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To cite this article: Giovanna Comerio (14 May 2024): Shaping the time to be a good teacher: a case study on teacher excellence and time ownership in a British transnational university, Higher Education Research & Development, DOI: [10.1080/07294360.2024.2349288](https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2349288)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2349288>



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Published online: 14 May 2024.



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Shaping the time to be a good teacher: a case study on teacher excellence and time ownership in a British transnational university

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ABSTRACT

This study is about a lecturer protecting herself and her teaching from the university's increasing demands on her personal and *timeless* time. The British university is shaped by a fundamental arrhythmia: the co-existence of digital time, that academics are encouraged to embrace working from anywhere at any time; and analogical time, the linear time of classes, deadlines, and required administrative tasks. Pressured by these competing demands on their time and responsibilities, research and surveys show that academics feel alienated as university time arrhythmia 'devours' both their thinking and personal time and can compromise their wellbeing. This case study aims at uncovering the connection between the lecturer's practices of teaching excellence, her administrative work and university time. Qualitative content analysis of semi-structured interviews illustrates how university time and teaching excellence are related, and university arrhythmia can actually be used to protect good teaching. This lecturer skilfully managed university *time-devouring* arrhythmia: when the university used an analogical logic of time, she used digital time, and vice versa. By doing this, she protected her personal and timeless time as well as her own teaching from mounting demands of teacher excellence, measured by the university's simultaneous and conflicting digital and analogical logics of time.

ARTICLE HISTORY


Received 8 March 2023
Accepted 27 March 2024

KEYWORDS

University time; digital time; analogical time; university arrhythmia; teaching excellence

A (personal) introduction

The news about the death of Dr. Malcom Anderson on 19th of February 2018, related to excessive workload and subsequent stress and fatigue (Pells, 2018; Walford, 2018, [june 6](#)), broke at a time when I was reflecting on the uses of time and university teaching as a theme connected to a research study I was conducting on teaching excellence and teacher agency. It motivated me to dig into the topic and I found that in the UK, research on the increasing academic workload and its consequences on staff wellbeing has been conducted since the mid-1990s (Court, 1996). In the last ten years, scholars have highlighted the increase of administrative tasks performed by academics and the negative

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impact on their workload, as well as the effect of isolation and stress on academics' mental welfare and personal life (Bothwell & Jump, 2018; Kinman & Wray, 2013). While there are some studies exploring the connection between workload and teaching (Hemer, 2014; Soliman & Soliman, 1997), there does not seem to be research on the possible connections between teaching excellence and university time, and this paper explores the experience of a lecturer who identified such a connection in her practice. This paper will touch upon the uses of digital tools and 'digital time' by focusing on these different types of time and how they are strategically managed in higher education. It is acknowledged that digital tools and time are components of post COVID-19 higher education, however this study is more interested in the strategic use of digital and analogical time. More precisely, this paper focuses on the case of a lecturer who was able to preserve her idea of 'good teaching' as opposed to 'teaching excellence' and protect both her 'timeless time' and 'personal time' (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003) by strategically switching between digital and analogical time to shape her work patterns.

Teaching excellence

The idea of quality of teaching at the university is related to the 'neoliberalisation' of higher education. Teaching quality – as 'the standards [teaching] must meet' (Ellis, 2019, p. 6) – has become part of universities' strategy to ensure public and private funding, as well as to attract fee-paying students. However, by the mid-1990s, the terminology has changed, and universities' narrative shifted from standards of quality to standards of excellence (Readings, 1996). Institutions self-monitor their own activities to make sure that teaching and assessing are conducted according to standards of excellence defined by external bodies, standards which are promised to students and aimed at strengthening their position in the educational market (Busch, 2017/2017). A question arises: Who conducts these individual and institutional self-monitoring processes? Mainly the same academic staff that perform the teaching activities. They do so through newly created administrative roles and tasks aimed at demonstrating that teaching is indeed happening and is happening according to the set standards (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Consequently, teaching excellence requires not only specific professional skills, but also time to develop effective teaching strategies that enhance students' education. It also entails time and work to demonstrate that excellence has been achieved.

However, such an idea of teaching excellence contrasts with teachers' conceptions. Academics think that excellence is about supporting students' motivation and engagement, fostering their critical thinking skills, enhancing their life-long learning habits, catering to their learning needs and ultimately inspiring them to go beyond the university 'requirements' (Skelton, 2004). Both definitions of 'teaching excellence' require time and effort. Accounting for 'teaching excellence' forces individuals to find alternative ways to make time for performing these administrative tasks (Bailey & Colley, 2015; Noonan, 2016; Osbaldiston et al., 2016; Spurling, 2015). Focusing on students' learning requires time to think of the best teaching strategies. This juncture marks where teaching excellence and tasks related to university accountability converge, challenge, and redefine academics' time.

Time

Neoliberal societies have seen a shift in how time is measured and work is organized. In *Post-script on control societies*, Deleuze (1990) observes how in industrial societies, people's lives were confined in enclosed spaces such as homes, schools, and factories. These 'locked in' lives were regulated by the clock (Deleuze, 1990; Thompson, 1967) and, according to the clock arrows, people would move from one enclosed place to another, to perform pre-defined roles and tasks. In the industrial workplace, Deleuze continues, the evaluation of the work accomplished was based on task completion and time spent on it. Time and tasks were measured *sequentially*, as a series of discrete units. The number of tasks completed in each time unit, and the amount of time needed to perform a given task were indicators of quality. Conversely, in post-industrial societies, time is measured digitally, and activities are to be conducted synchronously. People are not 'locked in' specific places and do not look at the clock anymore, they can work from anywhere (typically from home or a holiday residence) and at any time, (even during time off from work), including during their personal time. The matrix is the symbol of this type of society (Deleuze, 1990), where workers *multi-task*, that is perform an increased number of roles and tasks at the same time. However, because of the performativity of the digital tools they are to use, the time expected to perform those tasks is reduced. As a consequence, new digital tools and digital time impose an 'un-natural' rhythm, not sustainable by human beings (Hassan, 2017; Rosa, 2010) as it does not correspond to the rhythm of our minds and bodies.

Such a matrix model has also been integrated into the British university and has introduced fundamental changes in British academics' experience of time. In the UK as well as in British overseas campuses, academics need to perform several new tasks to demonstrate excellence, which are related to the more stringent accountability required for British universities by public or private funding bodies and fee-paying students. Grant applications, research reports, publications, as well as teaching and assessing activities, have all introduced new tasks and roles that must be performed in a time reduced by the speed of the digital tools. The logic of the analogical, industrial time, that measures the time needed to perform a task, is applied to digital time, with the result that tasks are to be performed in shorter periods of time, and simultaneously. The consequence is that activities requiring more time such as conducting research, preparing teaching and supporting students' learning are often sacrificed (Barry, Chandler & Clark, 2001) or conducted at home and during personal time (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Thompson and Cook (2017) discuss the 'arrhythmia' existing in universities as the very coexistence of analogical (industrial) time and digital (post-industrial) time and their contrasting logics.

Furthering this, I suggest that such arrhythmia is not only about the overlapping of two different times, but that it could be defined as a *time-devouring* arrhythmia. The combination of sequenced and simultaneous tasks, and university's demands for faster execution of tasks lead academics to use personal time for completing their work and reduce their thinking time. Such time-devouring arrhythmia contrasts with the need of what Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) called *timeless time*, that is time to think and reflect, and of personal time. This can have negative consequences on academics' wellbeing – they feel they must accelerate the rhythm of their lives, or they will experience 'feelings of anxiety and guilt for lagging behind in schedule and not achieving as much as they should do' (Ylijoki, 2013, pp. 246–247).

The issue is that academic work is based on ‘thinking’. However, creativity and ideas need time to develop (Noonan, 2016) and cannot grow in conditions of extreme stress or fatigue (Berg & Seeber, 2016), where individuals do not have enough personal time to rest both physically and mentally. Malcom and Zukas (2009, p. 500) argue that ‘purposive academic work itself creates the workplace in a way which evades the spatial and temporal discipline of the academic institution and of the educational policy structures which drive it’. As mentioned, Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) term *timeless time* the time in which academics can focus on their tasks as long as they need, ‘beyond all mundane concerns and temporal limitations’ (p. 62). The interviewees in their study discuss timeless time as mainly related to research, but I would extend it also to teaching. For academics committed to teaching, timeless time is the time needed to think creatively and prepare classes reflecting on their teaching philosophies and their students’ needs and preferences.

University teachers experience contradictions in how time is conceptualized by the university. On the one hand, university institutional life is grounded in an inflated analogical time or ‘scheduled time’ (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003) such as the fixed times of classes, meetings, exams, time allocated for tasks. On the other hand, the newly digitalized university allows an apparent greater flexibility: academics can work from virtually anywhere, and at any time. This way, however, timeless time is intruded upon, and personal time is gradually eroded. Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) conclude their article on academics’ time by asking a few questions. Because I am interested in teaching, the focus of this paper is on one of these questions, and precisely on what academics can do to allocate more time to timeless time and to personal time as a requisite of timeless time. I will consider the case of a lecturer who was able to protect her timeless time and personal time, as well as her teaching, by skillfully managing the institution’s own arrhythmia.

This case study

This case study is part of a research project on teachers’ agency in relation to the structures created on the Chinese campus of a British university to meet the British standards of teaching excellence. One interviewee, however, did not focus on policies related to or definitions of teaching excellence. She focused on the concept of time, and especially how she *re-organized* the university time to achieve what she considered to be good teaching (as opposed to ‘teaching excellence’).

The research was conducted on the Chinese campus of a British university where British degrees are awarded. Therefore, the campus adopts the same standards of quality of teaching and assessment, the same class format (lecturers, seminars, laboratories) as on the UK campus. Tania (not her real name) has been a full-time lecturer in social sciences for five years on this campus. At the time of our interview, she was on a renewed five-year contract. This research has received ethical approval by the university where the study was conducted.

Research design

I interviewed my participant, Tania, as part of a research project focused on teacher agency and teaching excellence. However, her case emerged as an *unusual* one (see

Yin, 2018, p. 49). In contrast to the other participants in the study, she did not focus her reflection only on discourses, policies and approaches on teaching and learning that influenced her own teaching agency and practice. Rather, during the first interview, she introduced and reflected on how the university's organization of time may generally affect definitions of teaching excellence, and discussed how she felt her use of university time impacted on her possibility of being a 'good teacher'. According to Yin (2018), case study enables researchers to explore a phenomenon whose boundaries with the context are unclear (p. 45), while Creswell (2007, p. 73) identifies cases as 'bounded' systems. My understanding of cases is that they are the result of the researcher's deliberate mental act of 'slicing' and examining a portion of reality, for example an individual or a social system. Therefore, to me, 'casing' (Neuman, 2014, p. 211) is not merely identifying a case, but building one out of reality according to the researcher's focus. A single-case study cannot aim at theory-building or generalizability; it is an 'intrinsic case study' (Stake, 2000, p. 437), and it can only serve as an 'exemplar' of a social phenomenon drawing researchers' attention to its possible significance, leading to further exploration. Tania's experience and reflection enable us to start analysing the possible connection between teaching excellence and a university's organization of time, and how an individual can make a strategic use of the university arrhythmia caused by the coexistence of analogical and digital time.

In this study, I used semi-structured interviews as I was interested in Tania's understanding of and reflection on her experience of teaching agency and teaching excellence. When conducted in a setting of reciprocal trust and respect, interviews provide opportunities for interviewees to formulate and express their views, feelings, preferences, and to analyse their experiences freely. This, in turn, enables the interviewer to gain a much deeper understanding of a phenomenon, as it is lived by the individual, and can provide an unexpected perspective (Seidman, 2006). Indeed, the latter is exactly what happened in this study, as Tania connected teaching excellence, university time, and her use of university arrhythmia.

I interviewed Tania twice, each interview lasting approximately 45 minutes, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. The limited duration of the interviews was due to their focused nature, addressing teaching excellence and university time separately. The study's emphasis on individual perspectives and strategies regarding university time precluded the use of alternative sources for triangulating data. However, Tania did review and endorse an initial draft of this article, affirming agreement with the data analysis and interpretation.

The research questions guiding this case study were: (1) what is Tania's definition and practice of teaching excellence? (2) What relationship does she see between her administrative work and the quality of her teaching? (3) How does she understand university time? Since these questions aim at describing a situation and its features, rather than creating a new theory, and because the material collected is very much focused on a specific topic rather than exploring different dimensions of a complex experience, I opted for conducting Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012, pp. 41–42). More specifically, I used Schreier's model of Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012; Schreier, 2014), which consists of segmenting the texts in units of analysis, and systematically reducing the qualitative data collected into categories of meaning according to the research questions. As such, coding was conducted deductively, that is guided by the

research questions (Bingham, 2023). I identified the following categories that I will analyse in the following sections:

- a) her analysis of good teaching and completion of administrative tasks. This category consists of two components, her definition and practice of good teaching (related to the first research question), and her views about administrative tasks and good teaching (related to the second research question)
- b) her definition of time
- c) her (re)organization of personal and work time.

As I am the only author, to ensure reliability of my analysis, I followed Schreier's suggestions about repeated coding. Therefore, I segmented the interviews in units of analysis, coded them, and applied the finalized coding frame, twice. While Schreier suggests a pause of about two weeks (2012, p. 157) between the first and the second analysis, I was able to have a pause of nine weeks.

Findings and discussion

Tania's analysis of good teaching and completion of administrative tasks

When asked to examine her understanding of excellent teaching as defined by the university, Tania focuses on her notion of 'good' teaching and reflects on how administrative tasks challenge the possibility of offering students authentic good teaching.

Definition and practice of teaching excellence

Tania supports university student-centered teaching, where students' active participation shapes the class, and is orchestrated in a way in which individual differences and emotional safety are taken care of.

Make sure that all, say that you have twelve students in the class [seminar], that they equally contribute to what's happening in the class. You have ... ways of including all of them even if their personalities are very different (...) without putting anyone on the spot.

At the same time, however, she is also aware of the potential negative impact of making life 'easy' for students by making classes based more on fun rather than work. She believes that students are not customers and are not to be entertained at the university:

I don't think we're entertainers, you know, I'm going up against that notion. I don't like it when students want to be entertained, I do think they have to put some work in as well. (...)

Critics of the neoliberal university highlight the 'dangerous' analogies between customer-centered practices and some aspects of the student-centered approach to teaching. Naidoo and Williams (2015), for instance, explain how unexpected outcomes may arise from a student-centered approach, and in universities' effort to allow students to make 'informed choices' about their studies by means of more transparent and detailed communication. For example, students might tend to choose and ask for less challenging modules and programmes. Tania seems aware of the potential overlapping of student-centered and customer-centered practices. However, as an academic who has taught students from different backgrounds in various universities, she has developed a definition

of teaching which matches the ‘positive’ aspects of the student-centered approach (see Naidoo & Williams, 2015).

Tania believes that good teaching depends upon being able to establish a relationship with her students and support them in their learning endeavours. She understands them not only as

learners with their cognitive skills, but also as *subjects* who have a personality and life experience that influence their learning. Teachers are to care for students, they should have the sensitivity (...) to be open and to have the sensors up (...) that they feel fine.

Designing classes with this in mind is for her the core of a teacher’s job, and it requires time for reflection, for being creative and to either devise her own learning materials or select and re-contextualize existing materials. To support and implement student-centered teaching, where the needs and abilities of everyone are carefully considered, her university promotes the use of technologies. Tania uses and experiments with these as she thinks they allow for a more engaging learning environment.

I attempted to make [the teaching materials] more up to date (...) add in other things to make it more interesting [for students] ... or video clips, interactive activities.

Tania prefers the terms ‘good teaching’ rather than ‘teaching excellence’. For her, good teaching is about enhancing students’ deep learning and educating them to become responsible for their learning:

They should gradually learn to think, to use the concepts, apply them in different situations, and think. It is gradual, and there is no end. So, my teaching is not just ‘measurable’ because sometimes to create an activity it takes hours, or five minutes, it depends on many things, how the students are ... also teacher skills, like creativity, organization, you need time to think, really.

She thinks that education is a process, rather than a goal that can be reached with a sequence of pre-defined and measurable teaching tasks. Therefore, educational work cannot be easily measured in terms of hours and minutes. In Tania’s view, education assumes that teachers have the time to think deeply and create activities which are engaging and meaningful for the students:

It takes time to create, to teach students in a way that they can engage and relate to the topics. If I’m too busy with administration, I cannot educate [my students], those tasks take all my time. This should not happen.

This is why she questions the increasing weight of administrative tasks in her work, saying how it ‘cannibalizes’ the time she feels she should devote to pre- and post-teaching activities that would ensure their true quality.

Challenges to good teaching

Tania believes in student-centeredness and the teacher’s responsibility to build a rapport with her students as core tenets of good teaching. She believes that it takes time and reflection to prepare interesting classes, provide individualized feedback to students, and create or at least select extra learning materials for students’ self-study in the university virtual learning environment.

In the interviews Tania shares that at times she feels unable to be the good teacher she wants to be:

I frequently feel I do a lot of things and I'm doing the teaching on the side rather than the main thing. That's not ideal, for you to do good teaching.

She identifies two obstacles. The first one is related to the creation of a plethora of administrative tasks and roles for academic staff to perform, which limit the time needed for preparing their teaching:

Too many [administrative] responsibilities, while we should have less, and thereby making more time for preparing [teaching] ... so yes, more time for that, that's something that is very important, I think.

The second obstacle is the idea that time can be a criterion to evaluate the worth of a teaching activity:

You know, now[days] the criterion to evaluate a [teaching] activity, is not only if it was a good activity, but also whether it was executed in a short time. Something good, but that required a long time to be done, is less good, quality and *time* spent are criteria equally important.

Administrative tasks and roles, and good teaching

Tania analyses administrative tasks and roles, and she takes different aspects into consideration. First, she comments on the increase in the number of components of each task, then she focuses on the time pressure faced by academics. Finally, she compares administrative tasks and teaching, and comments on their incompatibility.

The administrative tasks she analyses are those related to assessment and marking. In recent years, the tasks related to assessment have increased in complexity to involve more steps. In her university, these include colleagues' feedback on papers, the external examiners' opinion, and the actions to be taken accordingly – the actual marking, moderating and/or double marking of the exam papers, inputting the marks in a spreadsheet, sending the marked papers to the external examiner, writing reports for external examiner and the university, and general feedback to the students' cohort. She does not criticize the actual tasks per se, but she observes the time they require, and in many cases they must be performed during the teaching weeks, which makes it more difficult for the individual teacher to reserve time for prepare good teaching: 'I have to sacrifice my preparation time due to admin responsibilities'. The consequence is that all these tasks impact her efforts to prepare good classes, and they either restrict or at least 'regulate' her teaching as they shape the time that she can devote to teaching preparation:

So, all these things are kind of restricting or regulating maybe restricting is the wrong word ... Strongly regulating the ... teaching ...

Tania then compares administrative tasks and teaching tasks, and observes that while the results of the former are easily defined and immediately visible, the latter are not so:

Most administration tasks are pretty clear-cut, it is clear what has to be the result: you need the marksheet with the marks. [However, n]obody can tell you: you didn't hand out an extra hand-out. If you have the experience and the knowledge, you can deliver a class which is OK.

This means that staff accountability of administrative tasks takes the priority, while accountability on teaching becomes less important and eventually teachers focus on the pressing tasks.

A teacher not preparing a class (or not preparing it very well) is not detected immediately and can catch up later in the semester. If you don't mark, you are caught immediately. So you must do it as soon as possible.

For Tania, the university's gaze identifies those who do not comply with accountability requirements more easily and quickly than those who do not teach well enough (unless they receive complaints about their teaching in student evaluations). In such a way, administrative tasks take over teaching, even though these administrative tasks were presumably created to oversee and implement teaching quality.

Having analysed the impact of the increasing number of administrative tasks, Tania then looks at the relationship between the corresponding proliferation of administrative roles and good teaching. In contemporary universities, academic staff are offered the opportunity (or are often required) to act as exam officers, widening participation officers, recruitment officers, among other roles. However, often they need to perform more than one of these roles at the same time. While Tania does not criticize the idea of the administrative role itself – exclaiming that tasks should be taken seriously – she thinks that their multiplicity may be detrimental to teaching quality:

(...) taking that one [administrative] responsibility more seriously and having more time for that one thing ... doing it well, but also lightening the administrative, this would help us ... definitely would have a very positive effect on us and on our teaching, I'm sure.

In conclusion, while she acknowledges the importance of administrative tasks and roles, Tania is also aware that performing those tasks and roles well might compromise the quality of teaching itself.

Tania's definition and organization of time

The reflection on the need to prioritize administrative tasks and roles to satisfy university accountability requirements leads Tania to examine her definition and organization of her time and her ways to protect the time she needs to be a good teacher.

From digital time back to analogical time

Tania wants to ensure that 'good' teaching happens in her classroom, despite the increasing administrative load due to the implementation of accountability practices in her department. She realizes that administrative time and teaching time cannot be 'counted' in the same way. For the university, the criteria for evaluating the completion of an administrative task can be precisely defined and provides an analogical quantification of the time needed. The same is not true for good teaching.

They tell us how much time it takes to prepare a class, but it is not true, sometimes it takes less, sometimes more. But you don't know in advance how long it will take. How can they know? How can they measure?

Furthermore, she thinks that 'good quality cannot that easily be achieved in very little time' and she openly criticizes the

economical principle: you know, for them to say that you have done a good job, it is not enough that your work was good, you must have also done it over a short period of time.

It is not enough to produce good work, but you must produce it in the least amount of time ... otherwise it's not really 'good'.

However, Palmer (2007) tells us that teaching does not come only from pedagogy, strategies, tasks, and syllabi, but from an internal serendipity that allows the teacher to combine all these recognizable elements in ways that 'speak' to the students. This is why the preparation of a good class can take '5 minutes' as Tania says, or 'it can take hours'. Her priority then, is to make that time. When she started teaching, and for many years after, although the university insisted on measuring the time analogically, requiring academics' presence in their offices (such as in the Deleuzian 'industrial time'), she managed her time 'digitally'. However, her purpose was not to perform more tasks and simultaneously work on administration and teaching. The use of digital tools allowed her to work on weekends and late at night, in office or at home. Such flexibility gave her the necessary space to be creative and prepare good teaching:

I was able to work at home, when I wanted, just accessing the VLE, for teaching, or T-drive [a shared online space] for the marks and all the other administrative things. So I was able to use more time for creating my classes, or to find the materials ... because I worked out of the normal work hours. They were not important ... [and] No need to come to campus for all these ... why to be in office?

Using the time digitally instead of analogically enabled her to 'embed' timeless time in her personal time. She used time digitally, not for increasing her efficiency and performing more tasks, but for carving time out to think and carefully prepare her teaching. Certainly, one could argue with Ylijoki (2013) that her work time and personal time were colliding and that, without realizing it, she might have sacrificed parts of her personal life. However, this does not seem to be her experience and feeling, as she says that she was comfortable with this arrangement:

I liked this way, it was more ... It matched my personality. You see, it is not about counting the hours at work, at office, but about having the time to think how you teach. This was my way.

When her personal life became more complex and included the needs of other people, she realized that the digital use of time, allowing her to 'mix' personal and work times, was not possible anymore. In a time where the university started emphasizing opportunities to work digitally from home, she switched to university analogical time, devoted the time allocated by the university to the administrative tasks and teaching, and separated home time and office time to avoid scheduled time hindering her personal and timeless time. To protect her personal life, she organized her work time differently and switched back to an industrial and analogical model of time organization, where work and home are completely separated both as places of activity and time allocated to those activities, although she felt it did not suit her personality:

I'm not somebody who is very ... "this is my job and then I go home and do nothing". I think that this is a personality thing as well. (...) I don't work on a switch on-switch-off way (...) and it's not true that staying at office makes my work more efficient or even better. But I couldn't do differently, as I couldn't stay home or work in my 'free time'.

Afterwards, Tania states that currently she works only on weekdays and for a time that might be a little longer than in her contract, but this does not affect her personal life.

Sometimes she needs to work on Saturdays, to comply with some of the university requirements, and she goes to her office where she remains for a limited number of hours. She undertakes administrative roles and performs administrative tasks, but she thinks that if they function ‘well enough’ she would not like to spend much time on those, rather she prefers to devote the worktime to her teaching. Working for the number of hours expected by the university is her strategy to defend her timeless time and her good teaching, against the university attempt of imposing digital time as the new measure of teaching excellence.

Tania’s experience shows that, even without rejecting the neoliberal emphasis on accountability, the definition of teaching excellence based on administrative accountability can be ‘worn’ by a strategic use of the university *time-devouring arrhythmia* based on the coexistence of analogical and digital time. The analogical definition of time helps universities manage and regulate academics’ performance and performativity, and it also divides the academic workday into hours. The digital time does not erase such analogical logic. Responding to Ylijoki and Mäntylä’s (2003) question on what academics can do to increase their timeless time, Tania shows that the key might be to systematically use the ‘opposite’ time supported by the university but still not forbidden: when the university mainly used an analogical time, she used the raising digital time; and when the university used the digital time, she used the analogical logic. Therefore, Tania has been able to defend her concept of good teaching by leveraging the arrhythmia of university analogical and digital time according to her needs in the different phases of her career.

What, however, are the consequences of this type of strategy upon lecturers’ professional development and satisfaction? Teaching excellence measurements do not just focus on the learning environment. They stress the importance of innovation at different levels outside the classroom, through interventions such as curriculum design, assessment innovation, and development of employability skills through content teaching, to name a few. What are the consequences of focusing on classroom teaching only? In the long run, could Tania’s professional growth and satisfaction be compromised in a university that largely ignores the ‘excellence’ of the everyday classroom teaching, and the needs and experience of an academic that wants to keep ownership of her timeless and personal time? These questions demand further exploration. They are crucial because they refer to more general questions about the accountability of higher education to its various stakeholders. At the same time, can higher education support ‘good’ teaching while also protecting academics from excessive demands on their *timeless* and personal time, and ultimately their wellbeing?

Conclusion

In this paper I examined how a lecturer has used university time in order to protect both her definition of good teaching and her personal and timeless time.

Neoliberal definitions of teaching excellence require academics to perform a plethora of administrative tasks and undertake administrative roles that impact their work as teachers. The organization of those tasks is dependent on both the analogical time of the universities and digital time, that is, the time accelerated by new technologies that allow for tasks to be performed faster, at any time and from anywhere. Analogical time and digital time are mixed in higher education but not merged, as they coexist

and operate concurrently but with opposite logics based respectively on sequence and simultaneity. This coexistence identifies an arrhythmia (Thompson & Cook, 2017) that is a lack of synchronization that requires academics to integrate both time logics and perform their tasks as fast as digital technologies allow. I termed this arrhythmia as *time-devouring*, since the required number of tasks and the time speed dramatically reduce (*devour*) academics' personal and timeless time.

Tania, an academic who has been trying to find the time to be a good teacher, leveraged the university time arrhythmia to protect her idea of good teaching and her personal and timeless time from the university's mounting demands. Additionally, her experience shows that teaching excellence and the use of time may be related. At the beginning of her career in the analogical university, she used technology to organize her time digitally and create teaching activities at any time and from any place. She felt that including her timeless time within her personal time did not erode the latter but enhanced her good teaching. When this arrangement was no longer possible, she identified and used the analogical time included in the increasingly digital university. This allowed her to limit the impact of the new digital logic implied in her administrative tasks upon her personal time and timeless time. In essence, she skilfully alternates between digital and analogical time when the university encourages the use of the 'opposite' time, hence protecting her personal and timeless time.

Certainly, a case study based on a single individual and whose validity is only based on the participant's agreement cannot be generalized, nor can be used to create a theory on university time, its possible uses, or relations with teaching excellence. However, this case study prompts some questions for further research in those areas, such as the effects of the post-pandemic digital pervasiveness on university arrhythmia, and how the time spent on administrative tasks and in teaching responsibilities influences practices of teaching excellence. Answering these questions could lead universities to engage with and manage more effectively *time-devouring* arrhythmia to better protect, support and develop staff wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Lucia Brucoli for her unwavering support.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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