##### Researcher

Okay, obviously, I've read your profile, I had a look at your LinkedIn, so I know a little bit about you from that. But I guess kind of in your own words, could you tell me about your background, your career up until now and your current job role, please?

##### Participant 45

So my current job role is, I'm a [role] at [current institution] within their business school. I'm based in their [department]. I'm also bought out for time of one day a week where I work with the [research group] that I founded in [year]. I'm one of the directors for that group, which is nice. In terms of background, my undergraduate was in [alternative discipline], then a masters in [another alternative discipline], and then a PhD in [social science]. And so I've got quite a varied and interdisciplinary background to say the least. And if you've looked at my profiles, then you'll see that in terms of my research areas and areas of interest, again, very interdisciplinary and certainly not what I would expect if I was an outsider looking in for a traditional business background to be. I don't have a management degree. I teach on the executive education programme at [current institution], so I teach lots of courses concerning [topic area], because that's my main area of interest in terms of research. So yeah, I would probably classify myself as a [social scientist] who looks at business and [another alternative discipline].

##### Researcher

Yeah, I sort of noticed from looking at your profile, you are extremely interdisciplinary, I would say, obviously doing your work at the [research centre] that you founded, working within the school, but also coming from a [social science] background. Yeah, it's loads of different kind of areas. Do you, because obviously you just said you see yourself as a [social scientist] within that kind of department, do you kind of choose not to define yourself in a specific discipline, or would you say there is a kind of phrase or kind of, I don't know, is there a discipline you could put yourself in if you had to choose one, or do you sort of more choose to just be interdisciplinary?

##### Participant 45

I guess a bit of both, depending on who is the person I'm talking to and what the hat is I'm wearing. I think my faculty colleagues kind of rip their hair out a little bit when, there is a celebration of interdisciplinarity across faculty, particularly at business schools, they really ask for it, and it's always something strong within research proposals. But as soon as you come down to anything where you have to audit somebody and see how impactful their research is, they want to define you within criteria such as REF or within a box system that is distinct in its disciplines. And obviously, for someone like myself, I have regular conversations with our head of research, who simply does tear his hair out on Zoom calls in front of me saying "I don't know where to put you". In the past, for example, going through REF, I've sat more in [social sciences] than I have in business. It completely depends on sort of who's asking the question and why and what kind of hurdles are we trying to jump over. Personally? At the beginning of my career, I really struggled and found it very difficult within the business school setting because it didn't feel particularly friendly or inclusive, and I couldn't see anyone who was doing what I was doing in terms of interdisciplinary research. It was all focused on the ABS ranked journals and where the next output was going to be in terms of four star accreditation and all of that. And I really bought into that for the first two to three, maybe even five years of my career, and I was very miserable because I couldn't do it. It didn't feel natural to me. It wasn't where my interests were. And as soon as I decided - and this was after my father died very suddenly and kind of life just sort of took a different shape and feel - as soon as I decided to basically not care about the ABS ranked journals which are kind of ranked by editors who are mostly kind of older male professors - which is fine in terms of a ranking list, but again, didn't speak to me in terms of what research should be about when you do research. It should be about genuine curiosity about something that you want to discover or engaging with social groups or something in a unique way that's going to be impactful or whatever it is. It shouldn't be about "I'm going to get a paper in a four star journal". I can almost hear my colleagues falling over in shock in terms of me dismissing the career pipeline, and I don't mean to do them as disservice. That's a very secure way to have an academic career, and it plays to the metrics, and it probably makes your life a lot easier. It doesn't feel right for me. I want to ask the questions I'm genuinely curious about in more than one discipline. My background sings to that. My father was a sociologist. I nearly took sociology at university myself, and at the last minute thought "I really like [alternative discipline]". So did that, in some ways to kind of rebel and in other ways, because [alternative discipline], actually, when you sort of start thinking about [alternative discipline] and what that tells you about society and where that has come from, it isn't too far flung from sociology anyway. So I was kind of cheating with that to be honest. For me, it's more important that I'm happy with being an interdisciplinary scholar. And colleagues have called me transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, whatever it is that you want to label it, that's fine. But yeah, ultimately, I'm a social scientist and I have an [alternative discipline] background as well. We've got emerging disciplines that are doing what it is that some of us have been doing for years and years and years, and now we just get to name it, which is great. So I think there'll be more careers shaped in this kind of very ad hoc way as we start to move away from accountability metrics such as REF, because it's appallingly, I mean... I've just been reading, here we go, this is Caroline Criado-Perez's "invisible women" book, and she goes into a little bit about kind of misogyny within academia as far as you can within a book. But one of the things she highlights is accountability within REF and sort of how that is a system that's geared against, in particular, women. So if you have a career break or anything like that, it's very unsympathetic to those things. So I think it's just about being a bit tenacious and prepared to not fit into a box. And yes, that's distressful. And yes, that gets me into trouble. And I would probably have a much better career if I just decided that I was going to do everything in one discipline. But that just doesn't float my boat.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. You said the REF is rather appalling in the way that it actually sort of measures things. Why do you feel that is the case, why is that your opinion?

##### Participant 45

I think because the systematic processes that are involved with the REF are too general and in some cases completely invisible to properly understand. And it means that it is pretty detrimental to anyone who has caring responsibilities or any extra kind of pressures within their workload. For example, I'm dyslexic, which is great, so it takes me longer to write stuff. And yet you're given, within a set determined time frame, the level of productivity that you should have. And then you go away, so for example, for the dyslexia, within the university, you say to your head of research, well, look, I've got a disability here, this is going to impact my REF outputs, and then you kind of have to make a case for why that might be - more paperwork. A few months later, you'll get an email back from someone that you've never heard of before who says, well, we've decided that your REF output can be reduced by 0.25. So that might be less than a whole paper, and I think, what on earth? How does that work? And I know that they've got to deal with, there is probably a spreadsheet somewhere where someone has done some whizzy sums and in terms of their accountability, that works. But it doesn't help. So within the last REF round - we didn't find out I was dyslexic until I was pregnant, so that was 2015 - so I found out I was dyslexic, brilliant. Disability support, fantastic. I was obviously on maternity leave, so that offered a reduction in my REF outputs as well. And just kind of the combination of those things together were not enough to merit any significant reduction in workload allocation or REF outputs or anything like that, because they just expect you to do the stuff. And if you don't, and if you're not seen to be publishing in the ABS list that we all have to - and certainly "no one will publish in a two star journal, gosh!" Then you're kind of raked across the coals, really. I think that's really wrong. The whole system is set up to make you feel ashamed or that you're failing. It's not set up to encourage or support someone or to encourage failure as well, because you've got to write a lot and get a lot of rejections to start feeling successful, to start having stuff out there. I mean, I've probably written five times the amount of papers - actually, probably way more than that thinking about it - that have been rejected, never seen the light of day. And ask any academic, they will have that folder somewhere of outputs that just don't see the light of day because they've been rejected or you've moved on, or the work just feels too out of date now or whatever it is. And certainly in the generation of, whether it's a a REF impact case study or REF outputs or whatever it is, the generation of that content relies on someone having a steady career that is within one discipline that is clearly identifiable. So someone who is interdisciplinary or who has extra accommodating needs, caring roles, whatever it is, is a problem within that system. It's something to be fixed, and you're only fixed in a way where, you don't get buy out from your workload, you don't get extra support in the guise of a mentor or extra support for your writing. You get this weird sum that's done for you and a strange email, and here you go, your reduction in outputs is less than 0.25. Well, that means nothing. So yeah, it's, I'm a bit incredulous about it, to be honest. I would highly recommend tracking down someone on Twitter who hosts the Hidden REF Twitter account, and he is putting in place an answer to REF for how this can work better in terms of how we can properly account for the impact of research and the scope of research, regardless of whether it's on an ABS ranked list or not, frankly. And to get us away from these processes that absolutely demotivate, at best, and at worst, completely discourage and put you off from being in academia. And on the more serious side of things, I know colleagues who have been, their mental health has been really hit hard by accountability structures through things like REF. It makes things very difficult. So, yeah, it's not great.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. Thank you. You mentioned obviously, you don't necessarily see yourself as the typical kind of business school academic, obviously coming from [social sciences], and obviously an interest in [areas]. You really kind of could have gone in multiple different directions I would kind of assume. How was it that you actually ended up in a business school? Was it something that you kind of foresaw for yourself, or was it more kind of an opportunity?

##### Participant 45

Haha, that's such a good question. It's a bit of both. I was in a really privileged position where for my master's and my PhD, I got something called an ESRC plus one scholarship, so that paid for my master's and my PhD in one go, and it kind of fast tracked me on that. At the end of that, I was expecting to do what most PhD students do, which is go and do a postdoc for a couple of years. And I had one set up and that job was in the bag for when I finished my PhD, and it was based on [topic]. That was the project and I was involved with that. And that was all set up. As I was finishing up my PhD, I'd also just started running my own company, which was looking at [area]. So this was 2007, 2008, 2009, so very early days of [area]. And I had some clients involved who were mostly banks. So the financial sector was starting to realise that they were under the closest public scrutiny in terms of the frameworks around what might underpin financial services, but also their conduct in [area]. And they were starting to get a little bit worried about this. So it was through doing networking events, and I got involved with the [network] as well and started doing some early research about [area] and was still finishing up my PhD, which was fine. And I was at a networking event, I met someone from the business school who said, well, we've got a lectureship coming up. You should apply. And I was like, well, that'll be good because it'll be good experience to start applying for jobs. Obviously, you're not going to get it because it's a full lectureship for crying out loud. You don't walk into those, but I'll apply for it. So I applied for it. And I was right. I didn't get it. And they said, thank you very much. And I was like, okay, well, thanks for the feedback. That's great. And they did the usual thing that companies do, which is "we'll keep you on our books, and if we're interested, we'll get back to you". And literally the day that I graduated with my PhD, I had an email from [current institution] to say, oh, can you come in for an interview next week? We've got another lectureship and we think it would be good to interview and see you. And I was like, okay, so I went along and again didn't really think anything. I didn't take it too seriously to be honest at all, because how [current institution] do interviews is very wedded to the old school academic hierarchy. So what happens is you go up the night before, you do a meal together, so you and your competitors do a meal together, so you're in the surroundings. It's all kind of, as you can imagine, dead white men on the walls. So you've got to talk to your competitors, sit there and all that. The next day you're invited to do a presentation to the department based on your research and what you like your teaching to be like. And then you go in for an interview. So it's pretty full on. And the people I was with were, one of them was ten years out from their PhD, had loads of experience, loads of publications. I was like, I don't really know what I'm doing here, but anyway. Did all that and got the phone call, which was to say, well, we're not recruiting you to this post. And I was like, well, yeah, duh. And they said we decided that we really like you. So what we're going to do is, we've got money and we're going to set up another post, another lectureship, and we'd like you to come on board to do that. And I thought, right, okay, that's interesting. I was a bit bowled over, to be honest. So I went straight into a lectureship and kind of left the postdoc behind. And that's how I got into a business school. And I think if I was to reapply for my job today and to go forward for a job at the business school, I don't think they would employ me to be honest, not because I don't think I'm any good, but because I'm so difficult to fit in the box that they need me to fit into. And I can talk about the ABS ranking list, but as you can probably tell, I'm a bit down on it, and I don't think they like that. So yeah, I've probably done what every academic has done, which is once you're at an institution and in post, and it kind of feels more okay than it isn't okay, you sort of edge out a bit of a distinct image and distinct reputation for yourself. So I'm kind of the go to for doing interdisciplinary mad ideas research, which is lovely, but that reputation is probably more prevalent and respected outside of the business school. So I do a lot more research collaboration away from the business school within the wider university. I spend a lot more time with [research centre] colleagues than I do with business school colleagues because I feel that... we check in with each other, we have a daily meeting every day for 30 minutes first thing, so we see each other every day, even when we're socially distancing. I mean, I don't hear or see some of my business school colleagues certainly, gosh, well, I've been teaching since March last year from home. I mean, I haven't heard from some of them since then, for a whole year now. It feels really odd. You feel really cut off. There is lots of other things in terms of how disingenuous and cut off you feel within a business school. I think that's for lots of reasons. It's quite big. The department is quite big. It's nice that people don't necessarily breathe down your neck and check in on you. But also it'd be nice if someone did check in on you. It's all of that.

##### Researcher

Yeah. And you mentioned towards the beginning of the interview that your first few years in the business school you didn't enjoy because you felt that it was not the nicest environment and you sort of learnt about the ABS list and that kind of thing. How have you kind of dealt with that? How have you dealt with that kind of dissatisfaction, in a way, of that kind of culture of the business school?

##### Participant 45

It's been very hard. My first day going into the business school, my very first day on the job, I had obviously met my then line manager, who was my head of department. And the first thing he said to me was, he asked me a bit about my background because he hadn't been there for my interview, he had been on annual leave. That's was the first time I met him. And at that point I was still running my business, I was blogging, I was just trying to get a bit of a name for myself in online spaces because I could see that was a good career move in terms of, even if you're going to be a researcher at a postdoc level or even an academic. First thing he said to me was, I want you to give up the blogging and don't do the [running a business] stuff. Here is a printed copy of the ABS list. He gave it to me. He was like, I want you to spend the rest of the day reading this and come back and email me which publications you're going to publish to. And that was my first day ever at [current institution], and after that, my confidence was just shot, totally shot. I felt like I was being told to be something I wasn't. I tried really hard for the first two to three years to adhere to that... well, I was going to say advice, but I was being told to do it, to adhere to that structure, because I felt like if I didn't, I would fail. Like, I remember sitting on the train on the way home. So I live in [city], commuting home, and my father was still alive at the time, and I went to meet him down the pub and I said, I don't understand what this list is, and I don't understand why I'm being asked to only publish in these journals. It seems really limiting. And I was going through how many journals within the three and four star zone were kind of [interdisciplinary area] journals, and I think there was one. My research didn't fit within the scope of what a journal wanted, because it wanted all kind of quantified econometric stuff. And I was like, how am I supposed to do interdisciplinary scholarship, which might be about [topic], might be about [topic], but can't fit on this list? Like, I don't see myself here. Really confused about that. In terms of how I managed to cope with that, in the initial shock of it, because my dad was an academic, I was breaking bread with him in the pub and saying, this is rubbish, isn't it? And the joke being, so he was a medical sociologist, but he didn't have any medical training. He taught at a medical school, so he taught medical students how to talk to people because they need to know how to do that. And the ongoing joke was he was doing that with med students with no med training, and I was doing business with business students with no business training. So that was nice, a bit of humour, and that allowed us to do that. Since he died, that was kind of a point in time where I really did look hard at the ABS list and realised how much stress that had put me under and I did have a very symbolic ripping up of that printed out list that I had been initially given by my first boss. And then started to publish in journals that I respected and I read and not necessarily on that list, and some of them were, but they were only two star, and that started to get me my confidence. I felt better about it, just sort of starting to etch out a bit of an area for myself and doing it that way. Not to say that's easy. It's not.

##### Researcher

Well, that's really interesting. You said earlier in the interview that academics, we work to not just do research in these specific journals but also to be curious about something, engage with society. That kind of interest for society, engagement, impact, is that sort of shared with the business school? Is there any kind of focus on impact within the business school environment that you can kind of relate to and resonates in your work?

##### Participant 45

Yeah, I think there is. So for example, I'm PI on a huge project, and we're very closely audited because we're funded by the [research council], so the business school are quite hands off. They want a lovely report at the end of it that they probably won't read. But we're also funded by the ERDF, so the European Research Development Fund, and they very tightly audit us every quarter in terms of our output. So we've committed, for example, this is pre Covid-19 and we've had to kind of change our outputs because of Covid-19, but we've committed to certain business support strategies with SMEs within [region], which includes expanding the business, includes income generation, includes new jobs and growth within that area. Obviously because of Covid-19, we've had to slightly restructure that, and come down to proving evidence of businesses surviving, which frankly, is an impact, and offering, tailoring our business support in light of the pandemic. And for the business school, suddenly they see the light in terms of interdisciplinary scholarship and where that impact is through that research project. And I hate to say this, but I think it's because money talks. Because this is a multi million pound project, because I'm PI on it, that's already a bit of a coup for them. Because that evidence is there in terms of me bringing in X amount of money to go and do this piece of research, they can start to connect the dots between this very tight audited trail from the ERDF concerning the impact of that research. And yeah, I'm really proud of that project. I'm really proud of what we're doing. And that's the kind of thing I think business schools should be doing. This is all about local and regional growth. This is all about community support. The SMEs we're involved with, some of them are sole traders and literally during Covid-19, their businesses have been at the stage of about to go under, and being able to offer business support to those guys has been needed, bluntly. My sense of what the role of a business school should be, that's what it should be about. That immediate community impact, not necessarily a new theory for econometrics, which someone is going to use to advance capitalism. But then that's just me being lefty, before we get into politics.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. Thank you. And you mentioned, obviously there that actually Covid-19 has affected a few things within your kind of research, within that impact, having to kind of, I guess, recalibrate your goals, your plans for the following year or whatever time frame you work to. Could you tell me a bit more about how Covid-19 generally has affected your working life within your role in the business school and also obviously in the [research centre], and obviously on this huge project you're working on, all these different things? How has Covid-19 affected that and how you've approached things?

##### Participant 45

Yeah, in fairly obvious ways, I haven't been able to see my students this year. I teach face to face. The negative fallout of that has been the unrealistic expectations on workload, so the workload model still adheres to the old bricks and mortar, face to face teaching. And we all know that preparing online sessions takes a million times longer and is a million times more draining. That's the negative stuff. Positive stuff for me is, I probably thrive in online environments because it's my natural research area. I love it. I'm quite good at putting together interesting teaching and research modalities in online spaces, probably better than I am face to face, maybe, a little bit. For the project, the direct impact have been the team, when there's six of us who work together daily, we have never met face to face before. So the entire research team has been recruited during the period of Covid-19, and we've been working together probably for about nine months now and we've never met. But we're a really tight, coherent team within [university], and the wider project is across four other institutions. And what has been positive is prior to this, previous ops meetings and kind of big orchestrated meetings were always face to face in [another city], which inevitably meant you're going all the way to [another city] for an hour long meeting, which essentially would kill your entire day. What we've been able to do during Covid-19, and a bit like department meetings, is to have Zoom equivalents. So you're there for the time of the meeting, you can join it, you can fit it around caring roles, it's been loads better in terms of flexibility for anyone who's got a disability. Loads better because you've got the captions on the screen. You can prepare for those meetings. You don't feel quite as intimidated walking into a room with loads of other people all looking at you. I mean, certainly in terms of Covid-19, while the pandemic is awful in terms of what it's doing and how it's forcing us to live, which is very restricted, forcing institutions to recognise and acknowledge that flexible working works has been brilliant.

##### Researcher

I guess based off of that stuff you've already said, generally, have you found things sort of more stressful or kind of less stressful since Covid-19 came around in terms of your work?

##### Participant 45

That's a good question. I guess, things are very specific, I guess that's the reason why you're interviewing me, really. But I want to make sure that this is relevant to you, so if it is irrelevant, just stop me before I get too anecdotal. [Current institution] has a history of you needing to make a lot of noise to make sure the processes and checks and balances that should be in place are in place. And one example of that is workload. So for [project], as PI on that project, I get bought out, so the money that comes in from the [research council] and the ERDF funding councils buy me out from teaching for one day a week. [Project] has been going, part two of the project, has been going for a year now exactly. And still that workload is not reflected in my buyout from teaching. So what's happened this year is I've had a normal teaching load. I've been PI of a project where I'm required to work on it one day a week, and I get audited for that quite closely. So I have to fill in timesheets for it. And because of the extra labour around Covid-19, which requires us to do teaching in ways that we haven't had to do before, and has a lot of extra kind of work around it in terms of the emotional stress of it, but also when to do it, particularly if you've got someone who is little and school aged in household who requires home schooling, all of that sort of exacerbates not having enough time this year to be able to feel like I'm properly contributing to teaching, certainly to my own research and certainly to the [project]. And with that comes a lot of guilt. And I kind of feel a bit taken advantage of - a lot taken advantage of by the university, where you explicitly say I need help to do X, which is, please can you put [project] as one day a week into my workload? Because that is what the funding is there for. And I had asked for that repeatedly, probably once every, at the beginning of the project, I would say once every week. And as we got into kind of June, August, September time and I was kind of getting wrapped up into recruiting people onto the project, and the project really got underway, probably dropped to once a month, and as teaching took hold, I mean, I didn't really raise it with at all in the period of September to December because I was just too busy with teaching. I feel that the university is kind of double dipped. I've got good teaching scores, so they know I'm a safe pair of hands for teaching. That's good for them. They also know that I'm a safe pair of hands for getting work on [project] done because it's a project, this is the second part of it, and it's first iteration, I successfully did that. Why they cannot give me the workload for it when they had agreed to it, I don't know. It's a mystery for me, and it's a source of constant frustration to be honest. And it's made me really question whether I stay in academia or not. Because it feels a very simple thing, that you want your workload to reflect what your workload is. That seems fair. And while we've been, all of us, asked to do extra things this year, those extra things, if you were to look at my workload on paper, you look at it and say, well, she's on 121%, that's kind of reasonable. There's an extra 10% because of Covid-19 stuff. You know, she's stretched, but she's not dying. That doesn't include the stuff for [project]. There's a whole day a week there, of work that I am doing, I haven't ditched. The only stuff I've ditched really is my own personal research. That is what has, something had to give. And I've been working evenings and weekends, and obviously my own personal research agenda has just had to be completely ditched for a year. And for me, that has devastating consequences because I deal with research that is interdisciplinary and generally longitudinal studies as well. So if you ditch that in the middle of it, that is not just that one project that's affected, but multiple projects. And a bit like my colleagues that depend on going into the labs to do their work, it's just pretty dire in terms of my own personal research agenda. And I'm worried how dismissive the senior management teams are with applying that workload model in the way that it should be. And I think that's unfair at best and probably discriminatory at worse. And if I can't get it fixed, the reason for me going on leave this week is because I have a revise and resubmit paper due, and I can't get any other space apart from me being on annual leave, so I legitimately can say no to meetings, for me to do that paper. So either I ditch that paper, which I don't want to do because it's a good paper and it's a revise and resubmit, or I go on annual leave to give me some kind of legitimacy to say to my colleagues, can you just go away for a minute because I'm doing this over here? And during this period of leave, what I will do is I will contact the union and say, look, it's been a year, I think I need your help on this because I don't know where to go anymore. I've been to my line manager. I've been through the administrators. I've gone through the official processes, all the channels at the university I could possibly speak to about this. I've been polite about it, firm about it, nice about it. I'm not really one for throwing my toys out of the pram and making a big kind of "don't you know who I am?" scene. But I think in this case I'm going to have to get the union involved. And in terms of how Covid-19 has impacted, it's a bigger workload for everyone this year. But for me, it's been pretty devastating on a personal research agenda, because the university hasn't applied the workload model in the way that they should do. My workload is at 121% and [project] isn't part of that workload at all. It's invisible. I'm just expected to do it. And obviously, if I don't do it, if I wanted to play hardball and just stop doing it, then that would be one thing. I feel very committed and invested in [project]. I feel like it is a project that we need, especially during a period of Covid-19 where it's about providing business support to local businesses. And my goodness, do they need it right now. And if I was to pull on that for my own agenda, which is simply, can you give me the one day a week that you said you would and you're getting money from it, from these places, that are paying for teaching cover for me? It seems to be a power play that impacts, adversely, the people that we're trying to help through the project. I'm trying to find another way to do this. And the only way that so far I've been able to keep myself afloat over the past year is to work evenings and weekends. So I've had to make up that time in my personal time. On the one hand, I'm proud of the work that we're doing. On the other hand, I'm wracked by guilt because I have a research agenda which is woven into [project], which I can't do at the moment. Luckily, my postdocs, they can get on with their research. That's great. That's what it's there for. But I can't, as the PI. I feel like I'm missing out there a lot. And the university is taking the mick a little bit in terms of what it wants out of that. So it's happy for me to talk about [project] on BBC News and be part of [events] and talk about [project] there as a success. And in the context of, you know, within department meetings it's recognised as a multi million pound project, and yay, she's PI on this, so it looks good for us. But will they make room within my workload to do it? No.

##### Researcher

When you say "they" is that like the central university management, or is that a business school specific sort of team?

##### Participant 45

I think it must be a business school specific team, because all the university, so for example, research and innovation services, RIS, which supports anyone who has UKRI funding or whatever it is that comes into university, they're completely on board and fine with my one day a week. Everyone else around me says fine. The business school has said fine. No one has come back to me and said that this isn't fine. In fact, the business school has even said on multiple occasions, oh yes, we must add this to your workload, and it just never gets done. And for those guys, hey, it might just seem like a small admin error, but for me it's devastating. That one day a week is huge in terms of my workload, massive. So my next step with this is to accumulate my timesheets, to accumulate all the hours I've done over the past year on [project], send it again to my line manager and to workload, the administrators there, and say, look, this is what I've done, guys, this just isn't, this isn't fair. Do you want me to drop this over the next year or not? Because if you do that's one thing, but then we lose the funding for [project], so bye-bye to that for the university. And if you don't want me to drop this and we all think it's a good thing to do, then give me the time to do it, because that's fair. It's what we agreed to. It's what the money is there for.

##### Researcher

And if you were to sort of drop another aspect of your job, to have that time to fully commit to [project] in the way that you kind of already are, but just are not being kind of appreciated for, what would it be that you would drop if you could?

##### Participant 45

Ideally, I don't want to drop anything, but what the funding coming into university does is it allows them to buy me out from teaching. So it's money that should be paying a postdoc, for example, to do my seminars for me. I'll still be module leader but we have a postdoc to actually do the face to face stuff for the students, which is a bit rubbish, really, in terms of how academia works. Because I really like teaching my students and it feels that, in terms of the career profile of senior leaders, the further up the greasy ladder you get, the further away from the front line of being in front of students you get. And that feels a bit wrong to me. And certainly throughout Covid-19, where the decisions were coming from in terms of whether we have face to face teaching or not, or what was going to happen, came from people who haven't done teaching for years and years and years, that probably didn't even know what a student looked like. To be honest, I think it was a bit devastating all round, really, for tutors and academics who really wanted to do the best for their students and really upsetting for students who couldn't quite understand why all these different messages were coming out of a central university system that just did not know what it was doing. And ultimately was putting people at risk, at worst. I mean, at best, just having a really boring substandard set of teaching pedagogies, which they could have done a lot better. One thing that [current institution] did was, this time last year we had an emergency meeting of Senate, so I used to sit with Senate, but then after I had my daughter, I was on a period of maternity leave and you can only sit on Senate for three years. So by that point, my three years had come to an end. But I'm still quite involved with Senate. Anyway, we had an emergency meeting last year and what the proposal was, we were going to do something called [current institution's online offering]. And this was not just a response to Covid-19, but it was a set of special conditions for higher education, which would see the formalisation of [current institution] moving the bulk of its teaching online permanently. Not just for Covid-19, but permanently across the board, unless, of course, it was lab work or you're doing music or something that requires you to be face to face. And as you can imagine, that was met with a resolute "no" by everyone. In terms of, because there was no investment in terms of innovation around technology, innovation around pedagogies, nothing. It was just a proposal of, well, we've seen how the marketplace is shifting, the Open University do it quite well, we think we can do it quite well. And that was pretty much the Senate documentation. Because of that, because of those meetings so early, this time last year, literally, as we went into the first lockdown, during a point in lockdown in May and June, the university was in a very difficult position to say to people actually, we think we're going to do the autumn term online. Because it was already seeded in the doubts of, they're making this shift to [current institution's online offering], where actually jobs could be at risk, student experience was at risk. So people were actually not really on board with that, which means the university didn't make a decision at all. And it wasn't until September, they finally decided that some courses would be online, and students got a set of really confusing messages there, as did staff in terms of what to prepare for autumn term. So yeah, it's been tricky for all kinds of reasons, but especially for me, because my workload on paper does not reflect the workload that I'm doing and that's being missed.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. In terms of, I guess, the situation you find yourself in at the moment where you are having to really, I guess you said use annual leave to get the paper done and do things in the evenings, on the weekends. And I guess in a way, having to sacrifice your own personal research in a way that you don't want to. Do you think that is going to have, like, knock on effects for your kind of progression in terms of moving up the ranks?

##### Participant 45

We've been reassured that our research outputs during the period of Covid-19 will not hinder our advancement through the promotion process. That is the hearsay within the senior management teams here. Nobody's actually committed something to a piece of paper that commits to that. So frankly, I don't believe it because if you've got someone over here who has spent the entirety of Covid-19, because they can, using it like a writing retreat and producing six four star publications, against someone here who has good teaching scores but hasn't produced anything during Covid-19 because of parenting responsibilities and whatever else is going on, who are you going to promote? You're definitely not going to promote the person who doesn't have the publications or the impact statements that the university wants, no matter how much they try and seed that into the new discourse of equality and diversity at the university. I do not believe it. Not for a second. The other reason I don't believe it is just because of how badly treated I feel around workload in terms of, here's a very simple thing, I've got income for the university, it's X amount. It buys my time out. It also pays all these people to be employed. Why don't you use that to buy my time out so I can do research? I feel like even when you get everything set up and people say one thing to you in terms of well, yes, of course, give us your funding and we'll buy you out for teaching - that doesn't happen. So again, it's about trust, I guess in the senior management structures, which you can probably tell from the tone of my voice, I am not particularly convinced by at the moment. So the short answer to your question would be yeah, absolutely. I think this is going to be cataclysmic for some people's careers. I mean, in terms of women taking time off for maternity leave, any parent taking time off for maternity or paternity leave, whatever it is, whatever your caring role is, and that can be devastating on your career. If it's framed in the "how many publications can you get?" and "how far up the promotion ladder can you get?" in terms of how fast then, yeah, it is quote unquote "devastating". If we're looking at more long term in terms of, you know, there's more to life than just climbing the greasy pole, then I think devastating is perhaps too harsh a word. I had told the university I was pregnant and we were talking about maternity leave. This was a meeting I had with HR where it was very much framed as a negotiation on when I would take time off and whether I'd be able to use my annual leave alongside my maternity leave. And there was lots of toing and froing about that. The whole discourse within the business school is not set up to be supportive or indeed strategic at all. It's set up in such a way to basically make sure that the institution gets what it gets when it wants it. And it can do a lot of hearsay around inclusivity and diversity. So we had an email go out last week, which was about the senior leadership team at the university. And it was about, "there were eight leading roles that went to women last year out of twelve". And that's fine. But that tells us nothing about closing the gender pay gap, ensuring a promotion structure for early career researchers, retaining anyone with a caring role in academia. It simply ticks a box in terms of quotas of women in certain positions. The issues through the university and certainly in the business school are pretty systemic and established. I haven't followed a conventional career path, of course it will affect everyone, but hopefully I can kind of adapt to what it is I need to adapt to and make a good case of support for myself in terms of the journey through Covid-19 and out of it. And if anyone really pushes back on me, "hey, why didn't you write that four star paper?" I can say to them, well, I tried. You didn't give me the time. And I had three revise and resubmits last year, two to four star journals, one to a three star, that I couldn't do. Teaching, [project], there was just no room. I had to drop stuff. I had to. And the stuff that it felt alright to drop, in a kind of I'm not letting anyone else down way, was my stuff. Because I don't want to impact the [project] team, and I don't want to hurt my students. So what can I do?

##### Researcher

Okay, well, thank you for sharing that. And it's extremely interesting to hear your experiences. I was hoping I could sort of ask about one more thing, if that's okay. There's something else I wanted to ask about. And that was about the book that you wrote. I read your profile and stuff, so I was reading bits about you. I'm always really interested when I interview someone that's written a book because I know that obviously, as we've kind of established, in business schools, the currency is journal publications, and that is how you sort of progress. That is what is seen as producing good outputs. So in terms of the book, was that something that was like a personal interest for you to write? Or was that something, what was the kind of motivation behind that, given that kind of, I guess, kind of the norm in the environment of publications?

##### Participant 45

Good question. I guess it was a personal tribute to my PhD research, which I felt I've never been able to publish out of, because of how I entered, how I entered the academic marketplace in terms of being a [social scientist] and then into a business school. Yeah, that book really spoke to and gave thanks to all the kind of community activist groups around women in [industry] and all the kind of small level community support groups that I was part of, coming out of the PhD. And I really wanted to write journal papers and properly evidence that through the culture of academic publications, I suppose. And the way that you would do that as a [social scientist] is actually, you write a book. Now business schools, much to my surprise, even though the book is REF-able, don't see it as a publication output. So I may as well have not done it basically. But because I see my career as kind of more flexible than housed within a business school, I need to be doing what makes me happy, basically. And in the long term if I end up in a [social science] department, lovely. Or a [alternative discipline] centre or something like that, which is probably going be at a more progressive ex-polytechnic than it would be a Russell group, because they have those people there, then so be it. And yeah, it's funny because the book got spoken about at the last promotion committee. And everyone agreed that it was a good thing because it was interdisciplinary research, you're talking about diversity of women in [context], it deals with [subject], and obviously it sings to a lot of criteria that the business school should be doing in terms of research and everything else. And obviously I've written journal articles around that research too, so they've got those outputs. But still, they will not use the book as part of REF or as part of promotion processes, because apparently that's how business schools work. I had to do a sharp intake of breath then. If I drank gin, I would go and have a very large gin at that point. It's like, okay, that's fine, fine. For me the book has opened so many doors and it's been a really positive experience. I really enjoyed writing it, I really enjoy writing and thinking about research anyway, which is why doing this paper on annual leave doesn't seem that arduous, to be honest. But in the sense of it, getting you up the career ladder, within a business school, no. I like to think from other faculties and departments around the university, it is looked upon very favourably. I do a lot of work with [another discipline], certainly within the [research group], those guys really like it. And it legitimises my position in those kinds of spaces, too, which is kind of more important for me than signalling that I'm on a four star trajectory.

##### Researcher

The other thing I wanted to ask about that is, obviously, it formed part of the [training session for government]. That's obviously extremely impressive. Very explicit form of engagement, impact. I just wanted to know, was that something that you had a view to get involved with when you thought "I'm going to do a book", or was that something that, you know, you did the book and then it got attention or you then thought, oh, I can go to these stakeholders? How did that kind of play out?

##### Participant 45

Yeah, it was kind of a bit of both. I was already involved with those stakeholders prior to writing the book, just because of how established I am in some of the [networks], particularly in and around [city]. And obviously after I had published the book, then, this is where the university gets good, you see. So outside of the business school, we have a really good policies and engagement team, which is run out of research and innovation services. Those guys have direct links straight into Westminster, and in the past, off my own back, had done some stuff with the House of Lords, gone down to the Commons, blah blah blah. But I'd gotten involved with the new policy hub, the new policy research unit at the university, so outside of the business school. And those guys obviously picked up on the book and the nature of the work. And given that the government stuff was around developing this very distinct [structure] around [area], then it became a useful way to be introduced to kind of a new cohort within Westminster, who would be a good audience for that material. Because I kind of skirted around the edges a bit, but not fully involved in terms of actual training. Yes, I've gone down, I've done a few talks before and talked about kind of, well, this is an issue. And everyone would agree that, yes, this is an issue. And it kind of wouldn't go any further than that. So it was good to go down and feel like you're giving a workshop that actually has a training element to it, which gets beyond identifying what the problem is, but kind of like, what are the solutions? How can we start to kind of reframe what the narrative is? My point within the talk is we talk about [topics]. We're trying to promote inclusivity and diversity here. So in the same way that we might signal that there are specialist [communities for marginalised groups], that doesn't make things more inclusive at all. We're just creating in and out groups essentially. But yeah, it was good to go and do that. And I was supposed to do a follow up in 2020, but obviously Covid-19 happened.

##### Researcher

Okay, well, that's really interesting. Thank you for sharing that. And I think in terms of direct questioning, that's pretty much everything I would want to cover, everything I wanted to ask. So unless there's anything off the top of your head you can think of that might be relevant to this sort of area that we've been talking about, that you haven't had a chance to say?

##### Participant 45

The only other thing I would add is, so, [project] is a cool and sexy project. I think where I feel really constrained within that project is it forces me to employ people on temporary contracts on a very precarious basis. So I've got a really good team of postdocs working for me, one of whom is a grade eight. She is a senior researcher, and she absolutely should be in a full time permanent post. And she's not because of the way the academic market works. And it's not the first time she's worked with me, and we enjoy working together, and certainly, if given the opportunity in the future, I would like to work with her again. But within my team, it's a mixture of pride and guilt, in terms of those kinds of projects. Because you get funding into the university, which is great, and then 25% immediately gets taken away on overheads, whatever that means. And then within the heart of the project, you are forced to employ people on temporary contracts, and that really worries me, and really makes me feel a mixture of guilt, anger. And everyone is very dismissive of it. "Well, that's kind of part of the system, that's part of the game". We can say that, but that means that we're only employing people who are able to be employed in those conditions. So it means they either have a partner who works full time or they have extra support from wider family networks, or whoever it is, that means they can be on those precarious contracts, because you can't get a mortgage on a project that is two to three years. You can't do anything. It's just ridiculous. And then you're missing out on a whole quota of people who could work for you, you're just completely missing out because of the nature of how we set these jobs up. That makes me want to rage against the system big time. And particularly as part of [project] is to do with supporting people through kind of precarious business models or business engagements, all those kinds of needs. And yet within the heart of the project, we're completely hypocritical because we don't employ full time permanent staff, who are the postdocs, to work on that project. Argh. If I hear one more time from one of my colleagues that that's how universities work, I may have to throw a cat at them. But, it's bumpy. I mean, it's the reason why, when you asked me at the beginning, how did you get to work for a business school, it wasn't a straight A to B. But when I had the option of a postdoc on [topic], which is kind of where my heart was, compared to a permanent lectureship over here, it was like, well, it's obvious I'm going to go with a permanent post, because that gives me job security. And sometimes I think about what would have happened if I'd gone with my heart in terms of where my research would be. Weighing up my interests against a permanent job. And I went with the permanent job. I mean, from that day forward, I've been kind of wrangling into what it is I want to do, which is very typical of academics as well. But, yeah, the precarity of the job market is just cruel. Really cruel.

##### Researcher

Well, on that note, I think I'll let you get back to your annual leave slash writing retreat. Thanks so much for your time.