

## **LOCATION INDEPENDENT WORKING IN ACADEMIA: ENABLING EMPLOYEES OR SUPPORTING MANAGERIAL CONTROL?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this article, we consider the extent to which the practice of location independent working (LIW) enables academic employees to make choices and have agency in their life-work balance, and the extent to which it may support (or potentially be used as a form of resistance to) increased managerial control. Set within the context of an increasingly performance-led, managerialist public sector landscape, the impact and implications of these working practices are examined through the lens of labour process theory. Drawing on findings from an ongoing in-depth ethnographic study set in a post-1992 university business school in central England, we suggest that the practice of LIW is being used both to enable employees and to support managerial control.

### **BACKGROUND AND FOCUS OF OUR RESEARCH**

Within Mercia University, our case-study, post-1992 university business school, LIW refers to a formalised contractual arrangement whereby academics forego a dedicated office space on campus and work via hot desks, or remotely off campus. Although such LIW initiatives are often promoted as a tool to encourage flexibility and choice, they may also be necessitated by drives to improve efficiency. In this

sense, they might be construed as a managerialist intervention. Alternatively, academics could be opting for a formalised LIW contract in an attempt to escape or resist the managerialist landscape, or to obtain more choice and control in their working lives. However construed, the influence of managerialism and new public management (NPM) and the possible effects or tensions created by them cannot be ignored.

Driven by a bid to secure Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) funding, an LIW pilot scheme was introduced in 2008 for academics within Mercia University. This scheme had been developed from a similar initiative that had been implemented successfully in a nonacademic, commercial subsidiary of the university. Funding was secured under the rubric of "Institutional Exemplars," defined by JISC (2007: 1) as "projects aimed at supporting existing institutional strategies by providing solutions to institution-wide problems, based upon proven practices, technologies, standards and services. The solutions will act as exemplars to other institutions by demonstrating innovation and good practice, and building knowledge and experience, which can be shared across institutions." This definition, which explicitly sets out support for institutional strategies, seems to reinforce new managerialist ideologies aimed at legitimising managerial control. From the university's perspective, the main aim of the scheme was "to demonstrate that LIW can bring significant benefits to staff in academic departments, their employers and students and to build an LIW framework that can be adopted by other members of the JISC community" (Morris, 2009: 4). Even here, the discourse assumes that LIW will produce benefits for all concerned, not simply enable academics.

Within Mercia University Business School, 25 academic staff members (approximately 10% of those eligible) opted to take part in the pilot scheme. A formal evaluation report produced in 2009 pronounced the pilot a success and concluded that the university was not alone in recognising the widespread benefits that flexible working arrangements could afford. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that LIW might not be applicable to all categories of staff, or indeed across all institutions. It was further acknowledged that staff needed time to adapt to working within an LIW framework, as did their colleagues, managers, and students. Finally, the report recommended: "It will be important to undertake some longer term follow-up of LIW staff behaviours and activities in order to assess the full impact of LIW" (Morris, 2009: 12). Since 2009, the scheme has continued to be available to all academic staff within the business school. While the overall number of academics in the business school has grown to around 370, the proportion of LIW academics has remained constant at 10%. At the time of writing, there had been no long-term or indeed any substantial follow-up assessment of the impact of LIW since the original report published in 2009.

From the first author's direct observations and discussions with staff, it has become apparent that tensions exist between LIW academics, non-LIW academics, and managers (who may themselves be academics). Furthermore,

employees appear to be choosing LIW for a variety of reasons (e.g., to have greater freedom and autonomy over where, when, and how to work) and to achieve a variety of ends (e.g., uninterrupted time to focus on research outputs). Therefore, within this article, our overall aim is to consider to what extent the practice of location independent working enables employees and/or supports managerial control. We begin by setting up the theoretical framework for the research and providing an overview of labour process theory (LPT), new managerialism, and new public management (NPM) in the general context of public sector organisations and the specific context of higher education institutions (HEIs). Second, we explore academics' responses to managerialism, such as acquiescence, compliance, resistance, and/or subversion, or even using/taking control of rules and practices to their own advantage. Third, we consider the implications of this for the evolving face of the academic. Finally, we present preliminary findings from our initial observations and data collection that reveal specific examples of academic resistance and highlight the changing nature of academic work.

## **LITERATURE AND RESEARCH EVIDENCE UNDERPINNING OUR STUDY**

### **The Academic Labour Process**

As previously indicated, labour process theory (LPT) (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; Knights & Willmott, 1990; Marx, 1867/1990; Thompson, 1989; Thompson & Smith, 2009) provides the underpinning theoretical framework that we use to examine the impact and implications of the potentially managerialist working practices. In particular, it provides a useful theoretical lens with which to examine the complexity of contemporary academic workplaces and the nature of the relationships that exist between academics, managers (who may themselves be academics), the institution, and trade unions.

According to Marx (1867/1990), the labour process under capitalism can be contextualised as an exploitative relationship in favour of the minority, the ruling classes (the owners of production), and the majority, the working classes (the sellers of labour). For Marx, the main components of the labour process included the following: the personal activity of men and women; the subject of the work; and the instruments of the work. Although Marx himself would not have placed intellectuals in the proletariat, in the context of academia the labour process could be represented as including the academics themselves, involving issues pertaining to social interactions at work and reactions to the working environment; the nature of the work they do, for example, teaching, research, and management; and the instruments of work, which could be material, such as laptops, smart phones, and other facilities/equipment, or intangible, such as knowledge, skills, and experience.

Although Marx wrote over a century ago, his thoughts and ideas continue to be adapted, developed, and debated in the 21st century. The 1970s saw a resurgence

of interest, with writers such as Braverman (1974), Friedman (1977), Burawoy (1979), and Edwards (1979) applying Marxist labour process philosophies to the organisation and structure of work and labour. Smith (2008) comments on Braverman's contribution to a reevaluation of Marxist ideas, in particular, to a change in emphasis toward the examination of structural workplace conflict at the micro level. Nevertheless, within the contemporary literature there is still a great deal of debate on the most appropriate model for analysing and examining the labour process. Indeed, many writers are quite visceral in their criticisms of each other (see Adler, 2007; Jaros, 2005; Thompson, 2007; Vallas, 2007).

Writers such as Adler (2007) contend that a paleo-Marxist view is more appropriate and advocate principles of Taylorism and lean-production, arguing that capitalism is in fact a driver for skill upgrading rather than for skill degradation. However, Adler has been heavily criticised by writers such as Thompson (2007), who argue that his views result in the notion of a depoliticised workplace free of conflict between capital and labour. Vallas (2007) agrees with Thompson, stating that the view proposed by Adler is deterministic and reductionist and does not take account of the differences and inequalities that exist within organisations. Knights and Willmott (2007) acknowledge the importance of Marx's concept of the socialization of labour and the impact this has upon skills, while also finding some merit in Adler's views of paleo-Marxism, such as Adler's recognition of the importance of subjectivity. Even so, over 50 years ago, Dahrendorf (1959) critiqued Marx for not considering other oppositions and stated that criss-crossing lines of conflict could mean there would be no clear class cleavage or opposition between two classes.

Knights and Willmott (2007: 1369) also criticise Adler for failing to engage with neo-Marxist debates that seek to address concerns with regard to wider inequalities at work, arguing that "The capacity to appreciate the significance of forms of inequality and struggle other than class – among which may be included gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, ageism, ecology and anti-globalization – is conspicuously absent from paleo-Marxism." All these issues are extremely important vis-à-vis the academic profession, and several writers argue that the increased representation of women, ethnic and religious minorities, and non-UK nationals has affected the relationship between managers and academics (Barry, Berg, & Chandler, 2006; Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Saunderson, 2002).

Contemporary debates in the arena of LPT seem to have been subsumed within the wider remit of critical management studies and as such represent a shift away from Marxist ideologies toward more poststructural, institutional analyses. Tsoukas (2007) argues that this has promoted a move away from capitalist associations of production toward themes of institutions, culture, subjectivity, and identity. Nevertheless, LPT is still embedded within the political and social context of capitalism, but this context has changed to one of global capitalism incorporating multinational organisations. Even strong Communist economies, such as China, operate within a broader international capitalist context.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging a key dilemma facing critical management researchers, as noted by Hassard, Rowlinson, and Hogan (2001: 358), namely that “All too often, the answer from critical management studies is to write another paper. But writing another paper, which will only be read by other academics, in order to advance our academic careers, can hardly be seen as ‘free conscious activity’ in any Marxist sense, any more than being compelled to address the problems of management practitioners can be.” This presents challenges to any researcher attempting to make a difference through the examination, analysis, and interpretation of the labour process as it is lived and experienced in contemporary workplaces. Yet, we argue, this is a project worth undertaking if as management researchers we are to have any hope of understanding and improving working lives.

### **New Managerialism and New Public Management**

The concepts of managerialism, new managerialism, and new public management (NPM) as applied to higher education in the UK, and as reported in the academic literature, appear to be inextricably linked. Yet it is acknowledged that they are not necessarily the same in content and scope. Several writers (Davies & Thomas, 2002; Diefenbach, 2009; Hood, 2000; O’Reilly & Reid, 2010) discuss new managerialism under the umbrella of NPM, where NPM is viewed as an approach to public administration that seeks to improve public sector institutions and public services by making them more business-like and consumer driven (Hood, 2000). Nevertheless, the blurring of these concepts often means that the terms managerialism, new managerialism, and NPM are used interchangeably, and we are mindful of this within our research.

Managerialism as a concept is not new. Scientific management principles (Taylor, 1911) were early objective attempts to improve efficiency and increase productivity through rationalisation and tight control of working practices. Thus, Taylorist principles were seen as skill degrading and exploitative by LPT theorists such as Braverman (1974) and Burawoy (1979). Yet, there is much evidence of Taylorist principles at work in 21st-century organisations, call centres being a case in point (Ferne & Metcalf, 1998; Taylor & Bain, 2002). Other writers agree with Braverman (1974) and Burawoy (1979), stating that present-day managerialist approaches are drawn from earlier ideas and practices concerning older forms of managerialism (Deem & Brehony, 2005). As such, new managerialism enables a universal approach to managerial interest, a premise that has been embraced by many manager-academics. Furthermore, this premise is sustained by the rhetoric that serves to form the opinions and identities of organisational actors (Deem & Brehony, 2005). Some argue that the ideology of new managerialism satisfies both the interests of management and the interests of agencies instigating change, thus legitimising and extending the “right to manage” (Clarke, Gerwitz, & McLaughlin, 2000: 9). Winter (2009) argues that managerialist attempts to bring academics into line regarding corporate goals and values have led to divisions as a

result of tensions between administrative, professional, and managerial identities. Winter (2009) concludes that corporate reforms taking place in higher education have consequences for managers and academics, not least of which is the problem of how to achieve administrative efficiency in the face of a potentially demoralised workforce. As we explore in this article, one way in which academics may seek to escape the constraints is to opt for an LIW contract.

The pervasiveness of managerialism and NPM within academia has been argued by some to have affected the nature of the academic profession itself and the ways in which academics view, and thus adapt, their professional roles and identities (Archer, 2008; Bryson, 2004; Chandler, Barry, & Clark, 2002; Dearlove, 2002; Parker & Jary, 1995; Prichard & Willmott, 1997; Trowler, 1998; Winter, 2009). Deem and Brehony (2005) suggest that new managerialism appears to assist academic managers in their attempts to strengthen relationships of power and authority, thus marking a shift away from in Dearlove's (2002:257) words "easy administration and collegiality to the assertion of the need for management and governance." Nevertheless, Dearlove (2002) argues that universities do possess the capacity for real strategic change and rejects the notion of a golden age of collegiality. In order to achieve strategic change, Dearlove contends, academics must be willing to be leaders and to work cooperatively with administrators. Yet he acknowledges that not all academics within institutions will be fully committed to the implementation of managerial initiatives and strategic change. Other writers comment on the erosion of morale and job satisfaction as a result of the transformation of academic work (Bryson, 2004; Menzies & Newson, 2007). Bryson (2004) concludes that while for some academics their profession is still seen as an attractive career choice, the rest are just more or less coping with "further pressures to change academic work and practices" (Bryson 2004: 55).

New forms of imposed external accountability, such as the use of league tables, income generation targets, and performance management have also been cited as manifestations of managerialism (Anderson, 2008). The pressure of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is designed to assess the overall quality of research outputs, is a case in point. In many institutions (our own included), this has served to reinforce the long-standing mantra "publish or perish." "Performativity" has been coined as a term to describe the escalation of methods that require individuals to arrange their working lives so as to achieve targets and enable evaluation and measurement against key performance indicators, often to the detriment of personal commitments and beliefs (Ball, 2003). According to Ball (2003), while for some people this may present an opportunity to strive for excellence, for others it may cause inner conflict, may be viewed as inauthenticity, and may lead to resistance. Ball further contends that a potential danger of performativity is that it may lead organisations to value what is measurable, rather than measure what is valuable.

Several writers have examined the ways in which academics have adapted their working practices to cope with the increased time pressures, workloads, and work

intensification that are the suggested outcomes of new managerialist approaches (Anderson, 2006; Winter, 2009). Anderson (2006) explored academic experiences within Australian universities, but there are, however, parallels with new managerialism in UK institutions. Anderson was particularly interested in examining the ways in which academics utilise space and time, both to adjust to new ways of working and as a means of resisting managerialism. While it is acknowledged that the nature of academic work has always meant a certain level of spillover from work to home, it is the increased workload and work intensification that is seen as detrimental to the quality of teaching delivered and research produced. Anderson (2006) argued that earlier studies focussed on the implications of work intensification, such as stress, poor health, and low morale, but not upon how this has impacted upon the way in which academics have adapted or changed their ways of working. We argue that LIW could be seen as a strategy that has the potential to enable academics to adapt and modify their working practices to contend with the changing working landscape.

### **Academic Responses to Managerialism**

Knights and McCabe (2000) claim that Braverman's (1974) view of management as all pervasive and controlling ignores employee resistance. Therefore, they suggest, Braverman fails to offer a valid contribution to the understanding of both employee resistance and employee consent. However, Burawoy (1979) argues that in order to overcome control, employees often engage in workplace games. In this way, resistance may be covertly rather than overtly manifested. Furthermore, Edwards (1979) suggests that workers contest the controls and adapt their behaviour to suit their own interests. The resulting employee behaviour may, therefore, be in the form either of resistance or of conformity. Anderson (2006) contends that while research may be conducted within an LPT framework, the tendency has been to focus on blue-collar workers, in whose case the concepts of time and space are well defined. However, in the case of academics, the boundaries of space and time are ill defined, overlapping, and blurred.

How resistance is defined is a key issue, in terms both of employee resistance more widely and of academic resistance in particular. Prasad and Prasad (2000) discuss the distinction that is often made between formal and informal (or routine) resistance. While the former is manifested overtly in action such as employee protests, strikes, working-to-rule, and so on, the latter is more covert, indirect, and subtle and, therefore, less visible. Prasad and Prasad (2000) argue that routine resistance is often unplanned and spontaneous and, although harder to observe, is probably more pervasive in organisations. Its often hidden nature makes it even more difficult to observe and explore. A further dilemma here is the mundane nature of informal resistance, which can make it difficult to distinguish from other mundane forms of behaviour or actions, which may not necessarily be indicative of employee resistance (Prasad & Prasad, 2000; Scott, 1985).

Mather, Worrall, and Mather (2012) draw on Ball's (2003) notion of performativity in order to engineer compliance and encourage, cajole, or coerce lecturers into accepting and following the new culture. They argue that "managers' attempts to engineer compliance have powerful Taylorite antecedents ('one best way') and equally powerful consequences in terms of what does and does not get valued in the labour process" (Mather et al., 2012: 3). Within the institutions investigated, this resulted in resistance at an individual level in the form of vocal opposition, cynicism, and surface compliance. The overriding culture observed was senior management's overwhelming desire that lecturers should conform, aligning themselves with a specific cultural stereotype in order to ensure acceptance and compliance (Mather et al., 2012). Returning to Ball's (2003) notion of performativity, Mather and colleagues suggest that the imposition of managerialist controls has parallels with Taylorism, in so far as decision making is removed from task completion. Furthermore, from an LPT perspective, the status of the work itself is degraded (Mather et al., 2012).

Fleming and Spicer (2003) agree with Mather and colleagues (2012) that one of the ways in which workers resist managerialism is through cynicism, but they also argue that this is used as a way to dis-identify with the organisation. On the surface, cynical employees may appear as autonomous and compliant individuals, their resistance being hidden and informal (Prasad & Prasad, 2000). Trowler (1998) contends that it is in the nature of academics to analyse, reflect, and respond, if the situation calls for it. This, Anderson (2008) argues, makes academics, as an occupational group, more likely to resist management interference that they perceive as a threat to their academic and professional integrity.

### **The Evolving Face of the Academic**

As suggested earlier in this article, structural changes as a result of NPM, and the influence of managerialist approaches on the academic profession, cannot be disregarded. Menzies and Newson (2007) refer to this as the breaching of the "Ivory Tower" and highlight the notion of academics being transformed from relatively autonomous and self-governing individuals to managed professionals. Although whether an ivory tower existed in the first place is open to debate, Menzies and Newson's view is at least partially shared by Winter (2009: 123), who argues that "managerialism creates the values-based conditions by which individuals seek to align themselves with the enterprise (managerial identity) or to separate their academic selves from the demands of a corporate enterprise (professional identity)." Thus, the nature of the academic profession, academic roles, and academic identities have been transformed as a result of the pervading managerialist culture present in contemporary HEIs (Archer, 2008; Bryson, 2004; Chandler et al., 2002; Dearlove, 2002; Parker & Jary, 1995; Prichard & Willmott, 1997; Trowler, 1998; Winter, 2009). While this inevitably has repercussions for the ways in which academics construct and make sense of their academic identities



and “carve out time and space in the managerial university” (Anderson, 2006: 578), it is too simplistic to suggest that academics are completely powerless as a result. In comparison to those working in other occupations, academics do retain a certain amount of professional control over the choices they make and still possess a certain level of freedom in terms of how, when, and where they choose to work. In the case of Canadian academics, however, changes in respect of structure and conflicting time priorities have exerted a fundamental influence on the academic labour process and appear to have removed, or at least limited, the opportunities for academics just to take time out in order to think and reflect (Menzies & Newson, 2007). One outcome of this is the adoption of practices which, while chosen in an attempt to balance contradictory organisational and temporal demands, have a detrimental impact upon the standard and substance of teaching and research (Menzies & Newson, 2007).

Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) stress the importance of temporal order in academic work, arguing the need to take the ordering of events over time into account when attempting to unpick and interpret academics’ lived experiences. The tensions arising from conflicting time perspectives are not unrelated to the structural changes taking place in the world of academia and, as such, have an influence on the evolving nature of the academic profession. According to Menzies and Newson (2007), one of the ways in which academics attempt to manage these conflicting priorities is an increasing use of technology. In contrast, other writers suggest this reliance on technology has the potential to extend working time and connectivity even further (Lal & Dwivedi, 2008; Leonardi, Treem, & Jackson, 2010; Wilson & Greenhill, 2004). Therefore, while academics may feel more connected in a national and global sense, they feel more isolated at a local level. Henkel (2005) argues that academic identities are developed and maintained as a result of shared values, shared meaning, and sense making, which occur at both an individual and a collective level. Although in this article we are not examining academic working practices through the lens of identity formation and maintenance, identity is an integral part of what it is to be an academic in contemporary HEIs. Furthermore, we do explore the everyday experiences and relationships of academics and the meanings they ascribe to these.

Transformations in academic communities as a result of governance and structural changes have seen a shift away from autonomy toward control by management and priorities driven by financial goals and achievement of impact (Henkel, 2005). This observation supports earlier research that comments on the shift of HEIs toward corporate enterprise models and the rise of institutional leaders (Henkel, 2000). A current example of this can be observed in the trend for university vice-chancellor positions to be rebranded and advertised as positions of chief executives or presidents. Henkel (2005) comments that the emphasis on performance-led institutions has facilitated greater control over the academics within them, thus weakening the individuals’ sense of academic identity. However, we argue that instances of academic resistance and subversion may be means

employed by academics to protect, and possibly strengthen, their sense of identity. Emerging themes in Henkel's (2005) research are the importance of the academic discipline and academic freedom. In Henkel's work, academic freedom is broadly defined but integral to it is "being individually free to choose and pursue one's own research agenda and being trusted to manage the pattern of one's own working life and priorities" (Henkel, 2005: 169). Indeed, academic freedom may be a key issue in terms of LIW and it has already emerged as a theme in our ongoing observations.

### **METHOD AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

An ongoing ethnographic study of Mercia University forms the basis of our research design. As an academic (albeit non-LIW), the first author is embedded in the context and culture of the research, with firsthand experience of managerialist interventions. Since the beginning of this research project, she has kept a detailed journal, and this has encouraged her to record and reflect upon her own, and others', observations of the practice of LIW and its consequences as well as experiences of the managerialist praxis seemingly now entrenched in the university. This has added richness and depth to the study. Credibility and rigour is further enhanced by the use of the personal observational diaries of both LIW and non-LIW academics, triangulated with in-depth semistructured interviews.

#### **Academic Responses**

From the evidence collected so far, with LIW there is evidence of increased surveillance and individual accountability. Initial observations have highlighted that although LIW academics are given a laptop and smart phone (resources not offered to non-LIW academics), they are expected to record all their appointments in an open electronic diary and be explicit about the days they are working on and off campus. So, despite having the flexibility to choose where they work, LIW academics are being monitored in terms of when they work. This, potentially, gives new meaning to the concepts of absence and presence. Until very recently, there was no such requirement for non-LIW academics, who often work remotely on an informal basis, to be explicit about where and when they work.

Cross-department collaboration has been observed as an unexpected benefit of LIW. While departments are organised in geographic silos, hot-desk offices are across departments, facilitating cross-departmental communication. Nevertheless, LIW academics have reported feeling isolated and detached from their own department. This invisibility was observed at first hand when the first author was initially seeking out the location of the LIW hot-desk office. Academics based on campus have a dedicated office with their name, contact details, and office hours clearly displayed on the door. However, there was no indication of the location of the LIW office, and enquiries at reception proved unfruitful. The room was

eventually found, by a process of elimination, as it had the only unlabelled office door. Initial thoughts were that maybe this was a conscious decision on the part of the LIW staff, but questioning by the first author revealed this not to be the case; they just hadn't noticed. It seemed incongruous that no-one else had noticed either, especially as one of the LIW academics commented that students often have difficulty in finding them. However, within the hour a sign was put up on the door, clearly labelling it in large letters as the "Hot Desk Room" and in very small letters underneath "for LIW (location independent working) staff." We were struck by the presentation of the text, which was chosen entirely by the LIW academics themselves, not by the institution. This incident also caused the first author to reflect on her influence as a participant researcher and the need to be aware of potential bias.

Academic resistance to managerialism has also been observed. For example, an unpopular attempt to reengineer a department within the business school was met with a tranche of non-LIW academics completing (although not submitting) LIW applications as a way of highlighting their disapproval. This action was openly discussed within the department and could therefore be interpreted as an example of overt resistance. However, there was also a certain feeling of defeatism, with academics commenting that "it won't make any difference what we do; they will just go ahead with what they want to do anyway." In other words, regardless of any action by staff, management's prerogative would prevail. In the end, the feared changes did not take place and no additional requests for LIW were submitted.

### **The Changing Nature of Academic Work**

Performance of all academic staff members is measured, with expectations that they achieve REF research outputs, income generation, and increased student satisfaction. These outcomes are explicitly stated as part of the performance management process and are nonnegotiable. The ratification of the new performance management system itself was controversial, with the vice-chancellor offering individual incentives to gain staff acceptance and bypass collective union opposition. Pay is now dependent on performance, and this has resulted in staff applying indiscriminately for funding opportunities in order to achieve personal objectives. In some instances, while this has led to successful bids, ultimately money has been lost because the cost of conducting the research outweighs the income generated. A consequence of this was a global email message sent to all staff, instructing them to refrain from loss-making applied research with the pronouncement "This must stop." The irony of this was not lost on the first author or her academic colleagues. Furthermore, the heightened expectation that academics excel both as quality researchers and teachers caused one academic to comment, "They are trying to make sheep out of pigs."

More recently, LIW academics have been observed spending increasing amounts of time looking for work spaces within their subject-specific departments, rather

than working in the LIW office. When this was further investigated, one LIW academic commented that the hot-desk office is no longer adequate to meet the needs of existing LIW staff, as it is overcrowded, and it is often impossible to secure a desk. Furthermore, the environment is noisy, disruptive, and not conducive to work. It appears that many of the academics using the facilities in this office belong to a new subgroup of LIW staff who do not have personal access to a university laptop or printer and therefore need to work in hot-desk offices on campus to use university systems. We contend that this seems to make a mockery of the whole premise of “location independence.” One outcome of this is a somewhat nomadic existence for the original LIW staff, who, when on campus, have been forced to find working space wherever they can. In many cases, this has resulted in LIW academics using their colleagues’ offices and computers, or working in communal areas (such as the library) that are generally set aside for student use.

This observation was followed up in a discussion with an ex-senior manager, who recently stepped down from management into what he described as a “more supportive role.” This seems to imply that you have to be outside management to be supportive. Upon stepping down, the ex-manager became an LIW worker, remarking on the newfound freedom this has afforded him. In his new role, he prefers not to work in “touch-down” (his description) offices but likes to move around the campus and work wherever there is space in the department he is visiting. He has been very keen to promote the fact that he is no longer a manager, that is, “one of them” and is now “one of us,” reinforcing this by pointing out, “Look, I am not a manager anymore; that’s why I don’t wear a tie.” It struck us how instrumental this symbolism appeared to be in his construction of managerial identity and how easily he explained its disappearance, just by the removal of his tie. On discussing the topic of new LIW academics, he explained that they are office based, although they don’t have an office of their own, and work on campus in hot-desk offices. This definition is completely at odds with our earlier understanding of what it is to be location independent, and it appears that the term is being used to describe a practice that is, in reality, university-based flexible working. As far as the university is concerned, there is no difference or distinction between the LIW academics who have support in place to work remotely, and those who are “office based” (or rather, hot-desk office based) and do not have such support. However, managerial control is potentially far greater for the latter group. Furthermore, the efficiency savings made as a result of a reduction in office space and non-provision of dedicated individual equipment may be a driver here. It seems a long way from the original LIW pilot objectives, which aimed at bringing far-reaching benefits to staff, employers, and students.

Initial exploratory in-depth interviews with LIW academics have revealed differences in the reasons and motivations for adopting location independent working. For one senior lecturer, it was about having the freedom to choose when and where to work, even if this choice was never exercised: “I would say about

80% of my work takes place on the university site. It is more about I have the right to do things elsewhere; it just gives me flexibility even if I never use it. . . . I didn't go LIW to work from home. I never work from home; I work better at the university." Coupled with this, he preferred working in the large, cross-disciplinary LIW office, stating, "I like working in a big room with a nice view." Apart from the loss of a fixed personal office, he did not see any differences between the way he works now and the way he worked before, apart from feeling that he now has more choice and control over when and where he works. Another senior lecturer had quite different reasons for choosing an LIW arrangement. For this academic, it was about the convenience of being able to work from home and having flexibility and choice in where to work. He lives at a distance from the university, and having an LIW arrangement made it easier to work from home: "I thought it would be more convenient, more interesting idea, and better to work at home. I seem to get more done at home and it's really useful. I didn't really need an office anyway." Actually, losing a dedicated office had forced him to get rid of items he did not need, and he found the books and articles he had at home were now used more effectively as they were the ones that were really useful. One of the main benefits for him was the freedom from the frequent distractions and interruptions on campus. In this case, LIW was being used as an escape from day-to-day university life. This lecturer found that much of the work he did at the university (apart from teaching) could be done at home, and many queries could be dealt with just as easily (and more quickly) by e-mail. He felt he was far more productive at home, especially in terms of writing, and had been more successful in getting published since he started working in this way.

The views expressed by these academics suggest that they, at least, were satisfied with the working choices they had made. For them, having LIW arrangements gave them higher levels of control, autonomy, and choice than they would otherwise have had. There was also the sense that this freedom was in some way legitimised by the university because they were officially LIW academics. We acknowledge that our small sample may not be representative of other academics and it is far too early to draw any definite conclusions. Nevertheless, our interviews have provided us with a fascinating insight into the reasons why some academics are choosing LIW practices over more traditional ways of working, and this will be explored further in our future research.

### **LIMITATIONS OF OUR STUDY SO FAR AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

Our research is ongoing, but, from the findings discussed so far, there does appear to be evidence to support the notion that the practice of LIW is being used to both enable employees and support managerial control. However, the extent of the impact of either or both is yet to be established, and this will continue to be explored in our future research. We acknowledge that the research findings from

our small-scale case study may not be generally applicable to other academic institutions. Nevertheless, the issues explored are highly relevant to those managing and working in the UK higher education sector and, potentially, to organisations outside academia employing remote workers. Furthermore, the case of Mercia University is unique in its adoption of formal LIW contracts, and therefore its experience is of value to other organisations that may wish to introduce similar arrangements. Our research provides in-depth micro-level analysis not only of the practices and contexts of the organisation but also of the minutiae of the day-to-day lived realities of academics, thus enabling an in-depth exploration of the ways in which the organisational context is affecting, and in turn being affected by, the experiences and working practices of academics.

Our further research will incorporate in-depth semi-structured interviews designed to explore how and in what ways LIW and non-LIW academics experience, articulate, and make sense of their daily realities and identities. The views and experiences of staff involved in the implementation and management of LIW initiatives and staff trade union representatives will also be sought. Additionally, academics will be asked to complete diaries over a short time frame, with the aim of capturing a day in the life of an academic. The focus here will be on eliciting mundane, everyday occurrences, rather than looking for critical incidents. This, it is anticipated, will illuminate the extent to which LIW practices enable employees, support managerial control, or do both. This will be explored through a critical examination of the ways in which academics acquiesce in, comply with, resist, or subvert management control and the ways in which they use and take control of rules and practices to their own advantage.

## CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Evidence collected from the first author's ongoing ethnographic observations, together with views and thoughts expressed by academics, supports the notion that LIW is being used to both enable employees and support managerial control. Academic resistance was evident when staff considered using requests for LIW in an attempt to forestall an unpopular management decision. However, an example of employee enablement was also reported in the remarks of an academic who commented that having an LIW arrangement enables him to choose where and when he works, even if he does not exercise this choice. In contrast, an example of managerial control is provided by Mercia University's decision to introduce office-based LIW staff, for whom a dedicated office space is exchanged for on-campus hot-desking facilities. The option to work off campus (in other words, LIW as originally designed), is not a choice afforded to these office-based staff.

An ongoing theme throughout our article was the pervasiveness of new managerialism and its consequences for the academic profession. This was evident both in the literature and from observations at an organisational and individual level. This serves to reinforce the relevance and value of this research, and our

article makes both conceptually and empirically informed contributions to knowledge in this area. Moreover, the study demonstrates the pertinence of LPT as a theoretical framework with which to explore and analyse the academic labour process within a contemporary UK university setting. Earlier LPT research has tended to focus on blue-collar workers, with clear distinctions between work and home in time and space. These concepts, whilst still appropriate and significant to non manual professionals (academics), are blurred in this context. This inevitably has repercussions for the ways in which academics construct and make sense of their academic identities and “carve out time and space in the managerial university” (Anderson, 2006: 578). However, this is not to suggest that academics, or indeed manager-academics, are completely powerless. They do retain a certain amount of professional control over the choices they make. Within Mercia University, the decision to opt for an LIW contract is a choice made by individual academics, although the decision on whether or not to approve a request is made by management. Nevertheless, the academics still possess a certain level of freedom in how, when, and where they choose to work.

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