

# SEDA Spring Conference 2024



**Session Title:** The long and the short of it: dualities and dichotomies in HE today

**Session Type:** Workshop (45 mins)

**Main presenter(s):** Yvonne Hoggarth, Independent Educational Consultant

**Co presenter(s):** n/a

**Session Summary:** Pressure on HE leaders today, from inside and outside the organisation, can lead to a prioritisation of operational work over strategic, and a short-term focus on the known, over a long-term exploration of the new. This can inhibit organisational, and own, development. Drawing on published research, and using an innovative framework from the business domain, this interactive workshop will explore the dualities and tensions faced by professional service and academic staff face in HE today.

**Session Outline:** NB: This could be a research paper session (condensed) or workshop (extended).

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The higher education sector in the UK is evolving rapidly. Neoliberal reform, market deregulation and changes to funding mechanisms have led to an expansion in the number of students and providers, with universities operating in a globally competitive, marketised sector, and challenges and opportunities posed by rapid changes in the digital domain (HESA, 2023; Mahony and Weiner, 2019; Chan, 2018). To survive and thrive, organisations and their staff need to balance the push and pull of internal and external drivers, and long and short-term perspectives. This can result in dualities and tensions in the need for consistency and flexibility, efficiency and investment, consolidation and innovation, risk-taking and risk-mitigation (Pucciarelli and Kaplan, 2016).

This session will draw on published research, undertaken at one university in the UK, which applied an innovative framework from the business domain - ambidexterity (March, 1991) - to programme leadership in higher education. An interactive workshop will draw on attendee experience from their own contexts, in unpacking some of the operational and strategic dualities experienced by staff in HE today. Attendees will have the opportunity to reflect on the drivers for these dualities, and explore how they can be managed, balanced or resolved in support of their own, and their organisation's ability to thrive.

This session is relevant to all staff working in higher education who want to think more strategically, develop a shared understanding of operational and strategic dichotomies at play in HE, engage in some self-reflection, and explore how they, and their organisation, might better manage dualities and tensions that arise within their contexts.

**References:** Chan, S. (2018) 'A review of twenty-first century higher education', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42, (3), 327-338.

HESA (2023) Higher Education Student Data [online] Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students>

Mahony, P. and Weiner, G. (2019) 'Neo-liberalism and the state of higher education in the UK', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43 (4), 560-572.

March, J.G. (1991) 'Exploration and exploitation in organisational learning', *Organization Science*, 2 (1), 71-87.

Pucciarelli, F. and Kaplan, A., (2016) 'Competition and strategy in higher education: managing complexity and uncertainty', *Business Horizons*, 59(3), 311-320.