

ACADEMIC IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF AI

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ACADEMIC IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF AI

Higher Education and the
Digital Revolution

BY

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INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT

The landscape of higher education (HE) is changing. Over the last decade, almost every HE institution has started on the journey of digital transformation, which has created an identity crisis for academic staff. The speed and scope of digital transformation in the HE sector have increased due to the rapid developments in generative artificial intelligence (AI). Thus, anxiety over academic identity has heightened regarding how these developments will impact their academic freedoms, integrity, and role as a teacher. In this introductory chapter, the progress of digital transformation in HE will be outlined with an explanation of how AI has proliferated and increased its influence over this change. The chapter will also identify the identity crisis for academics during this period, the shifting of academic roles in a digital era, with the concerns of adapt or die, before outlining the purpose and framing the scope of the book.

Keywords: Higher education; artificial intelligence; academic identity; crisis; generative; education sector

The landscape of HE is changing. Over the last decade, almost every HE institution has started on the journey of digital transformation, which has created an identity crisis for academic staff. Anxiety over academic identity has heightened regarding how these developments will impact their academic freedoms, integrity, and role as a teacher. The speed and scope of digital transformation in the sector have increased due to the rapid developments in generative AI. Many books have been written about the rise of AI in education and how it will either make a positive contribution to the development of HE or destroy the very soul of teaching, learning, and assessment. No book has yet explored the impact on the identity of an academic, how lecturers and

educators in the HE sector see themselves, and how AI is poised to change this perception of self and how others see academics. Carrying on the great work of [Hall \(1996\)](#), [Archer \(2003\)](#), and [Mulcahy \(2006\)](#) regarding identity and the work of [Giddens \(1991\)](#), [Avis \(1999\)](#), and [Ball \(2003\)](#) regarding academic professional identity, this book proposes to add a contemporary lens of the impact on academic identity due to the developments of AI.

This book is for academics contemplating their place within the rapidly changing environment of HE, managers who wish to support their staff to survive and thrive in an era of AI and for digital education teams, who support academics, to gain an understanding of the complexities of the academic role and the impact digital transformation has on their identity. The book is also useful for developers who wish to gain an understanding of conflicts taking place within HE and why there may be some resistance to change and the adoption of new technologies. And, the book can also help trainee educators to gain critical insight into the opportunities and threats of digital and offer research evidence for those academics reflecting on the professional standards expected in HE. The book aims to highlight a crisis in the identity of academics provoked by the rise of AI. By academics, I mean those who teach and research in HE. However, at times in this book, I also use the words teachers and educators; in this context, those terms mean the same as academics. The world of HE and AI is vast and not all of the stories that could be told have made it into this book and, like generative AI, this book does have a cut-off date for its information, and nothing after the 31 July 2024 is included. I have chosen to focus on the important factors that impact academic identity in HE and how the developments in AI have impacted that identity. I have curated current research, activities, and explorations of AI along with my doctoral research into academic identity. I have been teaching in HE for over 25 years, and through much of that time, I have supported staff in developing their skills in digital education technology. I started out as a software engineer when I left university, which gave me knowledge of how systems work and the confidence to try out new technologies without any fear of pressing the buttons. I then gravitated towards teaching and spent several years as a lecturer in computer science alongside a role as a technology-enhanced learning champion. I have taught at all levels of education, from primary through to HE. While teaching, I discovered that I had a passion for exploring how people learn, and I eventually moved into teacher training to pass on advice, ideas, and experience to the next generation of teachers. Throughout my career, I have extensively used digital technologies to support learning, and during the last 15 years, I have developed a range of digital learning technologies and facilitated all of my teaching through a blend of online and face-to-face sessions. In 2018, I took the leap from teaching to an administration role, developing

online courses for a Russell Group university in the UK. At the same time, I worked with a partner to start up a business facilitating online professional development courses for academic staff in universities worldwide, including Dubai, India, the USA, and Qatar. I have now settled at the University of Bradford in the UK to lead their digital learning development team and the university's digital education strategy. I chair the university's Artificial Intelligence Special Interest Group and collaborate with internal networks and external partners to explore the opportunities offered by AI while ensuring that staff are trained and knowledgeable on the ethics, impact, and critiques of this developing technology. I am not an expert on programming AI, though I have used my programming experience to experiment with natural language processing and large language models. Nor am I an expert in data analytics, though my role requires managing data analytic teams. However, I have decades of experience utilising digital technologies to support teaching, learning, and assessment, and I have used AI for a decade to support the automation of administrative functions, task-specific assignments in the assessment of learning, and pattern matching in thematic textual analysis. I have also spent the last five years working with national and international organisations on their approaches to using AI in education. Throughout this time, I could not escape the discoveries I made during my doctoral studies regarding the impact of educational transformation on academic identity. My research initially started by exploring how changes to learning spaces impact what it means to be an academic before morphing to examine the impact of digital transformation on academic identity. With the rapid emergence and implementation of AI, particularly generative AI, my thoughts once again returned to how this can impact the academic's sense of self.

In Chapter 1, the concept of identity is complex and depends on various perspectives including social, outsider, and self. After defining the contextual scope of identity for this book, this chapter examines what academic identity means. This is framed by examining the historical context, traditional academic identities, and the challenges these identities face in the modern university. The chapter begins by outlining the timeline of HE and the development of modern universities, followed by an examination of the academic identity that includes teaching, research, and administration. These three pillars have long been considered the core components of an academic's identity. However, the chapter delves into the nuanced relationships between these elements and their impact on an academic's sense of self and role within the university. As the chapter progresses, it will explain how the scale of expectations on academics in the current HE sector and the mass digital transformation undertaken by all universities have impacted academic identities. Increased student enrolments, diversification, and technological advancements have redefined

how knowledge is created and disseminated. These are key factors that have altered the traditional identity. These challenges raise profound questions about how academics perceive their roles and the broader implications for HE. In addition, many academics have taught in the sector for decades, and some new academics are entering the sector with a traditional view of the identity of an academic. In conclusion, this chapter articulates the complex layers of academic identity, its theoretical underpinnings, and its challenges in the modern HE sector. The discourse in the chapter will demonstrate that the concept of academic identity is evolving, requiring critical re-evaluation and adaptation to meet the needs of the ever-changing landscape of HE. Contemporary research has shown that the rapid development and release of generative AI has academics considering their place and whether they should trust and adapt to the use of AI or resist it. This examination is not only relevant to academics themselves but also to educational institutions, policymakers, and society at large, as it reflects the ongoing transformation of knowledge, pedagogy, and the core principles of HE.

Integrating AI into HE represents a transformative shift in how academic institutions operate and engage with students. Chapter 2 explores the multifaceted impact of AI on HE, touching upon critical themes that encapsulate this transformation. First, the chapter outlines the developments of AI in education. It discusses how adaptive learning systems make use of AI to personalise educational content to individual students and optimise their learning experiences. The discourse also explores AI-driven assessment tools that provide educators with data-driven insights into student performance, offering a more personalised and efficient approach to grading and feedback. Second, the chapter extends the discussion to AI in teacher administration, demonstrating how AI technologies streamline administrative tasks in HE. The text examines the use of AI for enrolment and registration processes, reducing bottlenecks and enhancing efficiency, and AI's role in student support services, where AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants offer timely and personalised guidance to students, improving their overall experience. The chapter starts by outlining the issues of training AI, the complex issues of data privacy, and an emphasis on the importance of responsible data handling and security in an educational context. The chapter then concludes by critically examining ethical and practical considerations in integrating AI. Additionally, it discusses the challenges related to bias and fairness, addressing concerns surrounding algorithmic decision-making and its potential impacts on marginalised student populations. This chapter comprehensively explores the ever-evolving landscape of AI in academia, highlighting its potential benefits, challenges, and the imperative need for responsible and ethical AI deployment in HE.

In Chapter 3, the previous chapters on academic identity and the rise of AI in HE are brought together to draw out the transformative influence of AI on various facets of academia. The chapter explores the profound shifts in the roles of educators, researchers, and academic administrators in a rapidly evolving digital landscape by exploring the opportunities for an AI-powered pedagogy, the use of AI as a research tool, and streamlining administrative tasks using AI. The chapter starts with an examination of the opportunities for an AI-powered pedagogy. The text will examine AI pedagogical approaches through personalised learning, adaptive feedback, and intelligent content delivery and the potential of AI to enhance the learning experience for diverse student needs and increase student engagement. An argument will develop on the role of the human instructor by stating that while AI could play a significant role in the classroom, it does not replace the essential human touch. This section discusses how AI is continuing the educator evolution from transmitters of knowledge to facilitators, mentors, and guides, fostering critical thinking and creativity in students. The chapter will then explore the expanding applications of AI in research, from data analysis to hypothesis generation. AI's contribution to scientific discovery, data-driven insights, and computational power is discussed in detail, alongside discussions of the use of AI by staff and students for teaching and learning. The chapter will also address the ethical considerations and challenges related to AI-powered research, including issues of bias, data privacy, the responsible use of AI tools, and whether AI can be referenced as a co-author. The chapter concludes with the highlights of how AI could transform administrative tasks by automating assessment, improving feedback, creating lesson material, and enhancing decision-making processes through data analysis. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of AI on academic roles, shedding light on the opportunities and challenges that this technological revolution presents in the realm of education and research.

Chapter 4 delves into the dynamic landscape of AI integration within the HE sector through a series of compelling examples of its use. Divided into two main themes, the chapter explores the innovative strides universities have made in adopting AI and the challenges that universities have encountered as they have attempted to harness its power for the benefit of both students and academics. In the first part of the chapter, there will be an exploration of the pioneering initiatives undertaken by academic institutions, showcasing examples illustrating innovations in teaching and learning. From AI-driven personalised learning platforms to cutting-edge digital resources, these examples underscore the transformative potential of AI in enhancing educational experiences. Furthermore, the chapter examines how universities leverage AI to drive groundbreaking research. It explores the AI technologies used to advance

scientific inquiry, streamline data analysis, and empower researchers in various disciplines. In the second part of the chapter, the focus will shift to the challenges and setbacks that universities have encountered along their AI adoption journey. Drawing from real-world experiences, the examples provide insights into the complexities and pitfalls of AI implementation in academia. Readers will gain valuable lessons from the institutions' encounters with challenges, shedding light on the importance of ethical considerations, data privacy, and the need for a thoughtful approach to AI integration. Through these examples, this chapter offers a comprehensive overview of how universities are taking the lead in AI adoption and the valuable lessons they have learned from their successes and setbacks. It provides a roadmap for educational institutions seeking to navigate the rapidly evolving AI landscape, ultimately promoting the continued advancement of teaching, learning, and research in the HE domain.

Chapter 5 examines the identity crisis among HE academics as the landscape of HE is experiencing a profound transformation in the digital era, and this is exacerbated by the rise of AI. This chapter explores the identity crisis gripping HE academics, delving into the complexities of their relationship with AI and the challenges they face while adapting to the digital revolution. The first part of the chapter will examine the 'resistance to AI,' uncovering the deep-rooted apprehensions among academics. Fear of job displacement looms large, leading to profound anxieties about the future. Simultaneously, scepticism about AI's effectiveness and trust issues emerge, casting doubt on its role in education. Second, the chapter will explore how academics adapt to the Digital Era, describing academics' strategies when coping with this identity crisis. As academic professionals are encouraged to embrace professional development and remain relevant, this section also emphasises the need to view AI as a tool rather than a threat, requiring academics to learn to foster a more collaborative environment between humans and machines. Finally, the chapter will discuss balancing tradition and innovation, addressing the challenge of maintaining core academic values while incorporating AI responsibly. Academics are encouraged to strike a delicate balance between traditional methods and innovative AI-driven approaches to education while retaining the importance of preserving academic integrity and ethics. Chapter 5 serves as a critical exploration of the evolving identity of HE academics in a world where AI and the digital era are redefining the educational landscape. Addressing these themes provides valuable insights for educators, institutions, and policymakers seeking to navigate the ever-changing terrain of HE in the 21st century.

In the ever-evolving landscape of HE, the need for ethical considerations has become paramount, and Chapter 6 outlines the core themes of AI ethics and the role the academic should play in understanding and engaging with these. The chapter highlights the fundamental significance of ethics in academia by

examining the ethical principles that guide educational institutions and the role of values, integrity, and social responsibility in shaping the future of HE. The chapter starts with an outline of the ethical dilemmas surrounding AI in HE. The discussion will review the concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the consequences of AI-driven decision-making, shedding light on the imperative need for ethical AI practices within the academic sphere. The chapter will then explore formulating and implementing codes of conduct as a foundational element in promoting ethical AI in HE. Discussing the development of ethical guidelines for staff and students, it addresses how academic institutions can create a framework for responsible AI deployment and ensure that the educational mission aligns with ethical principles. In the final part of the chapter, the critical role of oversight and accountability mechanisms in safeguarding ethical AI practices will be discussed. The need for robust monitoring, transparency, and accountability systems to mitigate risks and challenges associated with AI technologies within HE and the role the academic could play in this will be emphasised. A reflection on the impact of any monitoring or accountability tasks by the academic on their identity will also be considered. This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of ethical considerations in HE, offering insights into the ethical underpinnings of academia and the indispensable need for responsible AI integration to shape a more ethical future for HE institutions.

Chapter 7 acknowledges that the rapid development of AI in academia is undeniable on the rise. There is a clear evidence that students are making use of AI to support their studies, and some HE institutions are utilising AI to improve the student journey and create efficiencies in administration tasks. This chapter aims to provide an insight into the key themes that will shape the future of HE academics with the development of AI tools for administration, teaching, learning, and assessment. The chapter begins by scrutinising AI's current and projected role in academia. It examines how AI has already infiltrated classrooms, research, and administrative tasks, augmenting human capabilities and revolutionising the academic landscape. The discussion will explore how AI streamlines administrative processes, enhances personalised learning, and enables innovative research. Utilising the previously discussed examples of AI in HE and synthesis of the use of AI in the commercial sector, the chapter offers an analysis of the potential advancements AI brings to the world of HE academics, such as improved student experiences, data-driven decision-making, and enhanced research capabilities. The text will also address the challenges, including ethical considerations, job displacement concerns, and the need for faculty to adapt to this evolving ecosystem. As AI reshapes the role of HE academics, the chapter emphasises the need for lifelong learning and adaptability. I discuss how faculty and institutions can empower themselves to

harness AI's potential through continuous skill development, embracing new pedagogical approaches, and staying current in a dynamic educational environment. The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of cultivating a dynamic academic identity. It explores how academics can maintain their relevance and distinctiveness in a world increasingly influenced by AI, offering strategies to blend AI's capabilities with human expertise, fostering innovation, and evolving their roles. This book chapter offers a thought-provoking and informative analysis of the evolving landscape of HE academics in an AI-dominated world, providing insights, trends, and strategies to navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The book concludes in Chapter 8 with a recap of the key points, explaining how the landscape of HE is altering through digital transformation. Alongside this, academic identity is constantly changing and will continue to do so. We must acknowledge that the speed and scope of digital transformation in the HE sector have increased due to the rapid developments in generative AI, which has created an identity crisis for academic staff. However, this is not all bad, as there is the potential for AI to remove some of the administrative burden that has negatively impacted the role of the academic over the last few decades. I will argue in the conclusion that we should focus on the importance of a human-centred approach to AI in HE, making the academics the subject matter experts guiding students and researchers through the maze of information, misinformation, and big data, and using AI as a tool to enhance this identity.

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