Overcoming shortage of second-career academics in business schools

Liap-Teck Ong[1]

[1]Lecturer, Faculty of Business Design & Arts, Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak Campus.

Abstract. This study addresses the United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) to "substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers[academics], including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and Small Island developing states" by 2030. Literature review reveals that there is a shortage of academics to teach business units globally due to the high demand for business education. Hence experienced and qualified business practitioners are recruited to assume the role of academics, collectively termed as second-career academics. This study was conducted to explore the challenges faced by these second-career academics in order to explore ways to sustain and retain them, as a measure to mitigate the shortage of academics in business education at tertiary level. The findings revealed that second-career academics experience a sense of discordance due to the fundamental contradiction between the ideals, pre-conceived perceptions of academic career and the everyday realities of academic task performance. The discordance is precipitated by differences in work culture between industry and academia, inconsonance with university management, and pedagogical/research challenges. The study suggests appropriate orientation and training opportunities to address the special needs of these second-career academics in order to sustain and retain their academic career, as a solution to the shortage of business academics.

Keywords: second-career academics, shortage of academics, business schools.

1. Introduction

The target of UN SDG4: Quality Education is "by 2030, (to) substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and Small Island developing states". In tertiary education, one of the growing trends is the teaching of business units at tertiary level. The literature shows that as a result of the increase in demand for business education, there is a corresponding increase in demand for academics teaching business modules. In response to this need, academia has begun to recruit business professionals and practitioners as second-career academics to supplement the first career academics in the teaching of business modules. Taking this goal in relation to the shortage of academics for business education globally, this study explores the challenges faced by these second-career academics.

Without such insights into how the second-career academics fare in their new academic career, there is a possibility that these second-career academics may underperform, produce insufficient output, make limited contributions, and perhaps, not last long enough in academia. Hence, it is hoped that the findings from this study will help to sustain and retain these second-career academics addressing the target goal of UN SDG4 to "substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers [academics],"

2. Literature review

Given that this study aims to address UN SDG4 "to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers [academics]" by 2030, the literature review covers two domains. The first domain is on the teaching of business and the second domain is on the shortage of academics teaching business modules in universities.

2.1 Teaching of Business

When the concept of business originated in Europe the eighteen century and the USA in 1888, the teaching staff members were actually from the industry and the teaching was more vocational than academic (Clinebell & Clinebell, 2008; Cornuel, 2007; Cornuel & Hommel, 2012; Cotton, McKenna, Van Auken & Meuter Au, 2001; Ford, Harding &

Learmonth, 2010; Grey, 2002). However, the findings from Gordon and Howell's reports in the USA in the 1950s suggested that business education should be conducted in a scientific manner just like engineering and other technological subjects with faculty members holding PhD qualifications. However, there is a recognition that business education should not be detached from industry and in fact, people from industry are required as well to make the teaching of business a holistic educational experience. For example, Simon (1976) who initiated an important study on the decision making of business practitioners to become academics in business schools, found that the decision was influenced by the duration of experience in the business world. Simon's seminal study on business practitioners' decision to become academics suggested that only those with limited business world experience are likely to be successful and remain as academics. Business practitioners with longer years of business experience tend not to be successful in academia unless they exhibited a strong degree of intellectuality (Simon, 1976, p. 345). These types of business practitioners were rare in 1945 when Simon first carried out his study on executive decision making process. However, despite the emphasis placed by Simon on intellectuality as a key attribute of a sustainable academic career, this was seldom mentioned as a key attribute in the subsequent literature on the performance of second-career academics. Business schools began to be staffed by first-career academics and second-career academics. In fact, the leading global institution of accreditation of business schools require both practicing scholars and academic scholars to be accredited.

AACSB International's report (2014) indicates that there are 52 schools of business in Malaysia, which suggests that there is a school or faculty of business in each of the 52 Malaysian universities or institutions of higher education. This illustrates the pervasiveness of business education in Malaysia.

However, very few published studies focusing on business schools can be found in Malaysia. A survey by Masood, Omar, Zakaria, and Tih (2011) which looks into the alignment between the human capital needs of Malaysian industry and the postgraduate programs offered by Malaysian business schools, revealed that a whopping 84 percent of the respondents (consisting of junior, middle, and senior level executives) stated that the postgraduate courses and executive development programs offered by Malaysian institutions were not really relevant to their organisations. In this study, 52 per cent of the respondents suggested that lecturers who conduct such programs should be professionally qualified and have industry experience.

According to Ahmad and Sulaiman (2013), the undergraduate business students in Malaysia seem to be more passive than their peers in the UK and the USA. They advocate the use of case studies to teach accounting in business schools in Malaysia. They claim that students exposed to the case-study approach are better prepared for a professional career in the accounting field.

The conclusion is that for a holistic business education, both first-career academics and second-career academics are required. However, the supply of both categories of academics is crucial. As reflected in the following review, there is a global shortage of academics to teach business modules in particular.

2.2 Shortage of Faculty in Business Schools

There is a current shortage of qualified staff for business schools in the USA, the UK, and Australia. Clinebell and Clinebell (2008) state that "executive professors" (i.e., second-career academics) are being recruited in business schools in the USA due to shortage of faculty, which also satisfies the accreditation requirements of AACSB International concurrently. The acute shortage of accounting faculty in the USA has led to several studies (e.g. Bishop, Boyle, Clune, & Hermanson, 2011; Boyle, Carpenter, & Hermanson, 2014; Boyle, Hermanson, & Mensah, 2011; HassabElnaby, Dobrzykowski, & Tran, 2012; Plumlee, Kachelmeier, Madeo, Pratt, & Krull, 2006; Plumlee & Reckers, 2014; Trapnell, Mero, Williams, & Krull, 2009). Trapnell et al. have captured several issues identified in these studies and listed the following major reasons for the shortage of accounting doctorates in US business schools: (a) limited doctoral supervision capacity, (b) unclear financial benefits to business schools from doctoral programs, (c) national focus of research funding being on science and technology fields, (d) the long period of time required to complete the compulsory coursework requirement, and (e) unavailability of data beyond statutory financial reports (Trapnell, Mero, Williams, & Krull, 2009, pp. 428-429).

In European business schools, the shortage of faculty is the focus of a study by Verhaegen (2005). According to Verhaegen, factors that affect faculty retention are gender, age, rank, and the level of job satisfaction. Besides, institutional factors such as the legal structure of the institution, its relative emphasis on research in comparison to teaching, the profile of students enrolled in business schools, and its accreditation status also affect recruitment and retention of faculty. His findings are consistent with those from similar studies.

A report on business schools in the UK by Ivory et al. (2006) indicates that "a significant proportion of faculty, probably close to one-third, are recruited from practice, rather than from the education sector" (p. 14). More interestingly, the same report states:

Recent research has shown that faculty may be in serious short supply in the future. For the period 2003-2004, nearly 4000 academic staff were aged 50 or over, a figure which implies that in ten years' time, around the same number will be retiring. At the same time, between 2001-2 there were only 244 new PhD qualifiers in business and management, many of them likely to work overseas. Even allowing for new business school faculty without PhDs there is a substantial gap between demand and supply. (Ivory et al., 2006, p. 14)

In Australia, the report by Coates Dobson, Edwards, Friedman, Geodegebuure & Meek (2009) highlighted the importance of higher education to Australia's economy and the emerging shortage of academics for higher education. This view is supported by a subsequent report by Coates and Goedegebuure (2012). These studies indicate the universality of shortage of faculty in higher education. The shortage of faculty is supported by another study by Larkin and Neumann (2008), which highlighted the shortage of faculty due to aging and retiring academics, an issue that was highlighted in the two reports mentioned earlier. Another study laments that, to some extent, the efforts and changes made by Australian business schools in order to be accredited by AACSB may have some adverse effect "in particular on faculty transitioning into academic [sic] from practice, thus making academia a less attractive career option for such accountants" (Lightbody, 2010, p. 13) due to the perceived increase in workload for compliance with the accreditation requirements of AACSB International. All these studies indicate that one of the challenges facing business education globally is a shortage of faculty.

Therefore, the literature review reveals that despite the importance of business schools and the apparent shortage of academics to teach business studies, there is a scarcity of research studies on the shortage of academics to teach business in the context of Malaysia in particular. In response to UN SDG4, this study is timely and aligns with the need to address the issue related to the shortage of faculty in business education in Malaysia.

3. Research Focus

Given the shortage of second-career academics in business schools, this study focuses on challenges affecting career transition of business practitioners transitioning into academia as second-career academics. The study enhances the knowledge and management practices required for supporting and improving the performance of second-career academics in business schools with a focus on the sustainability and attracting more business practitioners to join academia, thus alleviating the shortage of academics in business schools. To achieve this, the research focuses on the challenges faced by second-career academics in business schools through an in-depth analysis of their lived experience in performing their assigned work and responsibilities as academics.

4. Research Approach

To achieve the research focus, this study attempts to capture the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of those who have direct experience in the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002, p. 104) – in this case, career transition from business practice to academic practice. Their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs need to be captured and used for generating the meanings and insights expected from this research. In the hermeneutic-interpretive research paradigm, the approach is to capture the "lived experience" (usually through self-narratives, but also through other channels of self-expression) and then, interpret it through a cyclic process, comparing the narratives and expressions with suitable objects of comparison (usually encountered in the environment/context of the experience under study), gradually building up the credibility of the interpretations. Therefore, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with the participants, who are second-career academics in business schools.

5. Findings

The participants in this study experience a fundamental contradiction between the ideals, pre-conceived perceptions of academic career and the everyday realities of academic task performance. On one hand, their expectations of the academic career affirmed their beliefs about equality egalitarianism and concordance with academic practices, norms and customs, but on the other hand, their experiences with unfamiliarity, alienation, and unpreparedness for academic practices threw them into discord. The result of these disparities between expectations and actual lived experiences leads to the conceptualisation of the main theme of discordance supported by three categories themes as follows:

(a) Category Theme #1: Disenchantment with academic culture
(b) Category Theme #2: Inconsonance with university management
(c) Category Theme #3: Pedagogical and research challenges

5.1 Category Theme #1: Disenchantment with academic culture

In regard to experiencing discordance attributed to differences in work culture, it is clear that such experience is unique to second-career academics. This is because second-career academics have spent considerable time in industry and would have, to some extent, acculturated to the culture and practices in industry. Thus, they are in a position to discern and experience the difference in cultures and the resultant discordance.

Key Phrases for Category Theme #1

> *"When we came into the industry, the first thing they do is to orientate us which means that, this is the culture we would like to have, this is how people behaviour should be. In the university, I find that there is a lacking of engagement and connection"*
>
> *"It's different from, the working culture is very much different from the corporate world."*
>
> *"I find that university is not good in communicating out its priorities and I think that different organisation, like differences in culture, language, I think it's a language."*
>
> *"So over here the culture is that when top management has a proposal people think that they are not happy about it nobody will actually talk, except for a few of us here 3 or 4 of us here who actually had er industry experience er ranging from 3 years to 18 years, who are the ones talking."*

5.2 Category Theme #2: Inconsonance with university management

Another experience which leads to the sense of discordance is reflected in the participants' interaction with university management. The interpretation and analysis of the narratives and key phases resulted in the emergence of the category theme of 'inconsonance with university management'. As the participants were from the industry, they are more familiar with the perceived faster decision-making process of management in industry than in academia. This can be discerned from the narratives cited below:

Key Phrases for Category Theme #2

> "We *have no experience with communication with the management of the university because they seem to be such a distance"*
>
> *"management just like to force lecturers to do it"*
>
> "*Ya there is a lot of difference, there is a lot of difference yes. . .. There a lots of difference. . . First of all, in the academia there is a lot of discussion, talk talk, talk talk talk, on concept and so on. . .. In academia, they tend to spend more time talking talking talking about this concept, that concept, or that's how Oxford did it, that's how er NUS did it, or that's how Melbourne University did it and they talked about all the theoretical er discussion, but coming from the corporate world, er we are very action oriented, like myself, Dr C and all that we do things we need to move things, we need to get things done, we tend to spend less time talking talking talking. . . "*

The frustration is conceptualised as inconsonance with university management. Such discordance is a result of the participants' retention of the industry mindset they inherited and have yet to be discarded in their current positions as academics, as well as the difference in management style between industry and academia.

5.3 Category Theme #3: Pedagogical and research challenges

The final category theme which contributes to the main theme of discordance is 'pedagogical and research challenges'. The participants' previous experience as trainers in the industry, to some extent, mitigates their unfamiliarity with the teaching tasks. As revealed in their narratives, this unfamiliarity is partly due to (a) their lack of skills and knowledge in pedagogy, (b) differences in the mindsets of present day students and the participants' own experience as students, (c) unfamiliarity with academic research requirements.

Key Phrases for Category Theme #3

> *"I am a trainer, a trainer at the early stage of my career as a auditor in fact, I am training auditors. . .. When I just joined academician. . .. I thought I can teach but I can't teach. . .. Whatever experience we may have as a practitioner will stop somewhere, that is where I always say that I thought I can teach. At the end, I say I can't teach. . .. Again I always use, I think this is the fourth time I am repeating here, I thought I can teach but in the end I didn't, I can't teach. . .. I feel that educating a lecturer to teach . . . So there is a huge knowledge a practitioner think that they are good but I come from practitioner point of view, I say that's why at the end, I coin out this word, I thought I can teach but I can't."*

> *"I have difficulties at first in terms of delivering my lecture because I never confronted or encountered something like what you called something like public speaking or something like in front of mass students"*

> *"Now current trend the lecturers had to come down to the level of the students, not the students go up to the level of the lecturer"*

> *"I also have bad experience when I have don't have good feedback then I will feel very downhearted"*

> *"When I responded to students, it was a very business-like manner, 20 over years of writing in business letter, you are formal you are very straight to the point"*

> *"If you say any negative, it's more the parents rather than the children themselves"*

> *"there is a big change in term of when we were the students"*

Due to the challenges faced by the participants in compliance with academic practices, they experience disharmony, dissension, and schism. Accordingly, such experiences were categorised as one of the category themes that constitute the main theme of discordance.

5.4 Emergence of the theme of Discordance

The four category themes were synthesized as the main theme of discordance. The conceptualisation of this main theme of discordance is to reflect the disagreeable experience of the participants as second-career academics. Such disagreeable experience can be viewed through an ethnographic perspective as the differences in the industry and academic work culture apparently contribute towards the disagreeable experience. Such disagreeable experiences are encountered in dealing with students, colleagues as well as university management in the form of human interactions. The disagreeable experience also surfaced in the tasks being performed such as teaching and research, as admitted by some participants, was mainly attributed to their lack of skills and knowledge in these endeavours.

6. Discussion

The main theme of DISCORDANCE is a manifestation of the disparity between second-career academics' expectation and the reality they encounter in academia. Such disparity generates difficulties in career transition. This resonates with the argument of LaRocco and Bruns (2006), which highlighted multiple challenges such as unpreparedness for academic career and cultural differences between industry and academia. Several others have also reported discordant experiences among second-career academics. Wilson et al. (2014) reported culture shock, isolation, and disillusion among second- career academics. LaRocco and Bruns (2006) reported that their participants found difficulties in balancing work and life. They also faced difficulties in understanding university expectations in pedagogical and other performance areas. These corroborate with the results captured under the four constitutive category themes that make up the main theme of DISCORDANCE: (a) Disharmony with academic culture; (b) Encountering academic practice challenges; (c) Inconsonance with university management; and (d) Unpleasant parts of teaching. The participants in this study reported issues relating to generation gap, boredom in teaching, fear of public speaking, interference by parents, and age-related weakness, which have been conceptualised as 'Unpleasant parts of teaching'.

There is a different type of discordance reported by Learmonth and Humphreys, both second-career academics in the UK. In their auto-ethnographical study, they state that they were "uncomfortably confronted with (various versions of) former selves" (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012, p. 112) upon their transition from industry to academia. Having to play the "career game" in academia disconcerted them. They thought they had left it behind in industry, but the prevailing new managerialism in academia brought it to life for them. This created incongruence and stress in them.

7. Conclusion

Universities need to recognise second-career academics as a group of academics with special needs in order to sustain their academic career. Several things ought to change in the entire human resource management lifecycle in order to get the best contribution from second-career academics and minimise their discordance as identified in this study. Universities can address this by devising an intensive orientation program to familiarise them with academic culture and educational paradigms, especially as these have evolved under the contemporary policy regimes. These initiatives can help address the disparity between their expectations from academia and the ground realities of contemporary academics' work. Institutions of higher learning globally and in Malaysia need to address this issue if they aim to attract senior business executives to take up academic roles in business schools to overcome the shortage of business academics.

As discussed above, attracting, developing, and retaining second-career academics would require an appreciation of their discordance and special needs. These aspects need careful assessment for such initiatives to be effective in the long run. A major element of DISCORDANCE arises from the differences in the work culture between industry and academia. Consequently, the mind sets and skills relevant for career success in these two domains are not the same. Based on this research, it seems reasonable to suggest that second-career academics need counselling and guidance at all stages of the career transition process –before, during, and after their transition from industry to academia.

Universities can help by creating opportunities for conversation and collaboration to improve mutual understanding between industry and academia. Specific training needs to be arranged for second-career academics, and even professional and executives intending to move into academia. This study indicates various areas for such training such as teaching approaches, public speaking, curriculum design, quality assurance, computer technology, and academic writing. This in turn will facilitate the sustainability and retention of the second-career academics within academia, mitigating the shortage of academics in business schools in developing countries like Malaysia, which aims to be the regional hub of education excellence.

REFERENCES

AACSB International. (2014). Business School Data Trends Booklet. Retrieved 15 June 2014, from http://www.aacsb.edu/publications/datareports/

Ahmad, N. N. N., & Sulaiman, M. (2013). Case studies in a passive learning environment: some Malaysian evidence. *Accounting Research Journal, 26*(3), 173-196.

Bishop, C. C., Boyle, D. M., Clune, R. R., & Hermanson, D. R. (2011). A different model for doctoral education in accounting and auditing: student and faculty reflections. *Current Issues in Auditing, 6*(1), A1-A16. doi: 10.2308/ciia-50117

Boyle, D. M., Hermanson, D. R., & Mensah, M. O. (2011). Addressing the accounting and auditing faculty shortage: Practitioners' perceptions of academia. *Current Issues in Auditing, 5*(1), A70-A85.

Boyle, D., Carpenter, B. W., & Hermanson, D. R. (2014). The accounting faculty shortage: causes and contemporary solutions. *Accounting Horizons.* doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2308/acch-50967

Clinebell, S. K., & Clinebell, J. M. (2008). The tension in business education between academic rigor and real-world relevance: The role of executive professors. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 7*(1), 99-107.

Coates, H., Dobson, I., Edwards, D., Friedman, T., Goedegebuure, L., & Meek, L. (2009). *The attractiveness of the Australian academic profession: A comparative analysis.* LH Martin Institute, University of Melbourne & Australian Council for Educational Research & Educational Policy Institute.

Cornuel, E. (2007). Challenges facing business schools in the future. *Journal of Management Development, 26*(1), 87-92.

Cornuel, E., & Hommel, U. (2012). Business schools as a positive force for fostering societal change. *Business and Professional Ethics Journal, 31*(2), 289-312.

Cotton, C. C., McKenna, J. F., Van Auken, S., & Meuter, M. L. (2001). Action and reaction in the evolution of business school missions. *Management Decision, 39*(3), 227-233.

Ford, J., Harding, N., & Learmonth, M. (2010). Who is it that would make business schools more critical? Critical reflections on critical management studies. *British Journal of Management, 21*(s1), s71-s81.

Grey, C. (2002). What are business schools for? On silence and voice in management education. *Journal of management education, 26*(5), 496-511.

Grey, C. (2004). Reinventing business schools: The contribution of critical management education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 3*(2), 178-186.

HassabElnaby, H. R., Dobrzykowski, D. D., & Tran, O. T. (2012). Applying the International Medical Graduate Program Model to Alleviate the Supply Shortage of Accounting Doctoral Faculty. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education, 10*(2), 271-294. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4609.2011.00342.x

Ivory, C., Miskell, P., Shipton, H., White, A., Moeslein, K., & Neely, A. (2006). *The future of business schools in the UK.* Swindon, UK: Economic & Social Research Council, UK.

Khurana, R., & Penrice, D. (2011). Business education: The American Trajectory. *Business Schools and their Contribution to Society*, 3-15.

Khurana, R., & Spender, J. (2012). Herbert A. Simon on what ails business schools: More than 'a problem in organizational design'. *Journal of Management Studies, 49*(3), 619-639.

Larkin, J., & Neumann, R. (2008). *University career management practices for academic staff: A reality check.* Paper presented at the 22nd Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference, Auckland, New Zealand, 2-5 Dec 2008.

Larocco, D. J., & Bruns, D. A. (2006). Practitioner to professor: an examination of second career academics' entry into academia. *Education, 126*(4), 626-639.

Learmonth, M., & Humphreys, M. (2012). Autoethnography and academic identity: Glimpsing business school doppelgängers. *Organization, 19*(1), 99-117.

Lightbody, M. (2010). Exacerbating staff shortages and student dissatisfaction? The Impact of AACSB Accreditation on faculty recruitment in Australia. *Australasian Accounting Business & Finance Journal, 4*(2), 3-18.

Masood, A., Omar, M., Zakaria, M. S., & Tih, S. H. (2011). *Are Malaysian business schools programs innovative in* meeting *industry's needs?* Paper presented at Enhancing Learning: Teaching & Learning Conference, November 25-26, 2011, Miri, Malaysia.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Method.* London, UK: Sage.

Plumlee, R. D., & Reckers, P. M. J. (2014). Lessons not learned: Why is there still a crisis-level shortage of accounting Ph.D.s? *Accounting Horizons, 28*(2), 313-330. doi: 10.2308/acch-50703

Plumlee, R. D., Kachelmeier, S. J., Madeo, S. A., Pratt, J. H., & Krull, G. (2006). Assessing the shortage of accounting faculty. *Issues in Accounting Education, 21*(2), 113-125.

Simon, H. A. (1997). Administrative *behavior* (4th ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Trapnell, J. E., Mero, N., Williams, J. R., & Krull Jr, G. W. (2009). The Accounting Doctoral Shortage: Time for a New Model. *Issues in Accounting Education, 24*(4), 427-432.

Verhaegen, P. (2005). Academic talent. *Journal of Management Development, 24*(9), 807-818.