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Research article

The Living CV project: a model of collaborative learning in third space

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Abstract

The Living CV project is a collaborative initiative launched at a south coast university in the UK, which aims to help students develop their employability skills and evidence their learning outcomes. The project is delivered university-wide from a third space hub, where people from different disciplines and backgrounds come together to work on shared goals. It has therefore provided a way for colleagues across the university to collaborate within third space. In this study we focus on the role of the departmental Living CV Champions and their pivotal role in driving forward this third space project. These champions are situated across the university – in academic departments, in the university's central Learning and Teaching service and in its career service – but all are working across boundaries and drawing collaborators into the third space of the project. We suggest that the Living CV Champions are also collaboration champions for the institution, in the

way in which they support the development of staff networks and knowledge sharing, and therefore the collaborative capital of the institution as a whole. We find that third space projects such as the Living CV can contribute to the development of collaborative capital, act as a gateway for staff to wider communities of practice and build confidence for those engaged in them. In this case study we illustrate one route to achieving this, through a champions model which breaks down traditional academic silos and encourages wider collaboration.

Keywords collaboration; employability; social capital; collaborative capital

Introduction

Central to higher education is the recognition that students need to be prepared for an unknown and, to some extent, unknowable working life beyond university (Römgens et al., 2020). Coupled with the expectation that a degree brings with it a measurable 'positive outcome' for each student (OfS, 2022: 108), it is ever more important that students can recognise and articulate the knowledge, skills and experiences they have gained from their courses (Carmona et al., 2020; Muñiz and Eimerbrink, 2018). However, this is not always a straightforward task, and students often struggle to express accurately to prospective employers the abilities they might bring to a role, and indeed may fail to realise that they possess those abilities because of their studies (Tomasson Goodwin et al., 2019). The Living CV was initially introduced in one programme area, and it has since been extended across the institution to address this gap between knowledge and practice, as students struggled to understand how the learning they had undertaken on their course translated into valued skills in the workplace. However, this article is not about the Living CV as such. Instead, we focus on and explore its role as a catalyst for third space collaboration, and how this collaboration has benefited the staff involved and the students.

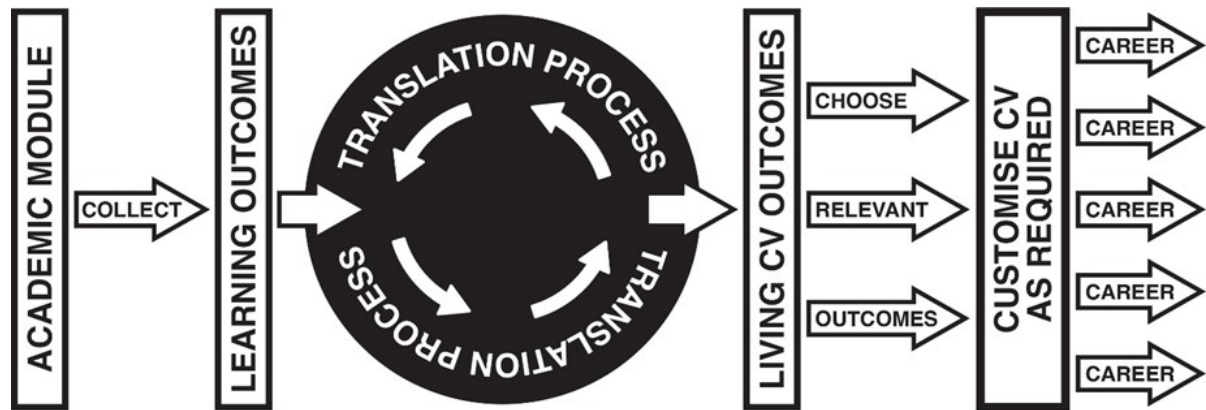
The Living CV reconfigures the formalised language of the module learning outcomes into CV-ready outputs for the benefit of both the students in seeing the value of what they are learning and the employers who receive those CVs (Dibben and Morley, 2019). Students collect these as incidences of learning throughout their studies and, eventually, choose and customise them to create a winning CV (the process is explained in full in Dibben and Morley, 2019). This not only allows them to keep track of their growing portfolio of knowledge and experiences as they progress with their studies; it also enables them to discover their options, shape their plans and market themselves (Carmona et al., 2020; Muñiz and Eimerbrink, 2018), offering learning gain to students. The Living CV therefore reflects a shift in mindset towards personal branding and self-promotion, enabling students to make use of more effective ways to stand out in competitive job markets. In contrast to other employability tools that focus on the production of static CVs, the Living CV follows a dynamic model (see Figure 1) that allows students to translate their learning into skills, experiences and achievements in real time, linking academic language with professional terminologies. It is also unique in the sense that it actively involves educators in what may traditionally be seen as an employability activity owned and delivered by professional service units. This allows educators to highlight the distinctive employability value of what they teach across the curriculum (Daubney, 2022).

Despite this, the wider roll-out has had its tensions. Although the Living CV is geared towards student employability, which is an institutional priority, it involves a shift in the learning and teaching culture of the university, needing the joint ownership of academic and employability staff. However, and characteristically of change, there has been resistance. Where it is championed and implemented, there are discernible benefits, but at the cost of those individuals' time and energy. Institutional support has not translated into a top-down, mandated and resourced position. Instead, collaboration in third space has largely driven it, with third space defined by and through the activities of '*unbounded and blended professionals*, as well as by academic staff undertaking project-oriented activities' (Whitchurch, 2008: 386; emphasis in the original). We follow Whitchurch (2008) in her established use of the term 'third space' to denote this blended arena between academic and professional, rather than *the* third space, to acknowledge the multiple possibilities of third spaces, yet without losing sight of our own specific context

(Buckley and Syska, 2023). For us, this involved drawing together the careers service and teaching staff, who all needed to be engaged in the overall progress towards this shared goal. These key members of staff are known as the Living CV Champions, working in third space outside of their usual roles to facilitate this initiative.

In this study, we investigate how and to what extent individuals assuming a Champion role in a third space project steer a wider institutional collaborative culture and achieve a sense of personal development.

Figure 1. The Living CV process



Literature review

Higher education is no longer defined by clear boundaries between academic and professional domains. Instead, we increasingly witness a fluid convergence of activities, fuelled by demands for knowledge exchange, public engagement and student support. This convergence has given rise to third space, which is a liminal zone where traditional roles blur and new identities emerge (Grant, 2021; McIntosh and Nutt, 2022; Whitchurch, 2008, 2013).

Tracing the evolution of the concept, Whitchurch (2008) first depicts third space as a terrain beyond the traditional binary of academic and professional, where we find 'blended professionals' (Whitchurch, 2008) and 'mixed portfolios' (Parkes et al., 2014), defying conventional categorisations and challenging assumptions about who holds knowledge and expertise (Sennett, 2004). This fluidity is driven by external pressures such as socio-economic expectations, linking degree programmes to employability (Callender and Scott, 2013) and increasing priority accorded to knowledge exchange (Kerridge et al., 2023; Veles, 2023) and online learning (Sapir, 2020; White et al., 2021). As a result, established notions of non-academic or support staff become contested (Bossu et al., 2018; Sebalj et al., 2012; Szekeres, 2011; Taylor, 2018), paving the way for integrated teams where academic and professional colleagues work side by side (Locke et al., 2016; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2017).

Navigating third space is not without its challenges. Individuals grapple with identity ambiguity, often caught between expectations held by different stakeholders (Beckingham, 2022). Yet, despite these hurdles, third space offers exciting opportunities. Interdisciplinary collaboration flourishes, fostering innovation and engagement with diverse communities (Whitchurch, 2018). New roles emerge, addressing contemporary needs such as widening participation and employability (Veles, 2023); higher education providers spend considerable efforts to design activities, pedagogies and learning spaces to allow their students to graduate with the attributes and skills needed to succeed in their future careers (Hill et al., 2016). This can be supported by social capital, which in the context of universities refers to the networks of relationships, trust and reciprocity that exist between individuals and groups. Social capital is widely acknowledged as an indispensable component of inter-organisational relationships (Gölgeci and Kuivalainen, 2020). It consists of the social networks, patterns, expectations and beliefs that promote interactive collaboration and coordination for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1993).

In this article, we explore the synergy between third space and the Living CV as a bridge between the theoretical knowledge students gain at universities and the work they aspire to undertake (Brook and Corbridge, 2016). The Living CV provides a tool for students to navigate this evolving landscape,

actively constructing their own employability narratives by curating learning experiences from across the academic and professional spectrum while benefiting from a breadth of academic and professional knowledge via academic teams and their Living CV Champions. However, integrating the process with existing academic frameworks requires careful planning and resource allocation. Moreover, traditional career development models may need to be re-evaluated to accommodate the diverse pathways and skill sets fostered in third space to ensure that collaborative initiatives such as the Living CV are successful. Some academics and professional services staff might express uncertainty about this new approach, necessitating open communication and ongoing dialogue to ensure its successful implementation.

For students, the Living CV has the potential to bridge the gap between academic qualifications and employability skills, empowering them to take ownership of their career development, communicate their unique value propositions to employers and ultimately thrive in the evolving landscape of higher education. For staff, the subject of this study, it represents an opportunity to build collaborative capital in the role of Living CV Champion, which may then translate and transfer to other third space activities (Veles et al., 2018).

Methodology

Context

Informed by the idea of collaborative capital as working together towards shared outcomes, this study takes an inductive approach towards exploring the experience of the Living CV Champions in fulfilling this third space role. The study site is Southampton Solent University, a university on the south coast of the UK, which has a firm orientation towards widening participation, social justice and real-world learning, and which offers a broad portfolio of practical courses, with many of its teaching staff maintaining strong industry connections.

An exploratory study (Dibben and Morley, 2019) of 17 final-year Fashion Photography undergraduate students was conducted in 2016, which found a link between students' clear understanding of their learning outcomes and an improvement in self-confidence, self-efficacy and satisfaction with their course. In 2019, the Living CV project was born out of this finding and launched to over 300 students across 10 courses in Southampton Solent University's Fashion Department. In 2022, the initiative was rolled out across the entire institution, to over 150 undergraduate courses and over 8,800 students. The roll-out was led by Living CV Champions operating in third space who, following application to the Head of Learning and Teaching, were selected by a panel of Heads of Department and the Vice-President of Education from the Students' Union.

A representative from the careers service was also included as a Champion, as the Living CV was an employability-focused initiative, and therefore the service needed to be embedded at the heart of the roll-out to coordinate support for staff and students. Later, an Employability and Enterprise Curriculum Coordinator was appointed to the central Learning and Teaching service, with the remit of liaising between the careers service and the academic community to ensure that the Living CV was embedded in the curriculum. Champions have been on a rolling tenure, with some stepping down after a period of professional development (where required as a case study for Advance HE Senior Fellowship or promotion). The group of Champions have a formal lead, appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, to oversee the roll-out over a three-year tenure. This individual is also one of the authors of this article.

The research team therefore involves two members of the Learning and Teaching service and an academic colleague who provides leadership and coordination for the Champions. From these vantage points, we wanted to understand the experiences of all those who had been responsible for driving the implementation of the Living CV across Southampton Solent University, particularly how they managed their own and others' expectations in relation to their roles, its perceived contribution to their professional development and any further opportunities that it might have opened for them.

Theoretical approach

As the goal of the study was to explore the experience of the role of Living CV Champion and its impact on those colleagues' personal and professional development, we adopted an inductive and qualitative approach. Our aim was to explore and understand the Champions' experiences of the role and the collaborations it generated, along with student perspectives on the Living CV project. As experiences,

and therefore reality, are not objective, but culturally and ideologically informed and socially constructed, an interpretivist approach was considered the most suitable (Sandberg, 2005).

Methods: data collection

Following Braun and Clarke (2006), we conducted interviews to generate deep and rich data. We undertook purposive sampling to understand this particular cultural domain (Tongco, 2007). To do so, we invited all current Champions (four members of teaching staff, the representative from the careers service and the Employability and Enterprise Curriculum Coordinator) to a semi-structured interview with one of the three researchers, taking care that direct reports were not interviewed by managers. All six Champions chose to participate; interviews took place online using Microsoft Teams, and a recording was made for the purposes of transcription.

Concurrently with staff interviews, a qualitative survey explored the perspectives of 61 students on the impact of the Living CV project on their confidence and their understanding of their learning gain. Administered in April 2024, one year after the programme implementation, the survey comprised four questions assessing student perceptions of project execution, reach, understanding and overall learning impact.

The research project met the criteria laid out by Southampton Solent University's Ethics Policy and Procedures, and ethical approval was granted.

Methods: data analysis

The six staff interview transcriptions were subjected to an inductive thematic analysis following the structured process laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006); data were coded by the three researchers separately, with key themes identified, and then compared and agreed. Our identification of themes was guided by our research aims to examine the benefits of collaboration for the individual, the benefits or otherwise of third space working for collaboration, and how collaborations might be supported. Once the themes had been agreed, we then undertook several more passes through the data to ensure that these themes were substantiated across the whole set of transcripts. In total, four themes were derived from the data, outlined below. Following this phase of data analysis, the student survey data were read, interpreted and coded according to these four themes using the same process.

Findings

Four themes emerged from the narratives: collaborative and social capital; integration for new staff; professional development and confidence; and institutional commitment. Each of these addresses a different facet of the Champions' role and was common to all interview participants regardless of their university role. The relationships between the findings are represented in Figure 2.

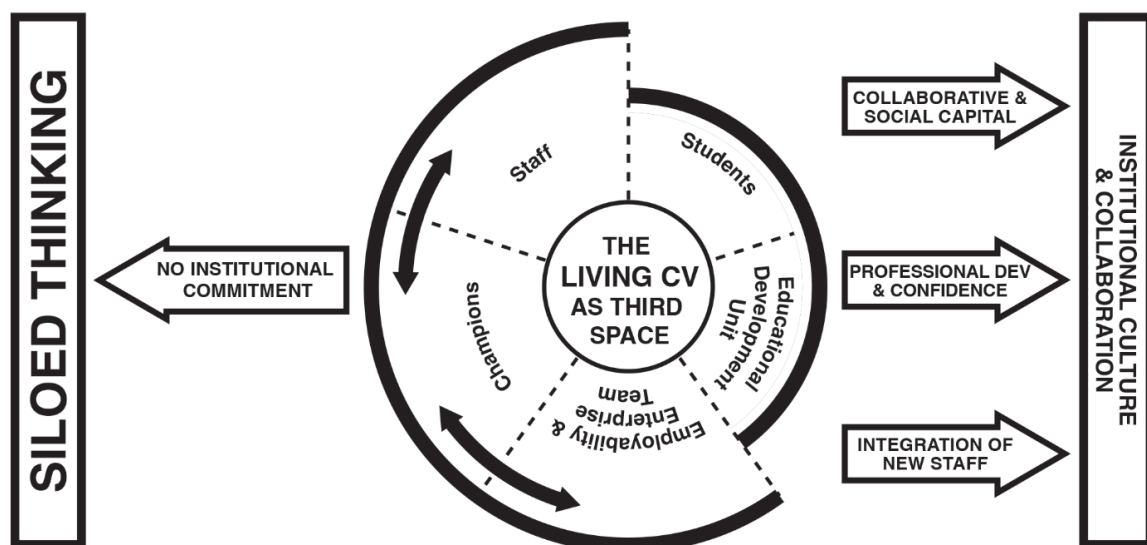
A catalyst for collaborative and social capital

The Living CV project provides a case study in how collaborative capital can be effectively nurtured within third space, yielding benefits for the initiative, the individuals involved and the institution: 'Different expertise, different skills, different knowledge. You are sharing collective knowledge so you're maximising overall impact and everybody benefits' (Participant 1). By bringing together 'all the different services' (Participant 3), the project dismantles traditional academic silos and fosters more formal interactions between diverse departments and faculties. Participant 4 also noted: 'If you sit in a little silo and just work all by yourself, it is limited with what can be achieved. But if you get others involved, it's reflective theory on a much bigger scale.' This is in line with Whitchurch's (2008) concept of third space as a terrain where blended professionals and mixed portfolios challenge conventional categorisations. The success of the project in this area underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and engagement with diverse communities, as discussed by Whitchurch (2018).

The cross-pollination of expertise and perspectives, exemplified by 'different skills ... sharing collective knowledge' (Participant 4), creates a more interconnected and collaborative environment, strengthening social capital beyond individual disciplines and fostering understanding across the university landscape. Establishing a high level of social coherence is also a crucial factor in pursuing

collective goals based on mutual trust (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993). By fostering trust, sharing knowledge and embracing diverse perspectives, the findings suggest the potential of collaborative practices to enhance individual growth, project impact and ultimately institutional change. Thus, third space collaboration not only benefits the project, and the individuals involved, but also contributes to the broader institutional culture, aligning with the literature on the role of social capital in inter-organisational relationships (Gölgeci and Kuivalainen, 2020). The emergence of a central figure such as the Living CV Champion, readily available to assist colleagues, demonstrates the development of trust and mutual support, as Participant 2 found: 'Working with the Champions in this third space allowed me to develop in my role and become a bridge across the institution.' This spirit of knowledge sharing and collaboration, evident in the willingness to 'report on how it is going on ... share our ideas and then also implement the ones that are functional' (Participant 4) fosters a sense of reciprocity within the project and strengthens social capital bonds by encouraging collective action and shared success. This third space project, therefore, has acted as a bridge, not only between disciplines, but also between university staff, and it has provided a catalyst for future collaborations.

Figure 2. Development of an institutional culture of collaboration in third space and challenging siloed thinking



These outcomes were also reflected in the student survey, with responses indicating that students appreciated the role-modelling they saw in staff and the sense of community that the project engendered: 'Seeing academics and careers staff collaborate effectively sets a great example for how important teamwork is – not just in education but also in the workplace' (Student 1). The result was, as Tomlinson (2017) indicated in his study, that students felt 'reassured' that 'there's a network of people invested in my success' (Student 2). For staff, the Living CV project also cultivated a sense of shared identity and belonging, as Participant 3 emphasises: 'Meeting people constantly' and learning from 'good work practice' creates a vibrant community within the project, where individuals feel part of something bigger than themselves. This reinforces the individual's social capital by supporting personal and professional connections that transcend roles and disciplines.

A mechanism for integrating new staff in the organisation

Our second finding revolves around the integration of new staff into the organisation, highlighting the role of third space in fostering communication with wider communities within institutions. Thus, the Living CV project acted as a welcoming 'bridge across the institution' (Participant 2), guiding newcomers through the intricacies of the university while offering space for a sense of belonging. For new staff, it is often not just about meeting colleagues; it is also about getting 'to grips with the culture of the institution and [meeting] so many different people' (Participant 2). Learning the inner workings of other

departments promotes understanding and collaboration, allowing newcomers to share their expertise and to contribute to a productive collective effort. This journey, as Participant 3 emphasises, is more than just the end goal; it is about helping 'new team members to quickly integrate' into 'the [university] family', and not just owning one's part in the project, but also establishing a community and a shared world view within which to build a professional identity based on interactions (Ryttberg and Geschwind, 2019). We suggest that the Champions model supports a sense of belonging and increased confidence among individuals acting as Champions in third space (Billot and King, 2017). This is particularly significant for roles without a clear template, such as that of the Living CV Champion, where individuals must navigate the intricacies of the university while contributing to a productive collective effort (Ryttberg and Geschwind, 2019).

Beyond professional ties, the project brought about unexpected friendships. Working closely with colleagues outside one's immediate circle built bonds that might not have otherwise formed, developing personal connections that become the bedrock of a lasting support network: 'You become quite close to people when you work with them in this way that maybe you wouldn't have met ... this in itself is a great way for new colleagues to establish their own networks' (Participant 3). This social integration reinforces the role of the project as a gateway, not just to the institution but also to a thriving community within it, the 'networks and norms' providing 'potentially better-informed insight and understanding' to all participants (Tomlinson, 2017: 342). Indeed, Participant 6 recognised the potential of the Living CV project to act as a 'space to foster' better collaborations.

By embracing collaboration and shared learning, universities can transform the staff induction process from a solitary trek through a maze into a collective journey towards becoming valued members of a vibrant academic community. Socialisation for new starters, especially when 'aligned with mechanisms for individual proactivity' (Billot and King, 2017: 619), is crucial in supporting a sense of belonging and increased confidence. This blueprint for integration, exemplified by the Living CV project, offers a powerful model for other institutions seeking to create welcoming and supportive environments for newcomers.

Enabler of professional development and confidence building

The impact of the Living CV project on professional development and confidence building is another finding. Stepping outside familiar roles, Champions have embraced leadership opportunities, leading initiatives, driving collaborations and gaining invaluable experience in navigating partnerships and owning their endeavours. This is consistent with the literature on the importance of leadership and proactivity in supporting professional growth (Locke et al., 2016; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2017), translating into confidence building and refined leadership skills that extend beyond the boundaries of the project:

Being a Champion has given me the confidence to lead and take ownership, and on the back of this I have driven other educational collaborations both at this university and in the community. I would never have done that before working in this cross-department collaboration. (Participant 3)

The cross-departmental nature of the project has ignited a diverse exchange of knowledge and expertise. Participant 2 noted that 'it's added another layer of knowledge of ways of working', honed communication skills and reduced initial anxieties, building valuable connections while gaining confidence in tackling cross-functional activities. The opportunities for skill building and network expansion empowered individuals to approach colleagues from different spheres with newfound confidence. This is crucial for navigating the contemporary academic environment, where roles are increasingly contested and professional identities are in flux (Smith et al., 2021; Veles et al., 2023). It also highlights the university's role in creating institutional conditions that enable identity construction and the socialisation of those assuming roles in third space initiatives (Behari-Leak and le Roux, 2018).

Within this safe space, participants have tested diverse leadership styles and received vital feedback from their peers, and also from students. They showcase their abilities to influence colleagues, work collaboratively and navigate team dynamics. This experimentation allows them to 'try new things in leadership, and to demonstrate leadership and planning, trying to influence people' (Participant 6), alongside other skills:

I think my communication has improved, and also I'm more confident in executing cross-department activities because I feel comfortable with discussing things, taking the complaints from our fellow academics and dealing with it. (Participant 4)

Furthermore, in a project explicitly designed to support students in their employability skills, its positive impact on their professional development was attested by Student 3: 'I feel like the work I've been undertaking in the classroom has real impact on my career readiness.' The students also connected this development to their confidence, with one student feeling that it 'empowers me to take ownership of my skills and knowledge' (Student 4).

However, navigating third space presents distinct challenges. Competing workloads and resource limitations mean striking a balance between project participation and existing responsibilities. Clear communication and integrating project involvement into job descriptions could address these concerns. Without a centrally led approach aligning such projects to an institution's values and objectives, there may be hesitancy and barriers to success.

Institutional commitment

The initiative found pockets of positive feedback, both from colleagues seeking greater support in integrating the Living CV and from external organisations impressed by its impact on students' employability skills. Participants reported that some colleagues embraced the initiative readily, showcasing awareness and cooperation:

They were quite receptive and there was some replies that they would actually like more support ... and it's actually been quite a good initiative, which was really good to see. (Participant 6)

However, while the Living CV project boasts significant successes in fostering professional growth and community, securing buy-in from all stakeholders presented its own set of challenges (Dewhurst, 2022). Whitchurch and Law (2010) allude to the complexity of third space as an emergent space on its own merits, and the 'challenges faced by individuals in their relationships with their colleagues and institutions, and in their careers, and ways in which they manage these'. Some remained hesitant, with participants reporting that they received lukewarm responses from their colleagues regarding the use of the Living CV in practice. Initial enthusiasm waned over time, as one participant admits. The completion of initial project goals and successful roll-outs led to decreased proactivity, especially if further engagement involved chasing individuals to participate:

I enjoyed it a lot towards the start because I was very enthusiastic. And I was kind of hoping that everybody else would be enthusiastic, which they were. I feel like now I've kind of trailed off a little bit where I'm maybe less proactive because the project that I aimed to do I've now completed, so I demonstrated the roll-out. (Participant 6)

Participants reported that the waning enthusiasm for the role was rooted in their struggle to come to grips with the scope of the additional third space activity within their formal job roles (Clark, 2021). Some considered these activities to be 'additional' and not part of their job, which eventually inhibited their motivation to invest more time and resources in the initiative:

It's not really in the scope of my current role as a lecturer to put that much time into it. Whereas I think if it was, I would probably be booking meetings with course leaders or suggesting workshops or running workshops. (Participant 5)

When things become kind of challenging, it's difficult to know how much time should be dedicated and how. (Participant 6)

These contrasting responses highlight the diverse levels of commitment from relevant stakeholders such as module leaders, course leaders and tutors. One participant attributed their personal struggle to gain feedback from other stakeholders to the latter's workloads and potential resistance to collaboration, echoing challenges identified in other university contexts (Rubens et al., 2017). It was noted that competing priorities can easily displace collaborative initiatives and innovation as priorities. Additionally, individual resistance to change can be a significant hurdle, with established routines acting as a comfort zone against perceived disruption:

I have noticed ... challenges from academic workload ... it's never the best time. (Participant 5)

It's not really necessarily the other teams or not wanting to collaborate, it's really more down to resources and availability and time. (Participant 6)

Some people are hesitant to change, and I think change is kind of scary; and because people have done it in a certain way for a long time, they don't see the benefit of doing it another way. (Participant 5)

However, the project also unearthed valuable strategies for overcoming these challenges. One participant's experience underscores the power of showcasing the importance of a strong central lead, highlighting the need for clear direction and positive role modelling. This approach aligns with the literature on the need for clear direction and positive role modelling in fostering collaborative initiatives (Locke et al., 2016; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2017). Demonstrating that the Living CV is an institutional priority, and framing it as collaborative opportunity, are likely to help quell anxieties and generate interest: 'Some staff just need to hear it is a priority, and then they get involved' (Participant 3).

Discussion

This study provides insights into the dynamics of third space within higher education institutions. Designed to investigate how individuals assuming a Champion role in a third space project steer a wider institutional collaborative culture and achieve a strong sense of personal development, the study identifies four key findings. We find that involvement in third space can propel collaborative cultures and personal development by driving the development of social and professional capital, function as a gateway into the organisation for new staff, and enable personal development and confidence building. We also identify that lack of institutional commitment can be a barrier for third space activity if it limits the buy-in from stakeholders (Dewhurst, 2022), highlighting the need for clear direction and positive role modelling in promoting collaboration (Locke et al., 2016; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2017).

Focusing on a Champions model, our findings suggest that the group of Living CV Champions traversed third space to bring academic and professional services colleagues together. Collaboration implies 'a working together with', in a relationship where all parties benefit (Fulford, 2016: 372); when that takes place in third space, almost by definition a heterogeneous space rich in ideas and perspectives, there is increased opportunity to explore novel ideas and experiences that can be integrated into a shared understanding of the common goal (Huang and Brown, 2019). This heterogeneity was mediated through 'collaborative capital' (Zhang and Sims, 2005), which refers to the effectiveness of individuals working together towards common objectives and results. This concept was exemplified by the Living CV Champions. These findings resonate with existing literature, suggesting that third space is a fluid, liminal zone where traditional roles blur and new identities emerge (Grant, 2021; McIntosh and Nutt, 2022; Whitchurch, 2008, 2013).

Our study contributes to the third space literature in the following ways. First, it links third space with the development of collaborative capital by dismantling traditional academic silos (Shine, 2010) and fostering more interaction between departments and faculties. Second, it emphasises third space as a gateway to wider communities within institutions (Behari-Leak and le Roux, 2018) by using a Champions model. Finally, it introduces the idea that third space projects can contribute to the development of confidence (Billot and King, 2017) in those engaged in them, which encourages collaboration with others in new contexts.

Furthermore, the findings also provide practical insights into challenges and strategies for navigating this evolving landscape. As higher education continues to adapt to external pressures and internal shifts, the cultivation of collaborative and social capital, the integration of new staff, professional development and the enhancement of personal confidence are likely to be key to institutional success. The journey of the project, with its successes and challenges, offers lessons for other institutions seeking to create more connected and collaborative academic environments.

Limitations in the project remain. Although rich data were derived from the Champions' interviews, it would have been useful to obtain similarly deep insights from the students, rather than using a survey. Although the survey gave us institutional reach, we had to compromise on depth; future research could connect staff and student perspectives more closely. We cannot yet evidence that wholesale culture shift

has taken place in the institution, nor that the Living CV as a reflective, employability-based mechanism has had the impact on student outcomes that it intends. Both these points are worthy of further investigation.

Conclusion

The Living CV project, via third space collaborations, has fostered individual growth and employability in the university's students. The opportunities afforded to those involved in rolling out the project have also led to increased confidence and enhanced professional development, and have begun a culture shift that has promoted a sense of community. Thus, colleagues across the university have had the opportunity to work outside, and beyond, their daily roles. The project suggests a desire within the institution for non-hierarchical collaborations that transcend departmental silos. Our participants thereby developed the social capital to carry into other projects and situations, and the Living CV project provided a platform for the cross-pollination of ideas.

It was not the project alone that produced these outcomes; the role of the Champion, as a navigator of third space and a focal point for collaboration, was vital. The Champions embodied the project, acting as a node in, and a prompt for, the networks developing within and around the project. In this way, they acted as collaboration champions, providing a channel for the flow of knowledge across the institution, and helping to break down silos between academic departments, and between professional services staff and academics. Within the ecosystem of third space, the role of the Champion nurtured collaboration by facilitating conversations, reimagining professional identities and challenging institutional constructs.

However, this shift towards a collaborative culture cannot exist solely within the confines of third space. It requires recognition from leadership that collaboration is a driver of institutional excellence. Time, resources and acknowledgement are needed to achieve this: time for staff to engage in these initiatives without sacrificing existing responsibilities; resources to support and sustain these endeavours; and, most importantly, acknowledgement, namely a recognition from leadership that the work undertaken in third space is not secondary or supplemental.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors declare that research ethics approval for this article was provided by Southampton Solent University's ethics board.

Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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