

Doctoral and Early Career Symposium on Academic Creativity and Openness

The Purpose of the Symposium

The purpose of the symposium is to help foster the development of doctoral students and early-career academics (ECAs), who are 'both the current underbelly and the future of the academic profession' (Bristow et al, 2017). These are rather challenging times to start out as a business school academic. In many parts of the world, the Higher Education sector has undergone and is still undergoing a number of profound changes, which are producing a combination of uncertainty, precarity, intensification and complexity in academic identities, work and careers. Business schools in particular have been at the forefront of discourses and practices driving these changes (Huzzard et al., 2017; Paulsson, 2017), and business school academics can consequently experience particularly intense pressures (Mingers & Willmott, 2013).

Within this context, the temptation for new (and other) academics is often to stick to the tried and tested ways of doing things – the rules of the established academic 'game' (MacDonald & Kam, 2007) – that are seen as the safest route to fulfilling the increasingly narrow criteria of academic 'excellence' (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014). However, such practices only tend to achieve a precarious kind of academic survival (Clarke & Knights, 2015; Knights & Clarke, 2014) and serve to contribute to the homogenization, stagnation and impoverishment of the management field that struggles to make itself relevant to the complex and rapidly-evolving issues faced by the world at large. Staying on the beaten track can also lead to inauthentic, uninteresting and unfulfilling academic lives and careers, and, combined with precarity, workload pressures, and issues of inequality and exclusion within academia (Ahmed, 2012), a brain-drain from the profession (Bozzon et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2011).

The premise of the symposium is therefore that in the current context we need to 'open up' academic work and careers in order to help PhD students and ECAs create new, innovative solutions to the complex tensions and dilemmas they face as part of their business school lives. The symposium will equip participants with new ideas and different approaches, as well as strategies and encouragement to innovate and make a difference in their institutions, their fields and society at large. Symposium attendees will be brought together with a group of experienced and engaging academics who are known for doing academia and management differently. Together we will explore how to think differently about key aspects of academic work and careers, and about being a different kind of academic. In this way, we hope that the symposium will help foster creativity and innovation in the management field, and encourage a more inclusive, compassionate, nurturing, engaging and relevant management studies community.

Symposium format

The symposium is a whole-day event and will consist of a mixture of plenary and parallel sessions in the form of talks, roundtable discussions, and hands-on practical and creative activities. We will cover writing and teaching differently, career problem solving, opening up publishing, power and resistance strategies, collaborating with technology, academic activism, and critical friendship. There will also be opportunities for informal networking and socializing, including a tea party to conclude the day.

Symposium speakers and facilitators

Dr Katie Beavan, University of the West of England

Dr Sadhvi Dar, Queen Mary University of London

Dr Sarah Gilmore, University of Exeter

Prof Nancy Harding, University of Bath

Dr Laura Mitchell, researcher, consultant and founder of Seriously Learned

Dr Olivier Ratle, University of the West of England

Dr Sarah Robinson, University of Glasgow

Prof Martyna Sliwa, University of Essex

Dr Jenna Ward, University of Leicester

Symposium organisers

Dr Alexandra Bristow

Prof Emma Bell

Dr Peter Bloom

Prof Jo Brewis