (2 CS, 2**

	AC)
F. Women researcher PPD course (AC)	**2 female (all AC)**
G. Leadership programme researchers (AC)	**1 male (AC)**
H. Academic residential SSP	**2 male (AC), 4 female (AC)**
I. Mindfulness programme	**1 female (AC), 1 male (AC)**
G. Resilience programme	**1 female (AC), I male (AC)**
F. Various programmes	**4 male F, 2 female F**
Total references to programmes	**9 female CS, 1 male CS, 13 female AC, 7 male AC, 4 male F, 2 female F.**