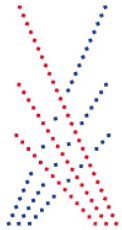

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TRANSFORMATION OF INDIAN ACADEMIA: EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMICS

DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER
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TRANSFORMATION OF INDIAN ACADEMIA: EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMICS

Summary

Indian academia is undergoing a transformation because of technological advancements and recent challenges brought about by the financial crisis. This paper captures the experiences of academics in the Indian Higher Education against the backdrop of some of these changes. The background of the paper revolves around career success, career adaptability and how faculty members can handle varied role demands in their work-life. Data is drawn from in-depth semi-structured interviews with academics from Indian Higher Education. The findings give us deep insights into how they construe subjective career success in academia interpreted from the experiences of faculty members.

Keywords: Transformation, Indian Higher Education, Lived Experiences, Career Success

Word Count (Excluding Abstract, Title, Appendix and References): 1994

Introduction

In 2008, the financial crisis served to strengthen the pace of transformation of academia worldwide (Hazelkorn, 2011). In the meantime, the developing economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China (BRICs) were gearing up to gain a competitive edge; leveraging the fourth sustainable development goal of providing quality education to all (Altbach, 2012). To accommodate the process of achieving India's inclusion and sustainability, National Knowledge Commission was set up to preserve autonomy and accountability in provision of funding (Hazelkorn, 2011). Even after this restructuring however, "deep inequalities" (p.6) are felt among Western nations and emerging economies along with advancement of science and technology (Altbach, 2015). The reasons for differences in global thinking pertain to international and national level policy changes, constraints on funding from public sources, achieving standards of excellence for research, pursuit of competitive edge by higher education institutes (HEIs) in India (Ponnuswamy and Manohar, 2016).

The transformation of higher education has been conceptualized into three forms 1) elite, 2) mass and 3) universal based on its functions (Trow, 2007). Elite refers to governance by the elite class in higher education; opportunities for the mass through skills required for technical and economic leadership roles whereas universal is the absorption of socio-technical dynamics by the larger public (Trow, 2007). During the later stages of transformation of higher education globally, a silent academic revolution has been brewing in India on account of restructuring (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009; Hazelkorn, 2011). This transformation has triggered a three step process (Mok and Jiang, 2016):

1) Accessibility of higher education by mass alongwith elite
2) Attempts to create equal opportunity for admissions in terms of diversity
3) Resolving labour market uncertainties to accommodate the higher proportion of passed out graduates

Insert Table 1

The emerging economic liberalisation as a result of transformation brought about a major setback to the Indian higher education when the "safety net" initiative was done away with; forcing educational institutes to generate their own resources for sustenance (Kumar, 2017; Carnoy et al., 2013). Source of expenditure on education initially moved from Govt. to market which gradually touched households, in accordance with the New Economic Policy (Gupta, 2008; Upadhyay, 2007). Autonomy and governance for universities remain a distant dream whereas the "privileged" few are our Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs), Indian Institute of Managements (IIMs) etc. (Varghese, 2016). So, the research question I would like to frame is how recent changes in the Indian HE sector impacted the lived experiences of Indian academics.

Universities are gradually transitioning into complex organisations with the academic profession largely influencing the way academic work is performed and how teaching, research and administration (better known as service) have become unconnected spaces (Archer, 2008). The above mentioned glocal transformation has largely impacted the way academics perceive their work roles and go about fulfilling them. Receiving funding for research projects, mentoring research students, doing consultancy work are expected from faculty members, in addition to the main roles due to the constraints on Government funding. The problem for scholars is to identify the lived experiences of faculty members through the lens of their academic work (Lunsford, Baker and Pifer, 2018) which has increasingly become difficult as universities are considered to be existing in a supercomplex period (Archer, 2008).

Literature Review

The lack of adequate funding by Government, forces Central and State Universities to appoint highly qualified faculty in ad hoc positions; thus, submerging their collective voice and leading to their exploitation (Kumar, 2017). The future of postdocs in India depends on making the academic sector amenable for them through a healthy mentorship culture (Barath, 2015). Access to learning as a value system may be emphasised at the stage of doctoral education itself to serve as an impetus in aspiring for a healthy academic career (Lippe, 2011; Gupta, 2008). Communication channels may be clarified during mentorship which enables early career academics to focus on bigger targets like meeting research publication criteria, a major success factor (Wang, 2016; Sutherland, 2017). The demand for Indian faculty in the job market is higher as compared to foreign trained and returned post docs (Barath, 2015).

Meanwhile, the premier institutes relate a different story in their contribution toward the teaching and research culture. Experts speak about more budget allocation towards producing quality research in premier institutes like IITs and NITs (Pandey, 2017). These measures, coupled with a built-in accountability for research productivity shall maximize the utility of project funding (Pandey, 2017). So also, collaborations of a larger order with foreign institutes can be necessitated as an alternative to seeking Indian Govt. funds (Padma, 2015). Similarly, the inter-migratory schemes devised for faculties among IITs go a long way in building quality research and teaching infrastructure with effective resource utilization (Verma, 2014).

How academics navigate the "contested discursive terrain" (Archer, 2008, p. 387) serve to lessen the confusion in literature surrounding academic success factors (Sutherland, 2017). Career is "the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work related experiences and activities over the span of a person's life" (Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, & Dullaghan, 2016, p.129). Research on career has advanced to explore developmental processes during the early, mid, late career stages, according to the individual's task needs and socio-emotional needs (Hall, 2002). Traditional career theories treated career as a profession which in course of time, shifted to career advancement ushering in the concept of 'career ladder' (Hall, 2002).

Hall (1986) has depicted how continuous learning and altering the work process suiting to the environment leading to career adaptability and a motivation to explore the career. Career adaptability is viewed by Savickas (1997) as the readiness factor required of an individual in dealing with the challenges posed by work environment; both controllable and contingent as a result of gloablisation and the corresponding transformation (Fiori, Bollmann, & Rossier, 2015; Tolentino et al., 2014). It is a construct of higher order which is dynamic in nature, beyond personality as well as core self-evaluation (Zacher, 2014). It is a self-regulating mechanism revolving around person and organisational factors and capturing their interaction (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Self-reflection as well as continuous assessment are essential for building identity and better career adaptability with the environment (Hall, 2002; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Requirements for development in three career stages pointed out were: (Hall, 2002)

- One needs freedom, a combination of support and autonomy during early career
- One alters his/her task role from player to coach during mid-career
- Gradual withdrawal from work settings making alternate plans during late career

Insert Table 2

Research conducted so far around lived experiences of academics highlights that less autonomy at institute level leaves faculty members with less command over "workload deliberations and policies" (Sutherland, 2017: p. 743; Altbach, 2014). Moreover, the uneven workload distribution in Indian academia forces college teachers to focus more on teaching whereas university departments are expected to produce more research (Altbach, 2014). This creates disparities in status and salary among public and private institutes as well as decides the research funding for faculty members (Altbach, 2014). As research productivity is a major factor for career success, all the above mentioned challenges ultimately come in the way of achieving career success (Ranga, Gupta and Etzkowitz, 2012).

When early career academics receive promotion, they naturally are in more control of the time devoted to quality research, conceptualised as academic freedom; revealed through their lived experiences (Stoke, 1949). A healthy balance between academic work roles shall be governed by the subjective criteria in objective domain; especially when research productivity is measured mostly in terms of number of research publications of referent others (Heslin, 2005; Sutherland, 2017). Generally, women academics strive to postpone research to undertake family responsibilities; and therefore, face huge challenges in publishing research papers during their career (Gupta & Sharma, 2002; Ishtiaq, 2017). Efforts are on to highlight such issues and how they can be compensated through timely career intervention measures (Wang, 2016).

Insert Table 3

Research Methodology

In this paper we direct attention to the lived experiences of academics in Indian Higher Education, focusing specifically on their conceptualization of career success and what factors are contributing towards it. We draw upon the insights obtained from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten faculty members working in public, private and premier institutes of higher education in North India. They form the unit of analysis for the current study During the interviews, data was recorded and immediately after reaching home, transcribed in verbatim. Thematic analysis performed on the verbatim offered rich insights into the lived experiences of the faculty members at early, mid and late stages of their career.

Insert Table 4

Major Findings

In-depth interviews with faculty members from Institutes in India offered right insights into the lived experiences of academics. Differences were noted on several variables such as, gender, type of institute, etc. The major themes emerging as a result of the qualitative analysis are summarised below:

1. Majority of the respondents reported experiencing multiplicity of role demands because teaching is pre-decided and time invested for research is a choice; administration is mandatory and extension work taken up for scarcity of funding. While the male respondents appeared better equipped at balancing academic work roles, female respondents reported feeling constrained by the intensity of the demands. This is evidenced by their response to inclusion of administrative tasks in work profiles– males regarded them to be an important source for understanding the institutional system and

developing networks. Several female respondents on the other hand, considered administrative tasks as a constraint on their already crunched time. The same evidence exists in literature too.

2. Half of the respondents interviewed, reported receiving institutional support and admitted that it submerged the effect of role stressors and in fact, claimed that family support was there whenever, the former was absent. Male respondents; in particular, cited family support as a crucial resource that helped to deal with work stressors. This is in line with findings of Ranga et al. (2012) that family support system goes a long way in reducing work-family role conflicts of women academics, but the extent of its contribution to their success remains debatable.
3. Seven out of ten respondents spoke explicitly about the lack of; but, need for mentoring at workplaces to help navigate early career challenges. Mentorship saves time and hedges conflicts between junior and senior faculty. The three respondents who reported receiving mentorship especially in teaching, acknowledged that their mentors served as role models actually helped to navigate their career journey; both in networking and in visibility of performance. So, the institution of a proper system in place for mentorship shall be recommended.
4. Not all respondents indicated experiencing congruence between their objective and subjective career success (SCS). For R10, both were necessary, for R1 & R3, objective was more relevant, R8 was more in favour of subjective career success, R7 spoke about incorporating elements of SCS in evaluating performance of an individual and so forth.

These findings offer implications for theory and practice. It highlights the need to study the lived experiences of academics in detail with a clearer focus on the way they construe career success and the factors influencing their conceptualization and experience of it. Understanding career success of academics in Indian context puts us in a more advantageous position to suggest changes in policy making and governance suited to improve the quality of higher education in a sustained manner. The findings also offer policy implications that can help to enhance the quality of career journey for academics; for instance, through instituting mentorship programs for younger faculty members.

This paper aligns well with the conference theme of 'Building and Sustaining High Performance Organisations during Uncertain Times: Challenges and Opportunities.' Presenting this paper at BAM 2019 would offer an opportunity to gain feedback from track participants and subject experts to identify prominent themes and undertake related relevant research. Before the conference, we aim to update the literature review and conduct additional interviews to strengthen and enhance our findings.

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Appendix

Table 1

Designation wise Distribution of Teaching Staff in Universities and Colleges

Designation	No. of teaching staff							
	University Departments		Teaching Colleges		Grand Total		% to Total	
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
Professor	34370	7646	110879	29197	145249	36843	9.88	6.24
Associate Professors/Readers	25013	7240	159912	58050	184925	65290	12.58	11.06
Lecturer (Selection Grade / Senior Scale)	1188	505	38901	15138	40089	15643	2.73	2.65
Assistant Professors /Lecturers	96453	35977	949925	404413	1046378	440390	71.17	74.58
Tutors / Demonstrators	5298	2820	48251	29457	53549	32277	3.64	5.47
Total	162322	54188	1307868	536255	1470190	590443	100	100

Source: UGC Annual Report 2016-17 (p. 118)

Table 2

Factors Pertaining to Subjective and Objective Career Success in Academia

Objective career success in academia	Sub categories	Subjective career success in academia	Subcategories
Research Productivity	Grants, Publications, Citation, Authorship	Life Satisfaction	Happiness, Work Life Balance, Health, Stress Reduction
Promotion and Tenure	Promotion, Tenure, Research, teaching and service	Contribution to society	Contribution, Connecting with local community, Influencing peoples' thinking
Status	Recognition and Awards, Research Collaborations	Freedom	Research discretion, More time allocation for research than teaching, Preference for working collectively than individual
Teaching	Student Strength, High score in subject	Job Satisfaction	Confidence, Balancing academic roles, Shaping Research, Mentoring
Salary	Adequate salary	Influencing students	Challenging student thinking, Inspiring female students

Source: Sutherland (2017: p. 748)

Table 3

Developmental Needs in Early, Middle and Late Career

Stage	Task Needs	Socioemotional Needs
Early Stage	Develop action skills Develop specialty and general skills Develop creativity, innovation Develop helping and team skills Rotate into new area after 3-5 years (new learning cycle)	Support Autonomy Develop Emotional Intelligence Deal with feelings of rivalry, competition
Middle Career	Develop skills in developing and mentoring others Master learning how to learn Develop broader perspective on own work Rotation into new area of work, requiring new skills	Opportunity, support for expressing feelings about midlife Revise sense of personal identity (regarding work, family, personal life, values, morality etc.) Reduce self-indulgence and competitiveness Connection with mid-life peers
Late Career	Shift from power role to consultation, guidance, wisdom Explore, begin to establish identity in activities outside current work role	Gradual detachment from current work role and organisation Support to help, see purpose, legacy in one's work Acceptance of one's one and only life cycle Support to help see own integrated life experiences as a platform for others

Source: Hall (2002: p. 124)

Table 4

Respondent Demographics

Respondent	Gender	Tenure/Non-tenure track	Stage of Career	Career Age (No. of years)	Ph.D Qualification (Yes/No)	Designation
R1	F	NT	Early	3	N	Asst Prof
R2	F	T	Late	16	Y (Foreign)	Professor
R3	F	NT	Mid	8	N	Asst Prof
R4	M	T	Late	28	Y	Prof
R5	F	T	Late	15	Y	Asst Prof
R6	F	NT	Early	4-5	Y (Foreign)	
R7	F	T	Mid	12	Y	Asst Prof
R8	M	NT	Early	5	Y	
R9	M	T	Early	8	Y	Asst Prof
R10	F	T	Mid	12	Y	Asst Prof

Source: Primary Data