



# University of Suffolk



## You can't block if you don't blend: implications of ineffective communication and siloed working from a new lecturer perspective

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### Emma Harvey Lawrence | Lecturer in Public Health and PhD Student

Trust and satisfaction are essential in society, yet both terms remain largely undefined and in decline (Pološki Vokić, Rimac Bilušić and Najjar, 2020). Across all institutional settings the impact of trust and satisfaction is palpable and certainly within higher education, the stakes are high. I transitioned into academia quite late in my career and I have experienced what many lecturers report: a sense of identity change and imposter syndrome (IS). *Both badges I still wear discretely under my ID card, until now thanks to this poster!* IS particularly, can be exacerbated by social environment and inextricably links trust in oneself and others due to a defining feature of insularity and of course is at odds between reality and perception (Vázquez, 2022).

A recent systematic review conducted by Jameson et al. (2023) found that very little research has been conducted to establish the connection between trust and **all staff** within university settings. What is interesting, is that while it wasn't possible to assess trust among all staff due to lack of evidence, most articles included an appreciation for universities undergoing a fundamental state of flux which risked permeating the very culture of institutions. So, I would ask: is our university at risk of a similar dichotomy to that of IS? Now more than ever, I feel we need to take all that is measured and utilise our facilities and services, to answer this question and establish quality and resilience in communication channels.

How? Therein lies the challenge... but I believe it is possible by embedding a sense of trust and satisfaction within.

### Todd Strehlow | Visiting Lecturer in Architecture

The journey from professional practice to academia sometimes takes a bumpy road. Perhaps as a visiting or occasional lecturer, more so. Years of professional experience working with colleagues, stakeholders, managers, and the public – all the while increasing your knowledge and confidence in your chosen field. But when you decide to become an academic, self-doubt creeps in and you wonder what you really know.

Two articles by Lesley Gourlay illustrate this. The first, entitled 'I'd landed on the moon', begins with a review of literature about experiences of new lecturers. They reported a sense of alienation or confusion on arriving in the academic context and felt inadequate because new academic colleagues wrote papers or presented at conferences 'as routinely as eating breakfast'.

In the second article Gourlay interviewed a larger group, looking at the transitions of the group from practice to academia. Similarly, they did not immediately feel part of a community, they had confusion about the role, and a sense of inauthenticity and isolation. Gourlay noted that one should not assume that the 'community of practice' of academia will not always see existing academics welcome new ones in an organic manner. Widening participation shouldn't just mean students but staff also – new academic staff from a variety of backgrounds that don't automatically fit right in with a community of practice.

### Suggested calls to action:

- Develop a welcoming process for visiting lecturers e.g: who's who, IT tips, key university procedures - support each other, in a way that echoes the 'new lecturer support group'
- Talking through the 'bigger picture' such as overall objectives for the course and wider university plans
- Regular briefings / updates (perhaps quarterly or as appropriate) for the extended team – e.g. via round robin emails with course news, share recent publications and conferences.
- Occasional events so the wider team of visiting / guest lecturers can meet, as well as the core staff team

### Ann Teemal | Lecturer in Mental Health Nursing

Studies conducted through the years have highlighted the difficulties Nurses face in making the transition from being an expert in the clinical area to becoming a Novice in academic arena. Young and Diekmann, (2002) discussed new Nurse Educators felt ill prepared in terms of skills, strategies, and practises of teaching.

Diekmann (2004) conducted a 12-year study examined the experience of New Nurse Educators, the study revealed new nurse educators felt isolated and alienated as they entered a new professional culture.

Although it can be argued that support for new academic staff has improved since these studies were conducted, it is evident that new nurse educators still struggle with adapting to their roles. This difficulty may be attributed to the transition process involved in changing careers and the need to redefine one's sense of self.

The challenges faced by new Nurse educators in adjusting to their roles can be attributed to several factors, including significant differences in job requirements, organisational culture and the overall nature of the University. These differences may have been more pronounced and unexpected than the new nurse educators had initially anticipated.

Similar to participants in the studies my experience of moving from an arena where I was deemed to be an expert due to having 33years of service working in various clinical settings to now become a novice an arena where I felt out of my depth. Overall, I felt I lost my sense of identity.

In the clinical area I was confident I knew what was needed of me, how to do it and where to get help if I needed however in the academic arena the system or processes was not straight forward which led to feelings of not belonging.

### Suggestion for Course of Action:

- **Reformulate induction:** Structured/formal induction explaining and showing how the University works and more importantly where staff fit in. We as a university make great effort in inducting new students however the experiences of new academics is not comparable.
- **Observe:** Provide more opportunities for teaching observations, marking, and familiarising with equipment, this is done to some extent however due to needs of the service little emphasis is placed here.
- **Guide:** Provision of a Handbook highlighting processes and procedures new academics need to follow like what is provided for our students.
- **Transition:** Allow the new Nurse Educator transitioning from clinical expert to novice academic at least 1 year to make sense of the new role, practices and an opportunity to consolidate all that was learnt in the year of transitioning.

### Dr Laura J Reeves | Research Associate – Leadership and Management Academy.

The literature surrounding communication in HE teaching tends to focus on the effective ways (and impact of) teachers' communication with students (Albalawi and Nadeem, 2020). However, teacher-teacher communication, arguably, can also impact effective design and delivery of teaching across a university. More specifically, a lack of inter-disciplinary communication can polarise a siloed approach to the way modules are designed and taught. A particular example is the teaching of research methods, while there are a multitude of different perspective, methods and approaches, most disciplines will offer students a research methods-based module to prepare them to complete dissertation work in their final year of their undergraduate degree. However, from my initial experience and observations of teaching such a module, departments across the University do not have effective communication in sharing resources or supporting each other to collaborate on the effective ways of designing and teaching common placed modules. Not only is this a potentially ineffective use of time in in designing potentially similar (or duplicated modules) across the University, but we are also restricting our effectiveness in improving higher employee engagement, increased levels of innovation and higher quality of services through internal communication (Reis Neto, Fulgencio da Silva and Ferreira, 2018). The implication of such an approach is that as a university we are not utilising open educational practices which are now becoming an expectation in HE (Panto and Comas-Quinn, 2013)

### Call to action:

- Widen the conversation about how departments can work more collegially to promote an inter-disciplinary and open access approach to the way UoS educators are making effective use of resources
- Establish which modules are being taught repeatedly across different courses, and consider how a collaborative, inter-disciplinary approach to teaching the module could be implemented
- Consider ways a Repository of Resources for these common modules can be developed so UoS colleagues can share resources to help reduce repetition of teaching, save time on duplicated module designing and development and foster internal open collaboration in teaching practice.



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### Jenny Sewell | Lecturer in Adult Nursing

The transition from expert practitioner to Lecturer has been one of the greatest challenges of my career. The feelings of imposter syndrome for those moving into the world of academia is well documented and for me was and remains a real issue (Wilkinson, 2020). The transition is often described as stressful and unsettling as a person's professional identity goes through significant change which can stimulate feelings of loss and grief (Miner, 2019 and Bower et al, 2022). Walking into a world that has its own language and structure makes this challenge even harder. Within nursing practice, we are taught the importance of communication skills from an early stage in our training and how the language we use can affect a person's experience within healthcare. We avoid the use of acronyms and complex medical terminology with patients to aid understanding and build relationships (Vermeir et al, 2015). My experience of being exposed to the world of academia has shown that there is a heavy reliance of acronyms, terminology, and an assumption that people understand them. This combined with communication being primarily through virtual forums has created a feeling of isolation.

The "new lecturer support group" that runs through the School of Health and Sports Science has been able to assist in overcoming the barriers experienced in communication. It has been created as a welcoming, safe space where questions can be answered with out the fear of judgement and with face-to-face meetings it is also an opportunity to build relationships in the world of hybrid working. They blend the above with more formal meetings around certain processes that are highlighted by the group such as extenuating circumstances. Research by Bower et al (2022) found that the use of formal mentorship and support systems can aid this transition and lead to increased staff satisfaction and retention my experience to date also supports this.

With thanks to the current facilitators of the new lecturer support group: Carolyn Benfield, Stacey- Anne Penny, Jo Suttlewood and Leanne Logan-Smith.

### Nancy Sims | Lecturer In Diagnostic Radiography

A fundamental trait of successful collaborative working across professions and/or disciplines has been acknowledged as the understanding of boundaries of their own knowledge and skills (Lewitt et al., 2019, p. 587). As such, the identified discombobulation and 'imposter syndrome' of many early career lecturers struggling with self-doubt (Wilkinson, 2020, p. 364) appears highly likely to impede their transition into roles which necessitate negotiation of siloed working, rife with initially impenetrable acronyms and unfamiliar processes. To this point, the need to create safe spaces for ongoing clarification seems a logical step to ameliorate factors which impact their job satisfaction. Interestingly of the 'Big 5' personality traits Neuroticism is shown to have the greatest negative impact on job satisfaction, while Extroversion is highlighted inversely (Steel et al., 2019, p. 231). Therefore, as these factors are to some extent dynamic, nurturing an environment where interaction among colleagues and superiors is predicated on the assumption that most people are; understanding, available and willing to help when seeking clarification should positively impact on satisfaction within roles and overall wellbeing.

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