Impressions and Expressions of Compassion in the University Workplace:

A Case Study

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Abstract

Calls for more compassionate universities have been gaining strength. The Covid-19 pandemic has magnified the detrimental effects of the marketisation and corporatisation of higher education in the UK and the sector finds itself in a desperate need for change because its current systems and structures are causing suffering. Based on a case study of a post-1992 university, this research explores the meaning attached by academics to the notion of workplace compassion (impressions), identifies the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion (expressions) and suggests ways of implementing them in a university context.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of twenty-two academics in a post-1992 university in the North-West of England where compassion had been introduced and promoted as an aspirational value. The interviews sought to explore the academics' perceptions of compassion as the university's aspirational value and its expressions in a university setting, and to recognise the benefits, challenges, controversies and tensions that its presence or absence creates for UK academics in a university setting.

Overall, the research has revealed significant divergence in the views of academics on impressions and expressions of compassion in the context of a university. It is considered to be fundamental to the professional identity of academics because it is inextricably linked to their student-facing role and to academic collegiality. The research has disclosed that compassion is both beneficial and detrimental to academics. It creates tensions, challenges and controversies due to complex power relations with students as consumers and to the conflict between the commercial nature of modern universities and academics' professional values. The issue of hierarchy associated with authoritarianism further adds to the complexity of expressing compassion in a university setting. Managers' attempts to employ what is perceived as false or artificial compassion trigger strong negative emotions and link these expressions to deception, manipulation and even violence.

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature on compassion and workplace compassion in three key areas: (i), the research context; (ii) the critical approach; and (iii) most significantly, in terms of the research findings. In addition, the empirical research contributes to practice by suggesting ways of implementing compassion in a university context.

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Chapter One

Introduction

> *Compassion is not religious business, it is human business; it is not luxury, it is essential for our own peace and mental stability; it is essential for human survival.*
> Dalai Lama (n.d.)

1.1 Background to the study and personal context

In 2018, when I was first drawn to the concept of compassion introduced as one of the aspirational values in a post-1992 university in the North-West of England, little did I know how significant that notion would become in 2020-2021. It was what I consider to be the stark contrast between the meaning of compassion and the nature of higher education in the UK that originally triggered my interest in the concept and made me question my understanding of compassion in general and in the context of higher education in particular. The global Covid-19 pandemic resulting in several lockdowns and a lot of pain, anxiety and uncertainty, has heightened the sense of what is morally right and what is not. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of universities in 'the nation's future health and well-being', and their vital role in society that was expressed simply but starkly by the University of Worcester's vice-chancellor in January 2021: 'No universities: no vaccines, no doctors, no nurses, no teachers' (Green, 2021). The pandemic has also demonstrated significant differences in the manner in which universities have been responding to the crisis and, in particular, has brought to the forefront the ethical values we live by, compassion in particular. As stated by one of the authors of the study on the impact of the pandemic on women in higher education, 'The usefulness of the shiny buildings and the fancy coffee machines was wiped out overnight. None of that mattered, what mattered was…compassionate leadership and trust in your staff' (McKie, 2021a). When the whole world came to a standstill, 'universities' attempts to maintain "business as usual" during the pandemic and their failure to reduce workloads' while rapidly moving teaching online have resulted in the sharp increase of academics' workload (McKie, 2021a) and seem to have demonstrated little or no compassion or compassionate leadership.

Compassion and compassionate leadership appear to have been also overlooked by those UK universities that announced cost cuts and subsequent redundancies in the midst of the global pandemic. Despite the sector's prompt adjustments to new circumstances resulting in relative resilience to financial losses, many universities have gone ahead with restructure plans involving job cuts and 'have been accused of "exploiting" the pandemic' (McKie, 2021c). It is not just the ethics of inflicting more pain in the midst of the pandemic by making staff redundant that seem striking but, in some cases, it is also the legality of the employed criteria that seems questionable. Liverpool University, for example, has been accused of breaching its own policies when selecting staff at risk of redundancy; instead of making specific posts redundant, 'staff have been selected on the basis of their perceived research performance' (McKie, 2021b). This controversial and questionable methodology that has been referred to as 'the "rank and yank" management approach used by firms such as Amazon' (Havergal, 2021) reflects the contemporary commercial imperative of higher education and demonstrates a somewhat ruthless nature of UK universities that is arguably far from being compassionate.

The commercial side of higher education in the UK was something I had to come to terms with when I started my teaching career in the country in the late 1990s. Prior to that, my experience as a student and later as a lecturer in a state-funded university in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, my native country, was entirely different. No official league tables existed at the time; however, the status, reputation and subsequent popularity of universities and their specific courses were usually expressed in the proportion between the number of applicants and the number of available places, which were capped based on the capacity and resources of a university. Entrance exam results and high school final grades were equally important when the number of applicants was two or sometimes three times higher than the number of available places. Studying hard was worth the effort because there were no tuition fees and student accommodation was either heavily subsidised or free. In addition to this, the students with good or excellent end-of-term exams results were financially rewarded by the student stipend paid on a monthly basis for the full duration of the next term. Although lecturers' salaries were notoriously small, it was the status, reputation and professionalism associated with employment in a state-funded university that provided opportunities and guaranteed additional income from working several hours in commercial organisations, or from private tuition. My value and reputation as a lecturer were based on my expertise in the subject and the quality of my teaching. These were the two areas I was expected to focus on and develop in order to advance professionally as an academic.

Following this experience of higher education as a public good, I had to make major adjustments to fit into the market-based higher education sector in the UK. Having worked in a post-1992 university in the North-West of England for the last 12 years, I have become 're-formed as a neoliberal academic subject' (Ball, 2012:17). It must be the contrast between these two completely different experiences and my cultural identity as an academic that sparked off my interest in compassion as an aspirational value in the context of higher education. I feel that the commercial nature and focus of UK universities seem to be at odds with the meaning of compassion and, hence, this study seeks to investigate whether introducing and promoting compassion as an organisational value could result in a more compassionate university. Since there appears to be little clarity about the meaning of compassion in this context, the study aims to gain some insights into the concept by exploring academics' perceptions and experiences of compassion. In addition, the project, as does any study carried out for the award of a Professional Doctorate, has to offer real-world practical value to the organisation as well as contributing to wider knowledge. Therefore, this study seeks to determine if workplace compassion is feasible and beneficial to academics and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing compassionate practices within a university context.

Having explained the background to the study and its personal context, this chapter introduces the project's research context before going on to establish the study's specific research aims and objectives. Subsequently, a summary of the research philosophy, approach and methods employed by the study is provided and the project's contribution to knowledge is clarified. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the thesis content and a brief summary of this opening chapter.

1.2 The context of the research

The notion of compassion in the workplace has been increasingly recognised in the organisation studies literature in general; however, it has yet to attract the attention it arguably deserves in the context of higher education in particular. This is a surprising omission. Over the last decade, considerable research has been undertaken into transformations in higher education, specifically into contemporary approaches to the management of universities and the consequences for the academic workforce associated with their marketisation (for example, Docherty, 2015, Waddington, 2016, Watson, 2008). To address these consequences, some researchers call for more compassionate universities (for example, Gilbert, 2018; Maginess & MacKenzie, 2018; Waddington, 2016; Zembylas, 2017), yet no previous empirical research has been conducted into workplace compassion in this context. This gap needs to be addressed and the study does just that. The notion of compassion associated with care

is arguably in conflict with the contemporary nature of British universities as commercial organisations which are identified with profit maximisation, competition and the widespread 'culture of chronic overwork' (Krause, 2018). This raises the question whether compassion in the context of 'the relentless neoliberal intsrumentalisation and marketisation of higher education' (Waddington, 2018: 87) is feasible. This study explores the meaning of workplace compassion in the context of UK higher education and identifies how it impacts academic staff. The research makes a contribution to practice by establishing if compassion is feasible and beneficial to UK academics and suggests ways of implementing it in the university workplace.

When discussed in the context of higher education, compassion is viewed as a skill that could and should be developed when universities train students and leaders (Gilbert, 2018; Maginess & MacKenzie, 2018; Salazar, 2017; Waddington, 2016; Zembylas, 2017), and as a practice associated with 'kindness in leadership and compassionate institutional cultures' that should be present in successful universities (Waddington, 2018: 87). It could be questioned, however, whether compassion is 'a skill that can be practised like any other problem solving process' (Gilbert, 2018: 1) and whether learners could be assessed in being compassionate, as suggested by some researchers (e.g. Gilbert, 2018; Rashedi, Plante and Callister, 2015). The complex nature of compassion is addressed in the research and explored later in chapter three of this thesis; however, the pedagogical value of compassion or its place in a curriculum is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, the focus of the study is specifically on compassion as a practice in the context of higher education.

As a practice and an organisational value, as mentioned earlier, compassion appears to be at odds with the commercial nature of universities. Recent developments in the sector associated with marketisation, commodification and the rise of consumerism have imposed institutional competitiveness between and within universities (Raaper, 2020) and have given dominance to rank ordering, 'the intensive auditing of higher education's outputs' and key performance indicators 'at the expense of more broadly based moral and social values related to care, autonomy, respect, trust and equality' (Lynch, 2015: 194). Supported by the cuts in the public funding, 'the neoliberal reforms in higher education have altered the public service ethos' (Raaper, 2020: 246), positioned students as consumers who '"shop" for a university' and 'desire best service and value for money', resulting in 'consumer relations in higher education' that resemble 'economic transactions' (ibid: 247). Despite claims in mission statements of 'empowering staff and students to discover and share knowledge that can change the world' and make 'significant, sustainable and socially responsible contribution[s] to the world' (Maginess

& MacKenzie, 2018: 44), UK universities seem to measure success by the imposed value of increased profitability. This focus on finance presents the danger of destroying education's primary purpose and essence. This emphasis on financial gain could result, as it is sometimes argued, in UK universities becoming 'reduced to "information-production" machines' where 'students are nothing more than fodder for statistics, and academics are nothing much more than grant-capturing operatives' (Docherty, 2015: 125). This type of environment seems incongruent with the value of compassion, which calls for exploration of the notion. A more comprehensive account of the research context is provided in Chapter Two of the thesis, whereas the next section explains the study's aims and objectives.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The title of this project is 'Impressions and expressions of compassion in the university workplace: An empirical analysis'. The research focuses on gaining insights into the concepts of compassion and workplace compassion (impressions), on investigating experiences of witnessing compassion in action (expressions) and on determining the impact of workplace compassion on academics in the UK.

The overall aims of the research are:

- To explore and critically evaluate the meaning attached by UK academics to the concept of workplace compassion
- To identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion in order to determine if these are feasible and beneficial to academics and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing them in a university context.

To achieve the research aims, the study has the following objectives:

1. To review critically previous research on compassion and workplace compassion and relevant theories and models with a particular focus on the organisation studies literature as a conceptual framework
2. To examine important developments in the UK higher education to gain a sound grasp of the study's context
3. To collect primary data on UK academics' perceptions of impressions and expressions of workplace compassion
4. To analyse the findings to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion, its presence or absence in a

university setting, and to recognise benefits, challenges, controversies and tensions it may create for UK academics

5. To determine if workplace compassion is feasible and beneficial to academics, and could be implemented in the UK university context
6. To contribute to the organisation studies debate on workplace compassion by presenting the study's key conclusions and, if appropriate, suggesting ways of implementing compassion in a university context.

1.4 Research philosophy, approach and methods

To achieve the aims and objectives stated in the previous section, twenty-two semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted and are the key data collection method for this project. Their main advantage lies in opportunities for meaning negotiation and interpretation of data. Also, interviews allow for clarification of respondents' perspectives of workplace compassion and these perspectives are not likely to be hindered or constrained by the researcher's views or language use and, therefore, they generate naturally occurring and meaningful data (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). It is this focus on interpretations of workplace compassion constructed in the process of social interaction and developed as a result of perceptions of the world and other individuals' behaviour (Creswell, 2009) that reflects the study's ontological view of constructivism. It is also the richness of the contextual data of the qualitative research approach (Stake, 2005) of in-depth interviews and a variety of interpretations that bring value to the project and make it stand out from previous research on compassion.

A number of previous studies on workplace compassion present scholarly and philosophical foundations of the concept, and focus on theorising (e.g. Atkins and Parker, 2012; Dutton *et al.* 2014; Fehr and Gelfand, 2012; Frost, 1999; George, 2014; Grant and Patil, 2012; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012; Lilius, 2012; Madden *et al.,* 2012; Rynes *et al.,* 2012;). The emphasis on theoretical concepts, models, structures and frameworks in these studies indicate that knowledge is associated with creating generalizable patterns and the authors view their role as social scientists in developing knowledge by means of formulating these conceptual frameworks (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill*,* 2019). This seems to suggest the authors' epistemological positivist position emphasising theory verification and the significance of what is claimed to be value free conceptual frameworks. However, the theories and models in these studies clearly highlight such benefits of workplace compassion as increased productivity, workforce's commitment and organisations' financial gains, which clearly reflects the values of mainstream management. This demonstrates that a critical approach seems missing in this area of research. Also, these studies appear to focus on

workplace compassion at the individual or group level of analysis (George, 2014) often presenting this as compassionate organising, whereas research at the organisational level of analysis does not seem to be well-established. The present study addresses the need for empirical research on workplace compassion with the focus on the organisational level of analysis and employing a critical approach.

The historical prevalence of positivism and the ontological position of objectivism seem to be demonstrated also in several empirical research studies on compassion in the workplace that employ large scale questionnaire surveys (for example, Aboul-Ela, 2017; Moon *et al.*, 2014; Neff *et al.,* 2008). Often justified by a close association with scientific knowledge and an opportunity to make generalisations because of a sizable population sample (Saunders *et al.,* 2019), questionnaire surveys, with their tendency to be transformed into 'ready-made symbolic generalisations' (Romani, Primecz, and Topcu*,* 2011: 438) reduced to a set of testable statements (Creswell, 2009), may result in oversimplifying the meaning of the complex concept of workplace compassion. In contrast to the quantitative research on workplace compassion, this empirical study overcomes the danger of distortion of the meaning of the complex notion by means of employing more meaningful approach to generating knowledge which is likely to be of a higher value to practitioners. Similar to another group of empirical research studies on workplace compassion (for example, Banker and Bhal, 2018; Cheung, 2008; Lilius *et al*., 2011), this study gains insights into the meaning of the complex concept, which is reflected in the choice of qualitative and inductive research methodology. It is this emphasis on sense-making, the significance of research contexts and the role of the researcher as an interpreter of symbolic meanings of a variety of situations and actions of individuals in these situations (Bryman and Bell, 2015) that determine the choice of qualitative approaches. The study's inductive approach results in naturally occurring and more meaningful empirical data, which allows for a variety of explanations. In-depth interviews employed as the qualitative study's key data collection method allow to focus on the participants' perceptions and experiences of social phenomena (Denscombe, 2011). This results in more meaningful and rich contextual data (Stake, 2005). In addition, the method highlights the significance attached to interpretations of meanings in the process of social interaction (Creswell, 2009), which reflects the ontological view of constructionism (Bryman and Bell, 2015) that underpins the qualitative study, and this ensures a variety of interpretations, which provides more benefits to practitioners.

However, it is recognised that the study's methods could present several problematic areas. These relate to power dynamics, possible interviewer and positive biases. In depth interviews may display unequal power dynamics owing to the researcher's agenda

and a certain amount of control over the procedure, as well as the influence of their interpretations on the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 173). Also, interviewees may employ "counter controls" by withholding information (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 173), either because of their perceptions of the interviewer or owing to the sensitivity of the subject (Saunders *et al.,* 2019). Moreover, because any social interaction is guided by relevant cultural scripts, interviews could be influenced by efforts made to create a good impression and to ensure a successful interaction, which may lead to a positive bias (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). These factors are taken into account and reflected upon.

As mentioned earlier, the context for the research is a modern post-1992 institution where compassion was selected as one of its aspirational values and actively promoted by the senior management in their communication, and by a number of staff development workshops on compassionate communication, on compassionate leadership and on compassionate working in September – November 2018. Since then, the university has undergone significant changes in its structure and staffing, including its Senior Executive Team. Although the new senior management's compassion narrative had become somewhat less prominent by the time the interviews were conducted, the value remained listed as one of the university's values in some internal documents that could be found on the website.

The fact that the case study university is my workplace is an important aspect of the research project which relates to its work-based nature and brings to the forefront the issue of trust and an ethic of care (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010). I recognise that as an insider, I could be 'in a privileged and powerful position' (ibid: 44) because of the trust and vulnerability offered by colleagues and their authentic revelations, and because of the knowledge of the context of these revelations. Possible implications of interviewing senior or junior colleagues also need to be considered due to the importance of participants' institutional and social identities (Koester, 2006; Wengraf, 2001). The relational nature of these numerous identities that interviews employ explicitly and implicitly (Alvesson, 2011) could influence both parties and subsequently, impact interview data. Also, although the researcher's 'insights as an insider are valuable', it is vital to be aware of and give sufficient attention to 'alternative perspectives' (Costley *et al.,* 2010: 33). Reflexivity mentioned earlier aims at maintaining clarity and openness about my own interests, position and view on power, and about divergent interests of participants.

Twenty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted in October 2020 – April 2021. When collecting primary data, purposive sampling was employed to ensure a sufficient range of relevant participants. This includes academics whose positions range from Staff Paid Hourly (SPH) to Principal Lecturers (PLs) with some managerial responsibilities, and academics' line managers, such as Deputy Heads and Heads of Schools. Participants' gender and length of service were also taken into account to ensure the range presents opportunities for some analysis. The selected sample included an even break down between female and male participants – 11 for each gender – and the number of participants, twenty-two, allowed for a fairly even representation of academic roles in a variety of categories mentioned earlier in this section. It is argued that the relevance of selected cases is determined not only by specific research questions but also by cases' ability 'to prove our assumptions wrong in the analysis' (Baker and Edwards, 2012: 16). All the interviews were transcribed and the data generated were analysed using open coding. To ensure clarity and to address any dangers associated with validity and reliability of the collected data, individual participants' transcripts were sent to these participants for verification. Following data analysis, a number of distinct themes emerged, and these are discussed in detail in Chapter Five of the thesis. The following section of this chapter now explains the study's significance and contribution to knowledge.

1.5 Significance and contribution to knowledge

This study is significant and contributes to knowledge in several ways. First of all, as mentioned in section 1.2 above, in contrast to previous research on compassion and workplace compassion, this study presents an empirical analysis of the concept in the context of UK higher education. Second, the study focuses on the organisational level of analysis and identifies the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion, and its presence or absence in a university setting. Third, in contrast to previous research in the area, the present study employs a critical approach and establishes benefits, challenges, controversies and tensions workplace compassion may create for UK academics. And forth, the study contributes to practice by means of establishing if compassion is feasible and beneficial to academics and could be implemented in the UK university context. It also suggests ways of implementing it in the university workplace.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters, as follows:

Chapter One: explains the background to the study and its personal context, introduces the subject of the research and makes a case for the study in the context of UK higher education. It states the key aims and objectives, establishes the study's significance and contribution to knowledge and provides a brief overview of the thesis.

Chapter Two: discusses the Higher Education sector in the UK as the context for the study. It examines recent changes in educational policy, explores the impact of neoliberalism on the sector and examines the role of values in communicating organisational culture.

Chapter Three: examines and critically evaluates the notion of compassion and workplace compassion in the organisational studies debate. It investigates previous research and theoretical models underpinning the concept of workplace compassion, focuses on the political nature of the notion, explores the link between compassion in the workplace and power and outlines any gaps in the debate on compassion which potentially provide areas for future investigation.

Chapter Four: explains the study's research design and employed approaches and methodology. It justifies the choice of qualitative and inductive research methodology and highlights the importance attached to interpretations of meaning of workplace compassion in the process of interaction associated with the ontological view of constructivism. It describes in detail data collection and analysis processes and discusses ethical issues relevant to work-based research.

Chapter Five: presents and critically evaluates the research findings and discusses these in relation to the study's aims and objectives as well as relevant literature. It examines the key themes that emerged from the analysis of the impressions and expressions of workplace compassion in the university context shared by the participants, discusses implications of these on institutional practice and explores the interchange between the academics' experiences of workplace compassion or its absence, institutional practice and relevant literature.

Chapter Six: draws conclusions from the research and evaluates its significance and contribution to the organisational studies debate on workplace compassion. It adds to

this debate by establishing the meaning of workplace compassion in the university context and suggests practical ways of implementing compassion in that context.

1.7 Summary

This chapter has provided the introduction to the study on workplace compassion in the context of UK higher education and has highlighted its timely nature. It has provided a brief overview of the debate on compassion in organisational studies and has emphasised contrast, or even conflict, between the commercial imperative of the higher education sector in the UK and the meaning of compassion. To determine the place of compassion in this context, it is important to investigate the nature of the sector associated with the philosophy of neoliberalism, which is the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter Two

The Context of Higher Education

> *The most powerful weapon is the theory of an era of unprecedented change since this can be used to generate compliance, often fearful compliance. …all these claims about post bureaucracy and change are really an exercise of power. Anyone who questions them is automatically painted as retrograde, old-fashioned, elitist, resistant to change and.. out of step with the modern world. Change is a crass theology… It is the doctrinal orthodoxy of those who rule us. Be insufficiently worshipful of its doctrine and you will be punished. Inflexibility, 'irrational' resistance to change, not buying in to the vision: these are the new heresies*. (Grey, 2013: 102)

2.1 Introduction

The phrase 'unprecedented change' perfectly describes the UK higher education sector with its significant transformations over the last three decades. This unprecedented change has been referred to as 'a huge gamble with England's universities', and serious concerns have been raised about the fast pace of the change that 'creates dangers and entirely avoidable short-term challenges for universities' and forces them to participate in an uncontrolled experiment conducted by the government (McGettigan, 2013: 6). The driving force behind this change has been the power of an education policy driven by the commercial imperative in the HE sector where 'the law and its processes of legislation are governed by money', which results in 'a state of affairs in which democracy itself is skewed by finance' (Docherty, 2015: 41). The sector's 'often fearful compliance' (Grey, 2013: 102) with the economic and political dynamic of the reform inflicting unprecedented change has resulted in 'the demise of an idealistic version of the university as an institution that disinterestedly searches for truth in various domains' and has entirely reshaped universities turning them into institutions that serve their 'funding masters, identified in the UK sector usually as 'government' (Docherty, 2015: 42). It is this prominence of the commercial imperative that has resulted in privatisation, marketisation

and commodification of higher education that has raised serious concerns and questions with regards to the role, purpose and value of universities in society as well as their relationship with the key stakeholders (Docherty, 2015; Collini, 2010; Collini, 2011; Collini, 2017; McGettigan, 2013; Nixon *et al.,* 2018; Svensson and Wood, 2007). Moreover, it is this prominence of the commercial imperative in the market-driven higher education sector, placing an emphasis on individualism and ruthless competitiveness that also poses a question about the role and place, if any, of ethical considerations in general and compassion in particular.

As established in the preceding chapter, the overall purpose of this thesis is to explore the perceptions of academic staff with regards to the concept of compassion and the extent in which it is desirable or possible in the higher education workplace. Therefore, this chapter seeks to contextualise the study by focusing on the significant transformations in the higher education sector in the UK over the last three decades. More specifically, the purpose of this chapter is to trace this transformation and its impacts on academic staff experience as a framework for the research that follows.

This chapter consists of three parts. First, it presents the timeline of the key transformations in terms of educational policy and other important changes and events that have constructed the current neoliberal terrain of the UK's higher education sector. It then goes on to examine the concept of neoliberalism, the key aspects of neoliberal higher education and the consequences of these on the sector. The third and final section then explores the effects of neoliberal higher education on academic staff. In so doing, this chapter seeks to provide the context of research and to establish the need for introduction of a more compassionate approach to management in the university workplace. As mentioned above, the following section of the chapter provides an overview of significant developments in education policy and other key events that, in recent decades, have shaped the landscape of the higher education sector in the UK.

2.2 An overview of the key developments in the educational policy in the last three decades

Over the last three decades, 'higher education policy has been something of a barometer of the growing dominance of the worldview expressed in… such buzz phrases as 'it is essential to sustain economic growth and maintain Britain's global competitiveness', 'consumers must have a choice of services', 'competition will drive up quality' and so on' (Collini, 2011: 9). As a consequence, the dominance of the commercial imperative has impacted on the value attached to 'a whole swathe of social, cultural and intellectual activities' whose 'overriding goal' has fundamentally changed and became measured in

terms of ‘contributing to economic growth’ (ibid). The prevalence of the new ideology has subsequently introduced the idea that education ‘can be offered and run in a manner akin to utilities such as gas and electricity’ (McGettigan, 2013: 3). This has meant that it has been necessary to move away from higher education as ‘the provision of a public good, articulated through educational judgement and largely financed by public funds’ to it being seen as the driver for the country’s economic growth in ‘a lightly regulated market’ where ‘consumer demand in the form of student choice’ determines what is offered by universities as service providers (Collini, 2010: 1). As rightly pointed out by McGettigan, ‘Markets of this kind have to be created’ (McGettigan, 2013: 3), and the developments in educational policy over the last three decades demonstrate attempts to do just that.

2.2.1 Shaping the sector: ‘from Robbins to McKinsey’ (Collini, 2011: 9)

Before moving on to discussing the key governmental policy developments and events that have shaped the current state of the higher education sector in the UK, it is worth noting that not only has it long been recognised that the relationship between the state and education presents the challenge of unequal power, but also that there have been attempts to address the issue. For example, the Haldane Report, published in 1918, ‘argued for a judicious separation between the interests of the state… on one hand and the interests of scholarly pursuit of research and truth… on the other hand’ and resulted in ‘a general principle designed to protect the university from direct governmental control and inappropriate interference, while still allowing for the state to exert an influence commensurate with and warranted by its commitment of a substantial financial interest’ (Docherty, 2015: 5). However, more recent developments in the sector indicate that the Haldane principle that sought to ensure that universities are protected ‘against the political manipulation of societal norms, especially norms concerning the true or the good’ (ibid) seems to have been forgotten and abandoned.

A subsequent attempt to address the power relations and to retain the essence of higher education can be found in the proposals contained in the Robbins report in 1963. Here, it was argued that universities by nature were closer to institutions like the research councils, the Arts Council, the Commission on Museums and Galleries and ’other forms of organised research that operated on a version of the arm’s length principle’ (Collini, 2011: 10). Hence, the purpose of the Robbins proposals was to recognise the significance of universities as contributors ‘to the spiritual health of the community of a proper organisation of state support for learning and arts’ (ibid). Again, however, these proposals were declined and the commercial imperative of modern universities as drivers

for economic growth is clearly demonstrated by the recommendations of the Browne Report that built the foundation of the current higher education sector. The fact that

> Lord Browne, a businessman with no particular experience of teaching or working in a university, was chosen to chair the seven-person committee, whose members included the head of McKinsey's Global Education Practice, a former Treasury economist who is a member of the UK Competition Commission, and a banker (Collini, 2011: 10)

explains his Report's radical proposal 'to cut almost all public funding of teaching, leaving universities to replace the lost income by charging students much higher fees' (Collini, 2011: 11). Despite being 'a shoddy, ill-argued and under-researched document which attracted a firestorm of criticism' (ibid) the Browne Report and the majority of its proposals were accepted by the coalition government and shaped the landscape of the contemporary HE sector in the UK. Also, the fact that the so called 'independent' review 'happened to come up with a proposal that fitted so exactly with the coalition's not yet announced spending plans' (ibid) demonstrates a spectacular failure of the Haldane principle.

The sharp contrast between the Robbins report's universities whose aims were outlined as 'promoting the 'general powers of the mind', the advancement of learning and the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship' (McGettigan, 2013: 10) and that of the Browne Report's universities is clearly evident in statements in the latter that define the purpose of higher education, such as: 'Higher education matters because it drives innovation and economic transformation. Higher education helps to produce economic growth, which in turn contributes to national prosperity' (BIS, 2010: 14). Hence, displaying 'no real interest in universities as places of education', instead, viewing them as 'engines for economic prosperity' (Collini, 2010) the Browne Report and its proposals were the culmination of the previous education policy developments and events as well as the foundation for the current state of the higher education sector. These are summarised and presented in Table 2.1 that follows.

Table 2.1 Key UK educational policy developments and events since 1992

Year	Policy developments and events	Key contributions/importance
1992	1992 Further and Higher Education Act	➢ Polytechnics reclassified as universities ➢ HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) established
1997	Tony Blair's election campaign 'Education, Education, Education'	➢ A new target of 50 percent of school leavers moving on to higher education
1997	Dearing Report	➢ Widening participation strategy highlighted ➢ Most of its 93 recommendations accepted and later implemented ➢ Its primary purpose 'to garner support for the introduction of student fees' achieved
1997	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) founded	➢ Standards and quality of teaching and learning in the higher education sector to be closely monitored
1998	Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998	➢ £1,000 per annum payable upfront tuition fees introduced
2004	'The Future of Higher Education' 2003 White Paper's proposals legislated by Higher Education Act 2004	➢ Introduction of £3,000 tuition fees from 2006/2007, indexed to inflation ➢ Means-tested maintenance grants introduced ➢ Upfront payment scrapped ➢ The present system of deferred repayments introduced (not starting till the graduate's income exceeds £15,000) ➢ Stronger links between universities and businesses
2009	'Higher Ambitions: the Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy' published by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)	➢ Following the financial crisis of 2007/2008, universities presented as drivers for economic recovery ➢ Stronger links with businesses, including offers of work placements for undergraduate programmes ➢ More part-time, work-based and foundation degrees to hit the target of 50 percent participation

2010	'Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance' (Browne Report) published by BIS	➢ Direct public funding removed for most undergraduate courses ➢ Universities as service providers and students as consumers of the services ➢ Detailed information about available courses and their content to be available for prospective students ➢ Tuition fees cap removed ➢ Changes to maintenance grants and loans ➢ Student loans extended to part-time students
2012	'A Review of Business-University Collaboration' (Wilson Review) published by BIS	➢ Like businesses, universities thrive on competition ➢ Emphasis on work experience during studies, hence sandwich degree programmes with lower fees ➢ Companies providing work placements incentivised by tax credits or grants ➢ Foundation degrees prioritised
2014	First Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise carried out	➢ Replacing previous Research Assessment Exercise, REF outcomes determine universities' funding for research and provide benchmarking in the sector ➢ Three elements are assessed: the quality of outputs, their impact beyond academia and the environment supporting research
2015	'UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law: Helping You Comply with Your Obligation' published by Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)	➢ Consumer protection law applies to the relationship between universities as service providers and prospective and current undergraduate students ➢ Emphasis on contractual obligations and value for money services ➢ Student number caps lifted
2016	'Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice' Higher Education	➢ Low student satisfaction with quality of provision and teaching ➢ Insufficient competition and lack of informed choice identified as reasons for quality issues, hence

	White Paper published by BIS	new providers invited to enter the market and expand ➢ Further de-regulation to enable greater competition ➢ Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is to be rolled out as a trial in 2017/2018 ➢ Office for Students (OfS) is to be established as a single market regulator ➢ UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is to be established as a single research and innovation funding body
2016	'Building on Success and Learning from Experience: An Independent Review of the Research Excellence Framework' (Stern Review) published by Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)	➢ Purpose and benefits of REF highlighted, key strategies identified ➢ Research-active staff submit papers for publication ➢ Outputs not portable and stay with the author's institution ➢ Peer review as the main assessment method ➢ 'Impact' and 'environment' to have institutional and Unit of Assessment (UoA) components
2017	Higher Education and Research Bill became an Act (HERA) in April 2017	➢ OfS is to replace HEFCE and Office for Fair Access (OFFA) ➢ OfS is to monitor quality standards and financial sustainability of universities ➢ Universities encouraged to offer Accelerated Degrees, i.e. 2-year programmes equivalent to full degrees
2019	'Review of Post-18 Education and Funding' (Augar Report), May 2019	➢ Concerns expressed about high expenditure on marketing, grade inflation, lowering of entry requirements and unconditional offers as unintended consequences of market competition in the higher education sector ➢ Minimum entry threshold, a selective numbers cap, or a combination of both recommended ➢ Everyone to have a Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) from 2025, giving

		access to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education ➢ Freezing average per-student funding from 2020/2021 until 2022/2023 proposed to achieve efficiencies ➢ Increase of research and teaching funding proposed ➢ Tuition fee cap of £7,500 per annum recommended by 2021/2022
2019	'Independent Review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)' (Pearce Report), August 2019	Proposals include: ➢ Subject-level TEF should be added to provider-level assessment ratings ➢ Stronger emphasis on metrics presenting evidence ➢ More detailed rating system: Gold, Silver and Bronze be replaced with 'Outstanding', 'Highly Commended', 'Commended' and 'Meets UK Quality Requirements' ➢ The name TEF, should be changed to Educational Excellence Framework (EdEF)
2021	'Interim Conclusion of the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding' published by Department for Education (DfE)	➢ An even stronger link between education and jobs due to Coronavirus pandemic impacts ➢ A stronger alignment of the provision to the needs of the economy, i.e. focus on healthcare and STEM ➢ Role of TEF in driving the quality of provision highlighted, however, no subject-level TEF to be introduced to reduce bureaucracy ➢ Freeze on the maximum tuition fee cap initially for one year, further changes to student finance should be considered ahead of the next Comprehensive Spending Review
2021	Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill announced in the Queen's speech to both Houses of Parliament on 11th May 2021	➢ Students' unions and universities are to secure freedom of speech for their members and others, including visiting speakers ➢ Individuals can seek compensation through courts if they suffer loss as a result of breach of the freedom of speech duties

		➢ OfS given power to impose fines for breaches
2021	Office for Students (OfS) funding reforms for 2021/2022, announced in July 2021	➢ 50 percent funding cut for subjects not related to medicine or healthcare, STEM or those supporting specific labour market needs ➢ Removal of subsidies for universities and colleges operating in London

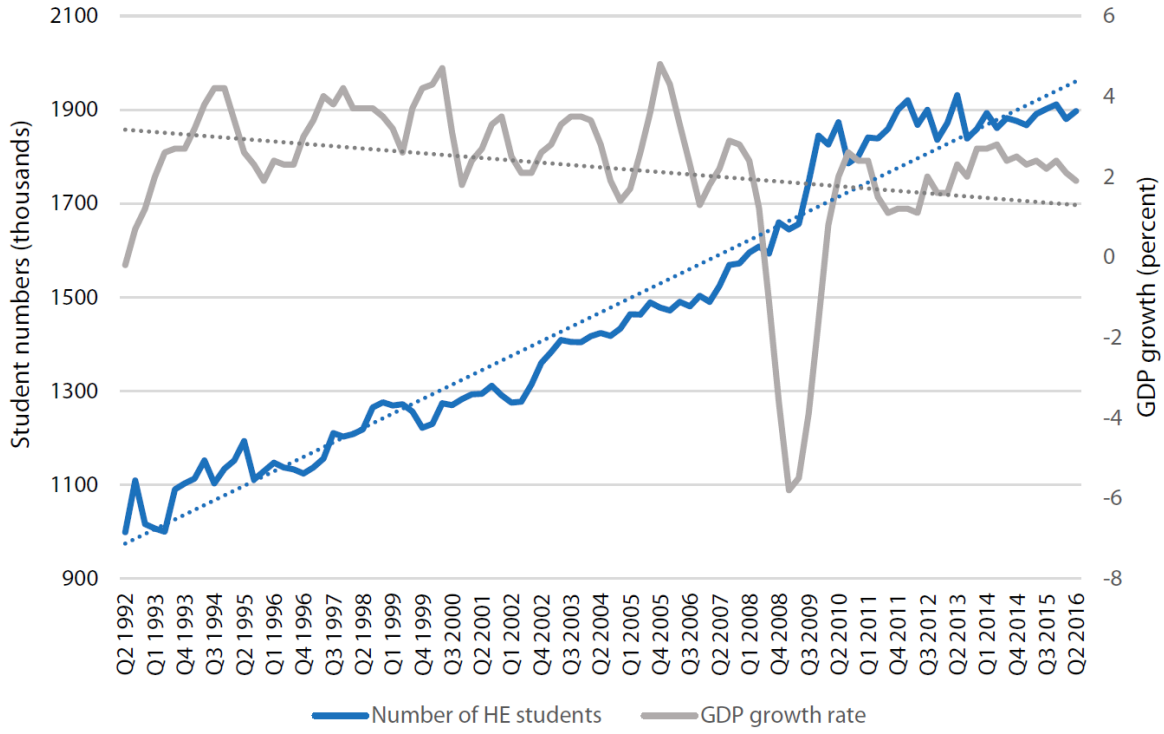
Sources: BEIS (2016); BIS (2009, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2019a, 2019b); CMA (2015); Collini (2010, 2011, 201)7; DfE (2021); HERA (2017); HoC (2021b); McGettigan (2013); OfS (2021); Tapper (2010); The Queen's Speech (2021); Watson and Amoah (2007)

As Table 2.1 above indicates, higher education in the UK has gone through an extremely prominent and rapid transformation process in the last three decades. These are well known and widely discussed elsewhere (for example, see Collini, 2010, 2011, 2017; Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Tapper, 2010), and a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of these educational policies and events is beyond the scope of the investigation. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise in particular that developments driven by the neoliberal commercial imperative created 'a fundamentally flawed system' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 1). The significant changes in the educational policy that have impacted most notably on the HE sector include the following: first, the substitution of the government's block grant by rising student fees; second, the sector's de-regulation aimed at stimulating competition between universities and encouraging new entrants to join the competitive market; third, the promotion of university-business collaborations; and fourth, attempts to increase universities' accountability for received funding in research and teaching by means of introducing REF and TEF (BEIS, 2016; BIS 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2019a, 2019b; CMA 2015; Collini 2010, 2011, 2017; DfE, 2021; HERA, 2017; McGettigan, 2013; Tapper, 2010; The Queen's Speech, 2021; Watson and Amoah, 2007). Overall, these key changes in the legislation have resulted in the massification and marketisation of higher education (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020; McGettigan, 2013), which, as critics suggest, are 'the two fundamental drivers of the sector's many problems' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 1).

2.2.2 Shaping the sector: massification and marketisation of higher education

With its 'noble roots' in the Robbins Report of 1963, the strategy to widen participation was timely and effective during post-war decades and did contribute to the rapid economic development as well as to an increase in social mobility (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 6; McGettigan, 2013). However, the over-expansion of the sector since the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 has not had a similar beneficial effect because 'while student numbers have grown rapidly, economic growth rates have trended towards zero' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 7). This can be clearly seen in Figure 2.1 below:

Figure 2.1 UK GDP Growth Rate vs HE Student Numbers

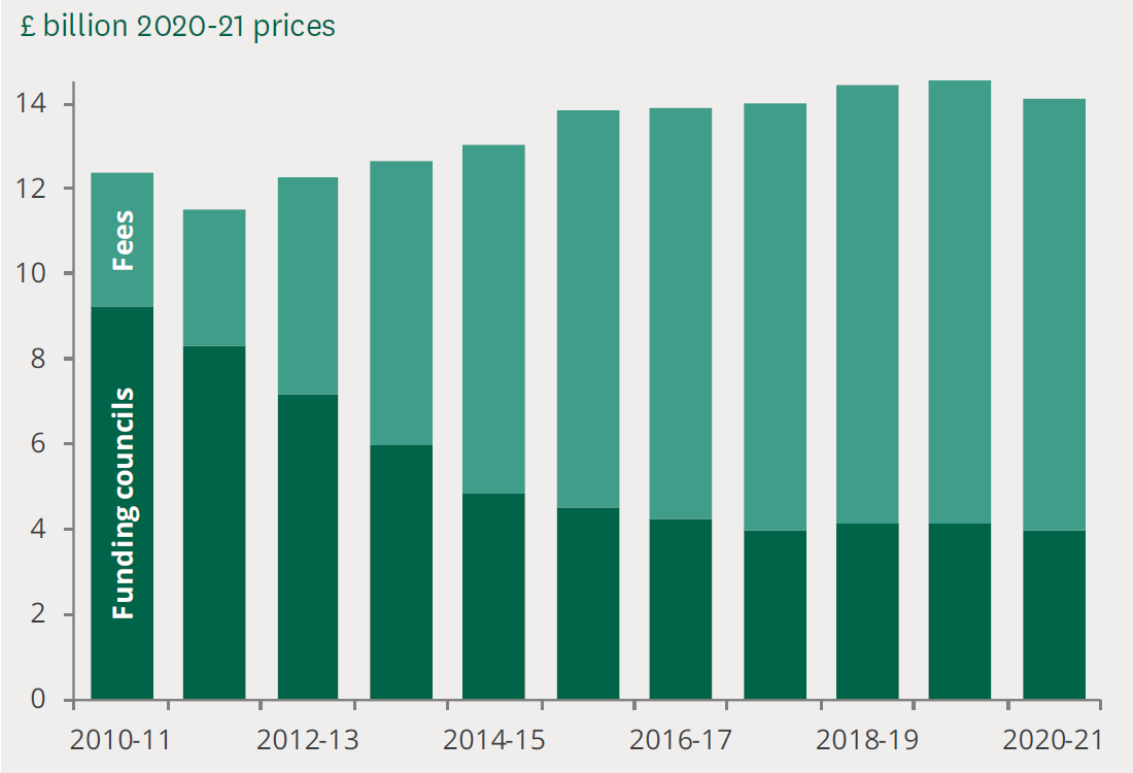


Source: Jones and Cunliffe (2020: 7)

The data presented in the figure above supports the argument that despite the expectations of educational policy makers, the over-expansion of the sector 'had no discernible impact on [the] rates of economic or productivity growth' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 6). As rightly pointed out by McGettigan, 'The flipside to expansion is the question of funding' (McGettigan, 2013: 19), and it was the vision of 'a more entrepreneurial higher education sector less reliant on central funding' (McGettigan, 2013: 6) that prompted the shift towards student fees. Following the Browne Report's recommendations, direct

funding through the funding councils fell sharply from 2010-2011 to 2017-2018 and was accompanied by the tripling of student tuition fees, as indicated in Figure 2.2 below:

Figure 2.2 Funding Shift towards Student Tuition Fees

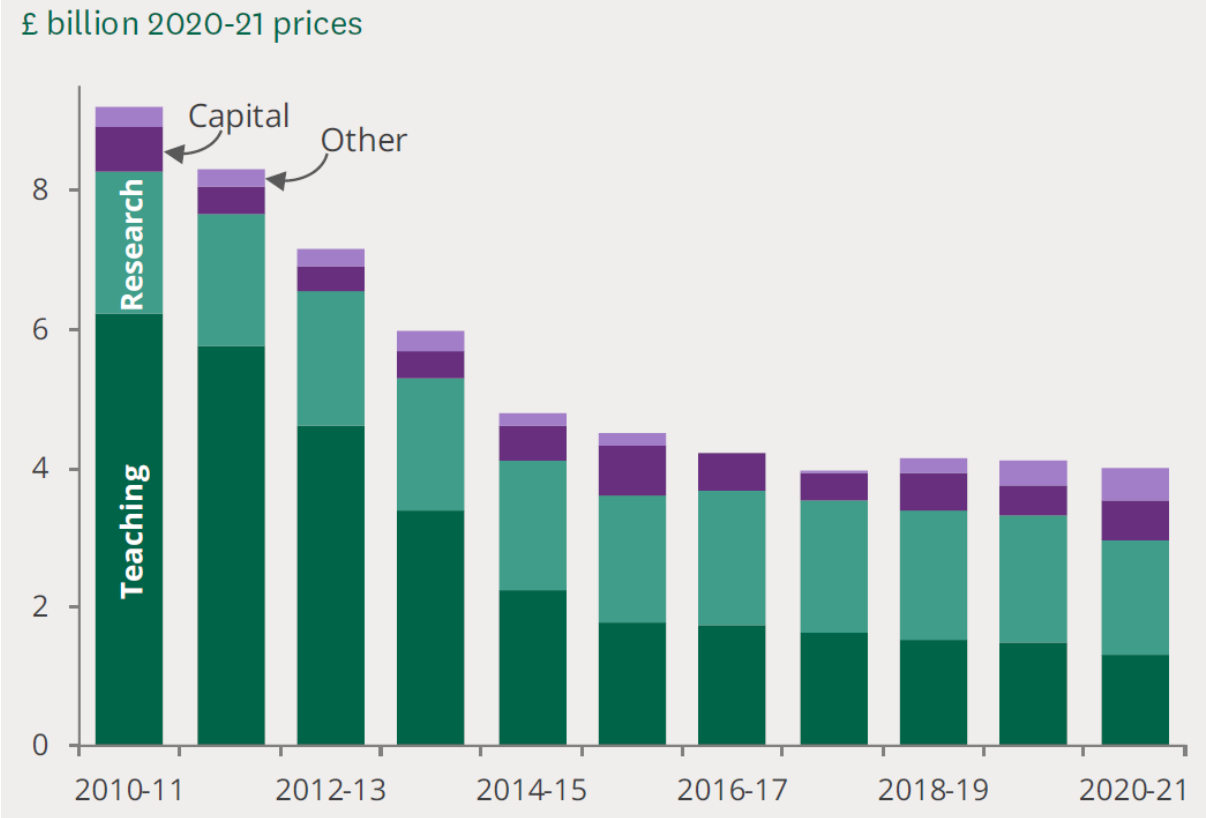


Source: HoC (2021b: 12)

Figure 2.2 above also demonstrates that despite the cuts in the government's funding, the total funding for universities through funding councils and student fees 'increased in real terms in each year from 2011-2012 to 2019-2020' (HoC, 2021b: 12). When originally set out, this approach to financing was considered to be 'a sustainable system of financing higher education that would lighten the burden on public finances, but also enable the sector to expand' (McGettigan, 2013: 20). However, since higher student fees meant higher publicly-funded student loans, this approach 'has been exposed as a fiscal accounting manoeuvre' because, despite reductions in the government's direct spending on higher education, its indirect spending increased and 'the government continued to subsidise HE by writing off that proportion of student loans not fully repaid at the end of their term' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 14). Consequently, the funding model resulted in the sector being subsidised by the state, and according to the Office of Budget Responsibility projections made in the summer of 2018, the impact of all UK student loans on the national debt 'increases rapidly from 5.5 percent of GDP to a peak of 12.1 percent in the early 2040s' (HoC, 2021b: 20). These alarming projections point to a rather

bleak future for the sector and are evidence of the flawed nature of the funding model and the educational policy that designed it.

Figure 2.3 Funding: Council Allocations 2010 - 2021



Source: HoC (2021b: 12)

Figure 2.3 provides more detail about allocations by the funding council and shows a great difference between allocations for research and allocations for teaching. The figure demonstrates that support for research through the funding council has been maintained at a stable level since 2010, whereas allocations for teaching fell even before the 2012 reforms, decreased particularly quickly from 2012 to 2015. Notably, the 2020-21 total for teaching is 79% below the 2010-11 figure in real terms (HoC, 2021b: 3). These drastic cuts in funding for teaching and the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercises indicate that educational policies have 'fostered a culture within universities that rewards research disproportionately more than it does teaching' (Collini, 2010: 1). This has resulted in fragmentation within the academy; its impact on academics will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.

Viewing competition as a driver of educational quality, one of the key principles of marketisation, was another erroneous assumption on the part of educational policy makers that has created additional problems for the sector (Gibbs, 2001; Inglis, 2011; Jones and Cunliffe, 2020; McGettigan, 2013). Contrary to expectations, when forced to compete with each other, universities shifted available funding away from teaching and research to other activities aiming at attracting prospective students (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020). Overall university spending on marketing, for example, increased from £14m in 1995 to £31.9m by 2011-2012 (Matthews, 2013). Former polytechnics seem to be at the top of the highest spending universities list, with the University of Central Lancashire's total marketing spend for 2017-2018 reaching £3.4m (Hall and Weale, 2019). 'Glossy new buildings…. designed to impress attendees at open days' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 15) are another substantial source of expenditure, with universities' capital spending quintupling from £1.04bn in 1995/96 to £5.25bn in 2018/19 (HESA, 2019). These escalating expenses have been accompanied by a sharp decline in teaching and support staff costs as well as a decline in the staff-student ratio (HESA, 2020). These unintended consequences of educational policy and higher education marketisation have driven universities into crisis (McGettigan, 2013; Jones and Cunliffe, 2020).

2.2.3 Shaping the sector: from unprecedented change to the state of fearful uncertainty

The flawed nature of the created system has been acknowledged in recent educational legislation. For example, the Augar Report, published in 2019, highlighted the unintended consequences of marketisation and fierce competition in the sector evidenced in factors such as inflated expenditure on marketing, the lowering of entry requirements and grade inflation (BIS, 2019a). Neither the Augar report nor any subsequent policies, however, have proposed any solutions to these problems. These have been exacerbated by the impact of Brexit and the global pandemic with, for example, the potential loss of EU and international students, lower home student numbers, decreased research work, losses in revenue accruing from accommodation, catering and conferencing (HoC, 2021a), the sector faces uncertainty and a severe financial crisis if not bailed out by a 'large-scale government aid' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 4).

The future of universities and the sector remains extremely unsettled owing to continuing delays in consultations on further reforms. Because of these delays, there are growing fears that educational reforms might be forced on the sector without any consultations at all (Baker, 2021). Recent funding reforms announced by the Office for Students include 50 percent funding cuts for creative and arts subjects and the removal of 'subsidies for

universities and colleges operating in London' (OfS, 2021). The cuts in funding have been condemned by the University and College Union (UCU) as the 'biggest attack on arts in living memory' and the 'act of vandalism, which will risk widespread job losses' and will create 'geographical hot spots' due to forced closure of courses in England (UCU, 2021). Since these changes to the distribution of higher education funding for 2021/2022 reflect the government's plans to prioritise funding for 'high value' subjects, such as STEM and medicine (OfS, 2021), tensions and fears about the direction of the future education reform and the fate of the sector are growing exponentially.

This section has explored the key changes in higher education policy over the last 30 years focusing on the sector's over-expansion and marketisation associated with neoliberalism. The question now is how these changes impacted the nature of higher education and affected those who work in universities. This is the focus of the following two sections.

2.3 Neoliberalism and neoliberal higher education

Unsurprisingly, given the significant changes over the last 30 years, a considerable literature exists that critiques marketisation of the HE sector and highlights its impacts on staff experiences (for example, see Collini, 2012; Davis, 2011; Docherty, 2015; Gill, 2009; Ginsberg, 2011; Haack, 2012; Kinman, 2019; Kinman and Jones, 2008; Kuznetsova and Kuznetsov, 2019; Lynch, 2006, 2013, 2015; Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015; Martin, 2016; Megoran and Mason, 2020; Morrish, 2014, 2017, 2019; Parker, 2014; Taberner, 2018). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review this literature in depth. Rather, the purpose is to identify the key themes that have emerged in that literature as a basis for justifying a focus on compassion in the context of the marketised neoliberal higher education.

2.3.1 Neoliberalism

The changes in the education reform presented and discussed in the previous section of the chapter have arguably been taking place globally, 'in countries in all continents, with very different cultural and political histories, with very few exceptions', and the nature of these changes could be summed up in one word – 'neoliberalism' (Ball, 2016: 1046). The term has been defined in a variety of ways but is usually viewed as the ideology of modern capitalism based on principles of the free market, privatisation, free trade and entrepreneurship, with the objective of minimising state intervention and expenditure on public services (Harvey, 2005). Thatcher's statement 'There is no alternative' reveals the

political essence of neoliberalism; it is presented as the only possible means of developing global economy but, having been implemented from the 1970s onwards, it has 'afflicted the development (and perhaps demolishment) of public service and social welfare institutions in many countries' (Andersson, 2012: 753).

Despite its widely acknowledged contribution to the global financial crisis and economic recession of 2008, the dominance of neoliberalism has not weakened (Andersson, 2012). Harvey (2010) explains its survival and an extremely strong global influence by the direct link between neoliberalism and an ongoing struggle for class domination of capital over labour. The proof of its success lies in 'the incredible centralization of wealth and power observable in all those countries that took the neoliberal road', where 'masked by a lot of rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade, it legitimized draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power' (Harvey, 2010: 10). As the ideology of new capitalism, neoliberalism arguably results in exploitation and diminished employees' rights (Wilson, 2017) as a consequence of the demands of the market, of competition and freedom of choice (Monbiot, 2016).

It is this emphasis on the freedom of choice and the responsibility for own success or failure that has constructed the notion of the neoliberal citizen as 'an autonomous and rational actor governed by competitive individualism', 'essentially a worker and consumer' who is 'self-sufficient and market-oriented' (Grummell *et.al.,* 2009: 193, also Lynch, 2006; Olssen and Peters, 2005). It is this emphasis on 'winning at all costs, a ruthless competitiveness' and 'the cult of individualism' (Giroux, 2010: 184) of the neoliberal rhetoric that is of a particular interest to this investigation because it 'underestimates the role of dependency and interdependency in human relations' (Grummell *et.al.,* 2009: 194, also Lynch, 2006) and places economics, markets and market considerations over moral responsibility and moral considerations (Giroux, 2010; Grummell *et.al.,* 2009), such as compassion. The contrast between the notion of compassion and the values of neoliberalism, sometimes referred to as 'a system of cruelty' (Couldry, 2005: 1), is examined in more detail in Chapter Three of the thesis, whereas this section continues to focus on the context of the research.

2.3.2 Neoliberal higher education

The marketisation and massification of higher education as the outcome of the educational policies discussed in the previous section of the chapter can also be considered to be the consequences of the assault of 'the tenets of neoliberalism' on universities, which has been taking place for over three decades (Smyth, 2017: 56).

Presented by the deceptive rhetoric as the solution rather than the problem, many neoliberal values seem to be 'idealised in the UK by the drive for performance efficiency (value for money) and the embracing of e-commerce' (Gibbs, 2001: 85). It could be also 'the relentless accent upon change' of neoliberalism and the sector's 'fearful compliance' with 'unprecedented change' (Grey, 2013: 102) that have forced universities as 'institutions whose *raison d'etre* is supposed to be critique and contestation' to embrace many principles of neoliberalism with remarkable enthusiasm (Smyth, 2017: 56). Having acquired corporate values of efficiency and productivity, universities have moved away from their original role of providing a public good with a commitment to developing intellectual and cultural traditions (Giroux, 2010). Indeed, as some argue, instead of being committed to addressing social problems, the sector has become 'a primary accomplice to corporate values and power [that] makes social problems both irrelevant and invisible' (Giroux, 2010: 186). Ball (2016) identifies three major neoliberal technologies or components that have reinvented the public sector in general and education in particular. These complex and multifaceted components that are 'highly interrelated and interdependent' are Market, Management and Performance (Ball, 2016: 1049). These three components are employed in the following subsections to characterise neoliberal universities.

2.3.2.1 Market

Aiming at transforming universities into businesses, this component includes arrangements of various forms of internal and external privatisation, increased competition and choice (Ball, 2016). Higher education is treated as a service or product available to those who can afford it and, since it is delivered by a variety of suppliers, a direct link exists between consumer preferences and universities' well-being, with competition and choice playing a significant role (Ball, 2016; Gibbs, 2001; Lynch, 2001; Olssen and Peters, 2005). This marketisation commodifies higher education, views students as consumers of the commodity and leads to structural, relational and ethical changes within the sector. Consumerism, with its 'highly doubtful and contradictory customer metaphor' (Svensson and Wood, 2007: 23), corrodes the relationship between students and universities by turning them into 'transactional deals between traders' (Gibbs, 2001: 85). The commodification and consumerism of higher education also impact upon student identities and learning processes by turning students into 'passive and instrumental learners', through reducing the range of discipline knowledge and discouraging innovation in teaching practices (Naidoo and Williams, 2015: 208). Structured as corporations and run as businesses, universities place an emphasis on outputs of their commodity in the form of student numbers, research grants and other

quantifiable indicators, with quality substituted and measured by productivity, efficiency and student satisfaction (Ball, 2012a, 2016; Collini, 2010). 'Locked in a battle for survival based on 'market share' (Svensson and Wood, 2007: 22), universities employ 'gloss and spin' when building their brand and corporate identity to attract potential customers (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013: 341). Another alarming outcome of the 'uninterrogated marketisation' of higher education relates to the government's strong university-industry links agenda in the field of scholarship and research, which has resulted in universities' growing reliance on the for-profit sector, whose values, ethical principles and priorities could be incongruent with the public interest function of universities and could 'undermine the very independence of thought that is the trademark of university research' (Lynch, 2006: 7). These changes associated with marketisation have altered the essence of higher education, the multiple purposes of which have become reduced by its economic imperatives, which 'challenges the social, moral and cultural roles' of universities (Naidoo and Williams, 2015: 220).

2.3.2.2 Management

Often referred to as leadership, management in education delivers the neoliberal agenda in marketised universities by means of imposing cultural and relational change (Ball, 2016). Widening participation policies have been applied not only in relation to students but also in relation to staff, and a considerable number of posts are now occupied by specialists from the business sector who joint university management in such areas as quality assurance, public relations, business relations and development (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013). By means of applying the private sector's principles of flexibility, clearly defined organisational and personal objectives and a results orientation, these representatives of New Public Management (NPM) have replaced the ethic of acting in the public interest with a new set of norms and rules that have transformed universities into income-oriented corporations where public-interest values are seriously challenged (Ball, 2012a; Lynch, 2015; Rutherford, 2005). Having gained significant power, NPM has replaced 'the traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate' based on the principles of democracy and collegiality with business values of efficiency and productivity, placing an emphasis on 'strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits' (Olssen and Peters, 2005: 313). This represents neoliberal governmentality and its associated hierarchy and specific line management chains of command replacing delegated power, with its restructuring initiatives accompanied with changes in contract specifications and tightly managed workloads; all of which encroaches upon and erodes professional rights, freedom and autonomy, and results in the de-professionalisation of the academy (Olssen and Peters,

2005). Moreover, this layer of middle and senior management appears to be 'exceedingly costly' for the sector not only because of the high salaries that 'senior managers justify… on the grounds that they run multimillion-pound competitive businesses', but mostly because they 'generate additional initiatives, procedures, strategies, audits and metrics, which waste even more resources by necessitating the employment of even more bureaucrats and distracting academics from teaching and research' (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 20). It is worth mentioning here that managerialism, the ideology behind management, employs change to justify managers' often rather questionable actions as responding to a constantly changing environment and its stabilizing and destabilizing forces (Grey, 2013), however, these are attempts to mask aspirations for control, the uneven distribution of power and organisational and societal inequalities (Parker, 2002).

British universities represent an extreme case of managerialism, 'such as the frequent appointment of 'presidential', high-salaried VCs' (Bowes-Catton, Brewis, Clarke, Drake, Gilmour and Penn, 2020: 379) whose pay increased by nearly 300% between 1994 and 2016 (Craig and Openshaw, 2018) and 'has continued to rise above inflation while university staff pay has been supressed, resulting in real-terms pay cuts of 17% since 2019' (Eyles, 2019 cited in Jones and Cunliffe, 2020: 20). This demonstrates a deep divide in the sector and its 'increasingly conflict-ridden working environments' (Kuznetsova and Kuznetsov, 2019: 1), in which management's restructuring programmes fuelled by neoliberal values incite fear or even terror amongst staff who sometimes are prepared to lose their job in order to protect and defend their university's social mission, their professional integrity and the values of the profession they love (Bowes-Catton *et al.,* 2020; Clarke, Knights and Jarvis, 2012; Parker, 2014). This type of managerialism is sometimes referred to as its 'hard' version due to the dominance and power endowed in institutional management systems in improving cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the provision (Trow,1994). Although all universities in the UK have been impacted by managerialism (Kok, Douglas, McClelland and Bryde, 2010), the newer post-1992 universities have been experiencing its 'hard' version the most (Tight, 2019), whereas traditional pre-1992 universities have maintained 'collegial structures and administration promoting academic freedom and most importantly autonomy for scholars' (Kok, Douglas, McClelland and Bryde, 2010: 101). However, regardless of university type, all universities have been forced to adjust to 'the new needs of profitability and competitive survival' and to deal with the conflict of interest between academics focused on education and managers preoccupied with budgets (ibid: 102).

2.3.2.3 Performance

Closely interlinked with the two technologies of the market and management as discussed above, this component brings to the fore the belief that if something cannot be measured, it cannot be managed (Broadbent, 2007). Served as 'measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection' (Ball, 2003: 216), performance is viewed as something that must be measured and managed, and performance management systems based on the accounting model of input/process/output have been introduced by NPM and operate in universities nationwide (Broadbent, 2007). The term 'performativity' is often used in the context of education and higher education (for example, Ball, 2003, 2012a, 2016; Jones *at el.,* 2020; Lynch, 2006, 2015) to refer to the complex and multifaceted component that relates to changes that 'are both out there, in the system, the institution; and 'in here', in our heads and in our souls' (Ball, 2016: 1050). University rankings and league tables have turned higher education institutions into performative universities where 'everything one does must be measured and counted and only the measurable matters' (Lynch, 2006: 7). These quantifiable measurements are claimed to be objective and neutral, and their simplicity and accessibility divert attention from the political and moral purposes of imposing market values and reframing the social relations of education (Lynch, 2013). Another significant aspect of performativity is fabrication (Ball, 2003; Jones *et al.,* 2020) that promotes 'a gaming mentality' (Jones *et al.,* 2020: 368, also Clarke *et al.,* 2012) and impression management cultures and practices in the HE sector (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013), where metrics are prioritised over substance, 'where journal ranking or grades are more important than learning' (Jones *et al.,* 2020: 368). To highlight the fabrication aspect of performativity, Dean *et al.* (2020) employ the Academic Potemkin Village metaphor, an effective imagery originated from a Russian myth, which accentuates the gloss and spin façade of branding and luxurious campus facilities constructed to conceal the futility of HE institutions whose core values of research, teaching and social mission are often compromised (Dean *et al.,* 2020). Hedges (2009) refers to this aspect of performativity as the 'triumph of spectacle' and offers a memorable comparison between the contributions of neoliberal universities to public and cultural life and those of pornography and professional wrestling, and argues that similarities lie in their superficial and meretricious nature resulting in successful illusions. As 'a powerful and insidious policy technology', performativity (Ball, 2012a: 19) with the vacuity of performance-related criteria (Parker, 2014) alongside commodification, consumerism and managerialism associated with marketisation of higher education have resulted in 'the hollowed-out university' (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013). The next question is how these changes have impacted academics. This is addressed in the following section.

2.4 Impacts on academic staff

Various perspectives have been adopted in the literature that discusses the effects of neoliberalism and neoliberal higher education on academics. Typically, however, the literature tends to focus on the negative impacts on staff (for example, Docherty, 2015; Hall and Bowels, 2016; Jones and Cunliffe, 2020; Jones *at el.,* 2020; McGettigan, 2013; Megoran and Mason, 2020; Morrish, 2019; Parker, 2014; Taberner, 2018; Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020). Within this debate, several key themes can be identified, and the following subsections present an overview of these themes.

2.4.1 Work intensification and unmanageable workloads

Having been 'squeezed by the demands of new student-consumers and the pressures from management to become more efficient, productive and therefore profitable' (McGettigan, 2013: 186) the majority of academic staff representing a variety of disciplines in UK universities struggle to complete their workload (Morrish, 2019). Work intensification and extensification means that by its very nature, academic work is seen as never finished and creeps into evenings, weekends and family vacations (Gill, 2009; O'Neill, 2014). The culture of overwork is often taken for granted in the sector in which, even before the Covid-19 pandemic when higher education moved online, workplace had been transformed to cyberspace, 'defused and displaced' (Petrina, Mathison and Ross, 2015: 61). Although concerns about pandemic burnout in the sector were raised on numerous occasions and acknowledged within the sector (for example, McKie, 2021a; Pickerill, 2021), senior management failed to reduce workloads to safeguard academics against its damaging impact (McKie, 2021a). It is such tragic events as deaths by suicide of Lecturer Malcolm Anderson at Cardiff University in 2018, and Professor Stefan Grimm at Imperial College London in 2014, that have shaken the sector by giving it 'a wake-up call' and pressing universities to change their widespread 'culture of chronic overwork' (Krause, 2018).

It is these tragic events that also pose questions about the role of metrics in the excessive pressure which has led to middle-aged academics being at greater suicide risk than their peers in other professions (Morrish, 2019). The sector's obsession with quantifiable performance indicators results in the domination of audit and metrics that are often referred to as 'targets and terror' (for example, Jones *et al.,* 2020; McCann *et al.,* 2020). The erroneous assumption that all aspects of academic work can be measured and counted means that excessive workloads and workload models under-count the time necessary for fulfilling tasks and many tasks prove invisible to assessors. This results in unpaid overtime (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020; Morrish, 2019; Petrina *et al.,* 2015), with part-

time and hourly-paid lecturers doing on average 45% of their work without pay in 2019 (Megoran and Mason, 2020). This leads to exhaustion, frustration and despair amongst academics and results in the need to 'compromise quality by diktats of quantity' (Taberner, 2018: 13) in order to survive. With reference to 'the dominance and brutality of metrics' (Erickson, Hanna and Walker, 2020: 1), Ball states, 'Our days are numbered - literary - and ever so closely and carefully' (Ball, 2012a: 18). This statement, however, could also refer to the desperation felt within the sector about the nature of work and the bleak future of the profession, with many academics deciding to jump ship either to escape the hostile environment of their institution (Parker, 2014) or to leave the sector altogether (Morrish, 2017; Taberner, 2018).

2.4.2 De-professionalisation and division within the academy

Another major issue having a negative impact on the sector in general and on academics in particular is de-professionalisation. Having been historically associated with a distinct profession defending 'the role of the university as a civic space devoted to independent and vigorous critique', academics used to represent 'academic virtues of respect, authenticity, courage, compassion, magnanimity, autonomy and care' (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013: 347). These moral principles seem to be incongruent with contemporary neoliberal universities that place market considerations and corporate values of productivity, efficiency, flexibility and accumulation of capital over ethical considerations and universities' civic responsibility, stripping higher education of public values and interests, confusing it with training and reducing universities 'to job-training sites' (Giroux, 2010: 185). The neoliberal agenda of marketised universities has removed the power of decision making and autonomy from academics turning the profession into an army of reserve labour, 'a force to eagerly exploit in order to increase the bottom line' (ibid). Burdened with unmanageable workloads and driven by the necessity to comply with numerous internal and external audits including REF and TEF (Morrish, 2019), academics have been reduced to 'grant-capturing operatives' (Docherty, 2015:125) or 'simply frontline delivery staff, an overhead to be reduced' (McGettigan, 2013: 186). This strips academics of their rights and autonomy and results in de-professionalisation of academics in the UK (Docherty, 2015; Giroux, 2010; McGettigan, 2013; Taberner, 2018).

One of the indicators of de-professionalisation and fragmentation in the HE sector is casualisation of academic labour, which some consider a significant problem in the UK (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020; Megoran and Mason, 2020; UCU, 2019). The number of part-time academic staff has risen 483% between 1995/96 and 2018/19 (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020) and around 70% of the 49,000 researchers in the sector were on fixed-term

contracts in 2019 (UCU, 2019). Academics on teaching only contracts also tend to be on fixed-term contracts and 42% of those academics were hourly paid in 2017/18 (Megoran and Mason, 2020). In 2019, 71,000 teachers were employed as 'atypical academics', usually hourly paid 'casual workers' on the lowest contract levels with fewer employment rights (UCU, 2019). This situation is not accidental; rather, it has become a business model employed by neoliberal universities aiming to cut costs. Casualisation of higher education dehumanises academics who exist on a succession of precarious contracts by making them invisible to colleagues and institutions and treating them as second-class academic citizens, by leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and demeaning practices, and by curtailing their academic freedom and preventing them from building meaningful careers (Megoran and Mason, 2020).

In addition to the division between academics on permanent contracts and those on precarious ones, there is also a split between research active and teaching focused staff driven by the educational policy that gives a much higher value to research compared to teaching (Collini, 2010; Ross, 2018). This issue is demonstrated by Figure 2.3 and identified in subsection 2.2.2 above. The drive to obtain more funding from the government and the ambition to achieve a higher ranking in university league tables has impacted a great number of devoted, competent and experienced university teachers who 'kept up with recent scholarship, but who were not themselves prolific publishers' (Collini, 2010: 1). Consequently, they 'have in many cases been hounded into early retirement, to be replaced (if replaced at all) by younger colleagues who see research publications as the route to promotion and esteem' (Collini, 2010: 1). There is also some evidence that if research active academics struggle to meet the targets in terms of publications, they usually volunteer to be downgraded to a teaching only contract (Taberner, 2018).

Collectively, these factors demonstrate that the de-professionalised and marginalised academic community is 'split into two clear camps of 'winners and losers', with star researchers enjoying a range of privileges associated with status, reputation, promotion and sabbaticals and those who find it hard to thrive in the metrics driven environment because their roles are built around teaching, academic mentoring and pastoral care, and whose outputs are impossible to quantify (Taberner, 2018: 15). This division between teaching and research is sometimes referred to as 'a tool of academic fracking' (Morrish, 2017) and often involves subsidising one activity with another (Bothwell, 2021). Yet, the separation of these two inseparable endeavours not only threatens the quality of provision (Bothwell, 2021; Ross, 2018) but also has resulted in the loss of status of teaching staff (Taberner, 2018). Despite the expectations that the issue will be addressed by the introduction of TEF (BIS, 2016; Taberner, 2018), the funding model has yet to be

altered and the government continues to cut its allocations for teaching (OfS, 2021; UCU, 2021), therefore, tensions within the sector, and academics' anxiety and fears about job insecurity continue to increase (Morrish, 2019).

2.4.3 The scourge of managerialism: performativity and surveillance, bullying and workplace aggression

In addition to the fragmentation amongst academics discussed above, the sector suffers from intense division and tensions between managers and academics. This has been created by the incongruence or even conflict between the corporate values of marketised universities that are promoted and imposed by management and the academic values of cooperation, collective governance and democracy (Erickson *et al.,* 2020; Kuznetsova and Kuznetsov, 2019; Morrish, 2014; Taberner, 2018). Managerialism is, according to Morrish (2014) practised in UK universities as a cult. With increased centralisation, standardisation and top-down hierarchical control curtailing the discretionary powers of academics, tensions between managers and academics are seen to be increasing (Kuznetsova and Kuznetsov, 2019). Moreover, the dominance of management has created a culture in which audits and metrics 'have been weaponised as tools of performance management' (Morrish, 2017) requiring academics to spend an increasing amount of time on reporting what they do rather than doing it in order to make themselves accountable (Ball, 2012a, 2012b).

The emphasis on performativity is transforming the identity of academics who increasingly tend to express or communicate their achievements according to the reputational drivers of their institutions, such as, for example, the number of grants obtained from prestigious funders or the number of publications in 4-star journals (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013). As such, this is arguably evidence of the hidden power that management holds over academics by creating conditions that are perceived as natural and, therefore, accepted without questioning (Clegg *et al.,* 2006). This, in turn, results in 'academic self-identity and self-identification' becoming 'colonised by institutional performance ideologies' (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013: 345). Burdened with the responsibility and pressure to perform in an environment where 'experience is nothing, productivity is everything', academics are obliged to improve their efforts each year by producing more publications, winning more grants and recruiting more students, then report on their achievements (Ball, 2012a: 19). Consequently, they are then set new, more diverse and challenging targets (Ball, 2012a).

The arguably excessive requirements to report on achievements, strengths and areas for improvement is referred to by Morrish (2017) as 'granular surveillance under the

disguise of new “robust” policies of performance management’. Other examples of this type of surveillance include professors being required to defray their salaries with grant income, or academics having to declare their intent to publish in designated high-impact factor journals and in preferred research areas (Morrish, 2017). It is academics’ heightened sense of responsibility fuelled by pressures of performativity that results in self-monitoring and monitoring their colleagues (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020). In addition to the subtle granular and lateral surveillance, there also exist numerous surveys, such as student satisfaction surveys, and more intrusive forms of surveillance (Reidy, 2020). The latter include online surveillance ranging from online communication used to assess the degree of obedience or dissent amongst academics when, for example, universities oblige staff to declare through electronic means if they are planning to participate in strikes, to technologies of tracing teaching activities, such as ‘lecture capture’ that are justified by widening participation but are sometimes repurposed for academics’ performance assessment or as attempts to replace striking academics with recordings of their courses (Tanczer, Deibert, Bigo, Franklin, Melgaco, Lyon, Kazansky and Milan, 2020). Resulting in curtailing academic freedom and preventing open intellectual debates without censorship, such managerial surveillance is considered to create an eerie and uncomfortable feeling of uneasiness and tension on university campuses (Tanczer *et al.,* 2020).

The spread of managerialism, marketisation, growing divide and competitiveness within the sector is resulting in negative impacts on employee relations and conflict-ridden environments (Kuznetsova and Kuznetsov, 2019) with growing incidence of bullying and workplace aggression (Taberner, 2018; Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020). Increased casualisation of staff and fears associated with threats of redundancy are reported to have created an aggressive culture where management decisions are expected to be accepted and acted upon without questioning, and academics, in order to keep their job, ‘have to justify and re-justify [their] position and look over [their] shoulder’ (Taberner, 2018: 16). It is argued that academia seems to be a particularly vulnerable setting for workplace bullying (Keashly and Neuman, 2010). Bullying in this context appears to be a subtle, indirect and sophisticated type of aggression that typically involves threats to professional status, isolating and obstructional behaviour aiming at undermining academics’ reputation, authority and competence (Keashly and Neuman, 2010; Taberner, 2018). It is often highlighted that bullying in this context tends to stay undetected, is difficult to evidence and is usually justified by the bully as normative (Keashly and Neuman, 2010; Taberner, 2018). Junior academics looking for support and protection from their more established and powerful colleagues are reported to be particularly vulnerable in the context of neoliberal higher education because it reinforces

the significance of paternalistic relationships in career development, enables bullying of young academics and prevents them from contesting bullying (Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020). More senior and experienced academics also report having been subjected to or having witnessed bullying mainly by managers or other academics, with most common forms of oppression being 'undermining the target's intellectual credibility, eye rolling when the target is speaking, excluding the target from work or social conversations or from formal or informal meetings, or overlooking the target for promotion' (Taberner, 2018: 16). These practices appear to indicate division and inequality that recreate 'dependency, paternalism, and exclusion' (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020: 22) in the sector that seems to be in a desperate need of compassion.

2.4.4 Universities as 'anxiety machines'

Hall's (2014) metaphor of a neoliberal university as an 'anxiety machine' has become 'an increasingly popular shorthand' (Hawkins, 2019: 818) for normalised conditions of 'uncertainty, instability, and mental distress for students and faculty members alike' (Peake and Mullings, 2016: 267). The impact of marketisation, performativity and managerialism on academics is manifested in worrying statistics. Academic counselling referrals, for example, witnessed sharp increases after 2012 and implementation of the Browne Review funding arrangements, with some astonishing increases in 2015/16 of up by over 300 per cent in some UK universities (Morrish, 2019). Unpaid overtime is another sign of this anxiety machine and staff surveys, internal and national, indicate that excessive working hours in the UK higher education sector have become unreasonable and unsafe; staff at colleges and universities across the UK undertake the equivalent of at least two days of unpaid work every week (UCU, 2022). High job demands and levels of stress were reported to be resulting in generally poor work-life balance and negatively impacting health of UK academics surveyed by Kinman and Jones (2004). Most respondents, however, were at least moderately satisfied with their jobs (Kinman and Jones, 2004). It seems to be genuine 'vocational love for reading and writing, qualities that intrinsically motivate academics' (Fleming, 2021:31) and keep them in their jobs.

2.4.5 On a more positive note

Despite these negative changes in working conditions, many academics feel passionate about their profession and committed to teaching and research (Docherty, 2015; Fleming, 2021). Kern, Hawkins, Falconer Al-Hindi and Moss (2014: 836) explore joy in their academic practice; however, they strongly oppose the uncritical discourse that positions academics as loving and pursuing their work 'despite breakdowns in mind, body and career' because it glosses over 'the harms of universities as workplaces'.

Hodgins (2012: 8) writes about his transition from being cynical to more caring and insists that fighting ‘a losing battle with optimism, joy, passion, love, curiosity, generosity and collegiality is a far better way to live than feeling at once justified in one’s bleak reading of the world and powerless to change it’. These narratives suggest that in cultivating emotions, such as joy, in their profession, academics engage in a politics of a radical practice that could challenge the organisation of work in a university instead of ‘clinging to detachment as a strategy for survival’ (Kern et al., 2014: 835). Compassion can also be one of these emotions.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the significant transformations in the higher education sector in the UK over the last three decades. It has contextualised the study by means of tracing this transformation and determining its impacts on academic staff experience as a framework for the research that follows. It has evaluated the complex and multifaceted components of neoliberalism that characterise neoliberal higher education, specifically, the market, management and performance, and has contrasted these characteristics with the value of compassion. The chapter has discussed in detail the impact of neoliberal universities on academics and justified a focus on compassion in the context of the marketised neoliberal higher education. The following chapter presents the literature review which explores the concepts of compassion and workplace compassion.

Chapter Three

Compassion and Workplace Compassion: A Review

Compassion is the basis of morality. Arthur Schopenhauer (n.d.)

3.1 Introduction

It seems evident from the discussion in the previous chapter that there exists a clear disconnect between the widely acknowledged developments in the higher education sector associated with its marketisation, commodification and neoliberal governmentality and the notion of compassion. The neoliberal values promoted by the commercial imperative within much of UK higher education have resulted in a conflict-ridden sector characterised by extreme managerialism, work intensification, casualisation and unmanageable workloads. Moreover, these trends have more recently been amplified by the additional challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a consequence, and as evidenced in the preceding chapter, an increasing number of scholars are voicing their concerns about the state of affairs in the sector and calling for more compassionate universities. It is not clear, however, what it means for a university to be compassionate and, indeed, precisely how compassion is understood in a British neoliberal university. Hence, it is necessary to establish and explore the meaning of the concept of compassion within this context. This is what this chapter sets out to do.

Specifically, the purpose of the chapter is to review the extant literature on compassion in general and on workplace compassion in particular, as well as to appraise the practices within modern organisations associated with the notion of compassion. As such, it seeks to establish a conceptual framework for the subsequent research in this thesis. The chapter comprises three main sections. First, it explores the meaning of compassion and its complex, multi-dimensional nature before going on to provide a comparative analysis of compassion with other concepts often associated or used interchangeably with it. In doing so, this first section of the chapter draws primarily on theories and models from the fields of philosophy and psychology, whereas the second section explores the notion of workplace compassion from the perspective of debates within organisational studies. It is crucial to this study to determine the extent to which

the meaning of compassion alters in the context of a workplace; hence substantial attention is paid to the examination of compassion and its associated practices in the workplace. In particular, the second section offers a critical appraisal of Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model, investigates the debate on suffering, explores the framework for compassionate decision making offered by Simpson, Clegg and Pitsis (2014b), discusses the issue of power and the emotional aspect of management and focuses on the concepts of compassionate care and increased moral responsibility in the context of modern organisations. The third section of the chapter then reviews critically the compassion literature in the context of education generally and of higher education in particular. Scrutinising the balance between the intellectual and the emotional in relation to compassion, it considers the constructs of critical compassion and politicised compassion as a means of highlighting the political nature of compassion in this context. In this third section, the role of compassion in educational leadership is explored and gender differences in the compassion debate are highlighted. Hence, this section is of fundamental importance to the present research, building as it does on the traditions of Critical University Studies (CUS) and linking some of its content to the relevant points presented in the contextual chapter of the thesis.

3.2 The notion of compassion and its complex nature

The close link between compassion and morality as expressed in the opening quote of this chapter appears to be ubiquitously acknowledged in the literature on compassion (see, for example, Maginess and MacKenzie, 2018; Nussbaum, 1996; Porter, 2006; Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton and Margolis, 2012; Thomas and Rowland, 2014; Whitebrook, 2002). What this suggests is that it is generally assumed that compassion has an inherent moral orientation which is reflected in concern for those who are in need or are suffering and consequently involves some form of action aimed at enhancing their welfare or alleviating their suffering (Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2011; Nussbaum, 1996; Oveis*,* Horberg and Keltner, 2010). This aspect of compassion as 'a central bridge between the individual and the community' and as a fundamental contribution to the individual and social well-being (Nussbaum, 1996: 28) is also expressed in different religions. Christianity views acts of compassion and kindness as a way of having influence over own behaviour towards others; compassion is cited throughout the text of the Koran in which it is revealed through tolerance, honesty and sharing of wealth and resources with those in need whilst in Buddhism, compassion is viewed as dedication of the self to others 'and helping others before putting ones' own needs first' (Thomas and Rowland, 2014: 100). At the same time, in addition to its key function of facilitating cooperation in the community and

protecting ‘the weak and those who suffer’ (Goetz, Keltner and Simon-Thomas, 2010: 351), the affective aspect of compassion as ‘a care-taking emotion’ (Oveis *et al.,* 2010: 619) also seems to be accepted ubiquitously in the relevant literature from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (see, for example, Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Keller and Pfattheicher, 2013; Lilius *et al.,* 2011; Zembylas, 2013). However, within studies of morality, some theorists argue that owing to its emotional dimension, compassion is not only complex but also controversial (Goetz *et al.,* 2010). This aspect of compassion is significant to this study and requires exploration.

3.2.1 Compassion as a controversial notion

This controversy surrounding the notion of compassion lies in the contrast between emotion and reason as emphasised by ‘some modern moral theories - liberal and individualist moral theories in particular – [which] have treated compassion as an irrational force in human affairs’ (Nussbaum, 1996: 28). In other words, within studies of morality, some theorists regard compassion as an unreliable source of moral judgement whereas others insist that compassion is an appropriate guide to judgements about what is morally right and wrong (Goetz *et al.,* 2010; Nussbaum, 1996). The view of compassion as an unreasonable force is supported by the so-called ‘compassion-hostility paradox’ observed in empirical research in social psychology that reveals a positive correlation between the pro-social characteristic of compassion and the anti-social attribute of hostility (Keller and Pfattheicher, 2013). This positive association could be linked to an ancient philosophical perspective known as ‘orphism’, which recognises the coexistence of the divine and the evil in mankind (Craig, 1998). Unlike the other two contrasting perspectives that view humans ‘either as purely selfish, competitive, and hostile in nature’ or as altogether moral and prosocial (Keller and Pfattheicher, 2013: 1526), this approach acknowledges that such pro-social and anti-social characteristics as compassion and hostility may in fact be compatible. This highlights the complex and even controversial nature of compassion and questions its role in making moral judgements, an issue that demands further investigation.

3.2.2 Compassion as a source of moral judgement

The perspective on compassion offered by Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher who refers to compassion as ‘the basic social emotion’ (Nussbaum, 1996: 27), views the notion as a rational and logical source of moral judgement. Nussbaum presents a comprehensive analysis of philosophical studies on compassion in which she explains that despite being an emotion, ‘compassion is, above all, a certain sort of thought about the well-being of

others' and 'a certain sort of reasoning' (Nussbaum, 1996: 28). She suggests that three main elements or beliefs are necessary for the development of compassionate emotions. These include, first, 'the belief that the suffering is serious rather than trivial' (Nussbaum, 1996: 31), second, 'the judgement that the person does not deserve the suffering' (Zembylas, 2013: 506), and third, the belief that the onlooker could find themselves in a similar position and experience similar suffering (Nussbaum, 1996; Zembylas, 2013). In order for the compassionate emotion to manifest itself, all three beliefs need to be present (Nussbaum, 1996), and, therefore, it is the cognitive element of compassion highlighted by the model that links it to rationality and appropriateness for moral judgement.

Nussbaum's analysis of compassion recognises the challenges presented by contemporary public life and social order with its inequalities and injustices, and, in so doing, she asserts that formal and informal education should be tasked with developing 'the ability to imagine the ills of another with vivid sympathy' (Nussbaum, 1996: 50). The role of compassion in civic education is seen in its ethical value and 'its ability to cross boundaries of class, nationality, race, and gender' by means of not only gaining relevant knowledge about people's struggles but also by 'being drawn into those lives through the imagination, becoming a participant in those struggles' (Nussbaum, 1996: 51). The term compassionate imagination is used to connect and unite the cognitive and emotional aspects of compassion, and Nussbaum argues that compassionate imagination needs to be developed by political leaders and should be embraced by formal economic models. What this means is that a nation's well-being should be measured not by GNP per capita, but by means of evaluating how wealth and income are distributed and how economic resources are 'supporting human functioning' (Nussbaum, 1996: 52). Employing compassionate imagination in the process points to the need to investigate the quality of lives in a nation by assessing such areas 'as infant mortality, access to health care, life expectancy, the quality of public education, the presence or absence of political liberties, and the state of racial and gender relations' (ibid). In her analysis, Nussbaum highlights the significance of compassion in moral judgement and social justice and defends its emotional aspect by asserting that emotion is a vital element in the information needed to ensure an informed decision about allocation of resources in a society. Since 'science must be responsive to the human facts', employing emotion means 'modeling [sic] human action scientifically' (Nussbaum, 1996: 53).

3.2.3 The ambivalence of compassionate emotions

The value of Nussbaum's analysis of compassion has been recognised in a number of disciplines (see, for example, Goetz *et al.,* 2010; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Zembylas, 2013), and her model has been developed further. However, some argue that the focus of the model on cognition is somewhat narrow because it presumes a universal view of the observer and the innocent sufferer and does not take into account the ambivalence of compassionate emotions (Zembylas, 2013). For instance, witnessing suffering might trigger mixed emotions; alternatively, a person could be simultaneously an observer and a sufferer, or it could be questioned 'whether compassion should also be extended to those who are not innocent victims' (Zembylas, 2013: 506). The third belief in Nussbaum's analysis, similarity with the sufferer, is emphasised by Goetz *et al.,* (2010), whose appraisal model draws on evolutionary psychology and adds the idea of cost-benefit to the concept of compassion.

Specifically, their model proposes that compassion is neither unconditional nor unlimited; rather, it is shaped by a kind of cost-benefit evaluation. The benefit element of the evaluation relates to enjoying cooperation with the sufferer and gaining from it. According to Goetz *et al.,* (2010) the observer benefits from compassionate responding, firstly, because of the closeness or similarity with the sufferer in terms of either family ties or shared interests and values, secondly, owing to the good character of the sufferer who is likely to demonstrate cooperation and altruism in return rather than exploit it selfishly. On the other hand, the cost element of the evaluation relates to the observer assessing their own ability to cope with suffering they witness and to regulate their own emotions by means of having sufficient psychological resources to adapt (Goetz *et al.,* 2010). High coping ability means that available resources outweigh the costs or threats, thereby leading to increased compassion, whereas low coping ability tends to activate distress and feeling weak and powerless, and normally leads to such emotions as sadness and fear (Goetz *et al.,* 2010). Atkins and Parker (2012) argue that the cost-benefit evaluation may not be conscious and that it also reveals concerns about one's own well-being as well as concerns about the well-being of others, which in turn could be regarded as a natural adaptive mechanism rather than self-interest.

The above analysis of compassion demonstrates the complexity and the controversy surrounding the concept, both of which are of much significance to the study of workplace compassion, the meaning of which is discussed later in the chapter. For now, however, in order to gain an even more in-depth understanding of compassion, it is necessary to compare it with several important concepts that are sometimes associated or used interchangeably with it. The following subsection is devoted to this comparative analysis.

3.2.4 Compassion and compassion-related concepts

The complex nature of compassion discussed thus far has been linked to its emotional, cognitive and social aspects, although other compassion-related concepts, such as pity, empathy, sympathy, love, caring and kindness, arguably reflect these aspects of compassion to varying degrees. It is the emotional dimension of compassion that unites these concepts that may be viewed as other-oriented states although there are certain distinctions between them. Despite being often used synonymously with sympathy (for example, Batson, 2009), compassion is regarded as encompassing 'a slightly broader set of states' and is more focused on alleviating suffering, whereas sympathy is associated with an emotional reaction to another person's state or condition that involves feelings of concern, sadness and sorrow (Goetz *et al.,* 2010: 351). Compassion is occasionally referred to as 'love in response to the other in suffering' whereas sympathy is defined as 'love in response to the other who suffers unfairly' (Post, 2002: 51). The term 'disinterested love' is sometimes used to emphasise the selfless other-focused nature of compassion (Frost, 1999: 128). Kindness and caring are other terms in the compassion-related family. Thomas and Rowland (2014) bring to the fore the social aspect of the notions of kindness and compassion by identifying them as attributes of grace and highlighting their role in moral judgement and decision-making. Another two important compassion-related concepts that can be considered additional dimensions of the social aspect of compassion are pity and empathy. These deserve more careful attention; hence, the following two subsections explore them in more detail.

3.2.4.1 Compassion and pity

Although Nussbaum (1996) uses the terms compassion and pity interchangeably, many researchers make a clear distinction between them (for example, Goetz *et al.,* 2010; Hoggett, 2006; Porter, 2006; Whitebrook, 2002; Zembylas, 2013). It is generally agreed that the key difference between pity and compassion lies, first of all, in the former denoting the feeling and the latter referring to the feeling accompanied by action (Whitebrook, 2002; Zembylas, 2013). In addition, pity requires an object, and innocence is a necessary characteristic of the object of pity, whereas compassion requires a subject and accepts their flaws (Hoggett, 2006). In other words, compassion shows patience and tolerance with the subject's 'otherness' and lack of virtues when responding to their suffering (Hoggett, 2006: 156). Another important distinction is the asymmetry of pity that involves either feeling concern for someone who is regarded inferior (Goetz *et al.,* 2010), or viewing the cause of suffering as something that cannot happen to the spectator (Whitebrook, 2002). This indicates that pity and compassion do not necessarily go hand

in hand; witnessing suffering might trigger feelings of pity but it does not necessarily result in action aimed at the alleviation of suffering that is associated with compassion (Whitebrook, 2002; Zembylas, 2013). This asymmetry of pity is not necessarily only contextual or based on individual characteristics of the spectator and the sufferer because arguably, it is also linked to social conditions and inequalities. Therefore, it reveals the political nature of the notions of compassion and pity, with pity downplaying power relations and inequalities and adopting a sentimental framing of suffering that is often presented as universal (Zembylas, 2013). This contrast with pity highlights the potential role of compassion in achieving a fairer social order to the extent that some theorists consider compassion to be 'an essential bridge to justice' (Nussbaum, 1996: 37; Porter, 2006; Whitebrook, 2002; Zembylas, 2013). This dimension of compassion is of particular importance to this study, requires more exploration in the workplace context and, therefore, will be discussed in the section on workplace compassion. The remaining part of this subsection, however, is devoted to empathy, another compassion-related notion, the political nature of which is also acknowledged in the literature and linked to social justice.

3.2.4.2 Compassion and empathy

Similar to compassion, empathy is a complex notion that has recently attracted attention of researchers from several disciplines, giving rise to a number of theoretical frameworks and conceptualisations (Zurek and Scheithauer, 2017). Indeed, there are arguably almost as many definitions of the concept as researchers investigating it (Zaki, 2014). There is consensus, however, that empathy includes cognitive and affective dimensions which are interrelated and interdependent and can be defined 'as the ability to understand and to share the emotions of others' (Zurek and Scheithauer, 2017: 58). Although the terms compassion and empathy are sometimes used interchangeably (Banker and Bhal, 2018), there are nevertheless clear distinctions between the two. Specifically, empathy relates to a range of different emotions, both positive and negative, whereas compassion seems to be restricted by negative emotional states (Zurek and Scheithauer, 2017). Another difference between the two concepts relates to compassion's desire to respond in order to relieve suffering, whereas empathy is restricted to understanding the feelings of another person and sharing the same emotions (ibid). Other differences between the two are not as clear-cut but are explored further below.

The key commonality between compassion and empathy lies in their other-centred multi-faceted nature that includes both emotional and cognitive dimensions, as well as an

important role they both play in moral judgements and ethical decision-making (Mencl and May, 2009; Simpson *et al.,* 2014; Zurek and Scheithauer, 2017). The cognitive dimension of empathy, sometimes referred to as cognitive empathy, is quite pronounced and often requires specific cultural knowledge necessary for the correct understanding of 'the dissimilar other's cultural world' (Ting-Toomey, 1999:160). It is this focus on cognition, a 'stronger element of identification or perspective-taking' (Pedwell, 2012: 282) and 'a clear cognitive and experiential boundary' between the empathizer and the object of empathy (Hollan, 2012: 71) that differentiates empathy from compassion. This important distinction has drawn much attention to empathy in the field of cross-cultural management, whilst it is also viewed as an important competency in the debates on relatively new constructs of mindfulness (Blasco *et al.,* 2012; Thomas, 2006; Thomas *et al.,* 2008; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Tuleja, 2014), cultural intelligence (Blasco *et al.,* 2012; Earley, 2002; Thomas, 2006; Thomas *et al.,* 2008; Tuleja, 2014), emotional intelligence (Cherniss and Goleman, 2001; Goleman, 1995, 1998), and in the well-established theoretical debate on intercultural conflict management styles (Euwema and Van Emmerik, 2007; Hammer, 2005; Holt and DeVore, 2005). Compassion, in contrast, is not viewed as a competence itself; rather, empathy is regarded as one of the competencies of compassion, which means that empathy does not necessarily result in a compassionate action (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017). It is the cognitive dimension or so-called perspective taking of both notions that, on the one hand, links them to morality and ethical decision-making (Mencl and May, 2009; Nussbaum, 1996; Simpson *et al.,* 2014; Zurek and Scheithauer, 2017), and, on the other hand, may encourage the spectator to avoid them (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017; Goetz *et al.,* 2010). This, in turn, may be related to the issue of motivation (Zaki, 2014), which is the focus of the next section.

3.2.5 The issue of motivation: compassion and empathy

Both, compassion and empathy are associated with pro-social care-related behaviour. However, this type of behaviour is neither necessarily automatic nor genuinely care-focused or altruistic. Rather, it is context and goal oriented (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017; Zaki, 2014). This means that caring behaviour could be motivated by the need to be seen positively by others, to be accepted and valued (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017). Equally, it could be motivated by the need to avoid feelings of shame or guilt for not caring - the term submissive compassion is used to refer to this type of self-focused caring behaviour (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017). Empathy is also associated with different motives. Zaki (2014), for example, identifies sources of emphatic motives such as offspring care that is related to empathy triggered by signs of helplessness, or ingroup identification and outgroup exclusion whereby 'observers should experience explicit or implicit goals to empathise

with ingroup, but not outgroup, targets' (Zaki, 2014: 1612). In addition, some studies suggest that cognitive empathy can be employed to manipulate other people and achieve maximum benefit for oneself at the cost of others, which means that empathy can be used to fulfil antisocial functions (Zurek and Scheithauer, 2017). This suggests that empathy, similar to compassion, can be controversial.

This controversy is revealed in the findings of an interesting study conducted by Gilbert, Catarino, Sousa, Ceresatto, Moore and Basran (2017). This sought to develop a measure of what the researchers refer to as 'competitive self-focused or even manipulative empathy' to identify whether people are aware of their capacity to employ empathic competencies non-compassionately to gain personal or competitive advantage. According to the outcomes of the study, the participants 'who scored higher on cognitive empathy also scored higher on competitive self-focused empathy', suggesting that individuals possessing empathic competencies do recognise their ability to employ self-focused empathy for their own benefits (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017: 7). Interestingly, the results of the same study also indicate that compassion motivation is different from empathy in this sense because it is 'not related to the degree to which an individual sees themselves as being able to use empathy for self-focused or manipulative purposes' (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017: 7). Rather, submissive compassion associated with self-interest, as mentioned earlier in the subsection, seems to be motivated by shame and defensive self-focusing (ibid). This critical account of the motivational aspects of empathy and compassion shows clear differences and similarities between the two notions and brings to the fore the complex, debatable and somewhat controversial nature of compassion.

3.2.6 Concluding the notion of compassion and its complex nature

A substantial body of literature on the concept of compassion views it as a focal point of many spiritual and ethical traditions and highlights its meaning as a social emotion that enhances the welfare of an individual and the community by making lives more morally coherent and communities more cooperative. However, compassion is complex and controversial. Some theorists are critical of compassion, considering it to be an unreliable source of moral judgement due to its emotional dimension that is deemed to be irrational and subjective. This position is clearly expressed in the following quotation by Immanuel Kant: 'A feeling of sympathy is beautiful and amiable; for it shows a charitable interest in the lot of other men… But this good natured passion is nevertheless weak and always blind' (Kant, 1960: 58). In contrast to this view, many researchers emphasise compassion's cognitive dimension associated with perspective-taking; they argue that

since the emotional aspect of compassion motivates altruistic actions towards those who suffer, even at a cost to the self, then compassion is indeed 'a guardian of the moral domain' (Goetz *et al.,* 2010: 365) that 'provides imperfect citizens with an essential bridge from self-interest to just conduct' (Nussbaum, 1996: 57). Also, it has been established that caring behaviour associated with compassion is not necessarily automatic but could be goal and context dependent (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017; Zaki, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to explore the concept further in order to determine whether its link to moral judgement and ethical decision-making remains unchanged in different contexts.

So far, the discussion of compassion and its complex nature has focused mostly on the debates in philosophy and psychology. However, this research is particularly interested in the compassion literature in organisational studies and in the context of a workplace. This is the focal point of the following section, which identifies and explores the meaning of workplace compassion and investigates any practices associated with it in the context of a modern organisation.

3.3 The notion of workplace compassion

3.3.1 The roots of research on workplace compassion

Compassion in the context of a workplace has been historically associated with compassionate patient care provided by healthcare professionals. When nursing was first established as a profession, Florence Nightingale was believed to have identified compassion as one of 'certain virtues and qualities' cultivated by good nurses (Perez-Bret, Altisent and Rocafort, 2016: 599, citing Bradshaw, 2011). The foundation of the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK in 1948 is viewed as an expression of compassion manifested in the commitment to provide free healthcare to everybody who needed it (West, Eckert, Collins and Chowla, 2017) and the Constitution of the NHS defines compassion as its fundamental value (Bray, O'Brien, Kirton, Zubairu and Christiansen, 2014). Being integral to healthcare, compassion is 'embedded in the ethics of healthcare professionals' as well as a driving force for choosing the profession (Cochrane, Ritchie, Lockhard, Picciano, King and Nelson, 2019: 120). As an essential component of person-centred care, compassion relates to healthcare professionals' 'ability to develop genuinely compassionate relationships with patients and families' resulting in positive healthcare outcomes for patients (Sanso, Leiva, Vidal-Blanco, Galiana and West, 2022: 1166).

Research on professional compassion in healthcare highlights the complex, ambiguous and contradictory nature of the notion that has been conceptualised and defined in

numerous ways (Bray *et al.,* 2014; Taylor, Hodgson, Gee and Collins, 2017). Compassion in healthcare has been explored from a variety of perspectives, such as 'psychology, ethics, health education and policy' (Fotaki, 2015: 199), whilst it has been attracting increased attention from researchers due to the challenges faced by healthcare services internationally. Such challenges relate to compassion deficit 'as a major factor contributing to medical errors, poor patient experience, and breakdowns in care delivery' as well as 'reports of burnout, compassion fatigue, and cases where workloads placed on providers are too demanding to allow for the personal, human contact that underlies compassionate care' (Cochrane *et al.,* 2019: 120). Moreover, these challenges have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the compassion deficit 'has been strongly accentuated by the current health crisis' (Sanso *et al.,* 2022: 1166).

Exploring these compassion-related challenges in healthcare is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it should be acknowledged that research on compassion in the context of healthcare has stimulated interest in the concept of workplace compassion in other fields. As modern organisations, healthcare service providers have experienced transformations in the world of work resulting in deterioration in the quality of life of healthcare professionals and in their physical, mental and psychological health (Jilou, Duarte, Goncalves, Vieira and Simoes, 2021). These changes demonstrate tensions and contradictions within the value of compassion, which has given research on workplace compassion in healthcare new directions. Indeed, compassion research has broadened to include the objectives of health policy and organisational structures in order to explore how these support compassion in healthcare organisations (Fotaki, 2015). Compassionate leadership and its role in building the culture of compassion in modern organisations is another significant avenue taken by compassion research in healthcare (for example, Sanso *et al.,* 2022; West *et al.,* 2017; West, 2021). These areas of research on compassion in healthcare demonstrate an evident connection to research on workplace compassion in organisational studies and in the context of higher education, which is the focus of this thesis. The following part of this section on workplace compassion continues to address this link as well as other historical roots of compassion research.

Over two decades ago, Peter Frost, a professor of the Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources Division at the University of British Columbia, shared his experience as a patient of a cancer ward where he witnessed compassionate nursing care. When reflecting on the experience in his paper *Why Compassion Counts!*, Frost (1999) highlights parallels between hospitals and other workplace settings where 'suffering and pain' demand 'dignity and self-respect' (Frost, 1999: 131). He contends that ignoring

these vital aspects of organisational life leads to a distorted understanding of workplace settings and calls for 'looking at organisations through the compassion lens' (ibid: 131). As for the nature of compassion required in the setting of a modern organisation, Frost argues that since 'a compassionate nurse may have to administer painful treatments, a surgeon still has to cut, a manager must sometimes fire, a loved one must be let go', workplace compassion is therefore not about 'bleeding hearts' or being soft; rather, it is 'a form of disinterested love' that alters 'the tone, the quality of the experience of those involved' and presents 'the potential for a healed outcome' (ibid).

These memorable comparisons and the sincerity of Peter Frost's story about his compassion encounter inspired, impacted on and engaged his readers and colleagues both intellectually and emotionally (Dutton and Workman, 2011). Moreover, his work became the catalyst of increasing interest in compassion in organisational studies debate (Rynes *et al.,* 2012). With Peter Frost's passing in 2004, his colleagues continued to develop the idea of 'compassion as a generative force' that 'propels and motivates action' (Dutton and Workman, 2011: 402) by means of researching 'what it means to be compassionate or part of a compassionate organisation' (ibid: 404). The terrorist attack of 9/11 in the United States in 2001 is often regarded as a defining event that challenged many taken-for-granted assumptions about security and organisation, and provided numerous examples of how compassion, in the face of acute trauma, tragedy and distress, helped companies to heal and rebuild (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius and Kanov, 2002). Although there are other historical roots that go back much earlier (Simpson, Clegg and Pitsis, 2014a), the collective trauma of 9/11 became a stimulus for compassion research contributing to the domains of Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) and Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB). Research in these two fields focuses on organisational effectiveness that 'goes beyond basic organisational survival', and it seeks 'to uncover what contributes to personal and collective thriving in the workplace' (Sekerka, Comer and Godwin, 2014: 436), and literature on compassion in the context of modern organisations is positioned mainly in these two areas of research. It is the meaning of compassion in the context of a modern organisation as well as practices associated with compassionate organisations that are the focus of this thesis and the following section now turns to the examination of the notion of workplace compassion, the model of the interpersonal process of compassion and practices presented by the organisational studies debate as indicators of compassionate organisations.

3.3.2 Focus on suffering

While acknowledging some of the aspects of the meaning of compassion discussed in the previous section of the chapter, the debate in Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) seems to remain silent about the role of compassion in moral judgement and social justice. Rather, it focuses solely on suffering, which is presented as 'part of the human condition' (Rynes *et al.,* 2012: 504), and, hence, inevitable in the context of a workplace (Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999). Organisations are considered to be 'fraught with pain and suffering' (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 811) with three possible sources of suffering in the workplace being commonly identified in the literature (Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2011; Rynes *et al.,* 2012). These include, first of all, the pain and suffering brought to the workplace from people's personal lives, such as grief, or caused by 'work-related factors, such as hostile coworker interactions, an abusive boss, or having to deal with overly demanding clients' (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 811). Second, the organisational studies narrative acknowledges that pain and suffering could be caused by organisational actions, such as, for example, mergers resulting in conflicts, 'poorly managed change, or indiscriminate restructuring and downsizing' (ibid). The third source of suffering relates to larger scale factors, such as natural disasters, man-made catastrophes, financial crises and uneven distribution of wealth resulting in the growing gap between the rich and the poor (Dutton, Worline, Frost and Lilius, 2006; Rynes *et al.,* 2012).

These sources of suffering in the context of a workplace are a mixture of unavoidable suffering associated with natural disasters, human vulnerability, emotionality and mortality on the one hand, and the pain and suffering inflicted by organisations in pursuit of profit maximisation on the other. However, the literature does not make this important distinction. Moreover, even though 'organisationally induced suffering' (Dutton *et al.,* 2014: 294) is admitted, the narrative on workplace compassion in organisational studies focuses mostly on the unavoidable type of suffering referred to above (for example, see Aboul-Ela, 2017; Atkins and Parker, 2012; Banker and Bhal, 2018; Dutton and Workman, 2011; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012; Lilius *et al.,* 2011; Lilius *et al.,* 2013; Madden *et al.,* 2012; Moon *et al.,* 2014; Rynes *et al.,* 2012). Since compassion is viewed as a response to suffering (for example, see Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2011), the failure to differentiate between unavoidable and inflicted suffering is likely to have resulted in the failure to recognise the differences in the possible responses to these types of suffering. This means that some of the aspects of workplace compassion are likely to have been overlooked, which alters the meaning of compassion in the context of a workplace.

The focus on suffering that is framed as sentimental and universal (Zembylas, 2013) attempts to normalise its presence in the workplace and, in contrast to other social sciences that link compassion to social justice and understanding social conditions that cause suffering (for example, see Conklin, 2009; Nussbaum, 1996; Zembylas, 2013), the discussion in organisational studies on workplace compassion overlooks its political nature. Furthermore, the literature adopts a somewhat pragmatic perspective on the notion of suffering. That is, the role of compassion is considered 'critical and consequential' because the pervasive nature of suffering in the workplace has 'serious implications for organisational performance and productivity' (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 811). Therefore, the aim of workplace compassion is generally considered to be the reduction of costs to organisations in terms of financial losses (Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kanov *et al.,* 2017). It is argued that this could be accomplished by means of providing opportunities to employees to deal with their suffering, but this can only be achieved by organisations acknowledging suffering and responding to it (Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2004). This response takes the form of compassion which, following Clark (1997), is viewed 'as a process comprising three interrelated elements: 'noticing' another's suffering, 'feeling' the other's pain, and 'responding' to that person's suffering' (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 812). As seen in the introduction to the section, the organisational studies literature often makes references to the medical and nursing context where compassion is viewed by medical professionals and policy makers as a competence and 'as a moral imperative that is an essential component of patient care' (ibid). Therefore, it is argued that since pain and suffering are present in other workplace settings, therefore, other types of professions and organisations need to give compassion the attention that it deserves. In order to gain an in-depth comprehension of the meaning attached to workplace compassion within organisational studies, this section now turns to Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model, which will be examined in detail.

3.3.3 Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model

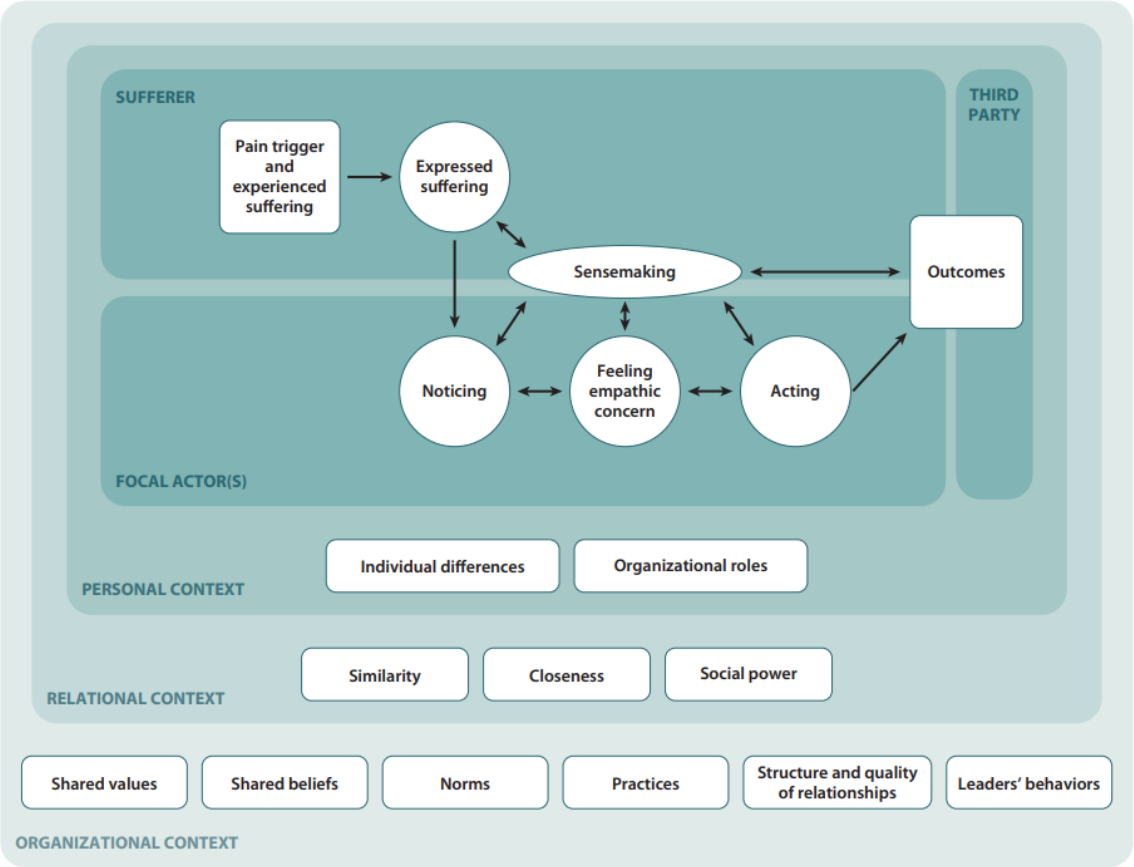
The Dutton *et al.* (2014) model is considered to be an outstanding contribution to the literature on workplace compassion in organisational studies and the most comprehensive theoretical model, combining as it does a range of divergent ideas that have not been integrated by previous research (Kanov *et al.,* 2017). The significance of the model to this research lies in its situating compassion in the context of a workplace and in identifying 'attributes and conditions operating at three levels of context (personal, relational and organisational)' that impact and shape workplace compassion in these three levels (Dutton *et al.,* 2014: 285). In other words, it is its comprehensive nature and the workplace context that make it necessary to give the model serious attention.

Synthesising the main organisational studies literature on compassion, the model demonstrates the focus on suffering, with experienced and expressed suffering triggering the process of compassion (see Figure 3.1 below). This is then presented as a set of three core subprocesses of 'noticing the suffering, feeling empathic concern, and acting to alleviate the suffering' (Dutton *et al.,* 2014: 281; Kanov *et al.,* 2004). Although it is acknowledged that these subprocesses could be taking place simultaneously and that the distinction between them could be blurry, the model displays them as interrelated but specific for the purpose of analysis (Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Miller, 2007). This distinction also reflects the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of compassion discussed earlier in the chapter and becomes particularly important at the organisational level of context, where these subprocesses have been referred to as 'collective noticing', 'collective feeling' and 'collective responding' (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 816-819).

The model presents a number of attributes and conditions that operate at each of the three levels of context and which impact on the process of compassion (see Figure 3.1 below). Specifically, in the personal context, the participants' individual differences, such as personal traits, attitudes, abilities, knowledge and demographic characteristics (Dutton *et al.,* 2014) as well as their organisational roles are considered to be important features that impact on the workplace compassion process. According to the model, similarity, closeness and social power are the main features that shape compassion in the relational context, whereas the process and outcomes of compassion in the organisational context depends on shared values, shared beliefs, norms, practices, structure and quality of relationships, and leaders' behaviours within an institution (see Figure 3.1).

There are both similarities and differences between the view on compassion discussed in the previous section of this chapter and the meaning of workplace compassion demonstrated by the model. As stated earlier in the subsection, the model makes a clear distinction between the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of compassion by presenting relevant subprocesses as specific. Also, similar to the view on compassion as linked to rationality, which was discussed earlier, the model emphasises the importance of compassion's cognitive element. This is demonstrated by 'sensemaking' being positioned at the centre of the compassion process model and linked to all but one of its elements (see Figure 3.1). This, however, does not mean that the importance attached by the model to the cognitive aspect of workplace compassion links it to moral judgement or social justice.

Figure 3.1 A Model of the Interpersonal Process of Compassion



Source: Dutton *et al.* (2014: 282)

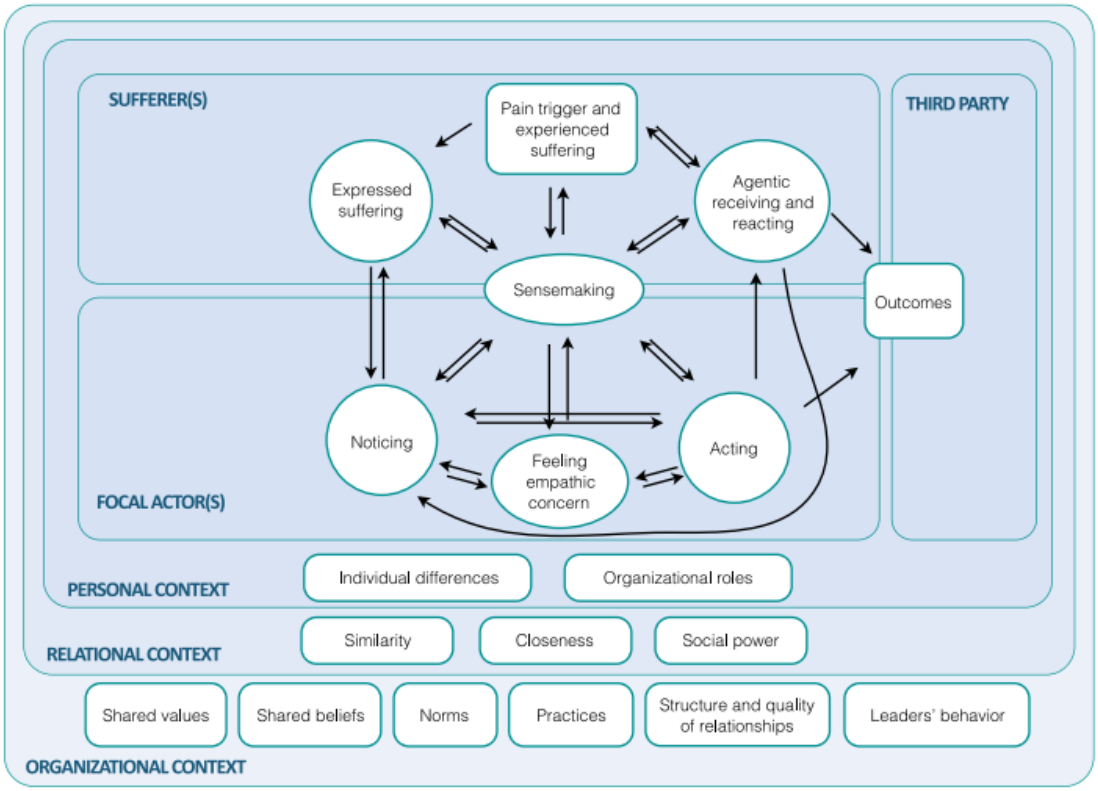
Another prominent difference relates to the role of the sufferer in the compassion process. The previously examined approach to compassion is based mostly on the observer's perception and comprehension of the nature of suffering and the sufferer, whereas the model emphasises the mutual involvement of the observer, who is referred to as the 'focal actor', and the sufferer (Dutton *et al.,* 2014). According to the Dutton *et al.* (2014) model, not only is the observer but also the sufferer actively engaged in sensemaking by means of interpreting and appraising their own and the other's situation at different stages of the process, and their effects on each other can impede or stimulate compassion (Dutton *et al.,* 2014). In other words, the observer's and the sufferer's intentional and consistent cooperation is required for compassion to take place (Kanov *et al.,* 2017). This attaches a particular importance not only to the sufferer's sensemaking ability throughout the process but also to their capacity and will or preparedness to express experienced suffering, which could be particularly problematic at the organisational level of context. Another difference between the approach to compassion discussed earlier in the chapter and the Dutton *et al.* (2014) model relates to the

additional element, the 'third party', which is introduced to highlight the impact of compassion's outcomes on witnesses and bystanders (see Figure 3.1). This also becomes particularly important at the organisational level of context.

3.3.3.1 Subsequent modifications of Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model

It has been acknowledged by the authors of the model that research on workplace compassion appears to be somewhat fragmented and not fully developed (Dutton *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the model is generally regarded as a starting point for further investigations and the development of the compassion literature. Since the model was first proposed, the debate on workplace compassion has progressed and various points of the model have been critiqued. Figure 3.2 presents a revised version of the compassion process model as modified by Kanov *et al.*, (2017) that addresses some of the critique. It is explained in what follows.

Figure 3.2 The reconfigured compassion process



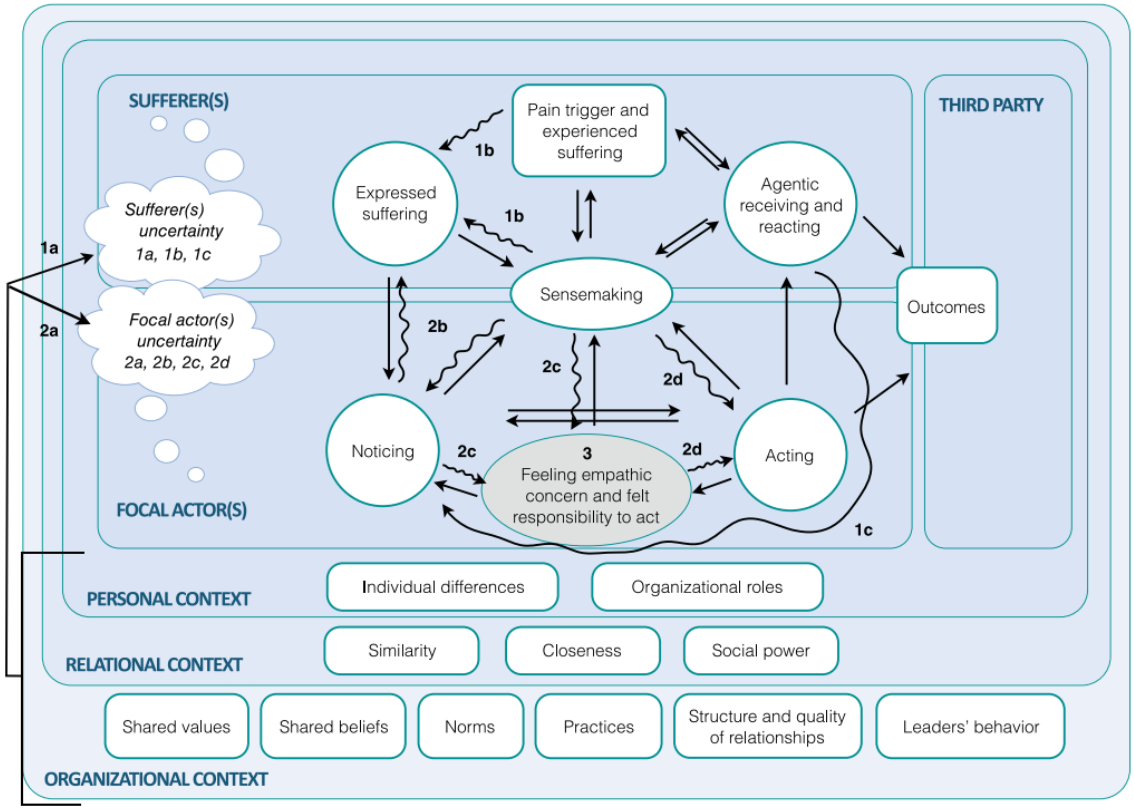
Source: Kanov *et al.* (2017: 756)

The revised model offers three main modifications. First, it emphasises the recursive nature of the three sub-processes of noticing, feeling empathic concern and acting that may move repeatedly and circularly in different directions (see Figure 3.2). Second, the model further highlights the role of the cognitive aspect in the compassion process by linking all stages of the process, including the trigger point, to the central element of sensemaking. Finally, the engagement of the sufferer in the compassion process is further highlighted by the revised model whereby an additional sufferer sub-process, agentic receiving and reacting, indicates that the sufferer's active and intentional participation is regarded as an important condition of the successful achievement of compassion (Kanov *et al.,* 2017). These modifications serve to accentuate the sufferer's engagement in the process and the importance of the cognitive aspect of compassion.

In response to the main critiques related to the tendency of organisational studies researchers to portray workplace compassion somewhat idealistically, Kanov *et al.* (2017) introduce the concept of uncertainty into the compassion process. This additional element refutes the suggestion that suffering is likely to activate compassion unless specific contextual influences are at play and explains how suffering and compassion are impacted by uncertainty as well as context-related factors (Kanov *et al.,* 2017). As demonstrated in Figure 3.3 below, the concept of uncertainty relates to both the sufferer and the observer or focal actor, and results in the uncertainty of workplace compassion. The reviewed model demonstrates that uncertainty could be heightened at each of the three levels of context, i.e. personal, relational and organisational, and consequently disrupts the compassion process. Nevertheless, the modified model also suggests how workplace compassion can be accomplished despite uncertainty.

Seeking to present a less idealistic view on workplace compassion, the modified model pays attention to the disruption of the compassion process and its causes in order to explain why suffering in the workplace does not necessarily result in compassion. Kanov *et al.* (2017) clarify that uncertainty of workplace compassion could be caused by a range of uncertainty-related factors that impact on the sufferer and the observer or focal actor. The sufferer, for example, could feel uncertain about the appropriateness of expressing suffering in front of other people, or could be concerned about the negative consequences of these expressions, such as judgement or rejection (ibid). Conversely, the uncertainty of compassion relates to the observer's doubts about the presence and reasons for suffering as well as their uncertainty about the type and manner of an appropriate response (ibid).

Figure 3.3 How compassion is disrupted and accomplished in the face of uncertainty



Source: Kanov *et al.* (2017: 769)

To emphasise the disruptive nature of uncertainty in the compassion process in the organisational context, Kanov *et al.* (2017) offer two sets of propositions in their revised model that reflect the disruptive impact of the sufferer and the focal actor uncertainty on the compassion process in this context (see Figure 3.3). The first set - 1a, 1b and 1c - proposes that all three levels of contexts, that is, the personal, relational and organisational, influence the sufferer uncertainty; the higher level of sufferer uncertainty results in more constrained or inhibited expression of compassion, in hindering the quality of compassionate actions, and in impeding the sufferer's reaction to these compassionate actions. Similar propositions are offered in the second set - 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d - that highlights the negative impact of focal actor uncertainty on each of the compassion sub-processes: noticing suffering cues, feeling empathic concern and engaging in compassionate action (ibid: 759-764). The model then links these two sets of uncertainty-related propositions to the personal, relational and organisational contexts of workplace compassion (see Figure 3.3) to demonstrate that the attributes and conditions in these contexts, such as, for example, individual differences, organisational roles or practices can further exacerbate uncertainty and consequently interfere with the compassion process in the workplace. The concept of uncertainty illustrates an attempt

to express the complexity of the compassion process; however, it does not explain how or why compassion is accomplished in the context of a workplace. To address this, Kanov *et al.* (2017) introduce the notion of courage.

Viewing 'compassion as a courageous act' (Kanov *et al.,* 2017: 765) has been inspired by the parallels observed between compassion as a response to suffering and courage as a response to challenging events associated with normally unexpected, unprecedented and disruptive critical incidents that demand attention in the workplace (Schipzand, Hekman and Mitchell, 2015). Drawing on Schipzand *et al.*'s (2015) model of the workplace courage process, Kanov *et al.,* (2017) highlight similarities between suffering and the model's two types of challenging events, namely, when dealing with employees in need or distress and when significant decisions have to be taken in the face of considerable uncertainty (Kanov *et al.,* 2017). It is argued that these challenging events align with instances of suffering, which create conditions for both compassion and courage (ibid). This highlighted parallel between suffering and the courage model's challenging events broadens the meaning of suffering and its relevance to the workplace by placing it on a scale with other types of unsettling and damaging organisational challenges (ibid). This implicitly acknowledges the organisationally-inflicted suffering mentioned in the previous subsection; however, no distinction is made between suffering caused by organisational actions and unavoidable suffering, or between the possible responses or courageous acts dealing with these different types of suffering.

Another significant parallel between the courage model's challenging events and suffering in the compassion theory observed and emphasised by Kanov *et al.,* (2017) informs another modification of Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model. This adjustment reflects the need to address the issue of motivation in the compassion process and is achieved by attaching an additional element, felt responsibility to act, to the feeling emphatic concern sub-process in the modified version of the model (see Figure 3.3 above). This alteration is justified by the assertion that both challenging events and suffering are required to trigger compassion, although they are not sufficient (Kanov *et al.,* 2017). This consequently raises the question of motivation. Following the logic of Schipzand *et al.* (2015), who view a personal sense of responsibility as the key driver of courageous action, it is asserted that compassion also can be accomplished only if the observer or focal actor experiences a felt responsibility to act (Kanov *et al.,* 2017). This additional motivation-related element of felt responsibility to act is considered to be the missing piece in the workplace compassion puzzle – it is a vital feature of the compassion process that may enhance the focal actor's ability to notice suffering and to feel emphatic concern towards the sufferer (ibid). Nevertheless, this paints a somewhat idealistic picture of the motivational aspect of workplace compassion inasmuch as it does not take

into account the context and goal-oriented nature of care-related behaviour (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017; Zaki, 2014), possible personal agendas and self-interest, or so-called submissive compassion aimed at avoiding feelings of shame or guilt (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017) that were mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Although it is acknowledged in the literature that organisational settings often render the accomplishment of compassion complex and problematic (for example, Frost, 2003; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2008), it is arguably the link to morality and moral judgement associated with decision about who is worthy of compassion, as well as the link to social justice in terms of attempts to understand the conditions causing suffering, that are missing in the debate. This alters the meaning of compassion, thus demanding further exploration of the concept and clarification of how compassion is achieved in the context of a workplace. To establish this, the following subsection will examine practices and routines associated with compassionate organisations.

3.3.4 Compassionate organisations: Cultivating compassion in the workplace

Following Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) workplace compassion process model discussed above, it is argued that in order to be compassionate, organisations must develop specific mechanisms or a range of systemic aspects, namely, values, practices and routines that enable them to engage in collective noticing, feeling and responding to suffering (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius and Kanov, 2002; Kanov *et al.,* 2004). Workplace compassion is viewed as 'a set of social processes in which noticing, feeling, and responding to pain are shared' amongst employees, and it is argued that when shared, these processes become collective; moreover, they 'must be legitimated and propagated, responding must also be coordinated' in order for an organisation to become compassionate (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 816). The following subsection critically evaluates organisational practices and routines associated with these social processes.

3.3.4.1 Collective noticing, collective feeling and collective responding to pain

Collective noticing involves the acknowledgement or shared appreciation of pain in organisations by individuals, which is supported by organisational structures, systems, values and practices (Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Dutton *et al.,* 2002; Kanov *et al.,* 2004). It is argued that this relationship is bidirectional, which means that employees engaged in collective noticing should promote relevant structures, policies and practices that intensify their alertness for suffering (Kanov *et al.,* 2004). To develop the capacity for collective noticing, organisations need to adopt relevant practices and routines, such as

regular meetings that provide opportunities for noticing signs of distress (Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Lilius *et al.,* 2008), the introduction of open spaces to organisations' physical architecture, and the development of strategies that assist and enhance communication about suffering in organisations (Kanov *et al.,* 2004). However, this overlooks the ethical aspect and 'complex intricacies of compassion as a social relational process entwined with power relations' (Simpson, Clegg and Freeder, 2013: 399), whereby the sufferer could choose to exercise their right not to share experienced pain in the workplace context (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson, Clegg and Pitsis, 2014b). In addition, these types of collective noticing practices and routines can be questioned in relation to Foucault's concept of disciplinary power (Thompson and McHugh, 2009); that is, they can be viewed as organisational surveillance tools employed by management rather than features of compassionate organisations.

It is also claimed that in order to be compassionate, organisations should strive to cultivate and legitimate collective feeling, which could be achieved by means of adopting relevant values, norms and procedures, such as 'feeling rules' and 'display rules' that encourage employees to share their emotions (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 818). However, establishing feeling rules potentially trivialises the essence of human emotions, ignores their unpredictable nature and implies that feelings could be cultivated (Pedwell, 2012) or controlled as if they were a tool. Hence, the relevance of this type of organisational practice to compassion in the workplace could be questioned.

Establishing display rules means that employees are expected to engage in emotional labour, specifically, intentionally displaying socially and organisationally acceptable emotions in job-related interactions (Grandey, 2003; Hsieh, Yang and Fu, 2011; Morris and Feldman, 1997). According to Grandey (2000), these employee efforts to conform to organisational expectations include surface acting and deep acting. However, both forms of acting are internally false and require effort although their purpose is different (Grandey, 2003). On the one hand, surface acting or 'faking in bad faith' (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987: 32) involves adjusting emotional expressions to camouflage true feelings and to simulate expected emotions (Hsieh *et al.,* 2011). Evidence from empirical research demonstrates that surface acting results in increased job dissatisfaction and high levels of stress (Grandey, 2003). On the other hand, the intention of deep acting or 'faking in good faith' (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987: 32) is to appear authentic to the audience, so conscious attempts are made to modify inner feelings and expressed emotions to match them to the required displays (Grandey, 2003; Hsieh *et al.,* 2011). Although not significant, a relationship exists between deep acting and emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003). Hsieh *et al.*'s (2011) study investigates the impact of compassion on these two emotional labour activities, surface acting and deep acting, and concludes that

‘compassion is positively associated with deep acting but negatively associated with surface acting’ (Hsieh *et al.,* 2011: 247). Also, according to the study’s outcomes, more compassionate employees are likely to ‘experience less emotional distress when following organisational displaying rules’ and ‘feel no or much less need to fake emotions’ (ibid). This demonstrates that workplace compassion could be associated with emotional labour and seems to focus mostly on the benefits it offers to organisations rather than to employees in these organisations, and in some cases may result in detrimental effects on employees’ well-being.

This tendency to prioritise organisational benefits, sometimes at the cost of employees’ welfare, can also be observed when examining collective responding to suffering and its associated practices suggested in the literature. Specifically, the literature on workplace compassion offers examples of practices as responses to suffering, such as sharing absent colleagues’ work (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov and Maitlis, 2011), donating paid annual leave to the co-workers who need time off due to difficult personal circumstances (Dutton *et al.,* 2002; Kanov *et al.,* 2004), or making anonymous donations to struggling colleagues (Lilius *et al.,* 2011). Such practices might complicate relationships within teams, create anxieties and insecurities related to self-identity and foster guilt owing to a perceived failure to express compassion in the workplace. These practices could also be viewed as examples of hidden relational power (Cunliffe, 2009; Thompson and McHugh, 2009) employed to achieve compliance and protect the organisations’ interests.

Also, it can be argued that these practices, camouflaged as concerns for employees’ welfare, are in fact sacrifices made by individuals at the expense of their own well-being, as opposed to investments in employee welfare achieved at the cost of organisational profits. Following the logic of corporate capitalism, modern organisations act in the interest of profit maximisation, which can undermine their ability to be compassionate. George (2014) highlights this fundamental tension between compassion and the logic of capitalism that justifies inflicting harm when, for example, ‘by laying off employees even when it is not necessary to do so for organisational viability’, in so doing arguing that capitalism ‘has the potential to create conditions under which compassion is much less likely to occur’ (George, 2014: 7). Certainly, underpinned by the ideology of corporate capitalism, modern organisations tend to promote the neoliberal values of self-interest, competition, individualism and materialism that are often associated with a beguiling sense of freedom and the corrosion of moral values (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009), which are incompatible with the value of compassion. Hence, since cultivating compassion in this type of workplace is likely to be challenging, a significant role in achieving this is given to leaders, who are often referred to as managers of group emotion (Humphrey,

2002; Kellett, Humphrey and Sleeth, 2002; McColl-Kennedy and Anderson, 2002; Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002; Pescosolido, 2002; Scott, Colquitt, Paddock and Judge, 2010). It is to this that the next section turns.

3.3.4.2 Leaders as managers of group emotion

The organisational studies literature emphasises the pivotal role of leaders in coordinating compassionate responding and instilling compassion in the workplace (Atkins and Parker, 2012; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Lilius *et al.,* 2013). As such, this equates to managing group emotion, which involves modelling a specific emotional response to a situation that causes an emotional reaction, in order to demonstrate what is appropriate or acceptable in the situation, particularly when there is an element of ambiguity or uncertainty (Humphrey, 2002; Pescosolido, 2002). It is argued that this allows the leader to deal with the situation, to set the emotional tone within the group and to influence employees' future behaviour, thereby creating shared emotion and communal actions that result in increased group solidarity (Pescosolido, 2002). Thus, in contrast to the argument discussed earlier in the chapter that the emotional dimension of compassion renders it a controversial concept, the organisational studies literature appraises the emotional aspect of workplace compassion as to be mostly beneficial and regards managing group members' emotions as a vital leadership function (Dutton *et al.,* 2002; Rynes *et al.,* 2012; Scott, Colquitt, Paddock and Judge, 2010). It is argued that managing employees' emotions is an important tool employed by leaders to regulate productivity and performance (Humphrey, 2002). Moreover, leaders displaying positive emotions are rated by their bosses and subordinates as better performers themselves (Sadri, Weber and Gentry, 2011). Indeed, it is argued that the benefits of emotional leadership to employees' perceptions of their leaders are particularly significant because, in some cases, leaders' emotional displays have a stronger impact on their subordinates than the content of their messages (Humphrey, 2002; Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002).

It is for this reason that some suggest that managers should display compassion when carrying out 'painful acts' such as 'firings, layoffs and downsizings' (Kanov *et al.,* 2004: 812). However, the claim that employing compassion 'not only helps the person in pain, but also allows the harm-doer to navigate the difficult situation and to maintain his or her moral identity' (Lilius *et al.,* 2013) seems both cynical and questionable. For example, the expectation that managers, in order to display compassion, should approach those colleagues who have been made redundant (Atkins and Parker, 2012) is arguably unreasonable because they are likely to be blamed or feel responsible for the decision.

According to research in social psychology, 'judgements of blame or fairness' are closely linked to the emotion of anger (Oveis *et al.,* 2010: 618) and, hence, managers' attempts to display compassion in this context could be seen as inappropriate and unhelpful, and are likely to inflict additional unnecessary suffering on both parties.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the severity of this organisationally-induced suffering is played down in the literature. Specifically, some refer to this type of organisational actions as something that 'unsettles people who lose their jobs and destresses survivors who are concerned about their colleagues' losses along with their own job security' (Dutton *at el.,* 2014: 280). This type of inflicted suffering is 'a collective organisation-wide loss' that could trigger grief (Hazen, 2008) affecting both leaders and their subordinates. Frost and Robinson's (1999) term 'toxic handling' relates to 'contagiously' absorbing the pain and distress experienced by colleagues and points to recognition of the negative impact of compassion in the workplace (Simpson *at el.*, 2014b). It is usually managers and leaders who act as toxic handlers, thus 'becom[ing] vicariously vulnerable to the toxicity of the very same hurt as the people who are the objects of their sympathy' (Simpson *at el.*, 2014b: 474-475). This detrimental nature of workplace compassion appears to be understated by the Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) literature that presents a predominantly positive perspective on the notion.

Another important issue that influences the role of leaders and their ability to be compassionate relates to the link between compassion and power. Social power is considered to be one of the attributes or conditions of the workplace compassion process (Dutton *et al.,* 2014), yet there exists an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that in some circumstances, higher power may damage compassion, and those with more power appear to be less accurate in interpreting other people's emotions and distress in comparison with individuals possessing less power (Dutton *et al.,* 2014). This view is supported by key findings in empirical research in psychology, which demonstrated that 'upper-class individuals showed less prosocial behaviour', 'charity and generosity' in comparison with lower-class representatives (Stellar*,* Kraus, Manzo and Keltner, 2011: 3). On the other hand, and as discussed earlier, the literature suggests that leaders, as managers of group emotion, play a pivotal role in coordinating compassionate responding and instilling compassion in the workplace (Atkins and Parker, 2012; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Humphrey, 2002; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kellett *et al.,* 2002; Lilius *et al.,* 2013; McColl-Kennedy and Anderson, 2002; Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002; Scott *et al.,* 2010).

Attempts to address this contradiction reveal another controversy in the compassion debate. According to Atkins and Parker (2012), the solution to the social power versus

compassion issue lies in psychological flexibility which, according to their model, may enhance compassion. They argue that elements of psychological flexibility 'input' processes, such as mindfulness and values-directed actions, lead to the 'outcome' processes of compassionate responding (Atkins and Parker, 2012: 529-530). The problem with this view is, however, that the values that are generally promoted in the modern workplace are self-focused norms related to competition and self-interest (for example, George, 2014; Grant and Patil, 2012; Pedwell, 2012; Rynes *et al.,* 2012), whereas compassion, as a care taking emotion (Oveis *et al.,* 2010), assumes the opposing other-focused altruistic ethics that foster care, empathy or even a form of disinterested love (Frost, 1999).

Grant and Patil (2012) attempt to address the discrepancy, arguing that the norms of self-interest could and should be challenged and substituted by helping norms by means of 'consistently modelling helping behaviour', 'destabilizing [self-interest] via voice' and 'creating the context for initiating and sustaining norm transitions' (Grant and Patil, 2012: 550-557). This, however, does not resolve the social power versus compassion contradiction. Hence, in an attempt to address this issue and to adhere to the principle of similarity-attraction in influencing others, rather simplistic strategies, such as shared initials or birthdays, shared interests, or group memberships and personality traits are suggested to increase 'perceived social similarity' (Grant and Patil, 2012: 555). The researchers nevertheless do recognise the limitations of these strategies and identify two significant risks to endorsement of new norms, namely, possible associations with hypocrisy and perceived threats to employees' values and freedom (Grant and Patil, 2012). In order to minimize these risks, they propose several tactics that appear to be clear indications of manipulation. For example, the suggestions that, in order to introduce compassion-associated norms and behaviour in organisations, high levels of uncertainty, frustration and pressure required to disrupt and change existing norms should be experienced by staff (ibid), seem quite remarkable and rather ironic. Creating these conditions in the workplace appears to show no concern for others or their well-being and is likely to produce the opposite effect by inflicting more suffering in the workplace. Attempts to operationalise compassion but which inflict more suffering appear to be morally wrong and call into question the appropriateness of compassion in the context of modern organisations.

These questionable strategies also emphasise the role of leaders in cultivating compassion with the aim of institutionalising it at the organisational level where it becomes important to scrutinise power and domination (Simpson *et al.,* 2013). Truly compassionate leadership may bring positive returns in the form of increased employee commitment, improved well-being and relations in the workplace as well as reduced

costs associated with decreased staff absenteeism and turnover (Dutton *et al.,* 2002; Rynes *et al.,* 2012; Scott, Colquitt, Paddock and Judge, 2010). However, when compassion relations are driven by the desire to increase productivity and to boost public relations, (Simpson *et al.,* 2013) and where leaders' expression of care is a tactic employed to achieve organisational goals, the benefits are usually temporary (Knights and Roberts, 1982; Roberts, 1984). Moreover, this approach to compassion could prove detrimental to leaders themselves owing to the stress associated with emotional labour, deep and surface acting discussed earlier in the section. Leaders' 'intentions are revealed not just through words but also through behaviours', and their attempts to achieve control by means of simulated compassion and fake relationships are likely to result in subordinates' resistance through emotional or physical distancing (Simpson *et al.,* 2013: 388). Leaders' effectiveness is not a morally neutral value (Roberts, 1984). Any attempts to use coercive power camouflaged as compassion fail to recognise and accept the ultimate dependence of leaders on their subordinates who could respond with various counter-coercive strategies (Knights and Roberts, 1982) that could seriously undermine workplace relationships, leaders or organisational interests.

The arguments presented in this subsection demonstrate a number of contradictions, controversies and tensions associated with cultivating compassion in the workplace and presenting leaders as heroic managers who empower and protect their subordinates. To address these, the organisational studies narrative has constantly revised and re-defined the notion of organisational compassion (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a), and some of these modifications are discussed in the following parts of the section.

3.3.5 Compassion as mediated by available resources and as a performance indicator

One of these significant changes in the rhetoric on workplace compassion relates to moving away from regarding it as the entitlement of managers who take the role of powerful givers choosing to be compassionate to their subordinates, to framing it as something communicated amongst employees (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a). This can be explained by the economic imperative of modern organisation concerned with 'maximising returns to shareholders' (George, 2014: 7). Since it is generally agreed that compassion-motivated actions are associated with costs (Oveis *et al.,* 2010), workplace compassion involving a cost becomes subject to available organisational resources (Banker and Bhal, 2018). The emphasis on available resources is clearly expressed in the operational definition of compassion for business organisations offered by Banker and Bhal (2018). They view compassion as a procedure involving the assessment of the

severity of the sufferer's needs and highlight that available 'monitory and non-monitory resources such as time and cost attached to the act of expressing compassion' need to be carefully assessed to ensure that overall organisational objectives are not hampered when 'a mindful decision of helping the sufferer' is made (Banker and Bhal, 2018: 8). Their empirical study reveals a clear distinction between the two roles adopted by focal actors, specifically, as compassion givers and compassion receivers, and highlights unique differences between these two groups' views and perceptions of compassion (Banker and Bhal, 2018). According to the study's findings, receivers expect compassion to be a fundamental element of the organisational system that enables organisations to express compassion not only towards individual employees but the whole company, whereas compassion givers, in particular those who are higher in the organisational hierarchy, concentrate on the viability of and barriers created by being compassionate (ibid). Furthermore, according to the study, compassion givers believe that there is an expectation of reciprocity when organisations grant employees with compassion (ibid). This breaks the fundamental principle of selflessness, uses compassion in an attempt to camouflage manipulation (Cameron, 2011) and is very calculative (Banker and Bhal, 2018). This casts doubt on the authenticity of compassion in the context of modern business organisations, demonstrates that the workplace context alters the meaning of compassion and explains that it is calculations and considerations of improved cost effectiveness that are arguably the main reasons for modifications in compassion rhetoric.

The dominant discourse on organisational compassion presents it as a radical practice and highlights its specific beneficial outcomes for employees (Rynes *et al.,* 2012) who become responsible for establishing compassion in the workplace. In other words, compassion is shifted onto the shoulders of employees as an additional expectation, function or duty. This is demonstrated in recommended actions, such as: recognising caring and compassion as part of an individual's role and making employees aware of the necessity of acquiring relevant knowledge and skills through appropriate training (Atkins and Parker, 2012); introducing an expectation that a conflict in the workplace is resolved by means of creating a climate of forgiveness that involves a certain amount of emotional labour on behalf of victims and offenders (Fehr and Gelfand, 2012), or adding the responsibility of developing the ability to self-regulate by means of alternating depleting and restorative tasks in order to avoid burnout, restore personal resources and provide high quality services (Lilius, 2012).

This shift to framing individual employees as being responsible for workplace compassion in the organisational context is particularly noticeable in the work of Madden, Duchon, Madden and Plowman (2012), who argue that organisational compassion can

be an outcome of spontaneous self-organising within the workforce. In contrast to the traditional perspective on the importance of management in creating organisational values and culture and in managing group emotion (Atkins and Parker, 2012; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Humprey, 2002; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kellett *et al.,* 2002; Lilius *et al.,* 2013; McColl-Kennedy and Anderson, 2002; Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002; Scott *et al.,* 2010), they view organisations as complex adaptive systems in which agents and their behaviour 'become widely recognised as a role responsibility and duty of organisational citizenship' (Madden *at el.,* 2012: 692). Therefore, it is argued that suffering is likely to be dealt with effectively by means of spontaneous acts of compassion and appropriate adjustments, and that these adjustments are to be later recognised and reflected in newly rewritten role definitions (Madden *at el.,* 2012). However, these additional responsibilities of caring for self and others, self-control and self-regulation, combined with the expectations of high-quality performance and productivity to maximise profits for organisations appear to be neo-normative controls that put additional pressure on the well-being of the contemporary workforce and call into question claims with regards to the benefits of workplace compassion for individuals.

Another important point relevant to workplace compassion as a function of human resources is the lack of attention paid in the literature to the threats of the political and business rhetoric of workplace compassion in constructing and exploiting the sense of identity and insecurity at work. Justified by the concern for the well-being of employees, the work practices and recommended actions discussed in previous subsections, as well as engaging emotional intelligence when addressing problems and offering help (Lilius et al., 2011) are additional examples of the emotional labour expected from a self-managing and self-enterprising contemporary workforce comprising 'ideal neoliberal citizens' (Pedwell, 2012: 286). These expectations are likely to create anxieties and insecurities related to self-identity and, as mentioned earlier, possible guilt owing to the perceived failure to express compassion in the workplace. Offering stress and mental health awareness training, mindfulness sessions and suicide prevention training are other examples of shifting accountability from the organisation to the individual (Krause, 2018). The suffering and struggles caused by heavy and often unmanageable workloads are then framed as the individual's inability to cope, or a mental health crisis, which organisations attempt to resolve by improved counselling provision or support services to staff. This serves to obscure the underlying causes of suffering and shifts blame on to the individual (Krause, 2018; Pells, 2018).

Presenting compassion as one of the key organisational values and an additional performance measurement criterion seems particularly insidious, because in addition to coping with their own struggles, employees are expected to spot, address and respond

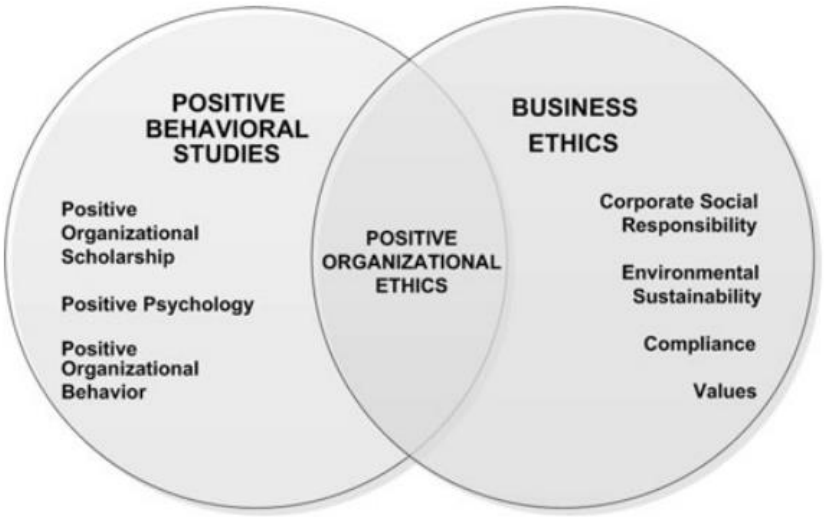
compassionately to any signs of stress in their colleagues or customers (Krause, 2018). In the context of a workplace, this casts doubt on the relatedness of the meaning of compassion to morality expressed in this chapter's opening quotation and questions the value of compassion as beneficial to individuals as claimed in the organisational studies literature.

So far, this section on workplace compassion has offered a critical appraisal of the concept based on the influential Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) framework. This is built around Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) model of the compassion process, with specific emphasis on noticing suffering, feeling emphatic concern and acting to alleviate the suffering. This framework underpins many studies in the area of POS that seek to provide practical advice to organisations, the focus primarily being on the benefits of compassion to employees and to organisations in terms of improved work relations, enhanced employee commitment, performance and productivity (for example, Aboul-Ela, 2017; Banker and Bhal, 2018; Lilius *et al.*, 2008; Lilius *et al.*, 2011). Under the banner of POS, organisational compassion has received recognition, development and legitimacy (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a) but the main limitations relate to a failure to address ethical considerations in the decision making about who is worthy of compassion and relations of power. These two areas are the focus of the following subsection.

3.3.6 Workplace compassion in the Positive Organisational Ethics (POE) debate

An emerging body of literature on workplace compassion that will be explored in this subsection provides a more critical perspective on the notion by means of identifying and focusing on three main limitations of the extant theorising and research on compassion in the context of modern organisations: (i) the failure to recognise it as a social relational construct employed in the pursuit of organisational interests; (ii) the tendency to overlook complex power dynamics within compassion relations; and (iii), 'the absolutist view of compassion as virtuous' (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a: 356; also Simpson, Clegg and Freeder, 2013; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). This critical approach to the concept of workplace compassion also explores ethical considerations involved in the decision-making process on worthiness and legitimacy of compassion givers and compassion receivers (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). This debate belongs to the nascent field of Positive Organisational Ethics (POE) that Sekerka *et al.* define as 'as a discrete area of inquiry within the broader positive behavioural science movement' (Sekerka, Comer and Godwin, 2014: 436) and position POE as an intersection between the domains of Positive Behavioural Studies and Business Ethics (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Positioning POE between literature domains



Source: Sekerka *et al.* (2014: 437)

The field of POE is concerned with positive ethics in the workplace, ethical organisations and what establishes and constitutes a positive ethical organisation (Sekerka *et al.,* 2014). Contributions on workplace compassion to the field of POE expand on and extend POS debate on the notion since they bring to the fore the issue of ethical decision making and explore complex power dynamics of compassion relations, hence offering a richer and more comprehensive view on workplace compassion (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b).

3.3.6.1 A framework for compassionate decision making

From the POE perspective, compassion is regarded as a social relational process that goes beyond noticing, feeling and acting to alleviate suffering, to also involve judgements about the appropriateness of offering and receiving compassion (Clark, 1987; Schmitt and Clark, 2006). The term legitimacy is used to refer to the appropriateness of the action, which means that the giver considers their response as compassionate and the receiver regards the giver's behaviour as legitimate or, in other words compassionate in contrast to one that is, for example, condescending (Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). Judgements about the worthiness of compassion receiving and giving relate to what is socially acceptable as causes for suffering and how compassion is enacted (Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). Interestingly, these have changed over the last century and the range of misfortunes considered to be legitimate for compassion giving has broadened from injury and poverty to include mental health issues, addiction and other social concerns (Clark, 1987). The range of modes considered to be legitimate compassion giving has also

broadened from financial support to include a variety of psychological and substance abuse counselling (Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). It is argued that these changes in the legitimacy of compassion relate to power and reflect the development of capitalism and democracy resulting in more humane and compassionate society (ibid).

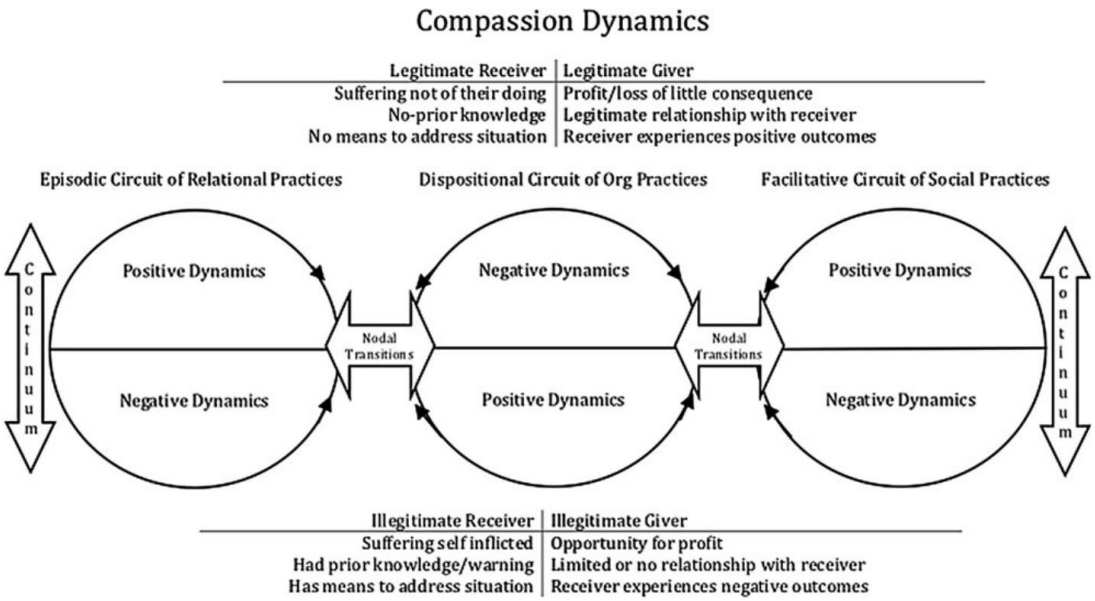
Based on the legitimacy-power framing, organisational compassion is then defined 'as the ongoing individual and collective capability for concern for another's well-being, which is characterized by relational processes of assessment as to members' compassion worthiness as legitimate receiver(s) and giver(s), and responding with giving, receiving or refusal to give or receive support' (Simpson *et al.*, 2014b: 475). In contrast to the meaning of workplace compassion in the POS literature explored earlier in the section, this definition focuses on organisational concern for well-being of individuals rather than their suffering, emphasises the moral judgement in the decision making and does not express an assumption that compassion is necessarily positive. In short, this perspective on workplace compassion treats it 'as an ethical practice that requires mindful reflexivity' and recognises that its nature, depending on the context, could be beneficial or detrimental to employees (ibid).

Another vital difference between the POS and POE perspectives lies in the significance given by the latter to power relations that are constantly produced and reproduced during legitimacy assessments of giving and receiving of compassion (ibid). This means that the power motives of the giver are evaluated when making a decision to accept or reject support, the reasons for rejection being, for example, feeling patronised or belittled by offers that highlight the receiver's flaws or struggles (Simpson *et al.*, 2013). Conversely, the receiver may accept the giver's support to strengthen their status by means of expressing appreciation in public to emphasise their connection to authoritative allies (Simpson *et al.*, 2013). The giver's power motive could be to boost their social status, or to impose attachment, indebtedness or dependency (Clark, 1987). By addressing the complex power relations, the POE perspective arguably provides a wider and more varied range of motivation-related aspects of workplace compassion in comparison with the POS literature.

The framework also addresses the issue of unavoidable and inflicted suffering mentioned earlier in the section, whilst the decision-making process on the legitimacy and worthiness of compassion giving and receiving includes establishing responsibility for suffering, which involves a mix of multifaceted and complex points (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). Thus, the compassion legitimacy and worthiness model (see Figure 3.5 below) incorporates a set of propositions related to both the receiver's and giver's legitimacy and worthiness of compassion. According to the model, the receiver is considered legitimate and worthy of compassion if they are not responsible for their own suffering, if

they were not aware of any danger or risk involved and if they have no means to address the situation. In contrast, the illegitimate receiver of compassion presents the opposite characteristics. As for the considerations of the legitimacy of compassion givers, these include no or little importance attached to the giver's benefits from providing support, a legitimate relationship between the two parties where the giver could be a friend, a colleague, a family member or an authorised professional caregiver, and the condition of the receiver gaining from the provided support. In order for compassion to be assessed as legitimate or illegitimate, at least one of the three conditions discussed above and listed at the top and at the bottom in Figure 3.5 needs to be met (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). The two vertical arrows on both sides of the model indicate that the legitimacy criteria of each power-compassion episode tend to include a mixture of considerations associated with legitimacy and illegitimacy of compassion (ibid).

Figure 3.5 Compassion legitimacy and worthiness model



Source: Simpson *et al.* (2014b: 486)

The model presented above is a multidimensional framework of compassion legitimacy; it demonstrates that compassion is interwoven with power relations that are produced and reproduced in every compassion related episode (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). To emphasise the power complexities involved in identifying compassion legitimacy, the framework employs Clegg's 'circuits of power' model (Clegg, 1989: 214), which uses the metaphor of electricity flowing through three distinct interacting circuits (see Figure 3.5). The episodic circuit represents irregular micro-level power relations in day-to-day social

exchanges when co-workers address feelings, conflict, communicate, offer support and resistance, with positive and negative outcomes (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). The dispositional circuit is concerned with how power relations are expressed and controlled within organisations, normative patterns of behaviour which are informed by policies, rules, procedures, practices and informal agreements (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). At this level, 'the power exerted is the power that lies in continuing or contesting 'business as usual'' (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b: 486). These official and unofficial rules legitimise or fail to legitimise compassion in organisations (Simpson *et al.,* 2013), and for an organisation to be compassionate, these policies and systems need to ensure the availability of resources necessary to support organisational compassion-related values, such as the values of equality, respect, commitment to others, dignity and importance of employees (Frost and Robinson, 1999). The facilitative circuit deals with organisational rights and responsibilities related to macro-level structures 'as well as the technologies of power embedded in socio-material structures' (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b: 486). Sometimes associated with the government's response to natural or other type of large-scale disasters (Simpson *et al.,* 2013), these structures also empower or disempower, reward or punish actions in the episodic circuit as well as restrain or foster norms and practices in the dispositional circuit (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). All three circuits interact by means of the 'obligatory passage points' marked as nodal transitions (see Figure 3.5 above) that allow the flow of power in both directions and where power shifts can be observed (ibid).

The framework presented in Figure 3.5 is based on several empirical studies that explore 'the connection between organisation, compassion and power' (Simpson *et al.*, 2013: 390), demonstrates the complexity of compassion-power relations in the context of a workplace and is arguably of great practical value to managers. Simpson *et al.,* (2014b) suggest that the model should be used by practising managers as the framework 'for systematic ethical reflection' required in their decision making, and should be applied to develop 'an organisational code of compassionate conduct' and to improve compassion-related organisational policies and practices (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b: 489). The model has also been employed as a practical tool in several empirical studies focusing on assessing the worthiness of compassion receivers and the legitimacy of givers (for example, Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). Furthermore, it has been used to evaluate organisational compassion capabilities demonstrated by several companies responding to an extreme event or a crisis, which accentuates power relations within an organisation (for example, Simpson *et al.*, 2013). Some of these studies' findings are discussed in the following part of the section, which focuses on organisational compassion capabilities and raises the question about whether modern organisations can indeed be compassionate.

3.3.7 Compassionate organisations: A myth or a reality?

A variety of responses associated with organisational compassion or its absence have been identified by Simpson *et al.,* (2013) in their empirical study that focused on the assessment, decision making and responding to the Brisbane floods in Australia in 2011 and used in the analysis Clegg's (1989) circuits of power model, which was explained in the previous subsection (see Figure 3.5). Three main categories of organisational compassion responses were identified in the episodic circuit or level of power: neglect, ambivalence and compassionate care, which led to three contrasting outcomes related to employee engagement, specifically, anger, cynicism and gratitude (Simpson *et al.,* 2013). Neglect includes non-decision, unreasonable demands and the failure to communicate concerns for employees and to keep them updated, as well as a refusal to provide financial assistance. Collectively, these resulted in employees feeling disappointed, angry and emotionally distant from the organisation (ibid). Ambivalence or ambiguity involves token gestures of concern where organisational response was initially slow but became more significant later. These concerns for employees were not regarded as authentic; rather, they were seen as aimed at meeting legal obligations to avoid court cases or as attempts to manage public relations (ibid). It could be argued that these two categories of ambivalence and, in particular, neglect do not constitute organisational compassion because no positive outcomes or benefits were experienced from organisational responses identified with these categories.

However, according to Simpson *et al.*'s (2014b) model of compassion legitimacy, the receiver experiencing negative outcomes is one of the conditions of the illegitimate compassion giver (see Figure 3.5). According to the framework, each compassion-related episode can display a mixture of aspects related to the legitimacy and illegitimacy of compassion (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b); therefore, these two categories of neglect and ambivalence can still be regarded as organisational compassion related responses. This implies that the authors of the framework do not believe that organisations can be compassionate or non-compassionate. Banker and Bhal (2018), whose operational definition of compassion for business organisations was discussed in 3.3.5, concur with this view, arguing that, since expressing compassion is a choice rather than an attitude, its absence does not automatically result in non-compassion (Banker and Bhal, 2018). They explain that non-compassion is not something that is opposed to compassion because both notions appear to operate in different dimensions (ibid). The findings of their empirical study present two unique sets of factors, referred to as vicious and virtuous factors, that either assist or hinder the expression of compassion in business organisations. However, the researchers point out that the presence or absence of these factors does not make organisations compassionate or non-compassionate.

3.3.7.1 Compassionate care as an attribute of compassionate organisations

It is important now to return to Simpson *et al.*'s (2013) study on the Brisbane floods, which, in addition to identifying neglect and ambivalence, established the third category of organisational compassion responses, namely, compassionate care. The main features of this response include speedy communication that often anticipates employees' concerns and uses a range of media, with the content focusing on two main points: first, the safety of employees and that of their families is the number one priority and second, the assurance that employees would be compensated in full for the time they could not work due to the floods (Simpson *et al.,* 2013). Compassionate care as an organisational response also includes financial and other types of gifts provided to the employees affected by the floods and contributions made to general flood relief funds (ibid). Simpson *et al.,* (2013) emphasise that this category of compassionate care employs organisational power to facilitate adaptation to the critical situation. They also suggest that the positive nature of the power reflected in adjusting companies' policies and if needed, bending several rules in order to support the workforce was regarded as displaying 'high compassion' (Simpson *et al.,* 2013: 395). This was particularly valued by the employees who expressed pride and eagerness to reciprocate the compassionate care by working hard (ibid).

The theme of compassionate care is also established at the dispositional and facilitative circuits or levels of power and compassion in the framework in Figure 3.5. Having a clearly expressed culture of care is identified as the main feature that distinguishes compassionate organisations from those in which negligent responses to employees' concerns exacerbated their anxieties (Simpson *et al.,* 2013). Those organisations in which prioritising people over profits was embedded in policies, routines and practices, such as allowances for bereavement leave, community service, flexible working hours and a better work-life balance (ibid) were reported by the participants as compassionate. Regional and state government interventions and local community involvement were identified by the study as those operating at the facilitative level of power and compassion. The study's outcomes also emphasise that in compassionate organisations, recruiting and promoting 'managers who act as role models through great leadership and compassionate care' is paramount because the focus on the ethic of care is expected to be on-going rather than reactive (ibid).

It must be noted, however, that Simpson *et al.*'s (2013) study on the Brisbane floods explores organisational responses to a natural disaster. It can be argued, therefore, that organisational compassion was employed as an instrument in the crisis management process, whereas contemporary organisations function in the competitive business environment and are concerned with profit margins and cannot possibly sustain

compassion-related demands on resources in their day-to-day activities. Nevertheless, it is compassion's relatedness to caring, which is seen as an established action that includes collective care and indicates the level of democracy, equality and justice in a society (Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer, 2014) that renders compassion a part of any organisation's functioning. Responsibility, defined by Tronto (2013) as one of the moral elements of care, is also an important component of the feeling emphatic concern sub-process in the modified version of Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model discussed earlier in the section. It is the sense of responsibility that, according to the model, motivates individuals to act on witnessed suffering and contributes to their compassion capacity by enhancing their ability to notice suffering, to feel emphatic concern for the sufferer and impact their interpretation of a compassion episode (Kanov *et al.,* 2017).

3.3.7.2 Increased moral responsibility: market-embedded morality and demoralising processes in modern organisations

In contrast to this view on the sense of responsibility as a motivation for compassion, Shamir (2008) attributes increased individual and corporate responsibilities to neo-liberalism. He highlights that instead of minimal conformity with rules, responsibility entails fulfilling one's own duties and embracing certain values voluntarily, thereby making governance and control more effective (Shamir, 2008). These increased individual and corporate responsibilities are regarded as neo-liberal attempts to collapse the distinction between economy and society by means of exporting the logic of the market to social domains and by imposing socio-moral obligations and ethical behaviour on corporations (Shamir, 2008). Such terms as the responsibilisation and moralisation of markets are used to refer to commercial enterprises acquiring the moral agency, and the instrumental and utilitarian nature of corporate morality and ethics is then presented in the rhetoric and practices that imply that businesses are commercially motivated to behave morally and need freedom of choice in their moral governance in order to meet the demands of the market (Shamir, 2008).

This might explain the focus in the organisational studies literature on the instrumental nature of compassion and its emphasis on the benefits that compassion brings to modern organisations in the form of increased productivity and enhanced performance, as discussed earlier. Driven by the commercial imperative and by the neo-liberal principle of self-regulation, corporations and organisational studies discourse position compassion as 'the very notion of moral duty within the rationality of the market: doing good is good for business' (Shamir, 2008: 13). Applying the logic of the market to values such as compassion and to the moral duties of corporations in general reduces the threat of regulation from outside and is justified by suggesting that any external intervention

would suffocate innovation and initiative within corporations (ibid). It is also claimed that regulation from outside would demolish the moral flexibility that is required to secure efficiency and cultural sensitivity within diverse corporations and, thus, 'the responsible corporation… also becomes no less than a moral authority' (ibid). This view on modern organisations governed by individual moral authorities that produce a set of moral values, regulations and policies arguably in order to enhance their ability to compete with other companies supports the argument that organisations can indeed be compassionate. However, it is the flexibility of 'market-embedded morality' (Shamir, 2008:1) needed by this type of moral authorities to ensure their competitive advantage that calls into question the meaning of compassion in the context of such organisations. Moreover, it casts doubt on whether it is indeed compassion or a competitive advantage achieved by means of emotional labour imposed on the workforce that is being framed as compassion.

However, an opposite perspective can be adopted inasmuch as it can be argued that organisations cannot possibly be compassionate because extending moral responsibility beyond human beings is ontologically inaccurate/mistaken (Jensen, 2010). According to this approach, having moral responsibility relates solely to people, whereas organisations are associated with demoralising processes and, therefore, exert powerful pressure on employees to persuade them to abstain from taking increased moral responsibility (ibid). Jensen (2010) identifies six such demoralising processes. First, constant change means organisations continuously reinvent themselves with the result that employees are obliged to prove their value to the company (Kotter, 1996). This subsequently results in competition and self-interest, leading to increased stress levels, decreased motivation and growing suspicions within teams (Jensen, 2010). Second, the acceptance of constant and often disruptive change aiming at doing more with less forces employees to continuously upgrade their skills (Bauman, 2002; Sennett, 1999), thereby shifting work ethics 'from long-term collective commitment to short-term individual gains' (Jensen, 2010: 428). Consequently, 'bonds of trust and commitment' are damaged and 'will' is divorced from 'behaviour' (Sennett, 1999: 31). Third, the concentration of power at the centre means that failures, mistakes and a range of responsibilities are dispersed and shifted to the periphery (Sennett, 1999) resulting in a lack of accountability and of responsible action from those in the periphery due to their reluctance to take a risk and their fear of being singled out and excluded (Jensen, 2010). Fourth, functional division of labour and narrow specialisation result in the social production of distance, which means that tasks and actions performed in one part of the organisation are distanced from other parts where their effects are observed or experienced. Consequently, individuals do not see the outcomes of their actions, which results in moral distancing (ibid). Fifth, focusing on narrow technical tasks or actions

obscures the moral importance of these activities; the tendency of organisations to evaluate their success based on effectiveness, efficiency, rationality and productivity is an example of this demoralising process. Finally, the sixth demoralising process in modern organisations relates to the manner in which individuals are reduced to a set of traits that are normally determined by quantitative measurements, such as cost-benefit analysis. This objectification of individuals produces a moral gap between them and decision makers (Jensen, 2010). Overall, this critical perspective on the modern organisation emphasises that in order to be successful, organisations need to create workplace contexts that increase moral distance between individuals in order to make it difficult for them to be spontaneously sympathetic or compassionate. In fact, this approach argues that this modern way of organising corrodes the moral character of individuals (Sennett, 1999). Moreover, since organisational action is declared as 'neither good nor evil' (Bauman, 1993: 125) or, in other words, 'morally indifferent', its demoralising processes present a threat of promising individuals to be released from any moral responsibility or guilt (Jensen, 2010: 432).

Another interesting and important point in the context of this thesis emphasised by the perspective relates to the fragile nature of people's moral character (Jensen, 2010) and how humans are often viewed as 'morally ambivalent' (Bauman, 1993: 10). This means that the behaviour of individuals depends on specific circumstances, is unpredictable and not necessarily determined by what is considered to be morally right or wrong. Moreover, it is argued that the way in which individuals perceive morality, or what is moral and immoral, is 'socially historic and institutionally dependent' (Jensen, 2010: 426). This concurs with observations earlier in this section about the morality-related notion of organisational compassion being constantly revised and re-defined, and with Shamir's argument that modern organisations are governed by individual in-house moral authorities. As the previous paragraph explains the impact of demoralising processes, this perspective develops these arguments further in the sense that it acknowledges that organisational contexts and the changing discourse on moral responsibility do alter individuals' perceptions of morality and make it hard for them to adopt increased moral responsibility. Therefore, it could be argued that this approach implies that not only are organisations incapable of being compassionate, but also that they determine how compassion is perceived by employees in these organisations and force them to abstain from being compassionate.

3.3.8 Concluding the notion of workplace compassion

Overall, this section of the chapter demonstrates that the notion of workplace compassion has benefited from much attention in the organisational studies literature, with compassion research contributing to the fields of Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) and Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB) in the exploration of effective and thriving organisations. Regarded as beneficial to both organisations and individuals, compassion in the context of a workplace is defined in the literature as a response to suffering and is framed as a solution to a number of organisational challenges associated with staff commitment, productivity and performance. However, some of the proposals on how to cultivate compassion in the workplace raise questions about the benefits it provides to a workforce coerced to accept emotional labour and additional responsibilities. The POS literature on compassion is expanded and extended by the contributions from compassion research in the field of Positive Organisational Ethics (POE) that focuses on the overlooked aspects of power relations and compassion as a moral judgement, as well as the controversies associated with workplace compassion, presenting a more critical perspective on the notion. This approach to workplace compassion acknowledges both its benefits and flaws. It considers it to be 'a variable practice' that, on the one hand, can involve ticking boxes to demonstrate compliance with relevant standards and legal requirements but, on the other hand, 'can be spontaneous, heartfelt and sincere, while no less routine' (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a: 356). However, another position emerges from the discussion on moral responsibility focusing on a motivational aspect of compassion. This insists that modern organisations corrode employees' moral character and prevent them from expressing sympathy or compassion because of the demoralising processes ingrained in their functioning. Despite these notable differences in perspectives on workplace compassion and its impact on organisations and individuals, the literature in organisational studies is, however, in agreement with regards to the notion being constantly revised and redefined both historically and contextually. Since the focus of this thesis is on workplace compassion in the context of higher education, it is to this that the following section turns.

3.4 The notion of compassion in the university context

Compassion in the context of education and higher education has been attracting increasing interest, particularly since the outbreak of Covid-19 (for example, Denney, 2021; Maginess and MacKenzie, 2018; Waddington, 2016; Zembylas, 2013). Nevertheless, few empirical studies have been conducted on compassion in this context. The impact of the key developments in the educational policy and the effects of

neoliberalism discussed in the contextual chapter of the thesis have resulted in the feeling of 'despair' in the sector where academics 'are alienated from the values, processes and identities' that define the profession (Fleming, 2019: 3). Hence, the need for compassion has been recognised as a potential solution to the challenges faced by the sector.

In comparison with the work on compassion in the organisational studies literature in the previous section, the concept of compassion is viewed more critically in the education-related literature. Specifically, the danger of adopting a sentimental discourse of suffering that stimulates pity instead of compassionate action (Zembylas, 2013) is highlighted and it is acknowledged that 'compassion can involve distorted judgements' based on factors irrelevant to morality, such as gender, skin colour, or accent that relate to in-group bias and can result in more harm than good (Maginess and MacKenzie, 2018: 42). Indeed, the compassion discourse in education focuses more on the political nature of the concept and emphasises its role in addressing structural inequalities and social injustice (for example, Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020; Maginess and MacKenzie, 2018; Zembylas, 2013; Zembylas, 2017). Hence, the literature distinguishes explicitly between the ambivalent nature of compassion associated with its emotional aspect and the role of compassion in challenging injustice and inequality by means of using terms, such as 'moralised compassion' (Maginess and MacKenzie, 2018), 'politicised compassion' (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020), 'critical pedagogies of compassion', 'critical compassion' and 'collective compassion' (Zembylas, 2013; Zembylas, 2017). This division demonstrates two contrasting poles of sentimentality and rationality that reveal organisational compassion as a fundamentally paradoxical concept presenting 'persistent interdependent, yet contradictory tensions' (Simpson and Berti, 2020: 434). These contradictions between the sentimental and the rational inherent in compassion are particularly significant in education because they relate to the contrast between the emotional and the intellectual, the main domains that yet to be viewed or treated as equally important.

3.4.1 A culture of carelessness in education

The culture of competitive individualism and self-interest that is usually 'rationalised in terms of 'a career'' in higher education is often attributed to the values of neoliberalism (Lynch, 2010: 59). This culture also reflects the role of education, which is primarily seen in developing autonomous and rational individuals whose relatedness to each other is not considered essential for their successful functioning (Nussbaum, 2001). In other words, the aim is to prepare younger generations for economic, political and cultural life;

the importance of developing young people as interdependent, caring and compassionate human beings is overlooked (Lynch, Lyons and Cantillon, 2007).

This culture is referred to as carelessness of education (Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007). Although neoliberalism has increased the demand for care-free workforce 'that is available 24/7 without ties or responsibilities' that might hinder their productivity (Lynch, 2010:57), it is argued that the origins of carelessness in education lie deeper within the Cartesian thinking that prioritises reasoning and separates scholarly work 'from emotional thought and feeling' (ibid: 59). This preference is evident in the status of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives for the cognitive domain, which is used internationally for evaluation and testing, whereas his taxonomy of educational objectives for the affective domain (Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia, 1964) has never received a due recognition (Lynch, 2010). This imbalance between the intellectual and the emotional demonstrates a general acceptance that formal education does not prepare individuals for the informal and unpaid caring and loving that they provide to each other in their lifetime (ibid). Therefore, since human mental health and well-being depends on supportive and rewarding relationships, ignoring the affective domain and neglecting care as a subject for teaching is a significant educational deficit (ibid).

Carelessness in education expressed in the prioritisation of the intellectual and the rational can be also observed in educational research that has arguably devoted insufficient attention to emotions (Lynch *et al.,* 2007; Zembylas, 2013), is, rather, mostly positivist-led and based on 'an assumption in scientific analysis that social actors are interest-led, power-led but not evaluatively led' (Lynch, 2010: 60). Research on affectively driven judgements on what is morally right exercised through interdependencies and vulnerabilities seems to be overlooked and there is lack of scholarly work on the role of human interdependencies in shaping social action (ibid). Research on compassion falls into this overlooked and underdeveloped category.

Exacerbated and normalised by neoliberalism, the culture of carelessness associated with competitive individualism and self-interest underpins not only scholarship but the very organisation of higher education and many of its practices (Caddell and Wilder, 2018; Fleming, 2019; Fleming, 2021; Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007). Competitive individualism is not viewed as 'an amoral necessity' in academia, rather, it is considered to be a desirable and necessary characteristic of neoliberal academics who are constantly reinventing themselves (Ball, 2003). Driven by the desire to succeed and 'seduced by competitive careerism and its incentive systems', academics 'have often played the neoliberal game' and 'the silent majority' of scholars 'quietly internalised the new dogma, leaning on it as the default option for how the profession works' (Fleming, 2021: 12). The expectation that academics work unregulated and long hours has become

a norm accepted by academics themselves (Clarke *et al.,* 2012; Fleming, 2021; Lynch, 2010), and often results in 'unhealthy lifestyles and unhappy relationships' (Fleming, 2021: 27). In recognition of demanding workloads and risks of physical and mental burnout, HR departments now typically offer a range of courses and training opportunities on work-life balance, stress awareness and time management, as well as what could be termed 'academic self-help' literature on how to navigate complex workloads and find meaning and happiness in their academic life (Caddell and Wilder, 2018: 16). However, these self-management practices cannot be associated with caring for academics or for their well-being because they not only add to already overwhelming workloads, but also deepen the 'hyper individualisation' of academic careers (ibid). Moreover, they demonstrate that there is limited capacity for compassionate commitment and reciprocal support in the modern university's 'wider culture of competition and strive for excellence' (ibid).

The culture of competition, carelessness and a lack of compassion also impacts on relationships within academia. According to the findings of Caddell and Wilder's (2018) empirical study on academics' experiences of kindness and collegiality in modern universities in Scotland, relationships among academics are somewhat double-edged. On the one hand, collegiality can be a source of support and encouragement; on the other hand, it can at times be challenging and even corrosive (Caddell and Wilder, 2018). The study's participants shared their experience of 'a darker side of collegiality' in higher education whereby colleagues 'deliberately attempted to 'clip their wings', steal work or spread rumours about performance' (Caddell and Wilder, 2018: 19). Unsurprisingly, for some of the study's participants, this kind of experience resulted in 'exploring alternative sources of support and mentorship' externally due to mistrust of their organisation and colleagues (ibid: 20). It also resulted in 'a lack of generosity with their own time' and a reluctance to commit to others (ibid). This challenges the feasibility of compassion 'in a culture infused with policies, practices and promotion criteria that privilege individual success and measurement of (comparative) excellence' because being compassionate and supportive of colleagues or students in this culture 'jeopardises being able to advance individual careers and develop prestige and institutionally recognised value' (ibid: 20-21). In other words, compassion seems to be an unaffordable luxury in the context of higher education. Therefore, because of the tensions and controversies surrounding the concept in this context, it needs further investigation.

3.4.2 The constructs of critical compassion and politicised compassion

The concept of critical compassion was introduced by Zembylas (2013) and further discussed and developed into what Gibson and Cook-Sather (2020) call politicised compassion. As mentioned above, these concepts emphasise the contrast between the sentimental discourse of suffering that evokes pity rather than compassionate action. The constructs draw attention to the dangers of simplifying the notion of compassion by linking it to the moral categories of 'good' and 'evil' (Chouliaraki, 2008). Zembylas (2013) contrasts practices of uncritical compassion that encourage feeling sorry for those who suffer, and lead to objectification, paternalism and voyeurism, with the notion of critical compassion that acknowledges and identifies the structural inequalities that cause suffering and challenges privileged irresponsibility.

The construct of critical compassion also emphasises that compassion as a response to suffering involves a distance between the sufferer and the observer. It is argued that in a society in general, there are groups with many caring responsibilities and obligations but, at the same time, there are others who can afford to ignore these responsibilities and take for granted that their needs are taken care of. Tronto (2000) refers to this as privileged irresponsibility. To address this division and to emphasise the politics of caring related to the issues of power, emotions and responsibility, it is suggested that compassion should be viewed as a response to human vulnerability rather than human suffering (Porter, 2006; Whitebrook, 2002; Zembylas, 2013; Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer, 2014). Suffering can result in a sentimental relationship between the sufferer and the observer that can overlook the structural inequalities that caused the suffering in the first place; however, 'a discourse of vulnerability neither eschews questions of suffering, nor obscures issues of inequality and injustice' (Zembylas, 2013: 508, 513). Another reason for viewing vulnerability as a more appropriate term than suffering lies in the notion that all humans are vulnerable, which prevents individuals from identifying themselves or others as victims (Zembylas, 2013). In addition, the concept of common human vulnerability accentuates the interpersonal and the inter-relational and reinforces the link between the personal and the political (Whitebrook, 2002). According to Zembylas (2013), critical compassion is cultivated only when the conditions giving rise to suffering are recognised and human connection is acknowledged. Education and higher education in particular are viewed as an appropriate context for cultivating critical compassion by means of exploring the emotional complexities of teaching for compassion with compassion and by means of developing a meaningful response to contemporary injustices in education and in the wider global context (Zembylas, 2013).

Building on Zembylas' (2013) work on critical compassion, Gibson and Cook-Sather (2020) advance the critical discourse on compassion, social justice and equality by exploring and challenging inclusion and diversity in higher education. They argue that driven by neoliberal values and the culture of performativity emphasising individual success, many modern universities are places where inclusion, diversity and equality have become disfigured and inverted (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020). According to them, the original meanings of the terms inclusion and diversity have been altered by the dominant political agenda and debates about resource allocation, resulting in categorisation, stereotyping and labelling students, the subsequent creation of division and the imposition of policy-driven definitions and identities (Gibson, 2006; Gibson 2015; Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020). Their concept of politicised compassion is a response to Zembylas' critique of essentialised categories of 'other', such as 'ethnic minority', 'non-traditional', 'disabled' and 'poor', and seeks to challenge and deconstruct these categories by exploring 'their origins and histories in relation to positions of power' (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020: 22). Politicised compassion is thus defined as 'an action-oriented, critical, and collective response of solidarity to the status quo of neoliberalism, exclusion, and micro and macro forms of inequality as and where they exist' (ibid). In the context of higher education, politicised compassion can be key in building partnerships between politicised academics and politicised students working together to counter systemic inequality and to pursue justice (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020).

Having examined these significant notions of critical compassion and politicised compassion, it is important to note the shift in the meaning of compassion in the context of higher education, where its sentimental aspect is viewed with caution and its political aspect associated with the positions of power, responsibility, justice and equality is brought to the forefront. Compassion in education and particularly in higher education is considered to be an important requirement for badly needed change, and it is therefore important to examine the role of compassion in educational leadership driving this change.

3.4.3 Compassion in educational leadership

Although still largely under-researched, compassion in educational leadership has been attracting increasing academic interest, particularly in the context of higher education (Denney, 2020). Indeed, some argue that the sector is witnessing what is sometimes referred to as the 'compassion turn' in response to the profound need to nurture cultures of compassion in universities, which requires leaders 'as the carriers of culture' to

incorporate compassion in their practice (Waddington, 2018: 87). This 'compassion turn' is, however, recent. Compassion or compassion related behaviour is not mentioned explicitly in any of the 13 forms of leader behaviour associated with leadership effectiveness at the departmental level identified in Bryman's (2007) literature review on the effectiveness of leadership in higher education in the UK.

However, according to a more recent study on leadership, pragmatism and grace, the term compassion is widely used and accepted as an important leadership concept and characteristic although a conceptual confusion emerges when attempts are made to define the notion of compassion and its application in leadership practices (Thomas and Rowland, 2014). The study highlights that in the reviewed literature, presentations of compassion are 'hierarchically dominant, patriarchal in description if not in intent and nearly always contextualised within organisational strategies' (Thomas and Rowland, 2014: 107). This means that compassion is viewed as a gift of the powerful leader to their subordinates and is usually considered to be attached to a specific leadership style rather than an important element of enhanced leadership (Thomas and Rowland, 2014).

More recent publications on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education emphasise the unpreparedness of educational leadership for dealing with the crisis and contrast the lack of compassion evident in the sector with the support and care received from local communities (Denney, 2020). In particular, some authors argue that the pandemic highlighted the detachment of higher education leaders who 'were mostly bystanders to real action', and insist that 'the goodwill, initiative and sheer amount of labour-time summoned by teaching faculty ensued not *because* of authority but *despite* it' (Fleming, 2021: 54-55). Furthermore, the pandemic magnified the flaws in the established models of higher education leadership which are fixated on the financial imperative and which resulted in the immediate cancellation of temporary contracts and compulsory redundancies (Denney, 2020). Kanov (2021) defines this type of organisationally induced or exacerbated suffering as 'a byproduct of contrived systems, processes and conditions' and emphasises that this type of suffering is preventable (Kanov, 2021: 87). Many researchers warn that in order to survive, universities and educational leadership must go through a radical change (Denney, 2020, 2021; Fleming, 2021; Waddington, 2016, 2018) and that authentic compassion in educational leadership is fundamental to such change (Denney, 2020, 2021; Konstantinou and Miller, 2022; Waddington, 2016, 2018).

Leadership in higher education, however, presents several problematic areas, and a transformation towards compassionate leadership is likely to be rather challenging, for several reasons. Generally, Bryman's (2007) study on leadership effectiveness in higher education in the UK highlights the absence of any consensus in regard to the definition

of leadership and little agreement or consistency in the perception of leadership roles within the academic community (Bryman, 2007). Thomas and Rowland (2014) put this lack of agreement down to the traditional values of academics who apply a questioning and sceptical approach to their everyday activities and responsibilities and by 'elaborate and collaborative divisions, hierarchies, specialities and sub-specialities within individual learning communities and other academic institutions' developed historically over centuries (Thomas and Rowland, 2014: 104). It could be argued, however, that it is the complex and fast-growing management hierarchies of university executives and senior managers with a great variety of roles 'that seem to have materialised out of nowhere' (Fleming, 2021: 52) that may be creating confusion at times.

The division between the two domains in the sector, between 'those who manage and those who teach/research' is taken for granted (Fleming, 2021: 23); the division within educational leadership is, however, rarely acknowledged. Beattie (2020), for example, refers to administrative leadership as an approach to educational leadership that endowed the sector with a new leader identity compliant with the imposed policy regime of auditing. It contrasts directly, therefore, with the traditional approach to academic leadership and its values. In a similar vein, Bolden *et al.,* (2012) make a clear distinction between academic management and academic leadership whereby the former deals with tasks, systems and processes aiming at achieving academic outcomes, whilst the latter, they claim, is concerned with influencing values and identities. According to Shepherd (2018), university leadership normally consists of the Vice Chancellor and their second-tier colleagues who are responsible for the areas of education, research and international partnerships. It is this senior management team that is perceived to have an important impact on their institution's values and norms (Denney, 2021) and, hence, that is expected to drive change by developing compassionate organisational values and cultures in order to enable universities to become more compassionate (Waddington, 2018).

However, the type of change in higher education has, as argued in Chapter 2 of this thesis, been largely determined by the governmental policy, educational legislation and associated funding allocations. Arguably, in the current neoliberal environment, 'under the veneer of leadership control', regardless of their position in the management hierarchy, the role of educational leaders has been 'diminished to the function of cogs in the disciplinary machine of the government that dictates its own goals and targets' (Beattie, 2020: 101). Consequently, educational leaders do not possess the ability to establish and actively work towards achieving the goals 'that are determined by their philosophy of education and the interest of their institution, staff and students' (ibid). This, in turn, means that the toxic environment of the modern university and its associated

preventable suffering are impacting not only academics but also their line managers who also often feel overloaded and unsupported, and therefore have insufficient personal reserves or capacity to respond with compassion (Denney, 2020).

Gallos (2008) offers an honest personal account of her experience as a university dean, comparing leadership with firefighting. She highlights the detrimental impact on staff and organisational culture of the rapid spread of toxicity within an organisation, resulting in many leaders who, due to their links to power structures, 'serve as buffers whose job includes institutional stress management', becoming toxin magnets and toxin handlers (Gallos, 2008: 359). To deal with the increased stress levels in order to stay healthy, Gallos suggests five strategies, namely: setting boundaries; keeping the body in good health; finding balance between mind, body and soul by focusing on 'positive sentiments, such as love, care, forgiveness and compassion'; appreciating beauty, such as arts, theatre, music, literature and creative writing; and building personal resilience (Gallos, 2008: 360-363).

Such strategies adhere to the self-help approach referred to earlier in the section. According to Gallos (2008: 364), 'compassionate workplaces fostering excellence *and* caring' could be achieved by means of reflection in management education and enhanced leadership as well as by developing multidisciplinary approach to learning that raises awareness of 'the messy sides of human and organisational behaviour'. This approach to introducing change and instilling compassion in universities reflects an overall mainstream management perspective which, by focusing on the flaws of humans and of their ways of acting and organising, attempts to grant validity to socially divisive management practices (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012). This approach to a transformation towards more compassionate organisations and leadership contrasts significantly with the previously discussed concepts of critical and politicised compassion that focus on bringing about social justice and equality. This demonstrates the difference of opinion in the sector and highlights the challenge of achieving a consensus in terms of finding ways of implementing compassion in universities.

Resilience and compassion, as well as courage, are identified as key elements of the 'Golden Braid' model of higher education leadership suggested by Denney (2021), who also emphasises the difficulty in developing courageous, compassionate and resilient leaders in cases where neither organisational structures nor culture within organisations support compassionate action (Denney, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has been considered to be a window of opportunity for the sector to evaluate the pre-pandemic values of UK universities that 'are no longer culturally fit for purpose in the post-pandemic world' (ibid: 43). However, it is not entirely clear how preventable suffering induced by

these neoliberal values can be eradicated and what role compassion plays in the process.

Another challenge in developing compassionate leadership in higher education lies, according to Fleming (2021), in the character of educational leaders themselves. Since there are very few countries where educational leaders are elected by their subordinates, self-selection by means of promotion, coaching and career development results in leaders choosing their successors based on personal traits and characteristics that are identical to the ones they themselves consider of great value in leadership (Thomas and Rowland, 2014). This can be problematic because, for example, kindness is regarded by many current leaders as a character weakness that impacts their behaviour and hinders their performance (ibid), despite its close link to compassion and authenticity. In addition, some authors argue that outcome-focused educational leaders become cold-hearted and 'institutionally numb to the feelings of those down the pecking order', or even turn revengeful and evil at times (Fleming, 2021:56). According to Keltner (2016), even if power is gained through such traits as empathy, openness, selflessness and fairness, these characteristics begin to fade when leaders start enjoying the privileges that come with power. In other words, power corrupts (Keltner, 2016), and the limited literature on the key characteristics of senior management in universities is scarce but mostly uncomplimentary (Denney, 2020), sometimes involving accusations of intimidation, victimisation, harassment and bullying of staff (Fleming, 2021). This negative reputation makes it problematic for existing and newly appointed educational leaders to instil trust, demonstrate authentic compassion and drive change in their institutions in order to make them compassionate.

3.4.4 Compassion in education: Gender differences

Since one of the aims of the thesis is to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with compassion in a university context in order to determine if they are beneficial for academics, it is important to address gender differences, if any, that influence academics' experiences and perceptions of compassion in this context. Some empirical evidence indicates that women have higher compassion scores than men (for example, Beutel and Marini, 1995; Rashedi, Plante, and Callister, 2015), however, this finding is not as significant for the thesis as the hypothesis that explains it, namely, that 'women are socialised to be more outwardly caring and compassionate' (Rashedi *et al.,* 2015: 136). Rather, it is the acceptance and the expectation to be caring in 'a care-free academic world' (Lynch, Lyons and Cantillon, 2007: 2), in which a particular 'care-less' form of competitive individualism flourishes (Lynch, 2010) that is likely to impact female

academics' experience of compassion in the university setting. Caring is 'an acutely gendered issue' (Grummell *et al.,* 2009: 194) with women being primary carers in society by default, sometimes referred to as 'care's footsoldiers', whereas men are 'care commanders' because they usually occupy positions of power and decision-making, and are, therefore, able to delegate caring responsibilities (Lynch, Baker and Lyon*,* 2009). Moreover, caregiving work undertaken by women and other less privileged groups is often overlooked and is persistently 'undervalued or devalued in terms of material rewards and status' (Zembylas *et al.,* 2014: 201). This puts women in a disadvantaged position in comparison with men.

It is acknowledged in literature that women are rewarded in universities 'significantly less for professional achievements than men' (Gersick, Bartunek and Dutton, 2000: 1027; also, Denney, 2021; Grummell *et al.,* 2009; Knights and Richards, 2003; Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007; Zembylas *et al.,* 2014). Historically, universities have been hierarchical and patriarchal organisations although new public management restructures in the sector sought to create gender-neutral and care-neutral services so that it could be claimed that women and minorities were enjoying equality in the workplace (Lynch, 2010). However, the typical career path for academics in British universities follows a male perception of success with such elements as being research active and having an uninterrupted career history, which disadvantages the majority of women and some men (Knights and Richards, 2003). Moreover, female academics are 'disproportionately encouraged to do the 'domestic' work for the organisation', such as running courses, teaching, thesis supervision and pastoral work (Lynch, 2010: 56), which takes them away from research and publishing and consequently reduces their chances of promotion. The neo-liberal values of excellence and performativity as well as related policies have exacerbated gender-based discrimination and its impact on female academics' careers, and 'the invisibility of the care work in the public sphere enables men to deny or remain sceptical about gender inequality' (Grummell *et al.,* 2009: 204). This demonstrates clear tensions related to care and compassion in the context of the higher education and their impact on academics' experiences.

The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated and magnified these tensions in higher education institutions that are 'inherently white and masculine and continue to marginalise those who fall outside of these categories' (Denney, 2021: 44). The burden of childcare and home schooling during the lockdowns fell mostly on the shoulders of female academics who could not publish or conduct research and who struggled with their day-to-day work commitments more than their male colleagues (Denney, 2021; Pickerill, 2021). Moreover, expectations of care and compassion escalated within

academia, with increasing demands for universities to care for the well-being of both students and colleagues.

Pickerill (2021) highlights two significant but contrasting points. On the one hand, the emotional labour and compassion associated with being a female leader finally gained visibility; on the other hand, the explicit and uneven gendered expectations of caring responsibilities made her feel uncomfortable (Pickerill, 2021). A professor and head of a department at the University of Sheffield, Pickerill makes a choice of reading and editing other colleagues' research papers instead of working on her own research. This is presented and can be considered as a caring and compassionate act. However, it can be argued that nobody should have to make this type of choice. Instead, sufficient time should be allowed for all academic activities to avoid this type of sacrifice. Pickerill herself warns of the danger of turning the high levels of stress and overwork that academics faced in the pandemic crisis into a habit or a norm (ibid). More generally, Kanov (2021) warns of the danger of devoting too much attention to compassion in organisations in which suffering is preventable. He insists that in these instances, compassion deals with the symptoms rather than causes of suffering, therefore, it is likely to result in more suffering (Kanov, 2021). In other words, if organisations rely on employees to assist and support each other when they are dealing with organisationally induced suffering, compassion can be harmful or even exploitative (Kanov, 2021).

This casts doubt on the benefits of compassion in the workplace and calls into question the meaning of compassion in the context of a neoliberal university. Can something harmful and exploitative be associated with compassion? Is trying to assist colleagues in dealing with high levels of stress or overwhelming workloads at the cost of personal career development or well-being really compassion? Are there different types of compassion? Does the context of a modern organisation change the meaning of compassion? Does workplace compassion exist? Can organisations or universities be compassionate? Can neoliberal universities be compassionate? Do academics benefit from compassion? Is it academics' responsibility to be compassionate? Is it morally right to expect academics to be compassionate at the cost of personal career growth or well-being?

Despite a substantial body of literature on compassion in various sciences, no empirical research on compassion and its impact on academics has been carried out in the context of a neoliberal university. Therefore, these questions remain unanswered. This literature review has already demonstrated the complexities, numerous tensions and problematic areas surrounding the concept of compassion, workplace compassion and compassion in the context of a neoliberal university, and it may be impossible to find definitive answers to the above questions. However, it is fundamentally important to investigate

the notion that has drawn so much attention from the public, scholars, academics and politicians because of the effects of the pandemic on the way we live and work, and the present study aims to address this.

3.4.5 Critical University Studies (CUS) and compassion research

Due to the adopted critical perspective on the higher education sector and the focus on academics themselves, their perceptions and experiences of compassion in the context of higher education, this research contributes to the field of Critical University Studies (CUS). The term was coined by Williams (2012), who also defined the scope for the field in his essay for The Chronicle of Higher Education titled *Deconstructing Academe: The Birth of Critical University Studies*. However, the movement itself is a branch of Critical Management Studies (CMS) which originated in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK in the 1990s (Smyth, 2017; Williams, 2012). The movement was triggered by a wave of criticism of the developments in the higher education sector associated with its corporatisation and academic capitalism (Williams, 2012). The word 'critical' in the name of the field means that it opposes the mainstream rhetoric and focuses on how current practices in the higher education sector serve the powerful and the wealthy, hence contribute to social injustice and inequality (Williams, 2012). Significant attention is given to the impact of neoliberal values and steep impersonal management hierarchies on university culture and experiences of academics, as evidenced in the titles of books written by academics, such as *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars and Neoliberal Ideology* (Smyth, 2017), *The Great Mistake: How we Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (Newfield, 2018), *The University in Ruins* (Readings, 1996), *The Great University Gamble* (McGettigan, 2013), *Universities at War* (Docherty, 2015) and most recent *Dark Academia: How Universities Die* (Fleming, 2021).

CUS is multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary within the social sciences and some argue that the critical element of the field is much stronger in the UK than in the US because of big cuts in funding for the social sciences and greater theoretical pluralism in the intellectual traditions (Fournier and Grey, 2000). As for compassion research in particular, although well established in such fields as psychology, philosophy and organisation studies, it is only beginning to gain momentum in CUS, primarily because of the effects of the pandemic on the higher education sector. Moreover, most of the few extant publications on compassion in the context of higher education are theoretical articles or opinion essays (for example, Denney, 2020, 2021; Waddington, 2016, 2018; Zembylas, 2013, 2017), pointing to a clear need for empirical research, which this thesis seeks to meet.

Another important point that needs to be highlighted here relates to the critical aspect of research on compassion. It is generally accepted that there is no straightforward way of demarcating the critical from the non-critical, however, whilst critical studies draw on 'a plurality of intellectual traditions', they are 'unified by an anti-performative stance, and a commitment to (some form of) denaturization and reflexivity' (Fournier and Grey, 2000: 7). This means that 'the principle of performativity that serves to subordinate knowledge and truth to the production of efficiency' is taken for granted in non-critical studies, whereas critical work 'questions the alignment between knowledge, truth and efficiency' and investigates performativity in order 'to uncover what is being done in its name' (ibid: 17). This makes a clear distinction between two perspectives on compassion in the reviewed literature, specifically, compassion as a tool to enhance productivity and commitment of the workforce, which represents a non-critical view, and compassion as a response to human vulnerability that aims to identify and challenge social injustices and inequalities. Although not entirely clear-cut, compassion literature in the context of higher education adopts a critical perspective, and the present research aims to contribute to this body of literature.

3.4.6 Concluding compassion in the university context

To conclude the section on the notion of compassion in the university context, it is important to note that, although little or no empirical research has to date been undertaken, there exists a distinct and critical perspective that views compassion as a response to suffering or human vulnerability that aims to identify and acknowledge complex power relations, social injustices and inequalities that cause the suffering. The political nature of compassion in this context (higher education) contrasts with approaches to compassion in the organisation studies literature discussed earlier in the chapter. The concepts of critical compassion and politicised compassion emphasise its role in developing a meaningful response to contemporary injustices in education and in the wider global context. Moreover, these two constructs highlight the danger of focusing on the sentimental aspect of compassion that simplifies it in the context of a university and that may result in facilitating further divisions in higher education and in deepening systemic inequalities and injustices.

The literature reviewed here presents a critical view of the higher education sector in general, highlighting the absence of an ethic of care in the content of education, in the university environment and in educational leadership. The section uncovers gender differences and gender-based discrimination in the sector in terms of academics' experiences of compassion and opportunities for career growth and links these to the

danger of compassion playing a role in facilitating preventable suffering. These contradictions, tensions and problematic issues surrounding compassion in the context of a neoliberal university cast doubt on the benefits of compassion to academics and present a range of questions that require answers.

3.5 Concluding Chapter 3

Having provided a comprehensive overview of compassion literature in a number of disciplines, this chapter reveals and highlights the notion's extremely complex and controversial nature. Despite being regarded as a virtue that complements individuals' well-being and strengthens the community, compassion, due to its emotional dimension, is sometimes considered to be irrational and subjective, hence unreliable in making moral judgements. Moreover, compassion-related behaviour is not necessarily spontaneous or automatic, rather, it depends on goals and/or contexts, which makes compassion in the context of a workplace more complicated and problematic.

The chapter also establishes that the notion of compassion has been constantly revised and redefined, both historically and contextually. These revisions and modifications are particularly clearly observed in the development of Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model discussed in detail in the chapter. Demonstrating the suffering-focused approach to workplace compassion in organisational studies research, the model highlights the instrumental role of compassion in enhancing the workforce's productivity, efficiency and loyalty, which allegedly permits the building of thriving and effective organisations and the improvement of employees' well-being. As discussed in the chapter, this view on compassion in the fields of Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) and Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB) is further expanded and extended by research in Positive Organisational Ethics (POE), which is demonstrated by Simpson *et al.*'s (2014b) compassion legitimacy and worthiness model. This model focuses on the aspects of workplace compassion overlooked by Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) model, such as power relations and compassion as a moral judgement. It also uncovers some controversies associated with workplace compassion, thus presenting a more critical perspective on the notion. The significance of these two models to this study lies in the range of meanings they attach to the notion in the context of a modern workplace. Since this investigation focuses on compassion in the university workplace and aims to establish the perceptions of academics of the concept in this context, it would be beneficial to identify if the insights of the study participants on compassion relate to any of the meanings of workplace compassion highlighted by these models.

In addition to the detailed discussion of compassion-related models and concepts, the chapter presents a thorough examination of associated with workplace compassion practices. The investigation reveals that these can put additional pressure on workforce and its welfare. This calls into question claims that workplace compassion is beneficial to individuals. Moreover, a more radical position on workplace compassion insists that, due to deep-rooted demoralising processes that are intrinsic to modern organisations, contemporary workplaces destroy the moral character of employees and impede their ability to feel and express compassion. Establishing compassion-related practices in the context of a modern university is another significant area of this empirical study. Therefore, it would be useful to determine whether UK academics' perceptions and experiences of these practices reflect any of the approaches discussed in the chapter.

The compassion literature in education supports this view because the culture of competitive individualism and self-interest promoted in modern universities prevents some academics from being compassionate. The reviewed literature demonstrates numerous tensions and contradictions in the sector. On the one hand, as emphasised by many practitioners and researchers, universities should be care giving institutions (for example Waddington, 2016,2018; Denney, 2020, 2021). On the other hand, the prevalence of the intellectual over the emotional, the neoliberal values of performativity and the financial imperative have created a culture of carelessness, chronic overwork and ruthless competitiveness in modern universities, which are sometimes referred to as edu-factories (Fleming, 2021). The reviewed literature has also identified gender-based inequalities in the sector in which compassion-related caring responsibilities are often undervalued and fail to provide sufficient career growth opportunities to those academics who undertake them. This casts doubt on the benefits of compassion and compassion-related responsibilities and expectations for academics.

This relates to one of the aims of the present study's research that seeks to determine whether practices and behaviour associated with workplace compassion are indeed beneficial to academics and feasible in a neoliberal university context. In addition, the study sets out to identify the type of behaviour and practices that equate to compassion in this context. These are referred to in the title of the thesis as the 'expressions of compassion'. As for the 'impressions of compassion', they relate to the other overall aim of the present study's research, which is to determine the meaning that academics attach to the concept of compassion in the context of a university. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 5, whilst the following chapter outlines the research methods that have been employed to generate these findings.

Chapter Four

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the philosophical position, methodology and methods employed to achieve the research aims and objectives identified in Chapter 1 and contextualised in Chapter 2. Central to this enquiry is the intention to define the concept of workplace compassion as perceived by academics (impressions) and to investigate their experiences of compassion in action (expressions). In addition, the research aims to identify the impact of the expressions of compassion on academics and to determine if compassion-related practices and behaviour are feasible in the context of modern universities. To achieve these aims, it was necessary to carry out a critical appraisal of the literature on workplace compassion and to review the relevant theories and models that form the conceptual framework for this research. This review, presented in Chapter 3, has revealed that compassion is an extremely complex and controversial concept which has been continuously revised and redefined. The review has also indicated that the context of a modern workplace influences and shifts the meaning of compassion and introduces an instrumental aspect associated with productivity and enhanced performance. This, in turn, increases pressure on the workforce, thereby raises doubts about the benefits of compassion in the workplace. Moreover, the context of higher education (the focus of this thesis) and its culture of individualism and self-interest serve to magnify the contrast between compassion as a care giving social emotion and the neoliberal values of performativity and competitiveness associated with the contemporary university. This then points to questions regarding the extent to which compassion is compatible with modern universities and its meaning in this context. As established in the introductory chapter, this is an under-researched area and, hence, this thesis will make an original contribution to this field by addressing the gap in compassion research.

This empirical study is built on the epistemological and ontological foundations of interpretivism and constructivism. The main reason for favouring these approaches lies in the assumption that the researcher and reality are inseparable and that any knowledge concerning the reality of lived experiences is subjectively created by our understanding of it. Qualitative methods of enquiry within one of the interpretive frameworks, social constructivism, are employed to achieve the research aims and objectives and are

considered to be the most suitable mode of exploring the perceptions of academics with regards to the meaning of compassion and its enactment in the context of a university, within one single case study organisational setting. Justifying the approaches and methodologies employed in this research is the focus of the chapter. It commences with a restatement of the research aims and objectives before providing a brief discussion of the main philosophical approaches and research paradigms. It then explains the research design and strategy, and goes on to justify the methodology and methods adopted for the research. The chapter also explains the data collection and data analysis process, addresses the role of the researcher as an insider clarifying associated ethical considerations, and states the limitations of the adopted strategy.

4.2 Research aims and objectives

As established in Chapter 1, the overall aims of this study are as follows:

- To explore and critically evaluate the meaning attached by UK academics to the concept of workplace compassion
- To identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion in order to determine if these are feasible and beneficial to academics and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing them in a university context.

To achieve these aims, the study has the following objectives:

1. To review critically previous research on compassion and workplace compassion and relevant theories and models with a particular focus on the organisation studies literature as a conceptual framework
2. To examine important developments in the UK higher education to gain a sound grasp of the study's context
3. To collect primary data on UK academics' perceptions of impressions and expressions of workplace compassion
4. To analyse the findings to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion, its presence or absence in a university setting, and to recognise benefits, challenges, controversies and tensions it may create for UK academics
5. To determine if workplace compassion is feasible and beneficial to academics, and could be implemented in the UK university context

6. To contribute to the organisation studies debate on workplace compassion by presenting the study's key conclusions and, if appropriate, suggesting ways of implementing compassion in a university context.

4.3 Philosophical approaches and research paradigms

A researcher's philosophical approach refers to their worldview and a set of beliefs about the nature of reality, or ontology, and how the knowledge about the reality is acquired, or epistemology. These ontological and epistemological assumptions, regardless of whether researchers are aware of them or not, shape every stage of their research (Burrell and Morgan, 2016). Another important concept, the research paradigm, reflects researchers' 'basic and taken-for-granted assumptions which underwrite the frame of reference, mode of theorising and ways of working' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019: 140). Although approached and interpreted by scholars in a variety of ways, the term 'paradigm' can be defined as 'a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted' (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 24). In short, it is a 'basic set of beliefs that guides actions' (Guba, 1990: 17). Central to any paradigm is a particular collection of ontological and epistemological assumptions, beliefs and ideas. In other words, any paradigm is concerned with the construction of reality in a specific context or discipline and with the received wisdom related to the perception and description of that reality. Being governed by a philosophical approach, a research paradigm in turn determines research methodology and methods (Grix, 2002).

To demonstrate a contrast between philosophical approaches in social science research and their related paradigms, this section focuses on positivism and interpretivism, and a summary of their key principles is presented in Table 4.1 below.

4.3.1 Positivism

Positivism is a position that argues for the use of natural science methods to study social reality (Clark, Foster, Sloan and Bryman, 2021). Although many researchers suggest that its influence has diminished since the 1980s with the more general acceptance of interpretivist methodologies, it continues to have a strong grip on many research practices and procedures (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Central to positivism is the 'idea that the social world exists externally and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002: 28). In other words, the scientific, positivist perspective has an etic (outsider) view of knowledge which

is claimed it is impartial and value-free. As can be seen in Table 4.1 below, positivistic approaches typically employ quantitative methods. These are associated with 'measurement, causality, generalization and replication' (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 167). A large sample size, analysis checks and test results are presented to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the findings because 'being objective is an essential aspect of competent inquiry' in positivist research (Creswell, 2009:7).

Table 4.1 Summary of contrasting research philosophical approaches and their related paradigms

	Positivism	**Interpretivism**
Ontology Assumptions made about the nature of reality	Reality is objective irrespective of the researcher's beliefs or viewpoint. It assumes that real world objects exist apart from the human knower	Reality is multiple and relative. Knowledge is not determined objectively, but is socially constructed
Epistemology The researcher's view of what constitutes acceptable knowledge	Researchers must be independent and human interests and emotions should be irrelevant. Explanations must demonstrate causality. The quest is to generate facts, verifiable truths and time and context-free generalisations	Researchers are part of what is being observed. They and their subject(s) are interdependent. The quest is to increase in-depth understanding of a given situation
Methodology Combination of techniques used to enquire into a specific situation	Use of hypotheses and deduction. Generalisations are made through statistical probability. Sampling requires large numbers to be selected randomly	Use of inductive technique. Small numbers of cases are chosen for specific reasons
Methods Techniques, tools procedures used for data collection, analysis and evaluation	Quantitative methods are used such as experiment, large scale survey and employ statistical analysis. Evaluation criteria: validity, reliability and generalisability	Qualitative methods are used such as focus groups, interviews, small scale questionnaires. The data content are analysed using e.g. thematic analysis. Evaluation criteria: credibility, trustworthiness, authenticity

Source: Adapted from Cassell and Symon (2004), Creswell (2015, 2018), Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Easterby-Smith *et al.,* (2002), Mason (2002) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, *(*2019).

It is the objectivity and impartiality of the researcher aiming to uncover 'facts' that can be 'proven', to utilise solid statistical tools and techniques and to obtain sound results that can be 'generalized' across different settings that many researchers find enticing (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders *et al.,* 2019). Several empirical research studies on workplace compassion that employ large-scale questionnaire surveys (for example, Aboul-Ela, 2017; Moon *et al.*, 2014; Neff *et al.,* 2008) are vivid examples of this attraction and demonstrate the historical prevalence of positivism and the ontological position of objectivism.

However, the positivistic paradigm and its related exploratory strategies have been criticised in social science research for their failure to properly reflect the underlying causes of social processes and complex phenomena (Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 2002). Empirical studies on compassion based on large-scale questionnaire surveys arguably provide grounds for such criticism. Despite their close association with scientific knowledge and an opportunity to make generalisations because of a sizable population sample (Saunders *et al.,* 2019), these studies may result in oversimplifying the meaning of the complex concept of workplace compassion. This is because of the danger of transforming these data collection instruments into 'ready-made symbolic generalisations' (Romani, Primecz, and Topcu*,* 2011: 438), thus reducing them to a set of testable statements (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, it is argued that interpretivism is a much more suitable paradigm for compassion research. This is discussed in the following section.

4.3.2 Interpretivism/social constructivism

Interpretivism holds that the social world is distinct from the natural world and that it is socially or discursively constructed. For many social scientists and management researchers, it is considered the most appropriate and preferred position to adopt when studying social phenomena because it 'respects the differences between people and the objects of natural sciences' (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 17). 'Facts' in interpretivism are always context-bound in that they do not apply to all people at all times and in all situations. From this methodological perspective, knowledge is always relative. As indicated in Table 4.1 above, interpretivists tend to employ qualitative methods and rather than seeking immutable truths, they strive to develop in-depth understanding of the reality that is assumed to be subjective, multiple and socially constructed (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Clark *et al.,* 2021; Saunders *et al.,* 2019). Therefore, knowledge about

the reality is not one truth; rather, it is open to interpretation. The interpretivist perspective has an emic (an insider) view of knowledge.

4.3.2.1 Interpretivism/social constructivism as the paradigm of choice for this study

It is this focus on interpretations and in-depth understanding of complex phenomena, such as compassion, that makes the epistemological and ontological foundations of interpretivism and constructivism appropriate foundations for this empirical study. The match between the study and the emphasis of this paradigm on interpreting symbolic meanings of a variety of situations and actions of individuals in these situations (Bryman and Bell, 2015) is reflected in the wording of the study's title, specifically in the terms 'impressions and expressions' and 'in the university workplace'.

It must be acknowledged at this point that the terms interpretivism and social constructivism are often used interchangeably (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Arguably, however, these terms emphasise different aspects of the interpretivist paradigm, namely, its focus on interpretations, which has been highlighted above, as well as the emphasis on constructing meanings through interaction. The term social constructivism accentuates the complex 'varied and multiple' meanings of experiences that are developed in the process of interaction or discussion, and sometimes are 'negotiated socially and historically' (Creswell and Poth, 2018: 24). It is also argued that the term reflects the complex and political nature of social interaction and is based on the view that meanings are developed in the process of this interaction with the world and other human beings, which results in the construction of interpretations of the world and other individuals' behaviour (Creswell, 2009). These important aspects of social constructivism provide opportunities for the exploration and construction of the meaning of workplace compassion and its expressions in a university setting.

Another notable characteristic of social constructivism that is of significance to this study relates to viewing 'people as creative interpreters of events… who interpret their experiences and who actively create an order to their existence' (Denscombe, 2011: 96). This means that human beings are regarded as active actors in constructing their social world and, therefore, as important contributors to knowledge. This focus on trying to see social reality through the eyes of those who are studied is often seen as problematic and highlights the issue of the researcher's values in conducting social research (Clark *et al.,* 2021). This is discussed later in the chapter whilst the following section focuses on research strategy and design.

4.4 Research strategy and design

Closely linked to researchers' philosophical beliefs and assumptions, a research design can be defined as the 'general plan' of how researchers go about answering research questions (Saunders *et al.,* 2019: 173). Usually, this 'general plan' is implemented and accomplished by means of employing either quantitative or qualitative methods which are frequently depicted in the literature as polar opposites. It is sometimes argued that this opposition is somewhat superficial because there is little difference between the two, 'other than the fact that quantitative researchers employ measurements and qualitative researchers do not' (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 26).

Table 4.2 Main advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative research

Qualitative research	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Captures the voices of participants and the human factor Gains an in depth understanding of the meanings which humans attach to their social world Uses inductive principles Provides detailed perspectives of a few people Facilitates a close understanding of the research context Recognises that the researcher is part of the research process in terms of their interpretation of the data Is a flexible structure to permit changes of research emphasis as a study progresses Theory follows data Less concerned with the need to generalise but to demonstrate that the data collected is trustworthy, authentic, honest, credible and relatable	Has limited generalizability Studies only a few people and is subjective. Provides only soft data (not hard, numerical data) Findings open to researcher interpretation so lacks objectivity
Quantitative research	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Draws upon large datasets in order to generalise conclusions Applies controlled experiments to ensure validity and minimise bias by using scientific, deductive principles Analyses data efficiently Investigates and explains causal relationships within data Examines probable cause and effect by testing a hypothesis Is a highly structured approach to ensure study would yield same results on different occasions reliably Data follows theory Researcher independence of what is being studied Appeals to people's preference for statistical data	Omits the human, social factor & nuances of behaviour Does not record the words of participants Provides limited understanding of participants' perspective Provides only hard numerical data (not soft data) Fails to address the how and why questions Is largely researcher driven

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2015 and 2018), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Silverman (2013a; 2013b)

In other words, this distinction between quantitative research design and qualitative research design is not universally accepted although it continues to be widely used as 'two distinct clusters of research strategy' (Clark *et al.,* 2021: 31). Table 4.2 above

provides an overview of some of the advantages and disadvantages of one research design over the other.

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research reflects the differences in their ontological and epistemological foundations (Clark *et al.,* 2021; Weber, 2004). With regards to quantitative research, an objective/positivist ontology assumes that there is an objective reality and the researcher exists independently from that one single reality. Knowledge is acquired by the use of a deductive methodology; the role of the researcher is to produce hard verifiable 'facts' and credible 'truths' constituting the knowledge. In contrast, a constructivist/interpretivist ontology assumes that there are multiple realities, that the researcher and the reality are inseparable and that epistemologically, any knowledge pertaining to lived experience is subjectively constructed. In this approach, an inductive methodology and qualitative methods are employed to uncover multiple 'truths' (Weber, 2004). These differences are addressed in more detail in section 4.5, whilst this section clarifies this empirical study's strategy and design.

This study adopts a qualitative research design because it aims to make sense of subjective and socially constructed meanings of a complex phenomenon (Saunders *et al.,* 2019), namely, compassion. To be more precise, this research focuses on eliciting an in-depth understanding of the meaning of workplace compassion and its expressions in a university setting by means of generating rich, thick data replete with meaning and connotation (Weber, 2004), which is one of the main characteristics of a qualitative study. In addition to the focus on sense making, the choice of qualitative approaches is determined by the significance of research contexts and the role of the researcher as an interpreter of symbolic meanings of a variety of situations and actions of individuals in these situations (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

4.4.1 Single case study as the choice for this research

In essence, this research is a qualitative single case study that explores the perceptions of academics of the impressions and expressions of compassion within the university setting. Case study research is one of the principal strategies employed in qualitative research design (Saunders *et al.,* 2019). It has been chosen for this research because a case study is 'an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, …institution… in real-life context' (Schwandt and Gates, 2018: 343). Yin (2018: 1) states that 'in general, case studies are the preferred

strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context’. Exploring the impressions and expressions of compassion in the context of a modern university appears to align flawlessly with this strategy.

Most case studies use either a qualitative or a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2008). This case study, specific to a post-1992 university, uses a qualitative mono-method approach and its value lies in the richness of the contextual data and the focus on experiential knowledge that is central to the qualitative research approach (Stake, 2005). This methodological choice for the research is justified by the nature of any case study as an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). This research strategy involves a comprehensive and thorough analysis of a single case (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022), which is a post-1992 university in the North-West of England.

The case study organisation is one of the UK’s largest universities. Declaring its mission as providing high quality education and creating opportunity in life, this modern post-1992 institution has been firmly committed to the Widening Participation agenda and scores quite well in the Social Mobility Index (Phoenix, 2023). In terms of the overall student experience, it has been classified quite favourably in the 2022-23 National Student Survey (NSS). The university has been awarded the designation of silver in the recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) exercise and has been recognised for its commitment to the use of technology and innovation both in the classroom and in a range of research projects and partnerships with businesses. Similar to other ‘new’ or ‘modern’ post-1992 universities, the managerial approach in the case study institution arguably reflects the focus on ‘ensuring control, determining accountability and assessing performances’, which results in ‘a stricter and more scrutinised form of administration’ (Kok *et al.,* 2010:102). As discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis, this type of managerial approach is sometimes associated with the ‘hard’ version of managerialism, and governance in post-1992 universities is sometimes characterised as ‘decisive’ and ‘opportunistic’ which may often result in ‘severe strains and considerable effects on academic freedom and autonomy’ (ibid).

In 2018, compassion was introduced as one of five aspirational values in the case study institution and remained as such for several years. Since then, the organisation has experienced a number of changes in its senior management team and in its structure; therefore, reviewing and evolving the values has been seen as an important strategic priority. Following a brief consultation period with the university staff, a new set of values has now been established and published. Although compassion is no longer listed separately as a value, it is mentioned in a brief description of one of the university’s four

values, namely, the value of support all. This emphasises demonstrating support, respect and compassion to students, colleagues and communities.

In addition to the points explaining the study's research design and strategy as well as introducing the case study university above, it is also important to emphasise that this investigation adopts the position that research cannot be value free and, therefore, it employs a reflexive approach. This means that it recognises the impact of the researcher on various aspects of the study, such as the choice of research area, formulation of the research aims and objectives, research design and data collection techniques (Clark *et al.,* 2021). These aspects are addressed in more detail in the sections on insider research and ethical considerations later in the chapter. The following section, however, focuses on the research methodology and methods employed in the study and explains the main aspects of the data collection process.

4.5 Research methodology and methods, data collection

The terms methods and methodology are often used interchangeably; this, however, is fundamentally incorrect. Methodology can be defined as 'the study of how a particular kind of investigation should proceed' (Schwandt and Gates, 2018: 341). Essentially, it explains the procedures which researchers use to investigate, describe and interpret various phenomena. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2002: 43) assert that any research activity's primary goal should be that it is conducted in 'ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims'. Given that the research is underpinned by social constructivism and because of the complex subject matter and flexible, adaptable and evolving research procedure, the study could be defined as exploratory research where a 'broad focus becomes narrower as the research progresses' (Sounders *et al.,* 2019:174). It is the researcher's interest in the diversity of perceptions and interpretations of meaning from the respondents' point of view that drives the study's research methodology and determines the choice of methods. The data collection methods employed in this investigation are in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews, which were conducted to reveal the participants' perceptions of compassion and its expressions in the context of a university. The methods used to analyse the gathered data are open-coding of the transcripts and the creation of a 'codebook' in the form of a spreadsheet. The purpose of this section is to describe and explain the process of sampling and the data collection methods employed in this study.

4.5.1 Sampling and selection

As stated earlier, this research is a single case study that follows qualitative design and is underpinned by the ontological and epistemological foundations of interpretivism and constructivism. The study employs non-probability sampling, which represents a group of sampling techniques that help researchers to select units from a population that they are interested in studying (Stake, 2005). The principal feature of non-probability sampling techniques is that samples are selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher rather than random selection. These judgements were based on the research aims and objectives presented in Chapter 1 and restated in section 4.2 above.

A range of non-probability sampling techniques are available, including quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, self-selection sampling and convenience sampling (White and Rayner, 2014). Cresswell (2015: 76) states that sampling in qualitative research is 'the purposeful selection of a sample of participants who can best help you understand the central phenomenon that you are exploring'. To ensure a variety of diverse perceptions in specific contexts, richness and relevance of collected data, purposive sampling was employed and efforts were made to secure a cross-sectional and balanced sample. For this research, a total of twenty-two participants were selected. Since the case study institution is the researcher's place of work, accessing potential interviewees' profiles on the university's intranet allowed to ensure a balanced sample that included participants with a variety of roles, positions and experiences in the sector and in the case study university. Potential interviewees were contacted by email that introduced the researcher and the nature of the study. Further details, including a participant information sheet detailing the purpose of the research, a consent form and an outline of questions (see Appendix i), were provided to those who expressed interest in participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

Recruiting research participants continued during the interviewing process because having been interviewed themselves, some respondents suggested potential participants who were subsequently contacted and interviewed. The sample includes academics whose positions range from Staff Paid Hourly (SPH) to Principal Lecturers (PLs) with some managerial responsibilities, and academics' line managers, such as Deputy Heads and Heads of Schools. Their experience of working in the sector ranged from 2 to 34 years. The sample includes academics on permanent and fixed-term contracts, working full-time and part-time, and comprises eleven female and eleven male participants (see Appendix ii).

4.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected for this single case study because of the benefits they provide in terms of the balance between structure and opportunities for meaning negotiation and clarification, and because of their strong emphasis on the significance of respondents' perspectives and interpretations (Clark *et al.,* 2021; Kvale, 1996). They employ open questioning in order to 'gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena' (Kvale, 1983: 174). Some researchers highlight the significance and difficulty in developing the appropriate interview strategy that, on the one hand, includes sufficient amount of structure and assertiveness on the part of the interviewer and, on the other hand, requires framing interview questions in an open way that encourages detailed responses and to allow for 'the constructive nature of the knowledge created through the interaction of the partners in the interview conversation' (Kvale, 1996:11; also, Clark *et al.,* 2021; Wengraf, 2001).

Another challenge associated with semi-structured interviews relates to developing an effective interview schedule (Clark *et al.,* 2021). The challenge lies in deciding on the wording of the main questions and their order and anticipating that they are likely to be asked in a different order to accommodate the flow of participants' narratives, and that additional questions to pick up on replies will be also used (ibid). The interview schedule used for semi-structured interviews in this study includes nine main questions in total (see Table 4.3 below) with eight of them supported by sub questions, or prompts (see Appendix iii for main questions and prompts). Cresswell (2015: 70) suggests that the central question should be very general and should contain the words 'how' or 'what' instead of 'why', as 'why' is more closely associated with quantitative research. The interview questions presented in Table 4.3 below follow this principle because they aim at eliciting the meaning attached by the study's respondents to the concept of compassion and its expressions in the context of a university.

The second and the third questions of the interview schedule presented below seek to elicit participants' general understanding of compassion both in general and in the context of a university in particular. Therefore, they are closely linked to one of the overall aims of the research, namely, to explore and critically evaluate the meaning of workplace compassion. Questions four, five and six address the other aim of the study, which is to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion in order to determine whether they are feasible and beneficial to academics. Questions seven and eight address both aims by means of exploring further to the meaning attached by UK academics to compassion and its expressions in a university context.

Devising interview questions that are closely connected to the research aims but not making them too specific is one of the useful guidelines provided by Bell *et al.,* (2022).

Table 4.3 Interview schedule

Main questions
1. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself starting with your experience as an academic in UK HE?
2. So what would you say if you were asked about the meaning of compassion?
3. In terms of a university setting, what would you say compassion means to you as an academic?
4. Can you think of any examples of compassion you have come across as an academic?
5. In 2018, compassion was introduced as one of UCLan's aspirational values. Would you say it has changed your experience as an academic in terms of how you behave or how others around you behave?
6. In UCLan appraisal form, section 3, Feedback on Performance ('how' it was achieved), lists all 5 values including Compassion, and asks to provide examples of how you demonstrate these values. How do you feel about being asked to give examples of demonstrating compassion in the context of appraisal?
7. There have been concerns that recent developments in the UK higher education associated with marketisation negatively impacted UK universities, academics' experience and role, and some academics/researchers call for more compassionate universities. What kind of university do you think is a more compassionate university?
8. If you feel UK universities could become more compassionate, what do you think needs to happen?
9. So is there anything that I haven't covered by my questions that you would like to share with me in terms of your experiences of compassion as an academic in a university context? Is there anything that you would like to add?

Piloting the interview schedule resulted in reviewing the wording of several questions rather than their content and rephrasing the final questions on the list. The purpose of making questions more indirect by means of starting a question with 'What would you say if you were asked about…?' was considered to be a more pertinent approach to questioning than more direct questions about interviewees' thoughts, opinions and views. Taking time when asking the final question of the schedule also proved to be beneficial as it allowed the participants to think of any additional points or relevant experiences. Also, this way of questioning aligns with the ontological and epistemological

position of social constructivism adopted in this thesis that regards the use of qualitative interviewing as a legitimate way of producing knowledge surrounding the research problem, aims and objectives.

This position and the research topic's emphasis on the meaning of the complex concept of workplace compassion encouraged both parties to engage in the negotiation of the meaning and prompted the interviewee to 'construct narratives of events and people' (Silverman, 2011: 169), which impacted the structure of the semi-structured interviews and the researcher's approach to questioning. Some authors argue that there is a need to reduce the number of questions because they are 'only one of the types of intervention that interviews make' (Wengraf, 2001: 63). Questions usually ask for the interviewee's 'explicit knowledge', which could be gained only if linked to the experiences or notions that are consciously perceived as 'controversial and needing articulation', whereas narratives, in addition to distinct beliefs, tend to provide 'tacit and unconscious assumptions and norms of the individual or of a cultural group' (ibid: 115). To encourage interviewees' narratives, not only was each participant emailed a brief overview of the interview's key points prior to the interview, but also they were requested to think of examples of witnessing compassion in the workplace. These examples generated effective narratives that clarified participants' perspectives and interpretations of workplace compassion. Also, these narratives facilitated the generation of valuable data that incorporated the participants' genuine perceptions of workplace compassion and authentic language use.

Conducting qualitative interviews, as with any other research method, has its strengths and limitations. Researchers largely agree that qualitative interviews are valuable for eliciting complex, detailed information, spoken in the interviewees' own words and that they are a highly flexible and adaptable way of generating data. However, there is also consensus with regard to the relative disadvantages of this method, including necessarily small sample sizes, that it is very time consuming both in terms of conducting the interview and in transcribing them, and that biases are difficult to rule out (Cresswell, 2015; Mason, 2012; Silverman, 2013a).

As stated earlier, a total of twenty-two interviews were conducted during the period of October 2020 - April 2021. Each interview averaged between 45 and 50 minutes in length. Although originally planned to be conducted face-to-face, all interviews took place online, on the Microsoft Teams platform, due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions. All interviews were conducted as video calls and recorded on two devices, a laptop using the Microsoft Teams app, and as an audio call on a mobile phone as a backup. Conducting the interviews online provided a number of benefits and allowed to mitigate some of the challenges of this method stated earlier. The advantages include

less of a time investment for both parties, efficiency, cost effectiveness and flexibility, more control over self-presentation and personal space (Zadkowska, Dowgiatto, Gajewska, Herzberg-Kurasz and Kostecka, 2022), as well as the ease of recording and some assistance with the transcription provided by the Microsoft software. These and other benefits and opportunities that the transformation from face-to-face to online interviews offers have been highlighted by several researchers who, having regarded online interviews 'as an option of a second choice for conducting qualitative studies before 2020', now claim that they 'have potential to be the option of the first choice' (Zadkowska *et al.,* 2022: 1; Keen, Lomeli-Rodriguez and Joffe, 2022).

However, several disadvantages of conducting interviews online due to Covid-19 restrictions as well as the possible impact of these challenges on the collected data also need to be acknowledged. The main issue of video interviewing relates to connectivity problems that may result in damaged or lost sound quality and video recording (Bell *et al.,* 2022). These technical problems may, in turn, lead to 'a loss of rapport and emotional connection' (ibid: 443) between the parties. This is also likely to create difficulties when transcribing the impacted interview. In addition to these technology-related challenges, the psychological and emotional effects of Covid-19 restrictions should not be overlooked. It could be argued that the restrictions and associated isolation could have heightened respondents' levels of emotions and increased their feeling of anxiety and isolation from work colleagues. These circumstances could have amplified the significance of compassion and, hence, the respondents' accounts of experiencing it in the workplace could also have been influenced by heightened positive and/or negative emotions. During the interviews, these disadvantages / challenges did not for the most part materialise. Technological problems did not occur and arguably all participants were sufficiently familiar and comfortable with online meetings / discussions for the interviews to be conducted successfully. There are also several ethical issues that need consideration. These are addressed later in the chapter but first, the following section explains the role of insider research for this study.

4.6 Insider research and researcher axiology

The work-based nature of the research study draws attention to the notion of insider research. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) advocate the value of insider research. They explore the dynamics and benefits under the headings of access, pre-understanding of context, role duality (colleague and researcher) and managing organisational politics. However, although the 'insights as an insider are valuable because of depth of knowledge', there is a need to be aware of 'alternative perspectives' (Costley *et al.,* 2011: 33). Reflexivity is of much significance for insider research because as an insider, the internal researcher 'need[s] to become conscious of the assumptions and preconceptions that [they] normally take for granted in [the] workplace' (Sounders *et al.,* 2019: 220). Another danger of being an insider relates to the problems that could be created by familiarity. Sounders *et al.* (2019) highlight the value of asking basic questions about the organisation and the industry, which insider researchers are less likely to do because their respondents would expect them to know the answers already. Also, the issue of status may 'inhibit' interactions with more senior or more junior colleagues Sounders *et al.,* (2019: 220). These issues of insider research are of a particular importance in any qualitative research study which requires that 'researchers 'position themselves' (Creswell and Poth, 2018). To achieve this, some background information about the researcher's cultural background and professional experience as well as clarifications about the interest in the research topic were offered in Chapter 1.

In addition, scrutinising one's own axiological stance and reflecting upon how it might influence the interview process is of much importance. Axiology is a branch of philosophy concerned with judgments about value. Understanding the role that values play in all stages of the research process is necessary if the research results are to be considered credible and reliable. For example, Heron (1996) argues that values are the guiding reason for all human action and that researchers demonstrate axiological skill by being able to articulate their values as a basis for making judgments about what research they are conducting and how they go about doing it. A researcher being honest and self-aware of their own values and position will heighten their consciousness of decisions taken during the study and the value-laden or neutral judgments made when interpreting data and drawing conclusions. Having clarity and openness about the researcher's interests and view on power, as well as an awareness about divergent interests of participants also contributes to the effectiveness of various stages of the research process.

4.7 Ethical considerations

In accordance with the university's Ethics Policy, participation in this research was on the basis of informed consent and entirely voluntary. Participants were made aware from the outset that they could withdraw at any time. All interviewees were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix i) in advance. A small number of participants were known to the researcher prior to the study; the majority, however, were not.

The researcher was fully aware of the potential bias associated with insider research and its possible impact on data collection, analysis and subsequent conclusions. Measures to mitigate these risks were taken at different stages of the research process. Specifically, the researcher's interest in the topic of compassion as well as their position regarding the contrast between the financial imperative of modern universities and compassion were openly stated in the research participant information sheet that was emailed to prospective participants (see Appendix i) and mentioned during interviews if relevant and appropriate. When analysing and presenting the study's findings, particular attention was given to remaining impartial and detached in order to present non-bias, well-balanced and fair analysis of the participants' accounts.

As the researcher is not in a position of power relative to the respondents and non-threatening, participants were more forthcoming in expressing their views. However, the work-based nature of the study could have provided the researcher, as an insider, with knowledge of the context of their colleagues' responses. This highlights the ethic of care in social research in general and was mitigated by means of emphasising and ensuring participants' anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage of the project. The issues of anonymity and confidentiality were addressed in a number of ways. Their discipline or subject area and nationality were not registered as it was deemed possible that participants could be identified by these. All recorded interviews and transcripts were kept securely on a password protected computer and immediately anonymised by coding participants, rather than using their names. The key to the codes was kept separately from the interviews. All data was treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR compliance principles and university guidelines. In addition, great care was taken not to compromise the anonymity of the participants when the study's findings were reported. If, in their account on compassion, a participant made a direct reference to a colleague or colleagues in the case study organisation, the anonymity of these colleagues was also protected so that the participant's anonymity was not compromised.

All interviews were conducted online, with the participants having control over personal space. Interviews were arranged in advance at the time that was convenient for the participants and confirmed in advance. It became evident that participants felt sufficiently confident and secure to be open and vocal. However, the researcher was aware that when discussing issues of compassion in the workplace, participants may experience recall about issues that they had faced and this could be distressing for them. In order to mitigate this, if a participant demonstrated signs of negative emotions, they would be given a choice to move on to another question, to have a break or to end the interview, and would be signposted to available support, such as staff counselling. In the event, no such actions were required.

4.8 Data analysis

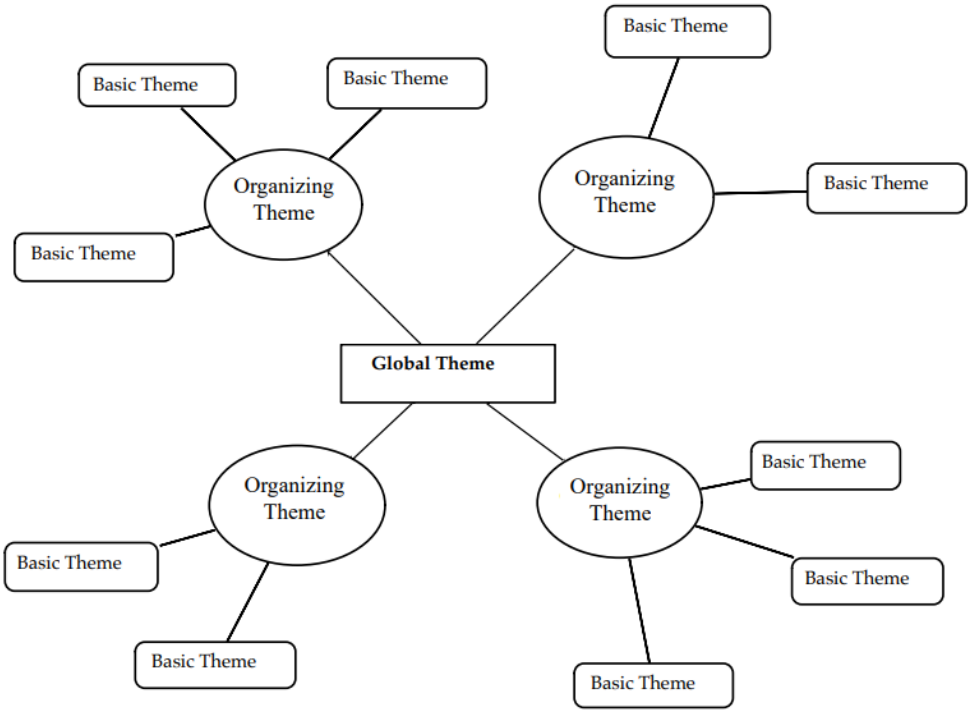
As mentioned above, all twenty-two interviews were recorded using two devices. The files were then downloaded to a computer. Each interview was transcribed in full by the researcher and a third party known personally by the researcher (see Appendix iv for an example of an interview transcript). The decision to use a third party was largely based on the time limitations faced by the researcher. Precise instructions were given to the transcriber with regard to confidentiality, practice and procedure. After all interviews had been transcribed, they were listened to again and any errors in transcription were corrected.

A major challenge with qualitative research is the large quantity of data that are generated which are rich in detail but difficult to navigate through. Authors on the subject of transcription debate the value of including non-verbal cues such as silences, hesitancy, coughs and sighs (for example, Bailey, 2008; Halcomb and Davidson, 2006). It is suggested that when thematic or content analysis is used, verbatim transcription is unnecessary, as is the inclusion of non-verbal cues, because in this method of analysis it is the search for areas of commonality that is of importance (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006: 40). However, according to Bailey (2008: 128), capturing features of speech 'such as emphasis, speed, tone of voice, timing and pauses… can be crucial for interpreting data'. Despite these variances in standpoint, most writers agree that the primary focus of interview transcription should be consistent with the overall research strategy and its theoretical foundations (Bailey, 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Halcomb and Davidson, 2006; Saunders *et al.,* 20012).

The audio files from the interviews were listened to several times while reading the transcripts, and early thoughts and notes were registered. This period of familiarisation was absolutely critical as it involved interpretation of data and identification of the key

themes and patterns relevant to the research aims and objectives. The process of thematic analysis was aided by the thematic networks tool proposed by Attride-Sterling (2001). The method was selected because it permits the organisation of the steps and procedures of a thematic analysis in a visual and explicit manner. As pointed out by Attride-Sterling (2001), thematic networks analysis is not in any way a new method. However, it involves employing a web-like network tool 'that 'makes explicit the procedures… employed in going from text to interpretation' (Attride-Sterling, 2001: 388). Thematic network analysis offers strategies of working with text and breaking it up into important elements that demonstrate explicit logic or reasoning and implicit symbolic meaning or significance (ibid). This results in identifying three classes of themes, namely, basic, organising and global themes, that 'are then represented as web-like maps' (ibid), as demonstrated in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1 Structure of a thematic network



Source: Attride-Sterling (2001: 388)

The process of thematic network analysis included three stages: (i) the reduction or breakdown of the text; (ii) the exploration of the text; and (iii) the integration of the exploration. The first stage involved coding material, identifying themes and arranging them, starting with basic themes based on detailed coding and grouping them in

organising themes which, in turn, were structured around global themes. The other two stages involved the exploration of the networks, identifying and interpreting patterns by linking global themes to the study's aims and objectives. As a result of the process, five dominant (or global) themes were identified. These themes and related subthemes are presented in detail in Chapter 5. Sunsein and Chiseri-Strater (2012), cited in Saldana (2016: 23), suggest that during the coding process, fieldworkers should ask themselves, 'What surprised me? (to track your assumptions), what intrigued me? (to track your positionality). And, what disturbed me? (to track the tensions within your values, attitudes and belief systems)'. This was particularly useful advice, as there were definite surprises. Again, the discoveries are presented in detail in Chapter 5.

4.9 Research limitations

The main limitation of the study is its mono-method research design. Additional sources of data obtained from, for example, documentary analysis, would have provided opportunities for exploring the complex concept of workplace compassion from a different angle and at the organisational level of analysis. Also, some scholars argue that any study based on qualitative interviewing is less naturalistic than methods such as participant observation because they encourage participants to create narratives of their past behaviour that could be viewed as elevated individual perceptions positioned as authentic (for example, Bell *et al.,* 2022). In addition, the study's sampling process was driven by purposive sampling. Although it achieved a heterogeneous sample of participants with sufficiently diverse characteristics to ensure a notable variation in the collected data, 'purposive samples cannot be considered to be statistically representative of the target population' (Saunders *et al.,* 2019: 321), which can be regarded as a flaw. Moreover, the impact of Covid-19 restrictions resulting in the interviews delivered online rather than face-to-face could also be considered as one of the study's limitations. Another aspect that could be viewed as a weakness is that it is a single case study and further research in other post-1992 institutions in the UK, perhaps in the form of a comparative study, is likely to provide a clearer picture about the overall importance attached to compassion in the sector. However, it can be argued that the value of the study is in the richness and the divergence of the findings that it has generated.

4.10 Chapter summary

To summarise, this chapter discusses the research design and methodology employed in the empirical study. It provides an overview of the research ontological and epistemological stance and justifies the philosophical and methodological position of interpretivism/social constructivism as the most suitable paradigm for this empirical study on workplace compassion. It argues that the principal values and philosophical views underpinning qualitative research and social constructivism are the best fit for the study topic and its aims and objectives. It evaluates semi-structured interviews and provides justification for employing them as the data collection method of the study. It addresses the issue of insider research. A single-case study is assessed and evaluated as the most suitable method for acquiring, analysing and interpreting data of breadth and depth. Data collection, sampling, data analysis and study limitations are explained. The next chapter presents and discusses the research findings structured around five dominant themes which emerged through the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts.

Chapter Five

Findings and Discussion

> *Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world… would do this, it would change the earth.* William Faulkner (n.d.)

5.1 Introduction

As established in Chapter One, the purpose of this DBA thesis, titled 'Impressions and expressions of compassion in the university workplace: An empirical analysis', is to capture the insights of academics into the concepts of compassion and workplace compassion (impressions) and their experiences of compassion in action (expressions), as well as to ascertain the impact that workplace compassion makes on academics in the UK. More specifically, the overall aims of the research are as follows:

- To explore and critically evaluate the meaning attached by UK academics to the concept of workplace compassion
- To identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion in order to determine if these are feasible and beneficial for academics and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing them within a university context.

To support the achievement of these aims, six research objectives were also established in Chapter One, the first two of which have been addressed in the preceding chapters. That is, Chapter Two examined important developments in the UK higher education sector over the last three decades in order to set out the context of the study, whilst Chapter Three critically reviewed the extant research on compassion and workplace compassion in order to provide the theoretical framework for the research. Subsequently, Chapter Four justified and explained the research philosophy and approach and methods employed in the investigation, including the data collection and analysis processes (research objective three).

The purpose of this chapter is now to present and discuss the outcomes of the empirical research in this thesis, in so doing contributing to the achievement of two of the remaining three research objectives, these being: (i) to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion, its presence or absence in a university setting, and to recognise benefits, challenges, controversies and tensions it may create for UK academics; and (ii) to determine if workplace compassion is feasible and beneficial to academics and could be formally implemented within the UK university context. These objectives are linked to the expressions of compassion, its impact on academics and the possibility of formally implementing compassion in a university setting. Hence, the title, aims and objectives of this thesis are closely connected and coalesce around four key areas of exploration. As mentioned in Chapter Four, these four areas informed the research approach, methods and the content of the schedule of semi-structured interviews employed in the study's data collection process.

Given that this thesis sets out to investigate four main areas, it would perhaps be logical that the presentation and discussion of research outcomes in this chapter are structured around these key areas. However, analysis of the data suggests that these four areas are not necessarily discrete or clear-cut; rather, they sometimes overlap and the boundaries between them are on occasion fuzzy. For example, educational leadership could be viewed as an expression of compassion in a university setting. However, academics' perceptions of compassionate educational leadership include their understanding of and insights into the type of leader or leadership, or the type of behaviour and practices associated with compassion, which relates to their impressions of compassion. Therefore, it would be illogical to separate these two areas of impressions and expressions of compassion and to present and discuss the findings related to compassionate educational leadership in two different sections. Therefore, for the purpose of both clarity and logic, the presentation and discussion of the research outcomes analysis in this chapter are structured around the key themes and subthemes identified in the coding process described in the previous chapter, whilst the four key areas of investigation are embraced within these themes and subthemes. In so doing, the risk of repetition and excessive detail is minimised.

The thematic analysis of the responses to the semi-structured interviews identified five dominant themes. These are intertwined, yet sufficiently distinct to be presented, analysed and discussed individually along with their supporting subthemes. These key themes are as follows:

Theme A: Compassion as a complex notion and a moral category fundamental to human existence

Theme B: Compassion as part of academic identity

Theme C: Compassion as both driven by and damaged by educational leadership

Theme D: Compassion as a response to inequalities and social injustice

Theme E: Compassionate universities: a myth and a reality

It is evident that these five themes address a range of important issues expressed in the study's title, aims and objectives. Specifically, the first theme focuses on academics' perceptions of and insights into the meaning of compassion in general, whilst the other four themes address more specific aspects of workplace compassion and its impressions and expressions in a university setting - the link between compassion and being an academic; the role of educational leadership in fostering and damaging compassion; the political nature of compassion in a university context; and finally, the characteristics of compassionate and non-compassionate universities. These five key themes are further divided into subthemes, and the findings are synthesised and discussed in relation to relevant literature in order to more fully understand the nature of compassion in a university setting and its impact on academics. Each theme is presented as a separate section, which is concluded by an interim summary and discussion. The discussion of the research outcomes is supported by direct quotes from interview scripts, thereby honouring the participants' voice and drawing attention to their particular use of language when sharing their insights, feelings and experiences of compassion. The quotes used in the following narrative are attributed to relevant participants whose profiles are provided in Appendix iv. However, participants remain anonymous.

The outcomes of the research are now considered under each of these five themes.

5.2 Theme A: Compassion as a complex notion and a moral category fundamental to human existence

The discussion of Theme A commences with the presentation of participants' perceptions of the meaning of compassion in general - that is, without attaching it to a specific context. Subsequent sections and themes then go on to provide insights into their understandings of workplace compassion in a university setting. The presentation and discussion of findings related to the impressions of compassion in this section is organised under several subthemes that address: first, the complexity of the notion that integrates the cognitive, emotional and social aspects and links these with a specific type

of behaviour or action; second, the perceptions of compassion as a personality trait and a skill and the possibility of educating and training for compassion; third, the participants' impressions of compassion as a moral, spiritual and religious category fundamental to human existence.

5.2.1 Subtheme A1: Compassion as a fusion of the cognitive, emotional and social aspects, as a reaction and an action

Unsurprisingly, when sharing their perceptions of the meaning of compassion, all participants highlighted the significance of the ability to understand another person's situation. This evidently relates to the cognitive aspect of the notion of compassion, as well as the capacity to experience the person's feelings. This fusion between the cognitive and the emotional aspects of compassion was emphasised in participants' references to compassion as, for example, 'insights into another person's domain' (P22), 'emotional intelligence' (P7), 'understanding how others feel' (P2), 'feeling what others feel' (P15), 'feeling together with someone else or feeling for someone else' (P20), 'thinking about and feeling for other people' (P21). This synthesis of the cognitive and the emotional domains of compassion can be also observed in the manner in which participants associated compassion with other related concepts, such as empathy, kindness, love, caring and sympathy. For example:

> I see it very much as a kind of empathy. I see it as thinking about humans. …Looking out for one another and making sure people are ok. (P10)

> I think intuitively I would think that compassion is fundamentally about kindness. I think it's about being kind and helpful and loving maybe. (P11)

> I think the other word that's most closely associated for me is just kindness. …Understanding, I think kindness and understanding are the two concepts that I think of that link with compassion. …Finding a way to understand somebody else's situation is the key to being compassionate to them and treating them with kindness. (P8)

> It is feeling what others feel, or recognising and caring about the feelings of others as if they were the feelings of oneself or the feelings of your nearest and dearest. (P15)

> It's having a level of sympathy with other people, attempting to understand what other people are going through, and trying to help people if they need it. Trying to put yourself in their shoes and imagine what they are going through at the time,

> and see if you would help in any way with the situation that they are going through, and that is just in general and in life. (P14)
>
> If somebody is demonstrating compassion to another person, they would demonstrate things like empathy, kindness, respect, caring, nurturing. (P7)

These responses to questioning about the meaning of compassion demonstrate that, for the interview participants, the social aspect of the concept is intertwined with its cognitive and emotional facets and includes a wide range of social contexts and relationships within them. Collectively, these insights emphasise that compassion is caring for others in the way one would care for one's 'nearest and dearest' (P15) and reflect the view of compassion as a care-taking social emotion that connects an individual and their community and contributes to the individual and social well-being. Such a perspective is also clearly expressed in the relevant literature in organisation studies (for example, Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2017), psychology (for example, Keller and Pfattheicher, 2013; Oveis *et al.,* 2010) and philosophy (for example, Nussbaum, 1996).

Interestingly, only one participant explicitly mentioned suffering when characterising compassion as a response aiming at easing pain and suffering (P2). This is perhaps surprising given that the literature on compassion across various disciplines, including organisation studies, focuses particularly on compassion being triggered by witnessing suffering (for example, Dutton *et al.,* 2002; Dutton *et al.,* 2011; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Greenberg and Turksma, 2015; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2011). This finding appears to be at odds with Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) model that emphasises the focus on suffering by viewing compassion as a response to experienced and expressed suffering. Although it could be argued that the notion of suffering is implicit in participants' references to compassion as understanding the other person's situation and what they are going through, the absence of explicit references to suffering could indicate that the research participants do not perceive its presence in the workplace as normal and universal. This, in turn, could relate to a more critical approach to compassion, which views the focus on suffering in the organisation studies literature as attempts to normalise its presence in the workplace (for example, Zembylas, 2013).

In their descriptions of compassion, the study participants emphasise the significance of its cognitive, emotional and social aspects rather than suffering. These three key domains of compassion associated with empathy, kindness and caring are, according to the participants, 'about mutual appreciation' (P22), which is reflected in 'trying to relate' (P9), 'being respectful of other people and being courteous' (P17). This emphasis on

sensitivity and equality as expressed by the respondents appears to endow the meaning of compassion with more subtle or nuanced tones in comparison to the suffering-focused meaning of compassion, which is sometimes linked to pity or mercy and, therefore, reflects uneven power relations (Goetz *et al.,* 2010; Thomas and Rowland, 2014; Zembylas, 2013). Indeed, one participant highlighted and expressed effectively this difference in the meaning by focusing on the cognitive aspect of compassion – namely, empathy – and linking it to creating relatedness and connection with the other person:

> …For me, it means relating to the person you're speaking to and seeing things from the viewpoint of this person instead of the point of mine. Trying to see from the other side, the other side of the story and trying to be sort of side by side instead of facing. (P1)

The visual imagery in these words of being 'side by side instead of facing' emphasises a sense of unity between both parties, whereas the dominant suffering-centred meaning of compassion in the literature not only creates a divide between the sufferer and the observer but also highlights that certain conditions, such as specific characteristics of the sufferer and the nature of suffering, need to be fulfilled in order for compassion to take place (Goetz *et al.,* 2010; Nussbaum, 1996; Oveis *et al.,* 2010).

Nevertheless, this distinction between the literature and the interviewees' responses does not suggest that their perceptions of compassion are overly positive, sentimental or uncritical. This is demonstrated by the fact that a significant proportion of the study's contributors highlighted that, to them, compassion involves an action and requires evidence of 'not just empathising but trying to do something about it' (P16), evidence of 'being helpful' (P11). These points concur with much of the literature on compassion in general (for example, Greenberg and Turksma, 2015; Nussbaum, 1996; Whitebrook, 2002; Zembylas, 2013) and with Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model in particular, which includes the behavioural aspect that aims at enhancing the sufferer's well-being or alleviating their suffering. As for the type of action, some participants suggested that sensitive interactions with people, such as when 'somebody will hopefully take a moment to think before maybe they say the first thing that comes into their head, or take a moment to think before they make a decision or even a judgment on somebody' (P17), or the manner in which they respond to people, the way in which they talk and listen (P6), are indicators of compassion. Other respondents, however, insisted that 'actions speak louder than words' (P22) and that 'an outcome' (P11) demonstrating evidence of 'trying to practise kindness' (P13) and 'trying to make a difference' (P14) is

required for authentic compassion. This position is clearly expressed by one of the participants:

> I think you can use the terms related to compassion quite easily without being it. You can say the right things, you know, which appear to be compassionate without actually being compassionate. (P11)

This observation raises the issue of authenticity of compassion; this will be addressed in more detail later in the chapter. However, the final discussion point in this section relates to the positive effect of compassion. Specifically, several participants emphasised the beneficial aspect of compassion that makes one 'feel better on an emotional level' because it gives 'emotional pleasure' (P13). According to one participant:

> We do it for feeling good about ourselves. So it's not just… it's not just, you know, doing something for the sake of doing it. If we do it, we do it because we want to feel good about ourselves, we want somebody to say thank you. So there's a selfish element to compassion as well. (P11)

These comments give prominence to the emotional and social domains of compassion and relate to the issue of motivation. In particular, the above observations support Gilbert *et al.*'s (2017) argument that caring behaviour associated with compassion can be triggered by the need to be seen positively and to be valued by others. Participant P11's reference to the selfish nature of compassion also aligns with Goetz *et al.*'s (2010) appraisal model, according to which, compassion is neither unconditional nor unlimited; its accomplishment depends on the outcome of a cost-benefit evaluation (Goetz *et al.,* 2010). A positive emotion, such as increased self-worth or an expectation of expressed appreciation as mentioned in the quotation above, are examples of this outcome which form the benefit aspect of the appraisal model. The issue of motivation was also raised by interviewees in relation to compassion in a university setting, and is, therefore, addressed later in the chapter. The following part of this section, however, is devoted to the findings on compassion as a character trait and a skill, as well as the possibility of educating and training for compassion.

5.2.2 Subtheme A2: Compassion as a character trait and a skill; educating and training for compassion

When discussing compassion as a personality trait and a skill that can be developed intentionally, the interviewees provided a range of varying and sometimes contrasting

views. Although they all agreed that compassion is a character trait, some insisted that it is an innate human trait whereas others argued that compassion needs to be experienced in order to be learnt. For example:

> I think it probably is something you're born with, and I think it's more likely that it is kind of stamped out of people rather than people need to learn it. I think children are naturally compassionate for one another and for other people, you know. Children, well, very emotional, you know. I remember my daughter being very upset that a snail had been squashed, for example, or worrying about people who you know. I mean, whether that was partly the way she was being brought up, I don't know. Of course, you never know. (P21)

> I'm thinking about my kids. I don't think kids are compassionate until they learn it. So I would say that you're not born with it. But I think there are plenty of things which are… we consider to be natural that you're not born with. It doesn't make them unnatural or solely learned 'cause they sort of came from somewhere. But you do need to witness compassionate behaviour in order to learn from it, but I think that's the same as anything else. I mean language. None of us is born with language, but it's natural for us to be able to speak. But you need to be surrounded by language to learn it, so I think it's… I think it's that. (P8)

Although there is a clear disagreement between these two accounts, it could be argued that the final reflection offered by the first contributor (P21) supports the significance and role of the upbringing explicitly expressed in the second statement (P8). According to these two participants, being surrounded by compassion, witnessing and experiencing it when growing up, results in people becoming more compassionate. Interestingly, however, another respondent's reflections seem to refute this point:

> I think in my case, what I hope is a compassionate approach to friends, colleagues, family and so forth, it is a result of my own family background and so on and so forth. Perhaps in a way it was a response to my own childhood, which perhaps was a little bit different. You know, like … I had a sort of late Victorian kind of upbringing. There probably wasn't much compassion in my childhood, so as a response to that, possibly, I am a more compassionate person to others because of that. (P5)

The above reflections of the respondent's childhood support the two previous participants' view on the importance of upbringing. However, it is argued that being surrounded by compassion when growing up is not a necessary condition for becoming a compassionate person. Moreover, it is suggested that one is likely to become more

compassionate because of a lack of compassion experienced in the family. Collectively, the arguments expressed in the three quotations above are supported by the literature on compassion which highlights the significance of parents' influences in formative years, as well as the impact of positive and negative role modelling in the family and later in educational settings (for example, Jaime-Diaz and Mendez-Negrete, 2020; Wear and Zarconi, 2008). Notably, in their study on critical compassion in education, Jaime-Diaz and Mendez-Negrete (2020) scrutinise the impact of teachers' assumptions, beliefs and values on their students and highlight the significance of teachers' childhood experiences and upbringing:

> History is never the past, we carry it within us, to revisit and examine it, as we implement decisions that we make about research, teaching, and the activism we engage. (Jaime-Diaz and Mendez-Negrete, 2020: 55)

As such, Jaime-Diaz and Mendez-Negrete (2020) emphasise that everyone is a product of their socialisation and, since teachers are 'active agents of change in the creation of knowledge', it is paramount that they develop 'the insight and awareness of the ways in which their lives shape how they see learning as an extension of their own education' (Jaime-Diaz and Mendez-Negrete, 2020: 57). Achieving this awareness and acceptance relates to nurturing self-compassion, which, as pointed out by several participants in this empirical study and in some of the literature on compassion, needs to be valued and developed because it supports compassion towards others (P11; P17; Neff *et al.,* 2008). This implies that both self-compassion and compassion are also skills.

Almost all the interviewees agreed with this view on compassion as both a character trait and a skill that can be developed; nevertheless, many seemed to be rather sceptical with regards to the success and effectiveness of training for compassion. The overall view was that as a skill, compassion naturally 'evolves throughout one's own experiences, your own upbringing' and social interactions (P5). Being trained to be compassionate later in life was considered to be unusual and difficult because one 'might have a bit of a rough road along the way making a few mistakes and upsetting people' (P2). Another argument supporting compassion as a naturally developed rather than intentionally trained skill relates to the important issue of cultural differences, which is expressed in the following reflection:

> I think you could possibly learn it, but I think it's something that comes more from your upbringing and the culture you're brought up in and just the way that you've been responded to and responded in the past. I think culture has got quite a lot

> to do with compassion as well. A sort of feeling of how involved you can be in other people's lives, and how much care you should take of each other. (P2)

In the above comment, the respondent draws attention to culture that impacts naturally developed intuitions about the appropriate degree of involvement in people's lives and the extent to which care is expected to be provided by members of society to each other. The literature on culture and cultural differences supports this view and asserts that this type of instinctive knowledge and feelings relate to societal rather than individual characteristics (Hofstede, 1980; 1991; 2001; 2011; n.d.). This is particularly noticeable in two cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede, specifically, Individualism versus Collectivism and Masculinity versus Femininity (Hofstede, 1980; 1991; 2001; 2011). According to Hofstede's research, individualist cultures are characterised by loose ties between individuals who value autonomy and independence whereas in collectivist cultures, relationships prevail over tasks and 'people from birth onwards, are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, and oppose other in-groups' (Hofstede, 2011: 11). The cultural dimension of Masculinity-Femininity demonstrates clear differences between the assertive pole called 'masculine', which is associated with 'maximum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders' in society, 'admiration for the strong', aspirations to be assertive and ambitious and the prevalence of work over family; and the modest and caring 'feminine' pole, which is characterised by 'minimum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders', 'sympathy for the weak', aspirations to be modest and caring and 'balance between family and work' (Hofstede, 2011: 11). Although often considered to be outdated and somewhat oversimplified due to reductionism and overgeneralisation (for example, Signorini, Wiesemes and Murphy, 2009), Hofstede's research and its findings highlight a high degree of variation in approaches to important societal issues associated with compassion-related concepts, such as empathy, sympathy, caring and equality in various cultures. Therefore, developing awareness of these differences is likely to be a significant and valuable aspect of education or training for compassion.

The majority of the participants in this research agreed with this point of view and alluded that education for compassion is possible and beneficial (for example, P2, P3, P12, P16, P19). However, it was also suggested that only certain kinds of people who are willing to develop their compassionate side would be suitable for such training (P13). Despite regarding compassion as an unusual area for teaching, the study's participants also pointed out that people could be trained to be more observant and prompted to look for other people's body language, tone of voice and hidden messages (P17) in order to interpret their emotional state more accurately, or training for compassion could

encourage people to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviour in order to be less self-centred (P14). Developing the ability 'to recognise that people's lives are complicated, and that people are complicated' was also identified as 'part of learning how to be compassionate' (P21). It was pointed out that, similar to this research project on compassion, developing an awareness of how emotional and behavioural responses support those in need could be turned into a learning activity (P8, P18 and P19). In other words, despite regarding compassion predominantly as a personality trait and a naturally developed skill, most participants viewed educating and training for compassion as being beneficial and suggested that the cognitive element of the notion should be the focus of such education or training.

The prominence of the cognitive aspect of compassion as identified in this research is not surprising. The study's participants were all academics, and they regarded the cognitive dimension to be the focal point of training for compassion because the intellectual prevails over the emotional in formal education and training (Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007). Moreover, compassion's cognitive dimension links it to rationality and increases its value as a social emotion (Nussbaum, 1996), which explains why training involving the development of this aspect of compassion was viewed by respondents as achievable and beneficial. However, it is likely to be compassion's emotional dimension, which is often regarded as an irrational and unreasonable force (Kant, 1960; Keller and Pfattheicher, 2013), that prompted scepticism amongst some participants regarding the potential success and effectiveness of such training. Moreover, since compassion is context and goal oriented, the issue of motivation makes it complicated and sometimes controversial (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017; Zaki, 2014) and, therefore, educating or training for compassion was considered by some respondents to be problematic. One of the participants eloquently explained the dangers associated with learning to be compassionate:

> I think it can be learned to the detriment as well in that people can create a veneer of compassion which is a masquerade and actually is quite psychopathic, which is about drawing people in. You become a smiling assassin, getting people to trust you simply so that you get to know them, and then you can take liberties or actually do damage. So, it can be learned not in a good way in that people can replicate it and behave like an actor rather than being intuitively or genuinely and authentically compassionate. (P22)

The account above highlights the contrast between authentic compassion and false compassion triggered by a hidden agenda. Gilbert *et al.* (2017: 7) explain that it is 'manipulative empathy' that is employed non-compassionately in order to achieve personal gains. Although there are similarities between the concepts of compassion and

empathy (Mencl and May, 2009; Simpson *et al.,* 2014; Zurek and Scheithauer, 2017) and the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably (Banker and Bhal, 2018), empathy does not necessarily result in a compassionate act and is considered to be one of the competencies of compassion, whereas compassion is not viewed as a competence (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017). Another important distinction between the two terms lies in the differences between self-focused empathy and self-focused compassion. According to Zurek and Scheithauer (2017), self-focused empathy is employed to fulfil anti-social functions by means of manipulating people and achieving personal gains at the cost of others, whereas self-focused compassion is triggered by the need to avoid feelings of shame or guilt for not caring (Gilbert *et al.,* 2017). This means that it is likely to be empathy as a competency of compassion that can be developed as a skill in the process of training or educating, whereas authentic and genuinely felt compassion is not likely to be achieved. However, Klimecki, Leiberg, Ricard, and Singer, (2014) differentiate between empathy training and compassion training and associate the former with negative emotions and the latter with positive ones. Hence, as one of the study's participants highlighted, 'people can definitely be trained to act as if they are compassionate' (P20), it could be argued that detecting whether people are genuinely compassionate or have learnt how to appear compassionate by means of mastering empathy is likely to be challenging. This explains the scepticism expressed by the majority of the study's participants about training or educating for compassion.

Several contributors, however, were more categorical, insisting that it is impossible to train people to be compassionate because 'it's something within people' and, therefore, cannot be engineered (P5). It was also pointed out that educating for compassion implies 'that there's a kind of a certain set of standards which everybody should achieve, kind of like the universal notions… which isn't very compassionate' (P9). According to several respondents, not only the outcomes of such training but also its process makes it impossible to achieve genuine compassion. It was argued that since 'training people tends to come with that kind of structure of 'This is what you do and this is how you do it', it is impossible to apply this approach to compassion, which is about interpersonal relationships (P9). This view reflects the literature that regards training for compassion problematic (for example, Wear and Zarconi, 2008) and, instead, advocates interventions and practices that nurture compassion (for example, Greenberg and Turksma, 2015; Rashedi *et al.,* 2015; Wear and Zarconi, 2008).

However, some researchers argue that the 'compassion-related curriculum is becoming a trend in higher education and thus perceived as an integral part of holistic education' (Rashedi *et al.,* 2015: 136). It is acknowledged that historically, compassion education

has been addressed in the training of healthcare professionals, aimed at preventing burnout and supporting compassionate care in nursing as well as in other helping professions, such as counselling (ibid). However, the findings of an interesting empirical study conducted with medical students and aimed at determining whether compassion can be taught, pointed out at the danger of 'shoving' the topic of compassion 'down [students'] throats' and highlighted the significance of role modelling, student experience and the absence of conflicting cues in educational environment (Wear and Zarconi, 2008). It is argued that in order to nurture compassion, a much broader and more comprehensive framework is needed with practical outcomes that include 'effective policies, programs, and practices that support the development of caring, compassion and service to others in our schools and communities' (Greenberg and Turksma, 2015: 280). A wide range of different and sometimes contrasting viewpoints in the literature and amongst this study's participants presented above highlight the complex nature of compassion. The following section continues the narrative of its complexity by presenting contributors' impressions or perceptions of compassion as a moral, spiritual and religious category central to human existence.

5.2.3 Subtheme A3: Compassion as a moral, spiritual and religious category fundamental to human existence

A number of the participants in this research viewed compassion as something more sophisticated, complex and prominent than a character trait or a skill involving a set of competencies. In particular, they emphasised the philosophical nature of the notion and its close link to morality, spirituality and religion. This connection was highlighted in some of the interviewees' interpretations of compassion as 'a moral category that takes roots in religion' (P20), 'one of the ingredients of enlightenment' (P15) and 'the practice of kindness' connected to 'the idea of morals', something 'like a moral standpoint' (P13). The importance of having 'understanding of the world around you, your relationship to it, and our relationship to each other' (P9) linked to morality and spirituality was accentuated by one of the research contributors in the following explanation:

> If you don't have that kind of understanding, you could either treat people as you would expect to be treated yourself, which isn't very compassionate. Or you believe that there's a kind of a certain set of standards which everybody should achieve, kind of like the universal notions, which again, isn't very compassionate. (P9)

Another participant drew attention to the significance of context when making moral judgements associated with compassion:

> People need different things at different times in different situations and … it can be kind to give somebody a chocolate bar, but actually, in some situations, no it isn't. And also, in some situations it doesn't help at all. So it is about understanding what that person really needs. (P8)

Both participants' comments above heighten the challenges of decision-making when attempting to respond with compassion; however, they address two different facets of compassion. Participant P9's reference to understanding the world, people and relationships relates to 'shared humanity' and 'a sense of connectedness' associated with spirituality, which Porter (2006:102) terms 'universalism' in the theory of compassion. The focus of Participant 8's comments, however, is on compassion as 'an emotional and practical response' to a particular situation, linked to morality and termed 'particularism' (Porter, 2006: 102). Both facets of compassion, universalism and particularism, require 'careful consideration' and the ability to make 'a reasoned judgment about the needs of a specific person, group, or socio-political concern' (ibid). A similar idea was expressed by one of the interviewees who pointed out that compassion means 'understanding where people are coming from and trying to relate to them on that level' (P9).

Another interesting point raised by the research respondents is the relationship between compassion, spirituality and religion. It was specified by one interviewee that compassion, 'like everything cultural, was generated by religion, and then made its way across to the secular culture' (P20). This link to religions was, however, identified as somewhat problematic by another research participant, who viewed religions as 'the political parties of spirituality' and who shared the following concerns:

> It's that idea of spirituality and the problem we have with religions, where religions say 'This is what spirituality is about. These are the answers to existence. This is why we are here and how we relate to each other', which is different from other religions' version of why we are here and how we relate to each other and what our place in the world is. (P9)

The reference to religions as being prescriptive is considered problematic by the participant who suggests that religions restrain spirituality by means of attempting to determine people's understanding of the world, their relationship to it and to each other. The following comment by the same participant demonstrates that for them, compassion is closely linked to spirituality rather than religions:

> I think there's that level of understanding, or that kind of, well, questioning that comes first before you develop that relationship. And for me, compassion is about understanding that. How important that is. And in the same way, as I said, how I

> would interpret spirituality is questioning that, that examination, trying to understand anyway. (P9)

These reflections emphasise the distinction between having specific expectations in relation to behaving compassionately which are associated with religions and exercising the freedom to question and challenge these expectations when making moral judgements, which the participant identifies with spirituality.

Another respondent presented a similar argument, albeit in the context of secular societies with different cultures by contrasting more rationality-focused law-abiding prescriptive societies, in which individuals rarely have to exercise their consciousness or moral judgement, with 'more lawless' societies, where rationality is not valued as highly and where 'inevitably conscience paradoxically comes to play a much more important role' (P20). This contrast is explained by cultural differences, which is expressed in the following observation:

> It is necessary to understand that there are different cultures and different ethics, and so without understanding these deep underlying reasons and every particular culture, it's very difficult to communicate and to draw any conclusions… Obviously there are things which are indeed common to all humans, like compassion, but nevertheless, there are cultural differences…. How we treat these, how we behave in life and which things are in need of discussion, and what goes without saying, this differs greatly from culture to culture. (P20)

The exploration of these cultural differences in relation to perceptions of compassion is a potential area for further investigation, though beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, the significance of the above arguments to this study lies in the value that individuals from various cultures attach to the morality-related concept, which has been identified as something that 'characterizes you as an individual, so it is existential, which determines everything else' (P20). These points are supported by Jensen's (2010) argument about striking differences between the moral domain and other human domains, such as political, social economic and legal. According to Jensen (2010:426), in contrast to other domains, the moral domain cannot be avoided by human beings because refraining from moral considerations means 'having to give up interaction, talk and action within the human community', therefore, compassion, because of its close link to moral responsibility, is fundamental to human existence.

5.2.4 Summary of findings and discussion: Theme A

As perceived by the research respondents, all of whom are academics, compassion is a care-taking social emotion that combines the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects and aims at securing and maintaining individual and communal well-being. It is associated with empathy, kindness, sympathy, respect and nurturing. Interestingly, little reference was made explicitly to suffering by the research participants, whereas according to much of the literature on compassion across various disciplines, compassion is activated by witnessing suffering (for example, Dutton *et al.,* 2002; Dutton *et al.,* 2011; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Greenberg and Turksma, 2015; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2011). Although suffering associated with hardships and difficult situations could be implied by the interviewed academics, their focus was mostly on relatedness, respect and appreciation of the other person's circumstances, which endows the meaning of compassion with a sense of equality rather than uneven power relations. The importance of compassion as an action associated with its behavioural domain, was emphasised by the participants, who viewed sensitive interactions as well as more tangible and practical efforts to support the other person as evidence of such action.

Almost all the participants considered compassion to be both a character trait and a skill that can be developed, however, varying and sometimes contrasting views on the possibility of training or educating for compassion were expressed by them. The majority regarded compassion as a quality that can be nurtured in an individual's formatives years by witnessing it in the family, but generally the research participants seemed to be rather sceptical with regards to the success and effectiveness of educating and training for compassion. Although most agreed with the possibility and potential benefits of such training and linked these to developing cultural awareness, empathy and emotional intelligence, they questioned the authenticity of compassion achieved by means of such training. Moreover, the issue of motivation was reported to be adding to the problematic nature of training for compassion; it was pointed out that as a developed skill, it could be employed to achieve a hidden agenda which in some contexts could be damaging. It was the contrast between being authentically compassionate and using it as an instrument to achieve personal gains that made some interviewees feel strongly against training for compassion. Conversely, others felt more positive about such training. Indeed, they acknowledged that it may result in developing the ability to demonstrate compassion without genuinely feeling it but nevertheless insisted that this outcome should be regarded as beneficial provided there is a positive effect of such demonstration.

Finally, the philosophical nature of compassion was emphasised by several participants who drew attention to its link to morality, spirituality and religion. These participants emphasised the complexity of compassion as a decision-making process based on moral judgements that reflect people's understanding of the world, their shared humanity, interconnectedness and each other's needs. It was pointed out that despite acknowledged historical links to religions, compassion is more associated with spirituality that allows for questioning and challenging expectations associated with compassionate behaviour, whereas religions tend to be prescriptive and, therefore, restrain the freedom of individuals. Another interesting point was made with reference to secular societies in which, due to the difference in the value attached to rationality which is expressed in how prescriptive and law-abiding these societies are, individuals exercise their consciousness and moral judgement to different degrees. It was highlighted, nevertheless, that despite these cultural differences, compassion as a morality-related concept defines people as individuals and members of a community and is, therefore, fundamental to human existence.

This section has presented and discussed the research findings related to the respondents' perceptions of the meaning of compassion without attaching it to a specific context. The following sections and themes now provide insights into the interviewees' understandings of workplace compassion in a university setting.

5.3 Theme B: Compassion as part of academic identity

The second key theme that emerged from the research is compassion as part of academic identity. The presentation and discussion of findings related to this theme is organised in this section under several subthemes. These include, first, academics' perceptions of workplace compassion; second, compassion as role plus; and third, compassion as expressed by academics' collegiality. The first subtheme deals primarily with academic's interpretations of the meaning of compassion, or impressions, in the university context, whilst the second and third subthemes embrace both impressions and expressions of workplace compassion. Hence, specific examples of how compassion is manifested in this context are provided and discussed.

5.3.1 Subtheme B1: Academics' perceptions of workplace compassion

All the respondents viewed compassion as part of what they do as academics. More specifically, the research findings indicate that in the context of a university, compassion was perceived, first of all, at an interpersonal level and included references to all three

domains of the concept, that is, cognitive, emotional and behavioural. The prominence of the cognitive element was emphasised in academics' references to compassion as empathy for and understanding of other people's situations in general (for example, P1, P2, P8, P9, P11, P12) and, in particular, an awareness 'that people often have lots of things going on that they might not explicitly bring with them to work, but going on in the background, and that could be having quite an impact on their activities and their behaviors' (P17). The emotional and behavioural aspects of workplace compassion were highlighted in the interviewees' references to caring (P4), kindness (P8, P10), sympathy (P18), willingness to offer and provide support (P2, P3, P12, P13, P18), all of which were often linked to teaching as a care giving profession (for example, P5, P7, P10, P15) and highlighted as 'something that academics do naturally' (P14). The importance of 'sacrificing time' (P3) and 'taking time to be kind and not thinking just about yourself' (P10) was also identified as a significant behavioural aspect of compassion in a university setting, as well as its relational element reflected in 'giving space to build relationships with both colleagues and students' (P9).

Interestingly, the respondents' insights on compassion in the university context pointed to a clear distinction between their understanding of compassion at the interpersonal and relational levels and compassion at the organisational level. In this respect, several different, and sometimes contrasting or even contradicting opinions were expressed with regards to the link between compassion and the profession. On the one hand, compassion was generally considered to be an important part of academic identity when dealing with colleagues and students at the interpersonal and relational levels, demonstrating a clear link between compassion and the profession. On the other hand, many participants questioned or even challenged its suitability in a university setting, particularly at the organisational level. For example,

> I'm struggling with compassion in an academic setting. I think empathy and understanding and being able to relate to your students is important. Having compassion, I think is something that is outside of an academic setting. Where in your social life, in your family life, or in the political events that are going on around you.. you'd have compassion for that, but…. Yeah, I've a little bit of a struggle with compassion in an academic setting… Compassion to me is almost like heartfelt, like you really feel upset about what's happening to someone else, whereas sympathy and empathy I think are more appropriate in an academic setting. (P2)

> Because it was brought into our vocabulary, almost like corporate propaganda, so when anybody around me in xxxxxxx [university] mentioned it, especially people at work, I take it more to do with work propaganda. Not my personal choice

> or my personal vocabulary. For me, the word empathy makes more sense than compassion. (P1)

> I mean the other thing about academics is that they are notably very cynical people. You know, that's the nature of the beast, that's part of the job. You know, we tend to be quite cynical, so when somebody uses the word compassion, we're gonna be 'Really? Honestly? How's that going to play out?' (P11)

The above comments indicate that it is over the emotional aspect of compassion and the nature of a university setting as a workplace, particularly at the organisational level, that interviewees cast doubt and scepticism about its suitability. In contrast, another participant viewed compassion as 'a stable entity', which 'stands above and beyond any professional' context (P20).

> I think compassion is a category that doesn't depend on which setting or which context you are considering it in, whether it's the university setting or a setting of a social life outside an institution, or family life or any other. It is a much more all-pervasive, all-encompassing personal and interpersonal entity or concept. And as such, it stands above any particular context such as a professional institution. (P20)

These varying comments point to a wide range of perceptions on the part of academics with regards to workplace compassion. All respondents, however, emphasised compassion at the personal and relational levels of a university setting which, for many, was inextricably linked to their profession, as explained earlier in the section. These findings add some nuances to Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model (see Figure 3.1), which identifies the three contexts, namely, personal, relational and organisational, but does not make a similar distinction between the first two levels that can be associated with a profession and the organisational level that can be viewed as problematic. This difference, however, could be explained by the nature of universities as organisations and of academics as critical thinkers, as expressed by one of the study's participants in the following observation:

> Maybe academics do tend to think more about these things than maybe they do in another organization. We've got philosophers and psychologists and all sorts of people that will probably think about it maybe in more depth than possibly somewhere else. (P17)

The introduction of the concept of uncertainty of workplace compassion to Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) modified model (see Figure 3.3) demonstrates the theory's attempt to address the complex and somewhat problematic nature of workplace compassion (for example,

Frost, 2003; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2008). This study's findings also indicated that the meaning and accomplishment of compassion in a university context can be varied, problematic and sometimes controversial. The following subsections address these in more detail focusing on the meaning of compassion and its expressions on all three levels in a university context.

5.3.2 Subtheme B2: Compassion as 'Role Plus'

As discussed in the preceding subsection, compassion was generally regarded by the participants as inextricably linked to their professional identity and reflected, first of all, in 'the way that staff support their students' (P21). When asked about the expressions of compassion in a university setting, most interviewed academics referred to going an extra mile to support their students (for example, P2, P5, P7, P9, P10, P13, P14, P16), or 'going beyond the role in a sense' (P5), which was termed by one of the participants as 'Role Plus' (P5). The cognitive domain of compassion was highlighted again when the participants commented on the importance of understanding students, including their environment and background, in order to allow them to achieve their goals instead of setting up standard targets (P9). Being sensitive was also reported as a significant part of 'Role Plus' because of the wide range of expectations in terms of the type and amount of support students find appropriate due to their cultural background (P2), and because of power relations between students and academics (P5). Sacrificing time in order to build relationships with students was also highlighted, and such examples as taking a student for a coffee when they need support (P17), 'spend[ing] a lot of time being counselors to students, and worrying about them, and chasing them up, and trying to help them with things that they find difficult' (P21) were reported as expressions of compassion.

Several compelling examples of the expressions of compassion as 'Role Plus' were reported by Participant P18, who shared stories about, first, a vulnerable student in her 60s with a number of health issues who received a wide range of support from tutors to enable her to continue with the course and second, about another mature student in her final year whose house burnt down. In the latter case, despite losing three months of study because of fire, the student successfully completed her course because of the continued support from academics (P18). Another interesting example offered by the same participant was about discovering that that a 2nd year student had failed to pay tuition fees for year 1. The student was entitled to a student loan but had never applied for it; this was overlooked by the Student Loan Company and the relevant administration department asked her to leave. Nevertheless, academic staff continued to support and

teach the student and supported her emotionally until the mistake had been rectified because she found it quite hard to deal with the issue. Again, because of the academics' support, the student continued with the course and successfully completed it (P18).

Interestingly, these success stories highlight compassion in the personal and relational contexts (Dutton *et al.*, 2014; Kanov *et al.,* 2017) of a university setting. Furthermore, there seems to be a clear contrast between the enactment of compassion at these two levels associated with academics' 'felt responsibility to act' (Kanov *et al.,* 2017: 769) associated with their professional identity, and the lack of compassion at the organisational level, or the absence of compassionate care (Simpson *et al.,* 2013) on behalf of the university. This was manifested in the third example by the administrative staff when following the organisation's procedures and, hence, requesting the student to withdraw from the course due to non-payment of tuition fees. This example also demonstrated that in order to respond with compassion, academics were obliged to ignore the relevant rules and procedures at the university's organisational level in order to offer continued support to the student. In other words, had the official rules been followed, no compassion would have occurred. This can be linked to and explained by the concept of courage that was introduced to the modified version of Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model (see Figure 3.3). The model views 'compassion as a courageous act' (Kanov *et al.,* 2017: 765) because of the similarities between suffering and challenging events that involve dealing with employees in need or distress. Therefore, it is argued that these challenging events create conditions 'not only for compassion, but also for courageous action' (Kanov *et al.,* 2017: 767). The incident rested to unpaid student fees described above supports this view because the persistence displayed by academics in supporting the students despite the administrators' request for her to withdraw can be regarded as an act of compassion and courage.

Although the importance and value of compassion as the 'Role Plus' was generally acknowledged and accepted by all the participants in this study, a significant number of them were more critical about this part of their professional identity linked to compassion and offered less positive insights into their experiences. It was, first of all, pointed out that academics were not always able to meet students' expectations in terms of providing support due to numerous administrative tasks and other responsibilities that comprised their heavy, sometimes overwhelming workloads (P2, P9).

> If you're constantly overloaded and overworked and you don't have…, you know, you can't remember who your students are, never mind giving them enough time to make them feel like part of something, or, you know, be compassionate with them. (P21)

Another source of tension related to the 'Role Plus' associated with care and compassion lies in the detrimental effect it can have on academics' career prospects and well-being, as clearly pointed out in the following comment:

> The compassionate people who then spend the most time giving therapy sessions and whatever with their students, don't have time to do any research, don't have time to do any. …they are more often the ones that are on the brink of a nervous breakdown or mental health issues themselves because they're picking on so much. (P16)

Several interviewees supported the argument above. Participants P10 and P13, for example, revealed that despite working in the university for 11 and 13 years respectively, they had found it difficult to start research or to submit a proposal for a doctorate study due to their demanding teaching and pastoral responsibilities which, they felt, were inhibiting their career development (P10, P13). This aligns with the literature that identifies a typical career path of an academic in a British university with research or being research active (Knights and Richards, 2003), yet responsibilities such as teaching and pastoral work, which are often associated with 'the 'domestic' work for the organisation', distracts academics from research and significantly reduces their chances for promotion and career growth (Lynch, 2010: 56).

In addition to the concerns about overwhelming workloads impacting negatively on the career development and well-being of academics as expressed in the comments of Participant P16 above, a certain degree of uneasiness was revealed by several respondents with regards to being encouraged to attend mental health and suicide prevention workshops. One respondent had particularly strong feelings against this type of training, highlighting the dangers of the 'superficial' 'ticking-boxes' approach to something extremely serious that demands specialist knowledge and skills that cannot be possibly developed in a two-hour workshop (P14). Moreover, such training may not only put the students who require professional help at risk but may also impact negatively on academics who themselves may be vulnerable (P14).

It was also pointed out that pastoral care responsibilities on a one-to-one basis with students can conflict with academics' professionalism, particularly if a student discloses their mental health issues, because this can impact on the professional judgement of academics.

> You know when you are a teacher, you are in a place of responsibility. You know you're there to do a job. I don't know… I don't think it's appropriate for it to be on that one-to-one level with the student. You are always friendly with the student, but it would have to be that detachment, again, there has to be that detachment.

> On a professional level, I don't know… if a student came to me and said, 'I'm going to do something stupid' and was relatively serious about it, then I'm thinking 'I've got to mark your work!' It's completely strange, but I don't know if I could actually allow or not allow my personal opinion to not sway my professional judgment. That would be difficult as well. …There should be boundaries. Absolutely, there should be boundaries on a professional level. (P14)

These reflections highlight complex power relations between academics and students, bring to the fore the issue of ethical decision making and question the appropriateness of offering compassion in the context where an academic's professional judgement may be distorted by the emotional element of compassion. These aspects of workplace compassion are widely discussed in the Positive Organisational Ethics (POE) literature that regards compassion as a moral decision-making practice that requires reflexivity and, depending on the context, can be beneficial or damaging to individuals (Clark, 1987; Schmitt and Clark, 2006; Simpson *et al.*, 2013; Simpson *et al.*, 2014a; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). The concept of legitimacy of compassion, highlighted by Simpson *et al.*'s (2014b) compassion legitimacy and worthiness model, is particularly relevant to the above reflections and to the following insights from the same participant:

> And likewise, if you make it the tutor's responsibility, that student doesn't feel comfortable talking to you because you are an academic, you will be responsible for their work and teaching their work. It might not be the best place for them either to talk to you because it's nice for them to have somebody different to talk to. And they know it's not going to be judged or it's not going to be thought about in the classroom. So again, for those guys, I can't imagine it, as I said, I don't think they'd want it either. (P14)

In these reflections, Participant P14 questions their legitimacy as a compassion giver from the student's point of view and suggests that another party's involvement may lead to a more positive outcome for the student. This view is supported by the multidimensional framework of compassion legitimacy (see Figure 3.5), which proposes that one of the conditions of compassion is a legitimate relationship between the two parties where the giver could be a friend, a colleague, a family member or an authorised professional caregiver (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). The reflections above clearly challenge the legitimacy of academics as professional caregivers due to their primary teaching responsibilities and the power that lies in assessing students' progress. Moreover, according to the framework, another important condition is for the compassion receiver to experience positive effects (ibid). This is also questioned in the comments above.

Since there is no certainty that both conditions are met, it could be argued that academics cannot be considered as legitimate compassion givers.

This clearly demonstrates that there are tensions associated with compassion as 'Role Plus', particularly at the organisational level of the university context. These tensions were reflected, for example, in some of the respondents' comments with regards to the contrast in the available support provision, such as mental health, for students and staff.

> The head of Health and Well-Being is not here anymore, but I used to meet her regularly, and she was a lovely lady, very compassionate. I was very comfortable to say to her, 'You know, there's a lot for students. But I would argue that there's very little for staff in terms of the support.' …She didn't necessarily disagree with me that there is a lot just in terms of services for students, and it's very well advertised, but I don't think there's a lot for staff, definitely not. (P13)

The frustrations expressed by the respondents above seem to relate to complex power relations within an organisation and how they are revealed in patterns of behaviour that are informed by policies, rules, procedures and practices of an organisation (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). These identify with the dispositional circuit of power relations of the multidimensional framework of compassion legitimacy mentioned earlier (see Figure 3.5), and according to Simpson *et al.,* (2013), they legitimise or fail to legitimise compassion in organisations. Frost and Robinson (1999) note that in order for an organisation to be compassionate, these policies, procedures and practices need to provide necessary resources. Yet the above comments of Participant P13 points to a lack of these resources in the case study university, particularly for staff. The following observation is another example that provides evidence supporting this:

> I mean, we've just had an email today, you've probably seen it, from the VC. I noticed earlier that they were talking about testing [for covid], and there was no automatic testing for staff, and there may be some tests leftover. I didn't think that that was the right thing to say. It sounded like 'We don't really care about you. We're jumping through the hoops and doing the testing for students, and if there are some tests left, maybe we'll get around to the staff'. (P10)

Another source of tensions in the relationship between academics and students that indicate lack of compassion associated with 'Role Plus', as reported by the respondents, is associated with the commercial nature of HE in the UK that commodifies education and treats students as customers. Several interviewees expressed their frustration with and resentment towards this approach because they saw a conflict between their professional identity and the commercial nature of British universities. For example,

> Education for me is a privilege, and sometimes, yes, I can understand it's a business, it has to operate as a business, it has to make a profit. But we are losing sight of the fact that the students are there to learn. And the students are the customers. That's what I really hate, and when a student says that to me, I hate that phrase, but it's true. They have to get an experience with that, to get an education. They're not there to make money for the University. They've got a level of expectance… I joined teaching because I wanted to teach, not because I wanted to raise money through bids. Not because I had to chase numbers to get students in… Well, I think that the pressures of bringing the money in and getting University operational, I think, conflicts in terms of what we're trying to do as a profession sometimes. (P14)

> In the UK, students were not charged for education for such a long time. But in my country, students have always paid tuition fees, and they feel compassionate enough, and students do respect teachers. And students don't behave like customers, but they behave like students. The problem with the UK is that many institutions had never been in the situation when they were having to charge students. So universities then employ marketing companies and marketing experts, and because these people are market-driven and are market-minded, they sell education as services rather than education as education. So this is the reason why students are behaving like customers. Because universities treat them like customers. They're afraid of them and try to please them. But if you have a proper stand in that and say, 'We are paid by you as a university but we are still educating you, not providing services to you', you can still do the job. (P1)

The frustration and resentment at having to treat students as customers revealed in the above personal insights contribute to the tensions and complexity of power relations in a university setting. Moreover, these tensions in the relationship arguably create conflicts in compassion-related episodes between the two parties and result in a lack or absence of compassion. According to the compassion legitimacy model, the imposed values of the commercial nature of higher education in the UK relate to the facilitative circuit of social practices that deals with macro-level structures and is sometimes informed by the government's policies (Simpson *et al.,* 2013). These structures inform and are likely to determine actions in the episodic circuit of relational practices between academics and students as well as the dispositional circuit of organisational practices of the university (Simpson *et al.,* 2014b; also see Figure 3.5). These structures, based on the service provider versus customer relations, promote a commercial approach and, hence, imply seeking opportunity for profit which, according to the model, is one of the conditions of an illegitimate compassion giver. In other words, the profit-oriented nature of modern

universities can disempower compassionate actions of academics associated with 'Role Plus'. Moreover, as noted by one of the study's contributors, this approach to students as customers creates the culture of complaints, and 'the culture that encourages complaints from students is not encouraging anything compassionate' (P1).

5.3.3 Subtheme B3: Compassion as expressed by academics' collegiality

The research findings identified collegiality as another form of workplace compassion in a university setting. A wide range of expressions of compassion in this context was reported by the study's participants, from day-to-day communication and encounters with colleagues, such as being asked and asking how they are and if they are doing well (P19), noticing that a colleague is having a difficult day and just saying 'Let's go and have a coffee' to give them a break (P17), to building meaningful, friendly and lasting relationships based on mutual support (for example, P4, P6, P7, P12, P13, P14, P17). As for the meaning of compassion as academics' collegiality, it was pointed out by most of the study's contributors, that it is, first of all, about understanding the challenges of the role of an academic and, secondly, about more personal and emotional connections associated with closer relationships such as friendships. The significance of these cognitive and emotional domains of the concept combined with closer personal relationships are highlighted in the following explanation of the meaning of compassion in this context:

> Compassion is perhaps moving into a more personal level of relationship with colleagues. I suppose compassion is understanding that we all struggle, we all have challenges, we have heavy workloads, all these various things. Being compassionate with colleagues is recognising that they suffer the same things as I do, that they have the same challenges, and trying to help support through that. …. We are getting into an interesting area where the compassion is mixed with more personal, emotional feelings about your relationships with people as well, where compassion goes beyond simple respect to elements of friendship, wanting to support. (P5)

The reciprocal nature of compassion as expressed by academics' collegiality was emphasised by several respondents as significant in their professional life; it was seen as something that makes it easier and more enjoyable on personal levels and when working in a team. For example,

> I've shown compassion to early career researchers and helping them to improve their outputs. I've done that outside my working hours, while on holidays. …I've

> experienced that as well in the past. People have shown compassion to me in the past through writing reference letters in a hurry, and helping me improve my research outputs, my research skills in general. (P3)
>
> When I first started, there was this specific colleague who taught me a lot of things, and then when there was a new staff member, I tried to… but I couldn't be as nice as her, because she was amazing. But I tried to…, like I remembered the things that I learned from her, and then I tried to teach the same things to the new staff member. Nobody forced me to do it, nobody asked me to do it, but because that was what I received, for me, it was expected of me. Not by others, but my myself. (P12)

These types of narratives about experienced compassion can be categorised as 'inferences about the self' (Lilius *et al.,* 2008: 208). They demonstrate what workplace compassion means to the participants and how their previous experiences of compassion improved their ability to carry out their responsibilities and to 'be more fully oneself in the workplace' (ibid). It also means that 'the experience of compassion in the workplace can have a lasting impact on how one sees his or herself' (Lilius *et al.,* 2008: 207).

Interestingly, in addition to supporting colleagues within existing relationships, several academics reported that establishing new relationships was also associated with workplace compassion. Participant P11, for example, highlighted that connecting to a previously unknown member of the faculty through a peer observation by discovering a lot of similarities in teaching online during lockdowns, exchanging these experiences 'like army stories', and enjoying and learning from them felt compassionate. Another interviewee reported that university-wide events that 'allow staff to come together and have discussions', such as Black History Month sessions, connect colleagues, create a sense of community, therefore, also identify with workplace compassion (P9).

These findings demonstrate that compassion and its expressions in a university setting add nuances to the meaning of workplace compassion associated with and triggered by suffering, which is the focus of much literature on compassion in organisational studies (for example, Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2017). The instrumental nature of compassion in this context, which is often highlighted in compassion literature, was explicitly referred to by one of the participants who viewed it as 'a guiding principle' of effective teamwork 'that can lead to greater productivity in the long run' (P6). However, the majority of the respondents perceived compassion as connecting to their colleagues and developing friendships and a sense of community with them based on shared challenges and values associated with their professional identity.

The research findings also revealed the significance of the social aspect of working in a university and the non-work-related interactions amongst colleagues in developing compassion associated relationships. Several participants revealed that informal conversations that show an interest in colleagues as people rather than academics, or where the aspect of work is removed from discussions, made them feel more valued and much happier and relaxed at work. For Participant P4, this was particularly important at the start of their academic career:

> I remember when I came to the School of xxxxxxxx, one of the first people who I felt was compassionate to me at the start of my teaching career was Xxxxx Xxxxxxx [a colleague's name]. She took care of me. Not because I was working in her team but just because I was a new person, and I was probably intimidated by all the Senior Lecturers, and she made me very relaxed and very calm outside of my duties as an Associate Lecturer, and that's what made me feel very comfortable working in the School. (P4)

Away days and traditions within teams, such as marking colleagues' birthdays or celebrating Christmas at work by sharing drinks and cakes, were mentioned as appropriate and useful in achieving compassion-based relationships amongst colleagues (P2, P4, P14). These findings align with the outcomes of a study that used the emotions of being grateful and feeling at ease as two measures of rating the frequency of positive emotion at work and which identified a positive relationship between experiencing workplace compassion and positive emotion (Lilius *et al.,* 2008).

Receiving and giving emotional support in times of difficulty and personal trauma were also reported by several research participants as expressions of compassion as kindness and caring about colleagues and their well-being. For example:

> I know that when my biggest thing that's happened to me probably in recent years, is when my mom died. And I was shown a lot of compassion by people around me, mostly from fellow colleagues. And people would put their arms around me, either verbally or physically. I just knew that they understood, and they were kind. (P7)

> We have online meetings on Fridays. Let's have a glass of wine. Let's talk about things and let's get it through and let's talk about something. Now, you can talk about work if you wish, but we'll talk about something different because it's all encompassing at the moment. So it's trying to have that environment as well,

> where you are able to express how you feel at that time. I think that's an element of compassion as well. (P14)

Emotional support provided by colleagues to each other because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic can also be added to this category of compassion. Curiously, opposing views were expressed by the respondents. Some reported witnessing more compassion amongst colleagues and evidence of greater concern about each other's welfare (for example, P4, P5, P13, P14). Therefore, they regarded the effects of the pandemic as 'encouraging more compassion, and love, and understanding' (P5). Participant P10, however, observed that 'particularly during the pandemic', their colleagues 'seemed quiet, …selfish and frightened, so [were] naturally protecting themselves'. This kind of responses can be classified as 'inferences about others at work', and are based on experienced compassion or its lack and, therefore, lead to conclusions about the calibre of interpersonal relations amongst colleagues, their personality and whether they 'can be trusted to respond when pain arises' (Lilius *et al.,* 2008: 208). This view implies that the difference in the participants' perceptions stems from the difference in the quality of interpersonal relationships within specific teams.

However, the research findings indicate that expressions of compassion in a university setting are context dependent and specific personal situations of staff influence their attitude and behaviour. As pointed out by several respondents, at a specific moment, typically compassionate academics can themselves be overwhelmed, stressed or under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines and, therefore, might not be forthcoming with support (P2, P11). The literature on workplace compassion concurs with this view and states that the reason for a failure of compassion can be 'an oversight by busy and preoccupied work colleagues' (Lilius *et al.,* 2008: 210).

Another important issue that contributes to the problematic nature of expressing compassion in a university context relates to sensitivity. As highlighted by one of the study's contributors, since pride is involved in an academic setting, 'colleagues might not want to show or admit that they are struggling, so one needs to be more sensitive and observant, and have the ability to pick up the signals' (P2). In addition to this, selecting the most appropriate method of expressing compassion was emphasised as challenging because it requires 'a level of awareness of the interpersonal dynamic that changes the way a message is received' (P22). The following story offered by one of the participants clearly explains these challenges.

> A colleague of mine is poorly at the moment, and we were all sending a text and she was finding that stressful. She didn't want to answer them, and she appreciated that we were thinking about it, but she said she didn't need us to text

> her in order to know that. So, I started sending a little card every now and then, and then she texted me to say, 'Please don't send the cards because it makes me feel guilty for not being at work.' So, we were doing things that we'd think were just about demonstrating care and concern, but it didn't land like that. It made her feel anxious. You've got to understand not just yourself and not just the other person, but the space between you as well. I think it's more than a two-person psychology that is about you, the sender, and the receiver. It's the space in which that occurs as well. Because the space in which that occurred…, because it was a colleague, it was work and the fear around work. (P22)

The narrative and reflections above demonstrate how the context of a workplace with its complex power relations problematises expressions and perceptions of compassion. It is clear from the account that the decision to send texts and cards was made based on strong interpersonal relations. It is also evident, however, that the workplace context shifted the perception of compassionate acts by adding the element that is outside of these interpersonal relations. The shift added the sense of uneasiness, anxiety and fears associated with being off work and diminished the intended positive effects of colleagues' support. This could be explained by the term legitimacy of compassion, which relates to the appropriateness of compassion giving and receiving and is used by the POE perspective to explore complex power dynamics of compassion relations (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). The approach recognises that, depending on the context, workplace compassion can be beneficial or detrimental to employees who can have a range of reasons to reject or accept offered support. Therefore, as an ethical practice, it requires mindfulness and reflexivity (Clark, 1987; Simpson *et al.*, 2013; Simpson *et al.*, 2014a; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b).

A conflict between compassion and competitiveness that is encouraged from an early age and particularly in the workplace (P21) was also identified by the research findings as problematic and creating tensions among colleagues. The negative impacts of competitiveness on collegiality were brought to the fore by several observations.

> We reinstated sabbaticals over the last few years at xxxxxx [discipline], which I think is a massive step in the right direction. But the way they are allocated at the moment is…, each year there's two or three and you'll have to compete for them. Actually, there's a certain level of animosity amongst those that don't get it towards those that do get it. (P8)

The comment above implies that there is a flaw in the current allocation approach, but its detrimental effect on interpersonal relationships is explicitly stated. What is of significance in the comment is that the animosity is evident not towards the system that

creates the allocation system but amongst competing academics towards each other, suggesting that the system is accepted by competing academics. Much of the literature concurs with this view, arguing that practices in higher education are underpinned by competitive individualism and self-interest (Caddell and Wilder, 2018; Fleming, 2019; Fleming, 2021; Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007). Moreover, some authors emphasise that not only do these practices and their unethical nature remain unquestioned, but the competitive individualism they promote is also regarded as a desirable and necessary characteristic of neoliberal academics (Ball, 2003) who are often 'seduced by competitive careerism and its incentive systems' and, therefore, choose to play the neoliberal game (Fleming, 2021: 12).

According to the research findings, having to compete for promotion is another aspect of the professional life of academics that creates tensions and hostility in the workplace. A reference to playing games was made by one of the study's contributors who shared their experience of not getting a promotion:

> Somebody who is less experienced got made to a senior lecturer level. They put the form in. It is quite a bone of contention because that person that got made senior lecturer did not have experience or was doing course leadership. I think she just knew which buttons to press, and she got on with the people who are making the decisions and she's now got the course leadership that I was doing so it's interesting…, interesting games. (P14)

It is clear from the above account that the respondent's indignation was caused not only by the means employed by the colleague to achieve promotion but also by their superiors' decision. The 'interesting games' comment, however, arguably indicates powerless acceptance. Unsurprisingly, the experience resulted in tensions in interpersonal relations and, as revealed in the following quotation, in a range of emotions reflecting the interviewee's internal struggle:

> The person who's got the position now that I was then, I've lost compassion for her because I know she's pushed her way in. So I'm less likely to help her now, and I think that's human nature. But half of me would say, 'Come on! Get over it! Help her!' But the other half would say, 'No! Stop it!' So I've got this conflict going on… (P14)

This participant's internal struggle is triggered by the conflict between their instinct to be compassionate and to help their colleague, and the feelings of annoyance and perhaps anger provoked by what is perceived as unfair treatment. It is clear from the comments above that the promoted colleague is regarded as an unworthy or illegitimate compassion receiver and, therefore, compassion is withheld (Simpson *et al.*, 2013;

Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). Similar findings are presented in an empirical study amongst modern universities in Scotland that revealed ‘a darker side of collegiality’ resulting in mistrust of academics of their organisation and colleagues and ‘a lack of generosity with their own time’ and a reluctance to commit to others (Caddell and Wilder, 2018: 19).

The research also identified division within academia as another source of tension that renders expressions of compassion in a university setting problematic. Specifically, it was highlighted that academics tend to work in teams built around their areas of specialism and expertise and apart from the Union, there is no space or structures in a university setting that allow them to relate to each other (P9). More importantly, the division between teaching-oriented and research-oriented academic staff was identified as a source of particular tension and sometimes hostility within the profession. The study’s findings indicate that research-focused academics are sometimes perceived as ego-centric, opportunistic and uncaring towards their colleagues and students, as reflected in the following observations offered by one of the study’s participants:

> I'm thinking of a particular professor who we all know, who worked in our School and there was almost zero compassion with him. And it was all about ‘What can you… what can you do for me?’ to the point where even the education aspect, which I think involves a bit of compassion… If you have no compassion at all, you don't really care if people are… if your students are learning. I think that there is a connection there. I’ve seen him marking some online kind of discussion boards and he looked at it and he was like, ‘OK, that's about the right length. I see about 3 citations in that - 65%.’ And I was like, ‘That's it? That's all? You haven't even read it!’ And he goes, ‘That should do.’ And then he went on to, you know, write another book and, you know, do all of the things that would allow him to get… climb up the food chain. (P16)

The above comments by Participant P16, who is a lecturer, express a clear sense of criticism and condemnation. They imply that advancing an academic career is linked to research activities and is achieved at the expense of teaching related responsibilities associated with compassion. This view is supported by much of the literature that considers that higher education is promoting a culture of carelessness which, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, is based on competitive individualism and self-interest (Caddell and Wilder, 2018; Fleming, 2019; Fleming, 2021; Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007; Mutch and Tatebe, 2017). As stated by most participants in this study, compassion towards colleagues and students requires time, space and effort. This means, however, that it jeopardises the career growth of those academics whose workloads include numerous teaching and pastoral responsibilities which prevent them from engaging in

research activities. This was reported by several participants of this study and discussed in section 5.3.2 of the chapter.

Finally, gender differences were identified as impacting on the expressions of compassion amongst colleagues. Interestingly, these differences were noted only by female participants; male respondents did not make these gender related distinctions. One participant suggested that it could be motherhood that automatically contributed to the pastoral aspect of their teaching and also asserted that relationships with other female colleagues were better than those with males because ‘females are better at working together and checking on each other’ (P10). The element of subjectivity and danger of stereotyping was acknowledged by other participants who made similar statements. However, one respondent felt particularly strongly about the distinction.

> At the university, I must say that I haven’t seen much compassion, especially from male colleagues, male managers. And also, all of the full-time staff within our department are men. There are no women that are full-time members of staff there. (P10)

Another female interviewee referred to compassion as not being compatible with a successful career in general, going on to emphasise that, in her view, men are more ambitious and, therefore, less likely to be compassionate:

> It doesn't benefit your career particularly to be compassionate. And a lot of men do get to the top by, I think, not being compassionate actually. Or by not allowing themselves to be compassionate. You know, businessmen typically trample all over everybody in order to get to where they want to go. So I think it's probably not compatible with progressing your career, but it probably is compatible with feeling, being a happy person, feeling like you're a reasonable person and not being, you know, upset about what sort of person you are and what you do. I'd rather be happy about what I do than feel I was damaging anybody. That makes me feel better, you know, it does benefit me in the end. (P21)

Interestingly, in their comments above, both participants referred to their male counterparts as being in the position of privilege and not displaying, or not allowing themselves to display compassion. Curiously, Participant P21 referred to businessmen, which could have been prompted by the commercial nature of universities where top management positions are typically occupied by people associated with the world of business. Moreover, according to this respondent, climbing the career ladder in this context not only conflicts with compassion, but also involves treading on others and crushing them. The respondent then emphasised that the idea of inflicting harm on other people contradicts the notion of compassion, whereas feeling contented, happy and

satisfied with one's job is more compassionate and beneficial to an individual. These reflections contrast with what are arguably the masculine values of competitiveness, individual self-interest, aggression and violence with the feminine values of contentment, self-compassion and self-fulfilment, highlight the benefits of the latter and imply that seeking promotion in this context may not be advantageous for an individual.

The observations of female participants on gender differences are supported by previous research that indicates that women have higher compassion scores than men (Beutel and Marini, 1995; Rashedi *et al.,* 2015). The findings add to the research on gender differences and equality in Higher Education which acknowledges that women's professional achievements are undervalued in universities in comparison to those of their male counterparts (Denney, 2021; Gersick *et al.,* 2000; Grummell *et al.,* 2009; Knights and Richards, 2003; Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007; Zembylas *et al.,* 2014). The literature also suggests that there are fewer promotion opportunities for female academics who are underrepresented in academic leadership positions (Sigurdardottir, Rafnsdottir, Jonsdottir. and Kristofersson, 2022; Williams, 2022). However, educational leadership and compassion is the focus of a separate theme identified by the research findings and are, therefore, addressed later in the chapter.

5.3.4 Summary of findings and discussion: Theme B

The research findings demonstrated a wide range of perceptions on the part of academics with regards to the meaning of compassion and its expressions in a university setting. Compassion was regarded as an important part of the professional identity of academics that is associated with teaching and pastoral responsibilities and as expressed in relationships with colleagues. The participants in this study emphasised the significant role of compassion on the interpersonal and relational levels of a university setting and provided some compelling examples of compassion as Role Plus and expressed by collegiality. However, some respondents expressed scepticism about the appropriateness of compassion at the organisational level of the context. As indicated by the research outcomes, it was primarily the notion's strong emotional element of compassion and certain characteristics of a modern university at the organisational level that created tensions, complexities and controversies around impressions and expressions of compassion in this context.

Specifically, the research revealed that universities, as profit seeking organisations, at times jeopardise the legitimacy of academics as compassion providers (Simpson *et al.*, 2013; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). Therefore, the enactment of compassion as Role Plus sometimes required courage from academics who had to take risks and overlook

institutional procedures. The research findings also demonstrated that heavy workloads, complex power relations between academics and students as consumers and the conflict between the commercial nature of modern universities and academics' professional values created tensions and sometimes diminished opportunities for compassion. Moreover, the study brought light to the possible detrimental effects of workplace compassion.

As for compassion as expressed by academics' collegiality, the research findings uncovered a range of benefits at the personal and relational levels, such as a more enjoyable working environment and supportive and reciprocal relationships that assist academics practically and emotionally with their day-to-day responsibilities and have a positive and lasting impact on their professional identity (Lilius *et al.,* 2008). The significance of the social aspect in connecting to colleagues and building a sense of community based of shared challenges and values was also highlighted by the participants' narratives. The research findings also unveiled that the context of a university problematises expressions and acceptance of compassion and requires sensitivity, mindfulness and reflexivity because of pride, complex power relations and potential anxiety, uneasiness and fears that are sometimes associated with academia. In addition, the outcomes of the study indicated that the culture of competitive individualism and self-interest underpinning the sector (Caddell and Wilder, 2018; Fleming, 2019; Fleming, 2021; Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007) results in feelings of animosity, hostility and indignation amongst colleagues. This, in turn, generates mistrust, a lack of commitment and a reluctance to be supportive (Caddell and Wilder, 2018), thereby making expressions of compassion problematic. The study's outcomes also exposed a division between research-focused and teaching-focused academics and revealed some gender distinctions as other important factors that create tensions in a university setting and problematise expressions of compassion as academics' collegiality.

This section has presented and discussed the research findings related to academics' perceptions of the meaning of workplace compassion and their experiences of it in a university setting as part of their professional identity. It mostly focused on the personal and relational levels of the context although some significant impacts of the organisational level were also revealed. The following section addresses the research findings related to educational leadership and its impact on expressions of compassion in a university setting.

5.4 Theme C: Compassion as both driven by and damaged by educational leadership

Another dominant theme to emerge from the thematic analysis of the research findings is the subject of compassion and educational leadership. This is presented and discussed in this section under three subthemes, the first of which addresses a divide between academics and management and its detrimental impact on compassion in a university setting. The other two subthemes group the research findings around two significant but contrasting arguments. Specifically, the second subtheme clusters the study's outcomes that demonstrate that educational leadership drives compassion in a university setting whilst subtheme three provides evidence that supports the view that compassion within universities is damaged by educational leadership.

It is important to clarify here that the terms management and leadership are used in this section primarily in relation to academics who have been promoted to managerial positions, but also in relation to senior managers whose positions are associated with the overall strategy of a university and are, therefore, considered to be part of educational leadership. It has been acknowledged that distinguishing clearly between these two terms or determining the meaning of academic management, academic leadership and educational leadership is problematic (Bolden *et al.,* 2012; Bryman, 2007; Shepherd, 2018; Thomas and Rowland, 2014). Hence, it is logical and reasonable that the terms management and leadership are used both in this section and more generally throughout the thesis in the manner in which the participants employed them in their accounts of impressions and expressions of compassion.

5.4.1 Subtheme C1: A divide between academics and management as an obstacle to compassion

The research findings revealed that compassion in the university context is impaired by an evident divide between academics and management. This division was linked first to the cognitive aspect of compassion associated with understanding of and relating to the challenges and struggles of those respondents who had similar roles and responsibilities. This divide was openly acknowledged and clearly explained by one of the interviewees, a lecturer, in the following reflection:

> I am more compassionate to the people I work with because I understand what difficulties they are going through. So, if I see them having struggles, I will help them. I'm less compassionate to the higher level of hierarchy because they often put the struggles on us, so I am less compassionate with those. They've probably

> got their own set of struggles, and perhaps I need to be a little bit more aware that they've got their own unique issues, but I'm less compassionate with those, because ultimately, they are the ones that are putting me under pressure, putting my colleagues under pressure. (P14)

Interestingly, the participant used the phrase 'the higher level of hierarchy', which could refer both to fellow academics with managerial responsibilities as well as senior managers identified with educational leadership. Also, it is significant that it was recognised that these more senior position holders are likely to have their own set of challenges and struggles that the respondent was not necessarily aware of. Despite this admission, however, Participant P14 inferred that those in 'the higher level of hierarchy' are unworthy or illegitimate compassion receivers (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014b) because they are in a position of power that allows them to exert pressure on academics.

Another interviewee, also a lecturer, used the term managers and was perhaps more compassionate towards them by highlighting how problematic it is for them to be compassionate:

> I think it ultimately depends on your character, particularly managers'. It's really challenging for them because, you know, all people are not born, you know, unkind. How do we practise this idea of kindness, positivity, particularly if you are a manager? How can I put it? How can we practise this idea of kindness, positivity, making staff happy, supporting health and well-being within the team? How do you do that when you've also…, when they've got these set parameters, they need to work in that, how do you do that really? And that's the challenge that I think managers have. In the midst of all the stressful workloads and targets being set all the time, I think that's the challenge. (P13)

Notably, this respondent refers to personal characteristics, such as kindness, and emphasises that being a kind and compassionate manager in a university is particularly challenging. This point was supported and developed further by another participant who insisted that senior university positions are incompatible with being compassionate because they demand being ruthless and taking difficult decisions, such as 'making people redundant, making decisions about who gets made redundant in the middle of a pandemic' (P16). The following response heightens the contrast between being an academic and having managerial responsibilities:

> I know that at least one compassionate colleague of mine, who could quite easily have become a PL by this point, in fact, was a PL at some point, but decided to not stay and come back down to the Senior Lecturer because she didn't want to

> put up with all of that shit. And she could tell that there weren't really opportunities to be compassionate. (P16)

To paraphrase, this respondent was referring to a deserving academic who chose to demote herself from the more senior position of a Principal Lecturer because arguably she disagreed with her new managerial responsibilities and wanted to remain compassionate in her job. This brings to the fore the issue of morals and also implies that those who are promoted to and stay in senior positions make a conscious personal choice related to morals by accepting managerial tasks and responsibilities that are often incompatible with compassion. This, in turn, implies that their character could be questioned. This argument was strengthened further by the same respondent who shared the following observation:

> I knew [the senior manager] before [the senior manager] became [the senior manager]. And I would have said I was quite happy that this person became [the senior manager] because I noticed bits of compassion within that person, being on our side, one of us. And we've seen over the last few years, that the person, slowly, slowly, slowly, just becoming a mouthpiece for the organization and obviously feeling that they are under threat for their job. And when they've got family and kids to support, they want to keep their job. (P16)

The divide between academics and managers is accentuated particularly forcefully in the above comments because it is argued that a former academic who had displayed compassion in the past had lost this personal quality after being promoted to a senior manager. The powerful metaphor of ‘a mouthpiece for the organisation’ intensifies the issue of losing voice to support other academics, which is quite ironic given that senior positions identify with greater formal power and therefore, considerably stronger voice. Moreover, the comments also convey a clear sense of antagonism, with two opposing camps being identified. According to Participant P16, being compassionate is identified with ‘being on our side, one of us’. It is also noteworthy that the above comments do display a certain degree of compassion because the interviewee acknowledges that the manager is at risk of losing their job if they do not go along with its requirements.

The limited literature on university management is, however, less compassionate towards ‘those who once were scholars’, labelling them ‘para-academics’ who ‘acquired the ‘boss syndrome’ and find themselves looking down on their erstwhile colleagues with mild disdain’ (Fleming, 2021: 53). According to the results of numerous studies, the behaviour of people ‘grows increasingly worse as they move up the ladder’ even if they were characterised as empathetic and fair, which is sometimes referred to as ‘the power paradox’ phenomenon (Keltner, 2016: 2). Fleming explains that formal power changes

how promoted managers relate to their subordinates because they are not 'obliged to check their own behaviour as they would with equals', and 'the inbuilt psychological distance' increases the powerholders' 'sense of self-importance compared to those below' (Fleming, 2019:8).

Another participant, a Senior Lecturer, continued the narrative of the 'us and them' divide by questioning how deserving those who get promoted to managerial positions really are:

> Some people are very good at performing at job interviews. They use the right words, the right jargon, the right timing, the right attire. You have to wear boots, apparently, as it has been known at this institution. These are the people who get appointed, not the people supported by everybody else. So here, when somebody gets promoted, the reaction is 'What? Why?' Nobody is supportive of her or him. And that's the wrong type, this is just the wrong type. (P1)

These comments point to frustration with the criteria employed in the selection process which are considered to be rather superficial and result in undesirable appointments to senior positions. The feeling of frustration and perhaps annoyance with a perceived lack of expertise in the areas of teaching and learning is expressed in the following remarks about senior managers who have the power of making important decisions in these areas:

> They have no idea what the impacts and consequences are to those who are teaching online as well as those who are being taught. And so, you have people who are directors of teaching and learning and haven't been in the classroom for 20 years. And that is just complete and utter nonsense as far as I'm concerned. If you were overviewing surgery at a hospital, you would like someone who is a surgeon to do that. (P11)

These comments refer to having to move all teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic which, as some authors argue, on the one hand exposed the unpreparedness of educational leadership in universities but, on the other hand, demonstrated the hard work and commitment on the part of academics that 'ensued not *because* of authority but *despite* it' (Fleming, 2021: 55). Another interviewee commented on their feelings triggered by emails and messages sent by senior management during the pandemic which thanked academics for their hard work:

> I think we get these emails and messages every so often that say, 'We thank you so much for doing such hard work. We know how hard you are working'. And at times, you think, 'You've got no idea'. It's just a superficial comment that, to be

> honest, it doesn't help. It makes you just feel low. Not angry. Angry is not the right word. It just makes you feel more detached because you think, 'You've got no idea'. Likewise, I've got no idea what they're going through, so it's a two-way thing. (P14)

These reflections suggest that the messages and emails of gratitude were not regarded as authentic. According to the interviewee, they consequently had the opposite demotivating effect that increased the feeling of detachment, thereby exacerbating the divide between academics and management. Interestingly, the final remark in the above reflection acknowledges that managers have their own set of struggles of which the participant is not aware. This arguably demonstrates a certain degree of compassion even though the 'it's a two-way thing' comment emphasises the divide.

These findings demonstrate perceptions amongst academics of a clear divide between themselves and management. They also provide evidence that this divide impedes compassion and, as such, contradict the mainstream organisational studies literature on compassion which views leaders as managers of group emotion that foster and coordinate compassion in the workplace (Atkins and Parker, 2012; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Lilius *et al.,* 2013). In addition to the perceptions of academics provided so far, the findings also demonstrated that those academics who have moved into management positions similarly experienced the divide. This is clearly expressed in the following observations:

> There's a perception gap between academics and management, and so when I hear the way that academics talk about management and when I find myself in a room in meetings with those same people, and in fact, I am one of those people, now I stop talking about them. The overwhelming majority of those people… They believe the same things as academics, and they care about the same things as academics, and they also care about those academics. …But my feeling is most academics think managers don't care, and most managers actually do care. That's… that's my feeling (P8).

Interestingly, and in contrast to the focus on the cognitive aspect of compassion related to understanding challenges and struggles in academics' comments, this respondent (P8) highlighted the emotion of care and insisted that managers not only care about academics but also have regard for the same matters. The respondent also raised other important points, explaining that it is 'a particular managerial style' that some managers 'have been trained in', which reflects 'a very narrow idea of what management is' and creates the impression that these managers are not compassionate (P8). The

significance of the cognitive aspect of compassion is highlighted in the following comments from the same participant:

> There might be some things which are unique to academia, but generally speaking, I think the basic principles of a compassionate management style are almost universal. And it comes back to what I said about understanding people's positions. (P8)

These remarks indicate that both academics and managers identify the cognitive aspect of compassion as the most significant. However, they also demonstrate that compassion tends to be viewed by managers as a characteristic of a management style. This aligns with the dominant approach to compassion in the mainstream management literature that attaches it to a specific leadership style as opposed to an important aspect of effective leadership (Thomas and Rowland, 2014). These differences might provide one reason for the divide between academics and managers.

Another important point raised by the research findings that needs to be addressed in this subsection is the impact of hierarchy on expressions of compassion, which was clearly expressed in the following remarks:

> When I am on the same level with people, I am perhaps more open and compassionate than with higher levels. And I think, likewise, I don't think the same level of compassion comes down. Because, again, they always are thinking of their level and their layer, that sometimes they don't think about things to the same extent that they should do to the ones in the lower levels. (P14)

These reflections suggest that compassion does not travel freely through different levels of the hierarchy, particularly downwards from higher levels of management to their subordinates. This respondent (P14), a lecturer, contradicts the argument made by Participant P8, a Deputy Head of School, referred to earlier about managers caring for academics. It is important to note that P8 provided a number of examples of expressions of compassion towards subordinates. These are discussed in subsequent sections, but the following observations made by P8, however, support the argument about being compassionate towards colleagues in similar positions:

> I still see this a lot with, not all but a lot of managers' is kind of a default position can be to absorb it. And so where there is… Where someone is struggling, the knee jerk reaction is 'OK. I'll take that away from you. I will take some work off you and then I'll see'. I mean, it's very common to see managers who age very quickly, they get very, very stressed. You get managers who suffer from stress a lot and one of the reasons is that they just absorb stuff from people to try to help

> them out. And they're trying to be compassionate, but actually what they're doing is making themselves ill by taking too much stuff off. And that's an easy trap to fall into, but it's not the right way to do it. (P8)

These observations align with Gallos' (2008) reflections on her experience as a university dean, in which she emphasises that managers, due to their link to power structures, often become toxin magnets and toxin handlers. It is probably this aspect of managers' responsibilities that P8 refers to when linking being compassionate with becoming ill. This is supported by the literature in Positive Organisational Ethics (POE) that views compassion as context-dependent and acknowledges that it can be damaging to individuals (Clark, 1987; Schmitt and Clark, 2006; Simpson *et al.*, 2013; Simpson *et al.*, 2014a; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). Also, according to Gallos (2008), one of the strategies for coping with the detrimental effect of toxicity on health is setting boundaries. Yet, managers are likely to be seen as lacking compassion if they employ the strategy which arguably may to some extent explain the divide between themselves and academics. Moreover, the issue of hierarchy further adds to the complexity of expressing compassion in a university setting because it is associated with authoritarianism. Due to the nature of their work, which relies on 'professional self-efficacy, collegial consensus and a degree of egalitarianism', academics 'loathe command hierarchies' (Fleming, 2021: 53). This also is likely to contribute to the divide between academics and management and to create barriers to expressions of compassion.

5.4.2 Subtheme C2: Compassion as driven by educational leadership

In addition to emphasising the obstacles to expressions of compassion associated with the divide between academics and management, the research findings revealed that these expressions can also be fostered by educational leadership. One of the most surprising outcomes of the study was the influence of one person in a senior leadership position on the impressions and expressions of compassion. This person was a former Vice Chancellor of the case study university who was perceived by most participants to have been the driving force behind the introduction and promotion of compassion as one of the aspirational values of the university. Although he had left by the time the interviews were conducted, almost all the participants in the study either mentioned him briefly or talked about him at length.

Several respondents commented on the character of the previous VC, stating that he was 'a very warm-hearted' and approachable person, whose sincerity about the importance of compassion in an organisation impressed and inspired them (P1, also P8, P11, P13, P17, P19, P21, P22). According to the findings, as a compassionate leader,

he made an impact not only on individual staff members but also on the culture of the university more generally:

> I have to say that I had some limited dealings with the VC at the time who basically was, I mean the compassion thing came from him, right? And I felt he really lived and breathed that ideal and it was my dealings with him that made me think 'Yes, that's actually a thing, that really is a thing'. And that I don't want to go over the top, but I found him quite inspirational in that respect. (P8)

> You know, he displayed those characteristics. You know, he would have personal meetings with people regardless of where they were in the pecking order, and he would know people's names. That was, you know, very human qualities, and I think he kind of demonstrated and embodied the value of compassion. (P21)

> It was all very different. It felt different, it felt like somebody like me could go to a Vice Chancellor and say, 'You know, I've had this idea. What do you think?' So, I think people seemed to be more open…. It did seem that we were on a bit of a roll. It's very difficult to put your finger on, but I did feel for a while it did become a kinder, more compassionate place to be. (P17)

The findings also revealed that in addition to personal qualities of the previous VC as an effective role model, it was his position of power that allowed for 'the transformation in the culture of management' (P15) and resulted in formalising and normalising compassion at the organisational level that fostered the new culture in the university. This was clearly explained by Participant P15:

> So, if you are a manager, your top priority is to oversee budget or deliver on what's deliverable, that's what they are prioritising, those issues. If they are told, 'Well, try and achieve these goals but do not compromise principles of compassion,' managers will follow that instruction. But also, if it's enshrined as a value, and it's not… it's not a mere lip service, but it's actually a value that is in some ways genuinely enshrined in the culture of the university, that allows people, especially managers, to give reign to their innate compassionate instincts. (P15)

These comments highlight that authentic compassion-related strategy was cascaded downwards and resulted in the shift in the organisational culture. According to the same participant, the reason for this shift was 'the transformation in the culture of management, including sort of 180-degree turn in the behaviour of some managers' who 'were delighted to be now given a license to be much more decent in the way they perform

their jobs' (P15). The change in the management style, in turn, produced a positive effect on the overall state of affairs within the university, as revealed by the following reflections:

> And I think that in itself helped people to feel less threatened maybe. And if you're not threatened, then you're more likely to be open and nice with other people. So, I think I noticed that people were happier generally when xxxx xxxx was the Vice Chancellor. (P21)

> Things like industrial relations improved tremendously. We didn't hear much from the union about problems with things, it just seems people were happier. (P17)

Interestingly, in their comments, both P21 and P17 agreed that people felt happier; however, the reasons for that increased happiness were explained by the weakened effects of negative influences, such as feeling threatened and facing problems related to industrial relations. These changes are arguably associated with feeling less unhappy rather than with feeling happier. This argument was supported by several other participants, who viewed the introduction and promotion of compassion by the former VC in the case study university as an attempt to remedy the poor state of affairs, or referred to it as a hope:

> Value of compassion, which I think was seen by the previous VC as a necessary value to adhere to, because I think he recognized that xxxx as an employer lacked compassion for its staff. (P5)

> When xxxx first came up with that, I felt it might become a very nice place. I felt that people hoped. But once he's gone, and also the way he's gone, and I thought, 'Right, that's the end. And we are going to go back to, you know, cut-cut-cut'. (P1)

There are some parallels and, at the same time, some contradictions between these findings and the mainstream organisational studies literature on workplace compassion. On the one hand, these outcomes support the significance attached to leaders and their crucial role in instilling compassion in the workplace (Atkins and Parker, 2012; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Lilius *et al.,* 2013). The findings also demonstrate that true compassionate leadership resulted in improved relations in the workplace (Dutton *et al.,* 2002; Rynes *et al.,* 2012; Scott, Colquitt *et al.,* 2010). On the other hand, according to the results, the key role of the compassionate leader in the case study university was seen in altering the approach and behaviour of managers which subsequently prompted the shift in the management style and organisational culture. Much of the mainstream literature, however, tends to focus mostly on increased productivity and performance of the workforce which is seen as the key objective of compassionate leadership (Beal,

2010; Humphrey, 2002; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Lilius *et al.,* 2013). Moreover, the departure of the former VC from the case study university indicated that the positive change did not prove to be sustainable at the organisational level. This is discussed later in the chapter.

According to the findings, expressions of compassion experienced by academics from their managers related to recognising their needs, their strengths, showing genuine respect for their performance and making them feel supported (for example, P4, P5, P7, P10, P15, P17). Appreciating employees' strengths and building on them was linked to compassionate leadership (P22). It was also pointed out that 'making allowances for the circumstances outside of work' was regarded particularly important and that 'individual managers can be quite sympathetic and accommodating' (P15). This was demonstrated by the following comments from one of the participants:

> My current line manager is a very compassionate woman. She is from a healthcare background, which probably helps. But last year I lost my father, and I had a few weeks when he was in the hospital, and I was having to spend quite a bit of time talking to doctors and one thing and another, and I never once felt like she was putting me under pressure. (P17)

Similarly, another participant, a manager, also associated giving 'a bit of leeway where it's needed' (P8) with compassionate management. This is clearly explained in the following reflections:

> Let's say there is a person whose spouse is not very well and is serious. I mean this is something that I've seen with a couple of cases and so knowing that, understanding that means when that person says, 'I'm not coming to this meeting today', just thinking 'Alright', not pushing it, not asking the question. You know that person does not need to be asked that question right now. Or they submit a report that's a bit late or it's slightly sloppy and you think, 'Well, that's not your best work, but I know your spouse is in hospital having had a heart attack. I'm not just going to mention that', and that's that. I mean these are really basic sort of fundamental examples. (P8)

These findings demonstrate that expressions of workplace compassion as a social relational construct are interlinked with complex power dynamics (Simpson *et al.*, 2014a: 356; also Simpson, Clegg and Freeder, 2013; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b) and are 'hierarchically dominant' even if not intended to be as such (Thomas and Rowland, 2014: 107). These findings align with the outcomes of Banker and Bhal's (2018) empirical study that identified a clear distinction between two roles that the participants pointed out in their examples of expressions of compassion. These roles are compassion givers and

compassion receivers, with managers as holders of formal power being regarded as compassion givers (Banker and Bhal, 2018).

The findings also highlight the challenges and complexities of compassionate management. As explained by P8, a manager, giving somebody space could be problematic because it could create 'tensions and resentment, and extra work and stress in another part of the team', thereby resulting in hostility within teams.

> Sometimes it looks like people are getting special treatment, but that's because their colleagues don't know what's happening in their lives…. But that breeds resentment because people feel that, well, that they're getting special treatment, they don't have to do as much work as other people. (P8)

These findings support the perspective on workplace compassion as a complex ethical practice that demands reflexivity and, depending on the context, can be beneficial or detrimental to employees (Simpson *et al.*, 2014b). Moreover, the highlighted 'misguided' judgements of individual managers or management teams that attempt to be compassionate but by doing so, produce negative impacts on colleagues in the form of extra work and associated with it tensions and stress (P8), relate to power relations expressed and controlled within organisations (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). More specifically, the problematic nature of compassionate management demonstrated by these findings relates to the positive and negative compassion dynamics in the episodic and dispositional circuits of power (see Figure 3.5). Since the balance between compassion dynamics in the dispositional circuit depends on the availability of resources that are required to support compassion-related values at the organisational level that are expressed in relevant practices, policies, structures and informal agreements (Frost and Robinson, 1999; Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014b), it is a lack of necessary resources that leads to the prevailing negative dynamics of compassion and, therefore, problematises managers' attempts to express compassion. These points lead to the subject of compassion being hindered by educational leadership; this is discussed in the following part of the section.

5.4.3 Subtheme C3: Compassion as damaged by educational leadership

A change in leadership with the arrival of a new VC and an associated restructure as well as subsequent threats of compulsory redundancies in the case study university were identified as damaging compassion by several interviewees. Notably, it was the contrast to the previous leadership style that was highlighted as causing fears about compassion being neglected or withdrawn. This is revealed in the following comment:

> It worries me that one of those values…. that value is not being demonstrated at the moment and I think that the value is going to be taken out of the values. You know, I don't think we're going to be encouraged to be compassionate anymore, which is a kind of terrible thing to take that away. (P21)

Interestingly, the concerns voiced in the above comment are about both the new leadership not exhibiting compassion and about compassion being taken away, in the sense that employees will not be encouraged to express compassion to each other. This revealed that leadership was regarded as holding a considerable amount of power over compassion-related values and practices in the organisation. Another interviewee supported this view and emphasised that the negative impacts of the change in the leadership approach were unnecessary and could have been avoided:

> In the way university is placing people at the risk of compulsory redundancy, and willing to make them compulsory redundant, it is prioritising other things over compassion here. …And this isn't because of university having some sort of dire financial gun to its head. …It's absolutely within the discretion of leadership. We are seeing a shift in practice away from that really extraordinary and exceptional situation where the university was genuinely espousing the value of compassion towards the situation where it's more a case that it's not. (P15)

Curiously, genuinely compassionate leadership associated with the previous VC of the case study university was referred to by P15 as a 'really extraordinary and exceptional situation'. Another respondent related being a compassionate leader with the previous VC's promise not to make staff redundant and suggested that this could have been the reason for his departure (P11). It was also emphasised that this type of leadership was 'not conducive to running a commercially driven enterprise' (P11). These findings highlight the tensions between the notion of compassion and the logic of corporate capitalism followed by modern neoliberal universities. Following that logic, organisations act in the interest of profit maximization, even if there is no threat to their financial viability, which undermines their ability to express compassion (George, 2014). These findings imply that, arguably, compassionate leadership is not compatible with organisational change that involves compulsory redundancies since they incite fear, anxiety and a sense of insecurity, all of which relate to inflicted harm and suffering (George, 2014).

Several participants suggested that constant change involving the introduction of new structures, processes and procedures was also damaging compassion in the case study university. It was pointed out that with constant change, time and effort was required to adjust and to learn new procedures and processes. This, in turn, separated academics even more and prevented them from further developing their knowledge and expertise

in their area of specialism (for example, P3, P6, P9). Imposing change that involved restructuring and the alteration of roles that often resulted in additional responsibilities and the teaching of new subjects was viewed as particularly damaging compassion, especially during the pandemic when staff were suffering 'additional personal strains' as well as 'working twice as hard because of having to work remotely' (P5, also P10, P14). These findings concur with Jensen's (2010) argument that constant change is one of the demoralising processes within organisations, leading to increased competition and self-interest amongst staff, higher levels of stress and decreased motivation.

Expressions of what was regarded as unauthentic compassion were also considered as damaging. The findings reveal that managers' attempts to demonstrate compassion by means of insisting that, for example, staff should log off by 5 o'clock, no emails should be sent on Fridays and no work should be carried out over the weekends or when on annual leave, were viewed as expressions of false compassion because heavy workloads demanded working overtime (P13).

> They're going through the motions. For example, we get told on a weekly basis, 'Now, you can only do what you can do during this pandemic, don't worry'. And yet, at the same time, we're having workload meetings where we're being told we're not working hard enough, and we need to take on extra stuff. And those two things don't mirror. And when that happens, I don't believe a word of what they say when they say, 'You can only do what you can do'. Because clearly, you know, that they've been told to say that, they've also been told that they need to save, you know, make savings on staffing costs by giving people more work, more hours each week. (P16)

The comments above emphasise that the contrast between managers' words and actions associated with false compassion result in mistrust toward leadership and management. The lack of trust was expressed in references to this type of attempt to show compassion as 'one of those tick box exercises' (P4), 'just words', 'lip service', 'go[ing] through the motions' (P16) and 'just yet another trend' (P7).

In addition, as observed by one of the respondents, managers have got 'their targets and agendas' and, therefore, 'they are after their own ends' when trying to express compassion (P14). Such a calculative view of compassion is also clearly demonstrated by the outcomes of Banker and Bhal's (2018) study, which disclosed that managers as compassion givers, when making decisions about expressing compassion, assess available resources to ensure that organisational objectives are not hindered and expect to receive it in return if required. This shifts the meaning of compassion because it contradicts its fundamental principle of being an act of selflessness. It also reveals that

it can be employed in an attempt to disguise manipulation (Cameron, 2011). Indeed, some participants reported that they experienced manipulation from their line managers and, therefore, had strongly negative feelings with regards to the expressions of what was regarded to be unauthentic or false compassion displayed by the same managers.

> In fact, I've felt the opposite of compassion from my line managers. The opposite of compassion. I don't know, this almost a vindictiveness in some of the actions, and a bullying aspect. 'But I'm your boss. I can tell you what to do. You're going to do it'. And showing zero compassion. And, you know, when you have your appraisals and your workloads meeting, they might start off that meeting with a few words that seem to go through the motions of displaying compassion, 'Oh yeah, it's been really tough. Oh, you're doing a really great job'. And then it's on to the business of screwing us over and making us work harder and increasing our workload year on year. (P16)

It is clear from the above comments that because of the stark contrast between managers' actions identified with vindictiveness and bullying, their allegedly feeble attempts to express compassion not only failed to achieve the desired effect but evoked strong negative feelings in the respondent and emphasised the deception and the exploitation that these expressions of false compassion were arguably aiming to disguise.

Another participant, a Senior Lecturer, also drew attention to the stark contrast between unauthentic compassion expressed in words and 'the actions [that] are telling you the opposite' (P7). As seen below, a very powerful metaphor of violence was employed to express the contrast:

> I mean, it's like, you know, a wife beater. You know, 'I love you. I love you. I love you'. But each time hitting somebody. (P7)

These findings indicate that expressions of what is perceived to be artificial compassion can evoke strong negative emotions and reactions that link these expressions to deception, manipulation and even violence. These results add to the literature on compassion that mostly focuses on its positive impacts on the workforce and on the bottom line (for example, Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lilius *et al.,* 2011) by emphasising the significance of the authenticity of workplace compassion. Beal (2010: 26) views compassion as one of the qualities identified with enlightened leadership and asserts that ego-driven leaders associated with manipulation, bullying and lateral violence are false leaders with 'no ability to feel compassion for others'. The findings of this study similarly reveal that ego-driven leaders could employ false compassion to camouflage manipulation and exploitation; moreover, the findings also

indicate that these attempts triggered strong negative emotions and reactions, amplifying the feeling of being deceived and manipulated.

Evidence also emerged from the research that, at times, an absence of compassion arguably resulted in and was perceived as instances of cruelty. Indeed, several striking experiences were shared by an academic who had worked in the case study university for quite a few years and yet was still on a temporary SPH (Staff Paid Hourly) contract, which in itself seemed to be in breach of the university's relevant employment regulations. In addition to a sense of vulnerability associated with insecure employment, the academic experienced personal losses and traumatic events; however, no attempts were made to offer support in recognition of the suffering. In fact, more suffering was inflicted:

> While I've been there, actually, in that [number of years], I've lost my mother, I had a miscarriage, and I had a breast lump. And not once have I seen any support. My manager at the time when I had the breast lump, I told him that I was going to the hospital, but I said, 'You know, if it's bad news, I won't be here on the teaching day after that'. And he replied, 'Well, you won't be starting any treatment, even if it is something sinister'. And I thought that was a terrible thing to say to somebody who is going through such tough times. And there was nobody else that I was kind of in contact with at that time. I had to disclose to him because he was my line manager, and I wanted him to know that I might not be in teaching. But I've not seen a lot of empathy at all. (P10)

The compelling account above is strikingly different from the reported experiences of those research participants who felt supported by their line managers and colleagues when going through challenging times, and whose comments were discussed in section 5.4.2 of the chapter. In contrast to that evidence, the experience described in the above quotation reveals that the complete lack no compassion on the part of the line manager combined with his cold-hearted and somewhat disturbing remark arguably inflicted more pain. The revelation that, at the time, P10 was not in contact with anyone in the team is also important because it means that there were no opportunities to share personal concerns or receive support from colleagues. According to the research findings discussed in section 5.4.2 and the evidence from the literature on compassion, it is the personality traits of managers and colleagues as well as interpersonal relationships with them that foster trust and compassion in the workplace (Beal, 2010; Lilius *et al.,* 2008). The findings here also reveal an additional disadvantage of being on a temporary teaching-only contract that results in few opportunities to build effective interpersonal relationships with line managers and colleagues which, in turn, problematised expressions of compassion.

Other examples of compassion being damaged by leadership and management as reported by the research participants included an absence of regular appraisals (P18), no consultations with staff when important decisions were made (P5, P18), no transparency or purposefully withholding information (P13), closing programmes without credible explanations, sometimes even when there were students on waiting lists (P18), streamlining courses by removing choices and options (P21), removing administrative support from individual areas (P1, P2, P9) and investing in buildings and other physical facilities whilst, at the same time, cutting staffing costs and making staff redundant (P1, P4, P7, P9). Several participants expressed strong feelings against the management's top-down approach to running the case-study university, emphasising that academics were not heard, did not have a voice and were being treated like replaceable cogs in the machine (P1, P4, P10, P12, P18). The findings also revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact exacerbated and magnified the damage caused by the leadership's cost-cutting measures which, as expressed in the following account, were perceived as not only uncompassionate but also cruel and immoral:

> What really threw me this year, is that I had a bereavement in April. My father passed away suddenly, not from Covid; he had a heart attack. He was found in really awful circumstances, really unexpected, you know. He was healthy, we thought he was doing OK. And so, the university, I feel like, has not supported me at all in that bereavement, but also tried to take my hours away from me in September, so I had to fight them. I say 'fight them', not really, but contest and say 'What are you doing? I've kind of devoted my teaching time to you for 10 years, and I've had a recent bereavement. We are in a pandemic, and you are trying to take the only thing that I was looking forward to away from me! (P10)

These findings concur with more recent publications on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education that highlight the lack of compassion in the sector and the obsession of educational leaders with the financial imperative which resulted in the immediate termination of temporary contracts and compulsory redundancies (Denney, 2020).

Interestingly, several participants with managerial responsibilities also noted and criticised the leadership's tendency to focus mostly on the financial health of the case study university, sometimes at the expense of staff experience and welfare. Indeed, prioritising the income and not 'proactively looking after the staff' was seen as damaging compassion by P22, a Head of School, who shared the following experience:

> I felt that we were increasing the number of students significantly, and I felt that we needed additional staff. So, I was asked to estimate how many more staff I needed. I did quite a bit of work on looking at the timetables and the numbers of staff, and I said, 'Surely, we have a financial model for this. Surely, we have a financial model that says if we bring in this amount of income that requires this number of teaching hours, we have a financial model as to what resources are required to deliver it. Oh, surely there's somebody in finance that I can ask to do financial modeling of this'. – No, there isn't one! Actually, if the University really cared about managing people's workload, managing people, workload, stress, giving people the capacity to teach, to respond to students and to be the academic that you need to be in your field, which isn't just about the student facing part of your job, we would have a financial model. And we don't. … The staff don't follow the students. So that demonstrates to me that actually, the finance has come before the people. (P22)

These findings demonstrated that the absence of procedures necessary to ensure sufficient staffing for increased student numbers arguably resulted in disproportionally high workloads and increased levels of stress amongst existing staff. This arguably not only damaged compassion but also inflicted suffering. Kanov (2021) defines this type of organisationally-induced suffering as 'a byproduct of contrived systems, processes and conditions' and emphasises that this type of suffering is preventable (Kanov, 2021: 87). These findings also reflected the neoliberal nature of higher education institutions associated with competitiveness and marketisation (Jones and Cunliffe, 2020; McGettigan, 2013) as discussed in detail in Chapter Two of the thesis.

5.4.4 Summary of findings and discussion: Theme C

The research outcomes structured around the theme of educational leadership and compassion revealed that expressions of compassion were impaired by a distinct divide between academics and management. It was discovered that formal power that allowed managers to put pressure on academics to achieve organisational objectives, which was often perceived as shaping managers' personalities and, therefore, preventing them from both expressing compassion towards academics and being unaware of the other group's challenges and struggles, created a clear and sometimes antagonistic divide between them. The findings also revealed that compassion was expressed more naturally amongst colleagues in similar positions but, however, did not travel easily up and down the levels of hierarchy. In fact, due to its association with authoritarianism and diminished autonomy, the issue of hierarchy was regarded as contributing to the divide between

management and academics which, in turn, generated obstacles to expressions of compassion.

As evidenced by the findings discussed in the section, interviewees expressed contrasting views of the impact of educational leadership and management on compassion. Indeed, a range of compelling examples were provided as evidence that enactment of compassion could on the one hand be facilitated by managers but, on the other hand, damaged or even destroyed by them. One of the most important and surprising outcomes of the study was the crucial impact of a genuinely compassionate leader in a position of power over individual managers and academics which resulted in a positive transformation in the overall management style and culture in the organisation. The interviewees shared their perceptions that being respected and supported by their managers, particularly during challenging times, as well as having their strengths and needs recognised and addressed, were expressions of compassion. The research findings provided numerous examples of expressions of compassion as a social relational construct and emphasised complex power relations that at times made these expressions problematic.

The section also discussed the findings related to the instances of what was perceived to be artificial compassion and demonstrated that when employed by managers, it triggered strong negative reactions by linking these expressions of false compassion to deception, manipulation and even violence. Other examples of compassion damaged by leadership and management, as reported by the participants, included cost-cutting measures associated with staff redundancies and marked increases in workloads. Magnified by the negative impact of the pandemic, this perceived prioritising of profits over staff welfare was regarded not only as destroying compassion but also as inflicting additional pain and suffering. These instances were sometimes linked by the participants to wider societal issues which are discussed in the following subsection.

5.5 Theme D: Compassion as a response to inequalities and social injustice

Another key theme that emerged from the research was compassion as a response to inequalities and social injustice. Indeed, several respondents alluded to the role of compassion in combatting the perceived lack of democracy and associated inequalities and discrimination they observed in the university setting. One interviewee, for example, insisted there were inequalities and discrimination in terms of career progression opportunities amongst British and non-British staff:

> In our School, I don't think we can say that we are very very friendly because there is a very big defining line between English born and English brought up colleagues versus foreigners. It's very clear in our School. So, the ones promoted are white British people and foreigners are always doing little bits and bobs they've been told to do as if they have no brain. And if you raise that, you don't get listened to, or you'd be told you are discriminating white people. (P1)

These issues were considered by the interviewee to reflect the national prevalence of the right-wing politics which were seen to be lacking compassion, as explained in the following observation by the same participant:

> The entire country's movement is not very compassionate at all. They are very harsh to foreigners, very harsh to weak people and the elderly, with difficulties, disabled people's benefits cut down, so people have to survive. It's the survival of the fittest. (P1)

In a similar vein, another participant drew parallels between current government policy and the lack of compassion displayed by the case study university's leadership in imposing compulsory redundancies, asserting that the obsession with profits would lead to more severe consequences in future:

> You know the Vice Chancellor…he takes his cue from the government, and the hard-right government that we have is all about profits. It is all about, you know.. We see that now that Brexit's happened, they're going to cut back on workers' rights. They're thinking about cutting back on statutory holidays and things like that. And if the Vice Chancellor is getting the message from above that that's OK, he's going to give that down to… It is trickle-down and we get trickle-down shit, and we're the ones that end up with the most shit on the bottom. (P16)

The comments above express the participant's strong political views and arguably relate to the construct of critical compassion that recognises and identifies structural inequalities and injustice that cause suffering (Zembylas, 2013).

Several other arguments presented by the research participants highlighted that a more democratic approach was needed to hiring managers and senior managers and to the decision-making process. One interviewee pointed out that in other countries, university managers and senior managers, such as Vice Chancellors, were not appointed but voted for by their colleagues and, therefore, had an obligation to represent their values and interests. It was suggested that a similar approach in UK universities would strengthen transparency, justice and democracy (P1). Another participant explained that their former colleague, prior to being appointed as a Head of School, had put forward the idea of

having a rotating Head of School and establishing an academic forum or a senate to ensure democratic decision making within the School (P16). Although these proposals were forgotten after the appointment, the interviewee implied that if they were to be implemented, they could improve democracy and compassion in the School and in the case-study university.

Another respondent felt particularly strongly about the university leadership and management not being accountable or held responsible for business failures or for poor decision making:

> We are always under the threat of the redundancy, losing colleagues…. I've lost three colleagues recently, you know, two were sacked and one – her contract wasn't renewed. And it's none of their fault! And the management are still there and they are still… having the same time. Why aren't they showing compassion? Reduce their salary? Or even resign if they couldn't maintain their staff? Their salaries are massive! In my culture, the management takes the responsibility first for failing to manage the business, or for failing to manage the people. But here, what they do is they make sure they keep their salary first and then they cut the weaker, the weakest, you know, hourly paid lecturers, casual contract ones…. They are the ones who suffer, they have children and I felt devastated when they did that. (P1)

These emotional reflections reveal personal and cultural values and a strong opposition to the perceived unfairness of the current practices within the sector associated with injustice and inequalities. In addition to challenging such practices, this respondent suggested ways in which they could be adapted to address resultant injustices. These findings are a valuable contribution to the literature on critical compassion, which regards responding to social injustice by means of challenging privileged irresponsibility to be the key role of compassion (Zembylas, 2013).

Another vivid example of the critical approach to compassion was provided by P19, a Deputy Head of School, who offered a comprehensive explanation of the complex and problematic nature of compassion. It was pointed out that, on the one hand, compassion was beneficial to individuals at the interpersonal and relational levels. On the other hand, however, since universities, similar to other modern organisations, operate in 'the broader market structures' of 'global capitalism', compassion at the organisational level could be identified with:

> neo-normative controls associated with emotional labour, intensification of labour, extracting as much value as possible from the workforce and commodifying compassion and selling it as a good student experience. (P19)

These associations reflect the critical approach to compassion and add to its meaning by viewing it as a desirable commodity that is likely to bring benefits to a university in a form of a competitive advantage. This also demonstrates that the logic of the market is applied to the concept of compassion in the context of a neoliberal university, which Shamir (2008) calls 'market-embedded morality'. However, by pointing to its affiliation with the intensification of labour, P19 raised doubts about the advantages of compassion to individual employees. Moreover, as implied in the following comments made by the same participant, this approach to compassion puts an additional strain on the relationship between management and the workforce:

> I think the whole point of capital versus labour value is to extract as much labour value as you can from the individual. And that's the point. That's the point of management. So therefore, some would see anything as an outward portrayal or outward enactment of compassion, you know, as a kind of neo normative control upon the workforce. ...I guess, you know, the university does it from a certain level that encourages colleagues to display more affective or emotional labour. It's still an intensification of work. (P19)

These findings unveil the complex and problematic nature of compassion in the context of a neoliberal university and arguably provide a further explanation for tensions and a divide between academics and management as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Several respondents raised a number of concerns with regards to the recent developments in the case study university which they perceived to be damaging compassion towards students. Participant P21, for example, suggested that reducing the number of optional modules demonstrated a lack of compassion because it did not allow for diversity and inclusion of students.

> It's assuming that people are uniform and happy to just go on one route. And people are not like that. And I think part of being compassionate is allowing for difference. Yeah, and if you're different, you make different choices. (P21)

This approach to higher education was regarded by another interviewee as not only misrepresenting the purpose of education but also as dehumanising students:

> I think it's so easy just to keep one replicated, to have this copying machine that you just keep on turning the handle, you know, and students come in on one end and just fly out on the other end. I mean that's not what universities are about! I hope not! (P18)

Another important point related to inclusion and compassion was raised with reference to the so-called 'No Detriment' policy which operated in the case study university during

the Covid-19 pandemic. It was argued that although effective in supporting students, it presented a potential risk of 'leav[ing] behind a certain body of students' because

> If you're a first to university… or first in the family to university student, or if you're a minority group, your voice isn't usually heard, and you are probably more unlikely to appeal than other people that are potentially more able to speak out. (P19)

These findings support the position that enactments of compassion have both benefits and flaws, highlighting the importance of reflexivity and moral judgement (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014a) and, therefore, presenting a more critical approach to the notion of compassion revealing its role in addressing inequalities.

The idea of giving voice to those who 'don't have the voice that we would possibly like them to have' (P19) was also linked to compassion. One of the participants stated that one of their research projects 'was all about disabled young people and connecting them with other young people, and helping people understand what it's like to be a disabled young person' (P21). The intention was 'to involve students as artists and sound recordists, and film makers'. In order to recruit students, Participant P21 used the argument that taking part in the project would be 'a good way of adding to their CV and showing that they'd taken part in a research project and that they could demonstrate their skills as a filmmaker, for example, for an actual real-life project rather than just as an academic exercise'. However,

> …at the end of it, what the students said was that the most important thing was helping to tell the stories of these young people. I don't think any of them said 'It was good to put on my CV'. So, I had kind of underestimated the student compassion in the first place by thinking 'Well, this is the way to kind of sell it to them'. If I have said, 'You know, you could really help out some disabled kids doing this..' Yeah, and I was really impressed that that was what students took away from it and that's what they really enjoyed. And that's what kind of kept them going because sometimes it was quite difficult doing this work. But they still stuck at it and at the end, they were really pleased that they had because they felt they'd made a difference. And that did matter to them. (P21)

Both the above narrative and the nature of the project it refers to challenge the culture of competitive individualism and self-interest in higher education that often overlooks the importance of developing young people as interdependent, caring and compassionate human beings (Lynch *et al.,* 2007). These findings also relate to what Gibson and Cook-Sather (2020) term politicised compassion. Specifically, the shared experience emphasised the potential of building partnerships between academics and students

working together to challenge systemic inequality and injustice (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020).

5.5.1 Summary of findings and discussion: Theme D

Numerous examples of the expressions of compassion offered by the respondents included those that demonstrated its role in challenging social injustice and inequalities. The findings revealed that issues such as discrimination of staff with regards to career progression opportunities, attaining profits at the expense of employees' welfare and lack of accountability on behalf of leadership and management were perceived to reflect a wider political climate in the country identified with the prevalence of right-wing politics. It was also pointed out that in the context of a neoliberal university, compassion could be equated with neo-normative controls, emotional labour and intensification of work. This critical view on compassion shifted its meaning and regarded it as a commodity and a form of competitive advantage. The findings discussed in the section also highlighted the instances when student diversity and inclusion were jeopardised, sometimes even when genuine compassion was enacted. The evidence presented and discussed in the section also connected the notion of compassion to challenging the culture of individualism and self-interest in higher education and uncovered opportunities for partnerships between academics and students in standing up to inequalities and social injustice.

5.6 Theme E: Compassionate universities: a myth and a reality

Another dominant theme identified by means of thematic analysis of the research findings relates to the characteristics of a compassionate university and the participants' views on whether universities can be compassionate. As established in Chapter One of the thesis, compassion had been introduced and promoted as an aspirational value in the case study university by means of a range of compassion-related initiatives and practices prior the start of the research project. Since one of the research aims is to identify the type of practices associated with workplace compassion in order to determine if they are effective and beneficial to academics and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing them in a university context, these initiatives and practices were given particular attention. The research findings related to these compassion-related initiatives and practices are now discussed under the final key theme of the chapter.

5.6.1 Subtheme E1: Compassion as an aspirational value and compassion-related initiatives

The research findings uncovered that the participants' views on the implementation of compassion as an aspirational value in the case study university were differing and sometimes opposing. Some of the interviewed academics felt rather sceptical about organisational values in general. One of the participants, for example, highlighted that

> Values are a strange thing anyway, because values are not rules, values are these internal things of people, they're codes of living. We all have values in different ways. So, to assume everybody has these values and should follow these values is wrong in the first place, I think. (P5)

Another participant linked introduction of values to constant change, particularly change at the higher level of the organisation, and to different leadership styles and therefore, also expressed scepticism about values:

> One management team of the university comes in - they introduce the values, including compassion. Another university management comes in - they don't exactly abandon the values, but they don't proactively promote them. And I think that's quite telling in terms of managerial styles, if you like. (P6)

Several interviewed academics emphasised the difficulty of determining the meaning of compassion as an organisational value. They commented that 'what compassion actually means is quite diverse, quite personal' and its meaning 'within a commercial operation' needed clarification (P11) and 'a good, strong, robust definition' (P18), which they felt was missing. Another participant found it odd to view compassion as aspirational because to them, it was a fundamental value (P9). It was also pointed out that it was impossible to become compassionate following a directive, without structures supporting and encouraging it (P9).

The impact of the introduction of the value of compassion, as reported by the research respondents, was also varied. Some participants reported that they felt no difference in the way they, their colleagues and managers operated (for example, P5, P10, P11). One interviewee shared that despite the efforts of the senior managers to promote compassion, the relationship with the line manager deteriorated because it became even 'more depersonalised' (P7), which was perceived as heightening the contrast between the rhetoric and the line manager's behaviour:

> You're hearing words, but the actions are telling you the opposite, and that's what I feel with these aspirational values, that someone saying one thing but behaving in another way. Meaningless. Meaningless. (P7)

In a similar vein, another participant also emphasised the contrast between words and actions and drew attention to the issue of trust accentuating that it was absent due to the contradiction between compassion as a proclaimed value and compulsory redundancies:

> I think it is a tick box exercise when it concerns values, and especially that there are also voices I heard saying that if the institution wants to have certain values on their moto, or as their logo, then it has to adhere to them, and therefore, it has to show compassion to its employees. And if it doesn't do it even for one single one, then there is no trust in the value of these values. And with the situation that is going on at xxxxx, that has been going on lately with compulsory redundancies and very tough times, I don't think people can take such values seriously. (P20)

These research findings concur with the overall view on mission statements and values in the Critical University Studies literature which highlights that sometimes focusing on morality, they tend to make grandiose claims and promises (Maginess & MacKenzie, 2018) that do not necessarily deserve much attention.

Several participants, however, expressed a notably much more positive view on compassion as one of the university's aspirational values and hoped that it would continue to be promoted by the new leadership (for example, P6, P8, P15, P17, P21). One of the interviewed academics clarified that as an organisational value, compassion was linked to both a direction and a permission:

> Essentially, what I'm saying is that it comes from a direction. In one case the direction is to be compassionate, and then people will do what they are told. In the other case it's a permission. They just think it's alright to be compassionate here, it's encouraged. In which case then, that just gives license to the innate impulses of most people to be compassionate. (P15)

The participant felt particularly strongly about the importance of having compassion as a value in the case study university because it demonstrated the acknowledgement and acceptance of the responsibility of the institution and its management to operate with compassion. According to the participant, this, in turn, provided opportunities to challenge the behaviour or decisions that did not adhere to the value of compassion:

> It's very helpful when the university itself has pledged to commitment to it [compassion]. Because then we can point out to the managers that the university is breaching its own declared principles, that's very helpful. (P15)

Another important issue that generated interesting research findings related to adding the university's aspirational values, including compassion, to a section of the appraisal form. The section titled Feedback on Performance asked the appraisee to provide

examples of how the values had been demonstrated. Almost all research participants expressed disagreement with this approach. Indeed, this attempt to implement compassion to the organisational culture was perceived by some respondents as 'odd' (P5) or 'weird' (P12), 'ridiculous' or 'a nonsense' (P7), 'like a test' or 'like a job interview' (P2, P8). Interestingly, these perceptions were shared not only by those respondents who were appraisees, but also by those with the managerial responsibility of appraising academics. For example, Participant P8, a manager and an appraiser, shared the following viewpoints:

> If you say to somebody, 'How do you demonstrate these things?' I mean, that feels like a test. It's like 'Am I compassionate enough… to work at this institution?' It's almost like a job interview type question, isn't it? Like, 'Give me an example of when you have dealt with this situation'. I mean it feels like a job interview or something. I don't really think that's what appraisals should be. There has to be some level of, I guess, there has to be some level of performance management involved in appraisals, but it's not really the main purpose of them. They should be about finding the best way to help people to grow. (P8)

In a similar vein, another participant, a Senior Lecturer, questioned the validity of the approach and linked it to a performance measurement criterion:

> I suppose my concern would be about the validity of that in terms of what does that feed into? So, the more examples of compassion you give, knowing how appraisals are, so does that mean that you get a better rating for your job? Or is it just a case of if you can't give examples of compassion, then you get a very low rating? (P9)

These findings demonstrated that the respondents recognised flaws in the leadership's attempts to implement compassion into the case study university's practices. These flaws relate to the dominant mainstream discourse that regards compassion to be beneficial to the workforce (Rynes *et al.,* 2012), therefore, is shifted onto the shoulders of employees as an additional responsibility or duty. These findings also demonstrated the respondents' critical approach to workplace compassion, which Zembylas (2013) termed critical compassion.

Interestingly, the majority of the participants who expressed their disagreement with the Feedback on Performance section discussed above, proposed what they considered to be more effective ways of promoting compassion in the appraisal process. Curiously, all the suggestions, regardless of whether they were made by academics or by managers

with appraising responsibilities, had one specific element in common. Namely, it was proposed that the focus of compassion-related questions or requested examples should be on the university rather than on the appraisee. For example,

> I don't think staff should be asked in their appraisals to give examples of how they are being compassionate, and it should be the other way round. I don't think the emphasis should be on staff to demonstrate that they are being compassionate... In my view, it should be asked in what ways do we consider the university could be more compassionate, and more sharing, and more courageous. (P5)

> Actually, I wonder if it would be better to ask people how they think the university demonstrates these rather than 'How do you do this?' Because then it's…. It feels very much like 'I've got to think of an example that proves that I fit', whereas if you can think about how the university is compassionate, then that helps you to believe actually, that yes, this is a compassionate place to work and to highlight those kinds of examples. (P8)

> Posing the question about whether people feel that they are always able to [be compassionate], or have the space, or 'Does the university allow you to show compassion?' will be a better one. Because then, if that's the case and people feel they can't, because they're pressured to get grades or push students through, then something can be done about that. Then it does have some kind of validity and purpose because it is then enabling people and giving them the space where they can be compassionate, and they are not pressurised. (P9)

These suggestions demonstrated that the participants regarded compassion as a joint responsibility that required commitment on behalf of both the employees and the organisation in the form of common practices and available resources. These findings support Simpson *et al.*'s (2014b) compassion legitimacy and worthiness model (see Figure 3.5, also section 3.3.5.1 of the thesis), which demonstrates that in order to ensure compassion, formal and informal rules and practices in an organisation need to provide resources necessary to support organisational compassion-related values, such as the values of respect, commitment to others and importance of employees (Frost and Robinson, 1999).

The research findings also indicated that despite the flaws of the values-related appraisal initiative discussed above, some participants felt it was a positive development and associated it with an attempt to change the culture within the organisation. It was

recognised that implementing such change in a big organisation would be challenging. One of the interviewees, a manager and an appraiser, explained that the initiative was sometimes treated as a tick box exercise by managers because the value of compassion had not become established in the culture of the university, not because those managers were not compassionate:

> There were others who probably were just as cynical as me in the beginning, and so if it was said in an appraisal, tick, tick, tick – I don't care… And that demonstrated that…. and that's not to say those people weren't compassionate… It was just that they didn't buy into it as an overarching philosophy the way that it was intended to be. And it's difficult to spread that down through an organisation as big as our university and get every level of management and leadership going with it. (P8)

Another participant provided a detailed clarification of the initiative's rationale and emphasised its genuine nature:

> To be fair to the people responsible for that, they didn't want it to be a tick box thing. They wanted this to be a kind of stimulus for genuine, thoughtful discussion about how those laudable university values become manifest of our own execution of our jobs. It's hard to do that, it's hard to ensure that does happen, doesn't get treated as an annoying formality that somehow degrades the values themselves. I would say from my inside knowledge, I know that was coming from the idealistic place. The management's intention wasn't to actually degrade or devalue the value, but rather, actually, to help it take root in the culture. Appraisal is one of the ways you can try and influence the university culture. (P15)

The comments of these two participants, P8 and P15, indicated that senior management's genuine intention to foster organisational change by means of encouraging conversations about values such as compassion during staff appraisals was misinterpreted and often perceived by academics as a performance measurement exercise. Interestingly, several participants revealed that as appraisees or as appraisers, they never requested or were requested to provide specific examples demonstrating that they were compassionate. It could be inferred that it was a combination of implementing values such as compassion at the organisational level and the sensitive nature of appraisals that resulted in unintended effects and scepticism generated by the initiative.

Other compassion-related initiatives aimed at promoting compassion in the case study university were events such as Acts of Kindness and Kindness Champion Awards. Acts of Kindness events were referred to by several participants as 'kind of nice' and 'a nice

sentiment' (P11), 'a reflection of what was important to the university at the time' (P19). One interviewee shared the following memories:

> These were interesting times. I was given a balloon by a student and some biscuits. And I needed to give it [the balloon] to somebody else, so I gave it to a security guy because they are always working very hard and we chatted a bit. This kind of thing could be very heart-warming, however, … trying to be compassionate in one institution will take more than promotional biscuits. (P1)

Kindness Champion Awards, another initiative aiming at promoting compassion at the case study university, however, generated more critical comments from the respondents. For example,

> I guess I'm sceptical of that. I have been nominated actually for one of those and it was nice, and it did feel lovely for the student to do that and to know that you're appreciated by the student. But I think it would be also nice to just get an email from a student, saying 'You've really helped me today, I had a great tutorial'. Maybe you don't need the prize so much. It seems a little bit staged. (P10)

> I don't really like those sorts of awards actually because the people that get those awards, don't tend to be the genuinely kind people. They tend to be the showy people or the people that actually draw attention to themselves quite often or do grand acts that are visible. The real kind person is a person that sits in the background and doesn't attract attention but is kind to other people. (P22)

Interestingly, both participants, a recipient and a non-recipient of the Kindness Champion Awards, identified different flaws of the initiative and there seems to be a contradiction between their arguments. However, they both felt that the Awards were contrived for a desired impression. Another research participant who also expressed disagreement with the idea of rewarding or being rewarded for being kind and compassionate, linked this type of awards to 'commercialising compassion', which was also associated with false compassion (P9).

One of the interviewees raised another interesting argument against the Awards by sharing the following observations:

> But it's funny actually, because one person that was put forward and she got an award, she wasn't kind at all. She was just showy. And I remember she was voted in from the students because she used to give the students loads of time. But actually, she did that because she wanted to be seen as a very special person, she wanted to win awards. But she was doing things that was not the protocol,

> so she was giving lots and lots of one-to-one support to students who then.. When they weren't in her tutor group and they went to somebody else's tutor group, they didn't say, 'Well, she was really wonderful!' They said, 'You are crap because I'm used to somebody doing this for me'. (P22)

In addition to questioning the intensions and the behaviour of the award recipient, Participant P22 highlighted the damaging outcomes of the compassion-promoting initiative, which arguably resulted in tensions between colleagues and students. It could be inferred that these tensions were created because of the culture of competitive individualism and self-interest prevailing in the sector (Caddell and Wilder, 2018; Fleming, 2019; Fleming, 2021; Lynch, 2010; Lynch *et al.,* 2007). These findings emphasised that practices and initiatives implemented to promote values such as compassion were perceived in a number of different ways and had a potential of achieving the opposite effect by increasing tensions or even damaging relationships between academics and students.

5.6.2 Subtheme E2: Characteristics of a compassionate university

The research findings demonstrated that participants' perceptions of other practices which could be associated with compassion, as well as their views on whether universities can indeed be compassionate, were also divergent. For example, the quality and accessibility of support for students and staff in terms of mental health provision was associated by some participants as an indicator of compassion. Providing support to students and to 'parents and families of students who'd had major issues or even something really quite shocking' (P17) was regarded as evidence of compassion. Putting 'not just students at the heart of health and well-being, but staff' because 'without staff, there are no students' was also identified as a characteristic of a compassionate university (P13). One participant, although supporting the idea of offering training such as stress-management to staff and students, warned about the danger of creating more stress by promoting this type of workshops and 'constantly using the word stress, stress, stress and problems, problems, problems' (P9). Others were more categorical and expressed a strong disagreement with the view that this type of support and training events were associated with a compassionate university.

> I have attended quite a few of these training sessions and my experience is they put all the onus on… HR put the onus back on the member of staff, they just kick it into the grass and say it's your responsibility. (P7)

The position expressed in the comments above aligns with the perspective of Caddell and Wilder (2018), who argue that this kind of self-management practices put additional strain on academics and their already heavy workloads, therefore, cannot be identified with compassion. Another interviewee agreed with this position and insisted that a more realistic and compassionate resolution was needed:

> If you just get someone to come and just give you a general session that applies to stress management, it's going to be things like 'Take some time out to clear your mind. And be mindful, and take rest', and so forth… But that's not really doable when the amount of work pouring in is just so great that every minute you are taking a break, your work is just piling in. And you've got to try and address it more realistically how to stop the work piling in, or to give people ways of feeling licensed to ignore the work pouring in and not feeling that they are somehow failing. (P15)

A critical approach to mental health and stress management provision was offered by another research participant, who linked the need for the provision to broader problems created by existing structures.

> I don't really think that they're the signs of a compassionate university. They're reactive mechanisms to problematic structures in the first place. You know, you wouldn't need well-being if people were treated properly. You know, you wouldn't need to set…. There's a lot more… It goes back to the point we were making before about structures, you know. If the structures are causing people to need well-being and stress management and stuff like that, change the structures, not just help people cope with it and think that the job's done! (P19)

The comments above reflect a critical perspective on the developments in higher education associated with its corporatisation, which are widely discussed in the Critical University Studies literature (Williams, 2012; also Ball, 2012a, 2016; Collini, 2010). These findings are also connected to the concept of critical compassion, which draws attention to the conditions that cause suffering (Zembylas, 2013) and which was discussed in more detail in section 5.5 of this chapter.

The research findings indicated that several participants felt sceptical about universities' capacity to be compassionate due to their focus on the financial imperative. As pointed out by one of the participants, 'When you've got a system which relies on the extraction of as much value as you possibly can from the workforce, then it can compromise this kind of things' (P19). To emphasise the incompatibility of compassion and modern universities, another interviewee used a metaphor of 'a little globule of oil in a glass of water', which do not mix (P7). Several participants referred to the restructure

accompanied by redundancies in the case study university and pointed out that those processes were also incompatible with compassion.

> You always feel a bit cynical about university that's gone down one road in terms of cutting staff and putting more on the existing staff and then trying to talk about being compassionate and developing compassion. (P9)

Others, however, insisted that the university 'has discretion about how it prioritises' (P15), therefore, it was indeed possible for universities to be compassionate. As clarified by one of the participants, compassion could be prioritised over commercial imperatives and universities could still be financially viable although not necessarily profit making (P15).

> If they run the university on more compassionate principles, that's going to generate…, that's going to absorb costs, so there'll be less money disposed to invest in research or star performers, or something like that. But in the view of most of us, it makes for a healthier organization, and one probably [that] is more consistent with the values that we have, or the view of what we think education should be. (P15)

This view was clearly and explicitly expressed by another participant, a lecturer, who highlighted the contrast between compassion and commercial imperatives reflected in the investment decisions of the case-study university's leadership:

> And that [commercialised nature of universities] is creeping into the compassion, taking away the compassion needed at an academic institution where your primary job is to educate. It's not to make money. And that's where we, as an institution, are starting to fail. It's evident. You look around on campus. They've invested millions of pounds in buildings … But how many people are being fired to achieve that? (P4)

The position expressed by P4 demonstrated a clear disagreement with the neoliberal values of marketised universities and raised the issue of misrepresenting the purpose of education.

As pointed out by another interviewee, at the organisational level, a clear distinction between compassionate universities and those that were less compassionate lay in

> the institutional willingness to deprive people of their livelihood through no fault of their own. Those who have performed their jobs completely perfectly might still lose their jobs. …. A more compassionate organization wouldn't do that, but the less compassionate does. (P15)

Most research participants expressed similar views and linked compassion to moral principles and the ethic of care. For example,

> Human beings are replaceable. Real estate isn't… How is that compassionate? ...Do we need to build new buildings, or do we need to take care of our employees who've been with us for 25-30 years? Who've given us the blood, sweat, sweat and tears making this University what it is today? Instead, that's not what they care about. They don't care about the people who put the work. They care about targets, they care about real estate. They care about everything else that's outside of the compassion. (P4)

However, a different position was presented by another participant, a Head of School, who highlighted the necessity for universities to remain competitive, sometimes at the cost of losing staff:

> You know, when we are operating, not just internationally, we are operating in a global market where we have to be competitive. And being competitive means that there will be casualties, without a doubt. (P22)

The comment reflected the neoliberal nature of modern universities which went through changes associated with marketisation and are run as businesses, therefore, place an emphasis on corporate values such as competitiveness (Ball, 2012a, 2016; Collini, 2010). In contrast to previously presented views, the necessity 'to be competitive' and associated with it 'casualties' were not identified with diminished compassion, which, according to literature on the neoliberal higher education, demonstrated that the management embraced the values, ethical principles and priorities of corporations in the pro-profit sector (Ball, 2012a, 2016; Giroux, 2010; Lynch, 2006; Svensson and Wood, 2007). These findings also pointed to a distinct difference in the participants' opinions about compassion at the organisational level, which was clearly expressed by one of the interviewees in the following comments:

> If you are driven purely by traditional business considerations, then yes, you very ruthlessly chop people out of the organization. But if actually we are trying to operate the university along what I think are socialist principles, where we sort of act as if we are one family working together for the good of all, then principles of compassion determine that you don't throw people out because the net contribution they are making is relatively low, that's not how we operate. (P15)

Interestingly, those participants who offered examples of the expressions of compassion at the organisational level were academics holding management positions or academics whose additional responsibilities entailed working with management and senior

management due to their involvement with University and College Union (UCU). However, those participants who were quite sceptical about universities' capacity to express compassion at the organisational level did not have any managerial responsibilities and shared examples of compassion they experienced mostly at the personal and relational levels.

As for the expressions of compassion at the organisational level, the research findings presented a range of practices. These included the measures taken to respond to Covid-19 pandemic, which became 'embedded within the organisation' and its culture (P19), such as 'allowances around the residential fees, …free food and drink, …provid[ing] laptops to people in hardship' (P22) and discretionary days. Investing in technology and IT services was highlighted by one of the participants as another characteristic of a compassionate university. This view, however, was not shared by those respondents who felt that constant change associated with learning how to use technology and with assimilating new systems and policies, such as the previously mentioned No Detriment policy, 'takes time out of how academics work with students' (P9).

The provision of counselling services for staff was also considered to be a characteristic of a compassionate university. Although some participants reported that it was not easy to access the service (for example, P7 and P13), it transpired that not only did staff in another part of the university, because of the nature of their work, use the service on a regular basis but also there were sufficient funding allocations 'for a lot of people to have private counselling outside of the organisation' (P22). The opportunity for a career break was also identified as a facility demonstrating the employer's compassion, yet it was pointed out that academics were often unaware of the provisions available to them (P22).

The most compelling examples of expressions of compassion at the organisational level uncovered by the research related to supporting individual staff members who were struggling to perform their duties due to health issues or because of challenging situations in their private life.

> There have been cases of people, members of staff, say, with mental health problems, or alcoholism and so forth, that they are not really able to do their jobs. And I would say that the university has generally been very compassionate in how it has handled that. So, when someone is in a very individually unfortunate circumstance where they can't do their job, the university has been very, very patient, trying to make it work. And that sort of things was tended to go on even. I'd say most of the time, that's the case. (P15)

These examples of compassion in action align with what Simpson *et al.* (2013) termed 'compassionate care', one of the three main categories of organisational compassion

responses. According to Simpson *et al.,* (2013), compassionate care is an attribute of compassionate organisations. Another participant, a Head of School, agreed with the view that the case study university was indeed a compassionate organisation; however, in the reflections that follow, this participant emphasised the importance of balancing compassionate care with the necessity for the university to remain sustainable:

> I think that sometimes we have to understand that you've got to weigh up the balance of making compassionate decisions with making decisions that actually protect the university as a whole, its future, so that it's sustainable. Sometimes tough decisions need to be made, but I don't think the University makes tough decisions easily. They make very lenient decisions and very supported decisions. (P22)

To clarify their position and to support the arguments about lenient and supported decisions, the participant then shared their experience of dealing with a situation which arguably demonstrated that compassion at the organisational level could be problematic:

> I've had my own battles with people about things, and I've had members of staff who…. When I worked out her sickness over a 5-year period, she had an average of 20% sickness year on year. And those sickness occurrences were all medically certificated and largely came in when a massive amount of marking came in. But they were certified sicknesses, and I said, 'Look, as far as I am concerned, this is incapability because over a 5-year period she had 20% sickness. That means that one year at that time she's not worked at all. And that's a whole year's wages and a whole year's work that other people have had to pick up. I can't only think about her, I have to think about the team that she works in'. And actually, being that kind and compassionate to that one person means that the people around her are working harder for nothing. (P22)

The perspective presented above highlights that compassion at the organisational level entails costs and requires resources. This reflects the relevant literature on compassion (for example, Banker and Bhal, 2018; Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.,* 2014b). It is clear from the manager's comments above that concerns were raised because these costs were considered to be too high, thereby damaging the university. This contradicts the position of P15, who insisted that workplace compassion means 'act[ing] as if we are one family working together for the good of all' and, therefore, not 'throw[ing] people out because the net contribution they are making is relatively low'. These opposing views could have originated from the differences in the organisational roles held by P22, a Head of School and a budget holder, and P15, a Senior Lecturer without managerial responsibilities. Moreover, Goetz *et al.'*s (2010) cost-benefit model proposes that

compassion is neither unconditional nor unlimited, thereby offering an additional explanation for the conflicting findings. Drawing on evolutionary psychology, the model highlights that the benefits of compassionate responding are linked to the closeness or similarity with the sufferer in terms of shared interests and values and the certainty that compassion will not be exploited selfishly (Goetz *et al.,* 2010). These two elements were probably impacted and weakened by the recurrence of sickness instances at the most demanding times, which was regarded by P22 as an unjustified additional and unnecessary pressure on organisational resources.

Interestingly, having referred to sick pay as 'incredibly generous', P22 went on to argue that in comparison with other industries, the amount of compassionate care and tolerance displayed towards staff in the case study university was rather excessive and sometimes resulted in underperformance:

> You know, my husband will say to me, 'My goodness! If they'd worked in civil engineering, they'd be out of a job like shit off a shovel'. No, they've been honoured these six months, you know. Six months reviewing their work and taking them through a pre-incapability and then taking them through another 12 months capability with a shedload of support that we give people to enable them to be a better worker before they would ever … it would ever be contemplated that we would cease their contract with us. So, in reality, it's very hard to get sacked from Xxxx [the university]. It's very hard to get sacked from Xxxx because Xxxx invests hugely in people who are not performing. You can complain as much as you like about the stuff that's being thrown at you, but actually, even if you don't do it, it's unlikely that you get sacked. (P22)

The above account appears to conflict with the previously discussed perspectives of other participants on workplace compassion and with the overall view in the POE literature that 'prioritising people over profits' and ensuring the availability of resources necessary for the ethic of care needs to be on-going rather than reactive in compassionate organisations (Simpson *et al.,* 2013:396). This also could be one of the reasons for most participants being sceptical about compassionate universities in general. Collectively, then, these findings are diverse and often contradictory, indicating that in a university setting, perceptions of compassion reflect employees' organisational roles and experiences. Therefore, compassion has the potential to create disagreements, challenges, tensions and controversies.

5.6.3 Subtheme E3: Research participants' suggestions on fostering compassion in a university setting

Interestingly, despite the differences in opinion, both groups of participants, sceptics and optimists about the ability of modern universities to be compassionate, made suggestions as to how compassion could be fostered in a university setting. These suggestions are summarised in the following table:

Table 5.1: Research participants' suggestions on fostering compassion in a university setting

How can compassion be fostered in the context of a university?
The meaning of compassion and its integration into structures and systems
1. Explain what it really honestly means for a university to be compassionate, define it clearly, provide a good, strong robust definition. (P11, P18) 2. Find ways that compassion could be more usefully articulated and also, how it could shape policies across universities. (P8) 3. Be more transparent about the services and provision that show compassionate care and are already available. (P22) 4. Having that aim of where we want to be, that balance between being compassionate, being successful and then putting into place the systems that are required to do that. (P9) 5a. In appraisals, ask staff how they feel the university demonstrates compassion. (P8) 5b. In appraisals, find out whether staff feel that they are always able to, or have the space, or does the university allow them to show compassion. (P9) 5c. In appraisals, it should be asked in what ways academics consider the university could be more compassionate, and more sharing, and more courageous. (P5) 6. Having the right structures and systems in place that allow academics to do more around their jobs, i.e. teaching and research. (P9)

More compassionate educational leadership and management
7. Academic leaders and managers need to experience the university from academics' perspective in order to have empathy, that is, to have classroom teaching experience, do research, write papers, shadow academics for a day and cover some of their lectures. (P11) 8.When recruiting and appointing managers, assess candidates' emotional intelligence and compassion in order to filter out people who lack these qualities. (P7) 9. Introduce training based on role-plays and other appropriate strategies to develop compassion as a skill, especially for management. (P7) 10. Apply a more democratic approach by filling in management positions with staff voting for the candidates, not by existing managers appointing new ones. (P1) 11. Apply a more democratic approach by rotating Heads of Schools, thus allowing developmental opportunities for others. (P16) 12. Hold management responsible for failing to manage a university as a business and for failing to manage people and expect them to reduce their salaries or to resign in order to maintain their staff instead of forcing staff out of their jobs. (P1)
Compassionate care towards staff
13a. Establish an academic forum or a senate within each School to ensure more democratic decision making. (P16) 13b. Hearing academics' voice and taking their opinions or suggestions into consideration when making final decisions. (P12) 14. Information sharing with staff should indicate trust and that they are treated with the respect that they deserve. Treating staff like partners you work with, not like somebody who can process so many students per week. It's about change of attitudes. (P18) 15. Allocate sufficient time to the tasks staff need to complete. (P3) 16. Allow space and time for academics to be compassionate. (P9)

17. Provide sufficient and efficient admin support allowing academics to do their jobs instead of dealing with spreadsheets. (P2, P7, P9)

18. Recognise and use employees' skills, strengths and aspirations when deciding on task allocation instead of putting people in the wrong positions and then putting a lot of pressure on them. (P4)

19. Support research impacting the real world and helping people to feel better, to behave better and to connect with one another. (P21)

20. Introduce a rolling sabbatical system where every five years, academics get a semester just to go and do something. And maybe that doesn't even have to just be research, it could also be about innovation and that's just as important. Or even doing something… going and teaching somewhere different to pick up something else that would enable people to grow. (P8)

21. Find a way to make working life a bit more stable, a bit more structured and just give people… let them see how they can progress and develop their career. And not just their career, but their lives and their passion. (P8)

22. Making allowances for the circumstances outside of work, not depriving staff of their livelihoods, making their working life as pleasant as possible within reason, or not making it needlessly unpleasant. (P15)

23. Allow opportunities for social gatherings such as away days, informal birthday and Christmas celebrations in order for staff to build relationships. (P2, P4, P14)

Contributions to the local community and the wider society

24. Make universities more democratic organisations with a compassionate environment by giving voice to the groups that do not have sufficient voice in the society in general and in the sector in particular, such as women, ethnic minorities, BAME groups, LGBTQ groups etc. (P19)

25. Raise the status of the climate crisis right across the university, which would be beneficial for the university as well because it's demonstrating values that everybody should be adhering to. This will also allow the university to employ the power it has and improve lives in the local community. (P21)

26. Organise more community engagement activities to have a better use of the facilities and equipment, for example Christmas Carol concerts, a soup kitchen on Christmas day, a range of community engagement projects in order to build a reputation of a compassionate organization within the community. (P22)
Compassion towards students
27. Educate students about what is morally right and wrong, treat them as students, not as customers. (P1) 28. Find out what compassion means from students' perspective and raise awareness about compassion by teaching a module on compassion. (P14, P18) 29. Compassion could be turned into a learning activity, taught and measured, qualitatively and quantitatively, to make it more tangible. (P18) 30. Offer a greater range of assessment strategies to avoid heavy reliance on academic writing. (P21) 31. Stop reducing the number of available courses and modules to allow for diversity and inclusion. (P21) 32. Put services in place for widening participation students because they need study skills and specific support. (P22) 33. Invest into mental health support for students as a lot of young people seem to be in a state of a crisis when they leave home and come to university. (P10) 34. Have a designated team of people who are the sort of people who care deeply and who are themselves extremely compassionate people, look out deeply about the students and who are given enough time to do what it takes, so the university would actually spend money on staff salaries voted for that activity. (P15)

It is important to emphasise here that the participants' suggestions on cultivating compassion in the context of a university presented in Table 5.2 above relate to

expressions of compassion at the organisational level, which is a significant focus of the study. These suggestions have been divided into five groups.

The first group includes proposals to determine and to clarify the meaning of compassion at the organisational level, to demonstrate and negotiate how compassion is expressed, and to incorporate it into relevant structures and systems. The second group lists the suggestions on achieving more democratic and compassionate educational leadership and management. The next section in the table comprises the biggest group of proposals, those that reflect compassionate care towards staff in general and academics in particular. This group of suggestions can be further divided into three subgroups. These address, first, treating staff with trust and respect (points 13-18); second, supporting a more compassionate approach to research and sabbatical opportunities; and finally, improving the social aspect of work to allow staff to build relationships and to create a happier working environment. The remaining two groups of recommendations include practical suggestions on contributing to the local community and wider society (points 24-26) and, finally, proposals to express more compassion towards students.

5.6.4 Summary of findings and discussion: Theme E

The research findings congregated around the final theme of the chapter demonstrate remarkable divergence with regards to participants' views on the type of practices associated with compassionate universities and whether universities can indeed be compassionate. These differences were observed in the respondents' perceptions of compassion as an aspirational value and other compassion-related initiatives promoted in the case study university. The majority of the participants felt quite sceptical about these initiatives although the intention to advance compassion in this context by drawing attention to it was appreciated by all interviewees. The findings revealed that there was a distinct need to determine and clarify the meaning of compassion. The participants' views on compassion-related initiatives were particularly varied and sometimes opposing. However, almost all regarded compassion to be a mutual responsibility of both the employees and the employer expressed in the form of common practices and available resources. The findings also indicate that despite genuine intentions to promote compassion at the organisational level, some initiatives may result in creating tensions and damaging relationships between colleagues and students because of the culture of individualism and self-interest.

The findings also reveal notably different and sometimes conflicting views on the attributes of a compassionate university. These contrasts and disagreements arguably originated from the participants' different organisational roles and experiences. A range of examples of compassionate care, one of the attributes of compassionate organisations (Simpson *et al.,* 2013; Simpson *et al.*, 2014b), were provided by the respondents. However, several discrepancies in their perspectives on what it means to be a compassionate university were uncovered. These contrasting views mostly reflected the concerns of academics in managerial positions about the impact of compassion on organisational resources. Yet, despite these differences of opinion, all participants provided valuable suggestions as to how to encourage compassion at the organisational level in the context of a university.

5.7 Concluding Chapter 5

This chapter has presented and discussed the findings from the empirical research under five thematic headings. The main research findings for each of the five themes are briefly described in the following table:

Table 5.2: An overview of the main research findings

Theme A: Compassion as a complex notion and a moral category fundamental to human existence	1. Compassion is a fusion of the cognitive, emotional and social aspects. As a care-taking social emotion, it reflects relatedness and a sense of unity, and aims to ensure and maintain individual and communal well-being. Authentic compassion requires a helpful and effective action. 2. Compassion is predominately a character trait; however, it also can be developed as a skill by means of enhancing cultural awareness, empathy and emotional intelligence. Although educating for compassion can bring benefits, as a developed skill, it could be used instrumentally to achieve personal gains. 3. As a philosophical concept, compassion is closely linked to morality, spirituality and religion, therefore, it involves a complex decision-making process based on moral judgments reflecting individuals' worldview, shared humanity and interconnectedness. As a morality-related concept, it defines people as individuals and members of a community and is, therefore, fundamental to human existence.
Theme B:	1. In a university setting, compassion is perceived at the interpersonal level as part of academic identity. However,

Compassion as part of academic identity	due to its strong emotional aspect, it is problematic at the organisational level. 2. Compassion is inextricably linked to the student-facing role of academics; however, heavy workloads, complex power relations with students as consumers and the conflict between the commercial nature of modern universities and academics' professional values create tensions and diminish opportunities for compassion. It can impede academics' well-being and career growth. 3. As expressed by academics' collegiality, compassion provides benefits of building supportive reciprocal relationships and assists academics practically and emotionally in their day-to-day responsibilities. The context of a university, however, problematises expressions and acceptance of compassion because of pride, complex power relations, potential anxiety, uneasiness and fears. A division between research-focused and teaching-focused academics and some gender distinctions are other important factors that create tensions and problematise expressions of compassion as academics' collegiality.
Theme C: Compassion as both driven by and damaged by educational leadership	1. Compassion is impaired by an evident and sometimes antagonistic divide between academics and management. Formal power allowing to use pressure to achieve organisational objectives is viewed by academics as shaping managers' personalities and relationships with them. Compassion does not travel easily up and down the levels of hierarchy, which creates obstacles to expressions of compassion. 2. A genuinely compassionate leader in a position of power has the ability to drive a positive transformation in the overall management style and culture in the organisation. As perceived by academics, being respected and supported by their managers, particularly during challenging times, as well as having their strengths and needs recognised and addressed are expressions of compassion. 3. Expressions of what is perceived as artificial compassion, when employed by managers, trigger strong negative reactions and link these expressions of false compassion to deception, manipulation and even violence. Cost-cutting measures associated with staff redundancies and marked increases in workloads damage compassion. Prioritising profits over staff welfare is not only destroying

	compassion but is also inflicting additional pain and suffering in the workplace.
Theme D: Compassion as a response to inequalities and social injustice	Compassion plays a role in combatting the lack of democracy and associated inequalities and discrimination by challenging social injustice and privileged irresponsibility. In the context of a neoliberal university, compassion can be equated with neo-normative controls, emotional labour and intensification of work, and regarded as a commodity and a form of competitive advantage. However, critical compassion provides opportunities to challenge these issues and the culture of individualism and self-interest in higher education.
Theme E: Compassionate universities: a myth and a reality	1. Compassion as an aspirational value has both flaws and benefits but its meaning in a university context needs a clear definition. Implementing compassion-related initiatives is problematic as they are perceived in different ways and may result in creating tensions and achieving the opposite effect. 2. Academics have different and sometimes opposing views on the characteristics of compassionate universities and on whether universities can be compassionate. The conflict between the commercial nature of universities and compassion at the organisational level reflected in prioritising profits over people is evident. Academics are both sceptical and optimistic about compassionate universities. 3. The interviewees present a range of suggestions on fostering compassion in the context of a university. These include incorporating compassion into structures and systems, ensuring more democratic and compassionate management, treating staff with compassionate care, universities contributing to the local community and the wider society and expressing more compassion towards students.

Across each theme, a variety of perspectives emerged with regards to impressions and expressions of compassion amongst academics in a university setting. The following, final chapter, now draws conclusions from these findings as well as assessing the extent to which this thesis has achieved its aim and objectives. It also highlights its key contributions to both knowledge and practice.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

> *We are but visitors on this planet. We are here for ninety or one hundred years at the very most. During that period, we must try to do something good, something useful with our lives. If you contribute to other people's happiness, you will find the true goal, the true meaning of life.* Dalai Lama (n.d.)

6.1 Introduction

As established in Chapter One, the initial interest in the topic of compassion as the focus of this thesis was triggered by its introduction as one of the aspirational values in a post-1992 university in the North-West of England. The notion of compassion as 'benevolent love and humaneness toward others' (Rynes *et al.,* 2012: 506), associated as it is with religion and spirituality (Thomas and Rowland, 2014), seemed out of place or contradictory in the context of the UK higher education sector widely identified with profit maximisation, competition, the widespread 'culture of chronic overwork' (Krause, 2018), low staff morale and a toxic working environment (Docherty, 2015, Waddington, 2016, Watson, 2009). This contrast between the idea of compassion and the modern university as a commercial operation pointed to the need to clarify the meaning or understanding of compassion in this particular context (impressions) and to shed light on how it is enacted (expressions) at the interpersonal and organisational levels.

The Covid-19 pandemic served to magnify the importance of compassion and drew attention to the concept in all social and political spheres. Moreover, 'the unprecedented global emergency revealed just how money-fixated higher education had become' (Fleming, 2021). In his recent book *Dark Academia: How Universities Die*, Peter Fleming refers to the post-pandemic university as a 'seriously ill patient' who 'displays tell-tale signs that their life support system is in major trouble'. He warns that 'the cause of this occupational malaise – the businessification of higher education – is still being pushed as the cure' and insists that 'the symptoms of terminal decline are not just economic' because even financially healthy institutions 'are also dying inside, overcome by a mood of mute desperation and melancholia' (Fleming, 2021: 145). Since the publication of his book, in the UK the sector's muted desperation has gained voice resulting in several rounds of strike action and marking and assessment boycotts during 2021-2022, and resuming in the 2022-2023 academic year when, for the first time in the dispute, the

University and College Union (UCU) secured a mandate for industrial action in all the UK branches (UCU, 2022). The unrest, contempt and antagonism within the sector indicate that it is in a state of despair which clearly needs a resolution. It is perhaps unsurprising then that, in their post-pandemic publications, several authors draw attention to compassion and its role in a university setting (for example, Cordaro, 2020; Denney, 2020, 2021; Konstantinou and Miller, 2022). Specifically, it is argued that higher education is in desperate need of a sector-wide conversation about the role and essence of universities after the Covid-19 pandemic (Denney, 2020) because 'our current systems and structures are causing suffering' and 'compassion could play a bigger role in changing them for the better longer term' (Denney, 2021:46). This thesis seeks to contribute to this discussion.

Having set out and justified the purpose of the thesis in the introductory chapter, the thesis then presented the context of the study and its conceptual underpinnings, establishing the foundations for the empirical research, the outcomes of which were discussed in the preceding chapter. The purpose of this final chapter is now to draw all the threads together and, in particular, to evaluate the extent to which the research aims and objectives of the thesis have been met. In addition, it highlights the significance of the research in terms of its contribution to both knowledge and practice. Following this introduction, the chapter is divided into six sections, as follows: first, a summary of the individual chapters is provided. Second, the research aims and objectives are reviewed and consideration is given to the extent to which they have been achieved. Third, the study's contribution to knowledge is identified whilst, fourth, its contribution to practice based on the key findings of the empirical study is highlighted. The fifth section considers the limitations of the research and makes suggestions for future research. Finally, the sixth section of the chapter offers brief personal reflections of my DBA journey. The following section, then, now presents a brief chapter-by-chapter summary of the thesis.

6.2 Thesis summary

Chapter One provides an introduction to and a broad overview of the thesis. It explains the original inspiration for the research by clarifying its background, personal and real-world context. It establishes the aims and objectives of the research, outlines the methodology employed in the research and introduces the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two establishes the context for the empirical study. It comprises three principal sections, the first of which provides an overview of the key developments in educational policy in the UK over the last three decades. The second section then considers the effect of these developments and, in particular, identifies the key characteristics of a

neoliberal higher education sector. The final section discusses the impacts of these characteristics on academic staff in the sector.

Chapter Three, drawing on research in several disciplines, critically appraises the extant literature on compassion and its complex nature. It goes on to review the concept of workplace compassion, scrutinising the compassion process model in the positive organisational scholarship (POS) literature and examines the framework for compassionate decision making in the field of positive organisational ethics (POE). Finally, the chapter investigates compassion-related issues and the concepts of critical and politicised compassion in education research.

Chapter Four considers the research design and methodology and provides the rationale for adopting a constructivist / interpretivist approach in achieving the aims and objectives of the empirical study. It justifies the study's ontological, epistemological and axiological stance, and describes the data collection and analysis processes. It also highlights the benefits and possible flaws of the qualitative single case study that employs semi-structured interviews for this particular research topic and context. Ethical considerations related to an insider researcher role, the issue of bias, respondent confidentiality and anonymity are also discussed.

Chapter Five presents and critically explores the research findings structured around five dominant and distinct themes which emerged through the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts. The discussion is supported by a wide range of direct quotes which honour the voice of the participants and their particular use of language. The final part of the chapter presents an overview of the participants' suggestions on how to foster compassion in a university context and concludes with a brief overview of the principal research findings under five thematic headings.

As noted above, Chapter Six now concludes the thesis evaluating both its position relative to the extant literature and its contribution to knowledge and practice. It considers the empirical study's limitations and makes suggestions for future research. Finally, it presents some personal insights and reflections on the overall DBA journey.

6.3 A review of the research aims and objectives

The main aims of this research were, first, to explore and critically evaluate the meaning attached by UK academics to the concept of workplace compassion and, second, to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion in order to determine if these are feasible and beneficial to academics and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing them in a university context.

To achieve these aims, the research had the following objectives. The extent to which these have been met is now evaluated.

1. To review critically previous research on compassion and workplace compassion and relevant theories and models with a particular focus on the organisation studies literature as a conceptual framework.

As presented in Chapter 3, a thorough review was conducted of the extant literature on the concepts of compassion and workplace compassion, which provided the theoretical framework for the empirical study. The complex and ambivalent nature of compassion as a source of moral judgement and an emotion was explored in detail and compared with several compassion-related notions, such as empathy, sympathy and pity. The concept of workplace compassion was investigated by means of scrutinising the compassion process model and its subsequent modifications in the POS literature and by examining the framework of compassionate decision making in the POE research. The critical appraisal of the literature on compassion and workplace compassion was then narrowed down to the context of education in general and higher education in particular, focusing on the culture of carelessness and the constructs of critical compassion and politicised compassion and highlighting potential gaps in the compassion debate in this context.

2. To examine important developments in the UK higher education to gain a sound grasp of the study's context

Principal developments in the UK higher education sector over the last three decades were identified and critically evaluated in Chapter 2. An overview of the key UK educational policy events since 1992 and their contributions were listed and presented in Table 2.1. The most significant developments that shaped the sector were examined, and the main characteristics of the neoliberal higher education as well as their impact on academics were critically evaluated.

3. To collect primary data on UK academics' perceptions of impressions and expressions of workplace compassion

Primary qualitative fieldwork was carried out by means of conducting semi-structured interviews. In total, 22 interviews took place and produced a large body of rich and salient data. The interview questions were informed by the aims and objectives of the research and encouraged the participants to formulate and share their perceptions of the meaning of compassion (impressions) and its enactment (expressions) in the context of a university.

4. To analyse the findings to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion, its presence or absence in a university setting, and to recognise benefits, challenges, controversies and tensions it may create for UK academics

The data were analysed initially by open coding the interview scripts and then by grouping the codes within the emergent themes. Five dominant themes were identified. Four of these intertwined yet distinct themes focused specifically on the type of behaviour and practices identified as compassionate responses and experienced by the interviewees (all academics) in a university setting. The research findings related to the absence or lack of compassion in these responses were also registered and analysed under these four themes. The participants' perceptions of the expressions of compassion in the context of a university as well as the benefits, challenges, controversies and tensions that compassion creates in this setting were presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

5. To determine if workplace compassion is feasible and beneficial to academics and could be implemented in the UK university context

As discussed in Chapter 5, compassion in the UK university context is feasible and predominately expressed at the interpersonal level as part of academic identity and collegiality although it creates tensions because of the culture of individualism and self-interest. At the organisational level, it is regarded to be a mutual responsibility of both the employees and the employer expressed in the form of common practices and available resources, therefore, is problematic. Compassion is both beneficial and detrimental to academics.

6. To contribute to the organisation studies debate on workplace compassion by presenting the study's key conclusions and, if appropriate, suggesting ways of implementing compassion in a university context

An overview of the empirical study's principal findings was provided in Table 5.2 in Chapter 5. Based on these main findings, the following section presents the study's key conclusions.

6.4 Key conclusions

Overall, the research has revealed significant divergence in the views of academics on impressions and expressions of compassion in the context of a university. Generally, compassion is perceived as a care-taking social emotion that reflects relatedness and a sense of unity and requires helpful and effective action. It is considered to be fundamental to the professional identity of academics because it is inextricably linked to their student-facing role and to academic collegiality. The research has revealed that compassion is both beneficial and detrimental to academics. On the one hand, compassion expressed in teaching and pastoral care is perceived as rewarding and, as expressed by academic collegiality, it contributes to building supportive reciprocal relationships assisting academics practically and emotionally in their day-to-day responsibilities. On the other hand, it adds to workloads, tends to hinder academics' well-being and diminishes their opportunities for career advancement. Also, compassion creates tensions, challenges and controversies due to both complex power relations with students as consumers and to the conflict between the commercial nature of modern universities and academics' professional values. Another significant source of tension and conflicts that problematise compassion in a university context is the culture of competitiveness, individualism and self-interest.

Also, the issue of hierarchy associated with authoritarianism further adds to the complexity of expressing compassion in a university setting. Being expressed more naturally amongst colleagues in similar positions, compassion does not travel easily up and down the levels of hierarchy. Moreover, managers' attempts to employ what is perceived as false or artificial compassion trigger strong negative emotions and link these expressions to deception, manipulation and even violence. Although a genuinely compassionate leader in a position of power has the ability to drive a positive transformation in the overall management style and culture in the context of a university, the sustainability of the positive change can be in question. It is the commercial

imperative of higher education that results in cost-cutting measures associated with staff redundancies and increases in workloads that damages compassion in this context. These cost-cutting measures and their outcomes are perceived as the prioritising of profits over staff welfare and, therefore, are regarded not only as destroying compassion but also as inflicting additional pain and suffering.

The above point, in combination with the finding that compassion is viewed by academics as a mutual commitment between the employer and employees, which involves availability of necessary resources, are arguably the most significant outcomes of the research. Overall, however, the research indicates that it remains uncertain whether modern universities can be truly and genuinely compassionate. It is certain, however, that they can be and need to be more compassionate. It is also conclusive that critical compassion in this context grants universities a significant role in combating irresponsible privilege and challenging social injustice and inequalities. This means, however, that compassion in a context of modern universities in the UK remains aspirational.

6.5 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to the literature on compassion and workplace compassion in three key areas: (i), the research context; (ii) the critical approach; and (iii) most significantly, in terms of the research findings.

First, in terms of context, this research is distinctive in that it brings value to the overall debate on workplace compassion in organisation studies. Specifically, its unique contribution lies in its detailed exploration of workplace compassion within the context of UK higher education focusing on the perceptions of academics of its meaning (impressions), as well as its identification of the type of behaviour and practices associated with compassionate responding (expressions). As such, it makes a valuable contribution to the extant literature on compassion in the context of a modern British university which, prior to this study, has been limited to predominantly theoretical and opinion essays (for example, Denney, 2020, 2021; Maginess and MacKenzie, 2018; Waddington, 2016, 2018) or has incorporated empirical studies on workplace compassion that explore a range of industries unrelated to higher education and overseas rather than in the UK (for example, Aboul-Ela, 2017, Egypt; Banker and Bhal, 2018, India; Cheung, 2008, China; Lilius *et al*., 2011; Neff *et al.,* 2008, USA; Moon *et al.*, 2014, South Korea). Furthermore, in contrast to the previous research on compassion, this study presents an empirical analysis of the meaning of compassion (impressions) and associated with it practices (expressions) in the context of a modern university in the

UK by means of employing most comprehensive theoretical models and concepts that are regarded as outstanding contributions to the literature on workplace compassion in organisational studies, specifically, Dutton *et al.*'s (2014) compassion process model and Simpson *et al.*'s (2014b) compassion legitimacy and worthiness model. The key findings of the study focused on the specific context of a modern English university are discussed in relation to the main elements of these multidimensional frameworks, thereby consolidating the setting of the research and the main approaches employed by these theoretical models.

Second, this research adopts the critical perspective on compassion, which is a further contribution to knowledge. Although it is generally acknowledged that demarcating the critical from the non-critical is not always straightforward (Fournier and Grey, 2000), in contrast to previous research on workplace compassion, this study adopts 'an anti-performative stance' (ibid: 7) and makes a clear distinction between workplace compassion as a tool to enhance productivity and commitment of the workforce and compassion as a response to human vulnerability that aims to identify and challenge social injustices and inequalities. By revealing complex power relations and divergent interests reflecting professional roles and, therefore, impacting compassionate responses at the interpersonal and organisational levels, the research has exposed the problematic and controversial nature of workplace compassion that, to date, has not been fully addressed in the relevant literature.

Third, the most significant contribution of this empirical research to the overall debate on workplace compassion relates to its principal findings that clarify the meaning of workplace compassion and its associated behaviour and practices in a university setting. In contrast to the suffering-focused meaning of compassion that dominates the organisation studies literature, this research has revealed an emphasis on equality, a sense of unity and the ability to understand and relate to the other person, thereby endowing the notion of compassion with more subtle and nuanced tones. The research has also uncovered the possible detrimental effects of compassion on the well-being and career prospects of academics and has questioned the legitimacy of displaying compassion towards students due to conflicting professional responsibilities and the power associated with them. Moreover, the research has discovered that a university setting identified with the culture of individualism, self-interest and competitiveness generates numerous tensions and obstacles to displaying and accepting compassion. The findings have also revealed that educational leadership and management both drive and damage workplace compassion. In addition, the phenomenon of false or artificial compassion and its detrimental effects in the workplace emerged from the research, representing another valuable contribution to the compassion debate which seems to

remain silent on this issue. Another prominent aspect of the research relates to the evidence it provides to support Zembylas' (2013) construct of critical compassion; arguably, no other empirical study in the context of UK higher education to date has drawn attention to the role of compassion in challenging privileged irresponsibility and in combating inequalities and social injustice.

The focus on the expressions of compassion at the organisational level of a university setting is another vital contribution of the research to knowledge. Through providing a wide range of examples of the type of behaviour and practices identified with workplace compassion in this context, this study has revealed the necessity for a mutual commitment between both the employer and the employees in the form of common practices and available resources. This is a new development in the literature on compassion in organisation studies that focuses mostly on the commitment of the workforce (for example, Aboul-Ela, 2017; Atkins and Parker, 2012; Banker and Bhal, 2018; Dutton and Workman, 2011; Dutton *et al.,* 2014; Frost, 1999; Kanov *et al.,* 2004; Kanov *et al.,* 2017; Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012; Lilius *et al.,* 2011). Also, the findings demonstrate a remarkable divergence and, on occasion, opposition in the perceptions and views of academics with regards to expressions of compassion. These reflect the divergent interests of different organisational roles, including different levels of concerns about organisational resources, which problematise expressions of compassion at both interpersonal and organisational levels. These findings are of significance and warrant further investigation. Finally, the study has offered a wide range of the examples of behaviour and practices regarded as expressions of compassion and generated suggestions on fostering compassion in a university setting. These outcomes have important practical implications and are presented in the following section.

6.6 Contribution to practice

As stated earlier in the thesis and highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, calls for more compassionate universities have been gaining strength (for example, Cordaro, 2020; Denney, 2020, 2021; Gilbert, 2018; Konstantinou and Miller, 2022; Maginess & MacKenzie, 2018; Waddington, 2016, 2018; Zembylas, 2017). How to cultivate compassion in the context of a university is one of the most important aspects of this study and is reflected in objective 6 of the research, namely, suggesting ways of implementing compassion in a university context. The summary of the participants' principal suggestions on fostering compassion at the organisational level are presented in Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 of the thesis. In combination with the study's main research findings (an overview of these is presented in Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 of the thesis), these

proposals form a significant contribution to practice for the case study university. These practical contributions drawn from the research findings have been divided into four main areas. These are addressed below and include integrating compassion into university structures and systems, facilitating compassionate educational leadership and management, promoting compassionate care towards staff and students and, finally, contributing to the local community and the wider society. Although similar research in other post-1992 universities in the UK might or might not generate corresponding outcomes, some or all of these proposals are, arguably, likely to be of relevance and practical significance to universities that aspire to be more compassionate places of work and study.

6.6.1 Integrating compassion into university structures and systems

These proposals relate, first of all, to determining and clarifying the meaning of compassion in a university setting and integrating it into organisational structures and systems. As demonstrated by the research outcomes, the views on moral values such as compassion are remarkably divergent and, therefore, their meaning needs to be negotiated, identified and clarified. The practical suggestions offered by the study's outcomes include the following:

- Provide a clear and comprehensive definition of compassion in the context of a modern university and determine what it means to be a compassionate university
- Articulate a specific aim demonstrating the balance between being compassionate and achieving a university's tangible objectives and ensure that relevant structures required to achieve the aim are in place
- Clarify how compassion shapes policies and practices within the university and identify the services and practices demonstrating compassionate care that are available to staff and students
- In appraisals, engage staff and their line managers in a discussion about expressions of compassion within the university, whether employees have opportunities (i.e. time and space) to express compassion, and in what ways the university could be more compassionate

It is important to emphasise here that these suggestions can also apply to other organisational values. Moreover, since many universities' mission statements and values 'reveal similar [to compassion] aspirations and moral focus' (Maginess & MacKenzie, 2018: 44), these institutions also can benefit from the listed above proposals.

6.6.2 Facilitating compassionate educational leadership and management

Another set of practical suggestions based on the research outcomes assists with facilitating compassionate and more democratic leadership and management. Arguably, the following proposals could be relevant and of use for other higher education institutions aspiring to be more democratic and compassionate organisations. They are as follows:

- Apply the principles of representative democracy when filling in management and senior management positions
- Apply a more democratic approach by rotating Heads of Schools, thus allowing developmental opportunities for others
- Hold management responsible for failing to manage a university as a business and for failing to manage people, and expect them to reduce their salaries or to resign in order to maintain their staff instead of forcing staff out of their jobs
- Ensure that academic leaders and managers are engaged in activities, such as classroom teaching, conducting research and writing academic papers
- When recruiting and appointing managers, assess candidates' emotional intelligence and compassion in order to filter out people who lack these qualities
- Provide appropriate training to develop compassion as a skill, especially for management

Although some of these proposals could be considered as somewhat radical, they arguably promote bridging the gap and divide between management and staff, thereby aiming to develop a healthier and more democratic environment within modern universities.

6.6.3 Compassionate care towards staff and students

Two other sets of proposals focus on facilitating compassionate care towards staff and students, therefore, are also a valuable contribution to practice because they provide specific practical solutions to fostering compassionate care at the organisational level. These specific resolutions can be achieved by means of modifying existing practices, policies, provision and attitudes, or by establishing new practices and attitudes. The proposals related to promoting compassionate care towards staff include specific suggestions on treating staff with trust and respect, aiding more compassionate approach to research and sabbatical opportunities and enhancing the social aspect of work allowing staff to connect and to build a happier working environment.

The suggestions aiming at facilitating compassionate care towards students comprise taking practical measures to develop students' awareness of moral values such as compassion, advancing student diversity and inclusion by means of providing options in the curriculum and in the assessment strategies, and allocating additional resources to strengthen student welfare provision and student experience.

6.6.4 Contributions to the local community and the wider society

The research findings revealed that making contributions to the local community and the wider society were also perceived as expressions of compassion, and several suggestions on how this can be achieved also provide a worthy contribution to practice. These proposals are as follows:

- Give voice to the groups that do not have sufficient voice in the society in general and in the sector in particular, such as women, ethnic minorities, BAME groups and LGBTQ groups
- Raise the status of the climate crisis across the university, allowing it to exercise its power and to improve lives in the local community
- Ensure more active community engagement and a better use of the university facilities and equipment by organizing a range of events and activities, such as, for example Christmas Carol concerts, a soup kitchen on Christmas Day and various community engagement projects

Finally, another practical although indirect contribution of the study could be achieved by publishing its findings in academic journals and presenting in relevant conferences.

6.7 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Whilst this research has successfully achieved the overall aims and objectives and made contributions to both knowledge and practice, it nevertheless has some limitations. First, by its very nature, an empirical qualitative study such as this is a comprehensive yet 'snapshot' piece of research. Thus, the findings are case specific and, therefore, not generalisable. It could be argued, however, that the notions of 'trustworthiness and authenticity' associated with constructivist qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 258) are of much greater value to this study than the traditional notion of generalisability ordinarily employed for assessing quantitative work. The choice of the case study institution was determined by the fact that compassion was formally introduced and promoted as one of the aspirational values within the university. As discussed in Chapter 5, the leadership's genuine intentions to foster compassion at the

organisational level and numerous compassion-related initiatives increase the suitability of the case study institution for this empirical study, which could be regarded as a strength. However, further research in other post-1992 institutions in the UK, perhaps in the form of a comparative study, is likely to provide a clearer picture about the overall importance attached to compassion in the sector, and therefore, might elicit findings of wider applicability.

The role of the researcher as an insider and the consequential challenge of minimising potential risks of subjectivity and bias can be regarded as another limitation of the research. It could be argued, however, that these aspects of research are unavoidable because the study's focus on respondents' perceptions of compassion in a specific context determined the choice of qualitative approaches, which emphasise sense-making and the role of the researcher as an interpreter of meanings of a variety of situations and actions of individuals in these situations as significant (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The research findings demonstrated great divergence in the participants' views, which point to several possible directions for future research on compassion in a university setting. These include the impact of gender differences and individuals' cultural background on their perceptions of workplace compassion, as well as the effects of the importance attached to organisational resources on expressions of compassion, which requires a more in-depth investigation of managers and senior managers' perspectives on workplace compassion. This could be supplemented with a documentary analysis of relevant policies and regulations. Finally, a useful suggestion for further research relates to one of the study's outcomes that highlights the need to explore and determine students' perceptions of the impressions and expressions of compassion in the same context of a modern university.

6.8 Final reflections

My DBA journey has been a mixture of a wide range of strong emotions, unforgettable experiences and, most of all, remarkable learning about myself and my values, about my profession and my colleagues, and about life and people in general. I started the journey with much excitement and apprehension but, at the same time, I was not entirely sure what to expect or if I would be able to achieve the final goal. It did not turn out to be a straightforward or smooth process. Following my father's death at the start of the taught stage of the programme, the deterioration in my mother's health caused grave concerns at times. This resulted in several unplanned emergency visits to Minsk, Belarus, where

she lives and, hence, it has been an internal struggle as well as a challenge in terms of finding time and strength to continue with the study.

Choosing compassion as the topic of the research did help with the struggle. I felt puzzled when I first saw compassion as one of the aspirational values of my university because I felt it was very personal, linked to an individual's religious beliefs and spirituality and, therefore, completely out of place in the context of a modern corporatized university in the UK. Also, it was introduced in 2018, the year when the sector was shaken by the death of Malcolm Anderson, a lecturer at Cardiff University Business School, who had been asked to mark 418 examination papers over a 20-day period and who left behind a note saying his workload had got to him (Krause, 2018). I felt it was somewhat cynical or even cruel to suggest that compassion should be part of our work environment without addressing the issue of academics' unbearable workloads because, in my view, it meant that in addition to coping with our own struggles, we were expected to spot any signs of stress in our colleagues and students and respond to them with compassion. These developments, in addition to the desire to understand what compassion meant to my colleagues and whether it indeed had a place in a neoliberal university, inspired me to start this research.

It has certainly been a journey of a great discovery. Learning about the culture of carelessness in higher education did shine a light on some of the decisions I have made in life and made me reflect on my priorities. I am extremely grateful to my research participants for both their happy stories of experiencing genuine compassion from their colleagues and line managers and for sharing the experiences that caused pain and suffering at work. Both types of the stories struck a chord with me and made me reflect on similar experiences. As highlighted by several participants, having those conversations was therapeutic and created a sense of unity that we as academics do not seem to be experiencing often enough.

At the start of the research, I felt uneasy with the emphasis on suffering made in the compassion literature in organisation studies. It seemed that the focus on suffering in the workplace normalises it and implies the divide between the sufferer and the observer. Having gone through the process that involved numerous challenges, angst, personal battles and self-doubt, I have experienced compassion that I would define now as an effortful response to human vulnerability that unites us. My DBA journey has highlighted that I have been privileged to have experienced compassion at different stages of the process, particularly from my supervisor. It is because of the compassion that I experienced as a student and as a colleague that I managed to complete the research project. Finishing this thesis has been the biggest achievement of my life.

I would like to close this with the Cherokee proverb used by Peter Frost, the founder of the Compassion Lab, a community of scholars focusing on compassion research:

> He [the grandfather] said to them [grandchildren], 'A fight is going on inside me… it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too.' They thought about it for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, 'Which wolf will win?' The old Cherokee simply replied, 'The one you feed' (Compassion Lab, 2013).

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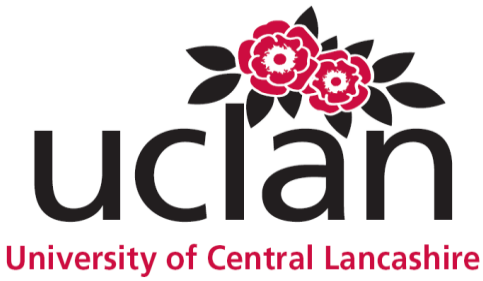
APPENDICES

Appendix i



Research Participant Information Sheet

Title of Research: "Impressions and expressions of compassion in the university workplace: An empirical analysis"

Researcher: Irina Alexa

Director of Studies: Prof Richard Sharpley

Course Leader: Dr Dorota Marsh

Dear Colleague,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study that is part of my DBA here at UCLan. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you do agree to take part, I would appreciate any feedback about the interview process.

The purpose of the study

My research project focuses on the concepts of compassion and workplace compassion (impressions), on the experiences of witnessing compassion in action (expressions) and on the impact of workplace compassion on academics in the UK. My study aims to identify the type of behaviour and practices associated with workplace compassion to determine if these are feasible and beneficial to academics, and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing them in a university context. The study has been reviewed by the relevant research ethics committee at the University of Central Lancashire.

The research project was triggered by my interest in the concept of compassion when it was introduced as one of UCLan's aspirational values in 2018. I feel that the commercial nature of UK universities seems to be at odds with the meaning of compassion, and the project seeks to investigate whether introducing and promoting compassion as an organisational value could result in a more compassionate university. Since there appears to be little clarity about the meaning of compassion in this context, my study aims to gain some insights into the notion by exploring academics' perceptions and experiences of compassion. Also, my project, as does any study carried out for the award of a Professional Doctorate, has to offer a real-world practical value to my organisation. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the study seeks to determine if workplace compassion is feasible and beneficial to academics, and, if so, to suggest ways of implementing compassionate practices in a university context.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited as an academic working in higher education or you may have been recommended to me by a colleague.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any time. Please see the section below on data storage for details about what happens to your data if you withdraw.

What will taking part involve for me?

Your participation in the study will involve an interview, conducted via Microsoft Teams, or over the phone (depending on your choice), which will last approximately 45 minutes, and will be scheduled at your preferred time and format. The focus of the interview would be around your understanding and experiences of compassion as an academic in the UK higher education in general and at UCLan in particular.

First, I will ask you to tell me what compassion and workplace compassion in a university setting mean to you as an academic. Second, I shall ask you to give examples of compassion you have come across as an academic. Third, I shall ask you if promoting compassion as UCLan's aspirational value has changed your experience as an academic and how you feel about being asked to give examples demonstrating compassion in the context of appraisal. Finally, I will ask you to tell me about the features of a more compassionate university and what needs to be done for UK universities to become more compassionate.

I would like to record our interview and I may take notes during our session. I will send you a copy of the transcript of the interview for verification and if there is anything in it which concerns you and which, on reflection, you would like to be excluded from the data, you can contact me to tell me this.

I am concerned to minimise any disruption to your working time so I will arrange interviews at a time and a place with which you are most comfortable. The data I gather will be used in my DBA thesis. You will not be identified in it, other than broad detail such as gender, job title and discipline. Anonymity and confidentiality are assured.

Data storage and security

If you tell me you wish to withdraw from taking part in this interview study and do so in the period up to 3 weeks after the date of our meeting, I will destroy any notes and recordings as soon as practical and your input will not feature in any part of the research. If you withdraw after that time, the data from our meetings may stay in the study.

All research data, i.e. consent forms, recordings of interviews, notes, other communications, will all be stored securely in UCLan's safe data storage facility, normally for 5 years. Data may also be downloaded and stored securely on my personal, password protected and encrypted laptop.

Any recordings of our meetings will be uploaded to my documents within 2 days of our meeting and then deleted from the recorder. I am the only person to use the digital recorder and when it is not in use it is kept in a locked cupboard.

You will be provided with anonymity and confidentiality. Your names will be coded, interview recordings and transcripts will be kept separately from the codes on a password protected computer. All data will be treated following the university guidelines and in line with GDPR.

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The University privacy

notice for research participants can be found on the attached link https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

What will I have to do?

If you are willing to take part, please sign the consent form below and return it to me. I will be in touch with you to arrange a suitable time to meet with you.

Also, please let me know if special communication needs arrangements need to be made for the interview, e.g. BSL interpreter.

What if I have any concerns?

If you have any concerns or complaints about this research, you can contact
Prof Richard Sharpley, LSBE, Greenbank Building, UCLAN, Preston PR2 2HE
Tel: 01772 894622

If you remain unhappy, or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with, then please contact the Research Governance Unit at OfficerForEthics@uclan.ac.uk.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

In taking part you will be assisting me enormously with my doctoral interview study and for that I am extremely grateful. You may find that taking part is an interesting and thought-provoking experience and it may contribute in a modest way to your own reflections on your professional workplace and life as an academic.

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you have any questions at all about the research, please do contact me.

My Name: Irina Alexa

Tel: 01772 896425

Email: IAlexa@uclan.ac.uk

Consent Form

Title of Project: "Impressions and expressions of compassion in the university workplace: An empirical analysis"

Name of Researcher: Irina Alexa

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated July 2020 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason (please see note on withdrawal above).	
3. I consent to the interview/session being audio-taped. (Please see note on data storage above).	
4. I agree to take part in the above study.	

If you have any concerns or complaints about this research you can contact:

Prof Richard Sharpley, LSBE, Greenbank Building, UCLAN, Preston PR2 2HE
Tel: 01772 894622

Name of Participant:

Date:

Preferred contact method and details:

Signature:

Appendix ii

Interviewees' Profiles: October 2020 – April 2021

Participant	Role	Gender	Age group	Length of service in case study uni (years)	Length of service in HE (years)	Contract: full-time or part-time	Contract: permanent or fixed-term
P2	SPH	female	35-44	5	5	part-time	fixed-term
P10	SPH	female	45-54	11	11	part-time	fixed-term
P12	AL	female	25-34	2	2	full-time	permanent
P18	AL	male	55-64	10	10	part-time	permanent
P13	L	female	35-44	13	13	full-time	permanent
P14	L	female	35-44	7	7	full-time	permanent
P4	L	male	35-44	10	10	full-time	permanent
P16	L	male	45-54	6	6	full-time	permanent
P1	SL	female	45-54	25	28	full-time	permanent
P7	SL	female	55-64	28	28	full-time	permanent
P9	SL	male	55-64	34	34	full-time	permanent
P3	SL	male	35-44	6	15	full-time	permanent
P15	SL	male	55-64	25	32	full-time	permanent
P17	PL	female	45-54	15	15	full-time	permanent
P6	PL	male	45-54	24	28	full-time	permanent
P20	R	female	45-54	6.5	28	full-time	permanent
P11	R	male	45-54	11	27	full-time	permanent
P21	Prof	female	45-54	9	21	full-time	permanent
P5	Prof	male	55-64	14	31	full-time	permanent
P8	DHoS	male	35-44	6	9	full-time	permanent
P19	DHoS	male	35-44	10	10	full-time	permanent
P22	HoS/Prof	female	55-64	18	18	full-time	permanent
Total 22		**11 females/ 11 males**	22-64	2-34	2-34	3 part-time	2 fixed-term

SPH	Staff Paid Hourly
AL	Associate Lecturers
L	Lecturer
SL	Senior Lecturers
PL	Principal Lecturer
R	Reader
Prof	Professor
DHoS	Deputy Heads of School
HoS	Head of School

Appendix iii

Main Questions and Prompts for Interviews

Main questions	Prompts
1. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself starting with your experience as an academic in UK HE?	How long have you worked as an academic in HE? How long have you worked at UCLan?
2. So what would you say if you were asked about the meaning of compassion?	What do you associate with compassion? Emotions/feelings? Words/language? Actions/behaviour? What kind of emotions do you identify with compassion? What kind of language? What kind of actions/behaviour? Do you think compassion is a skill, or a character trait, or both? Can people learn to be compassionate?
3. In terms of a university setting, what would you say compassion means to you as an academic?	What does workplace compassion mean in a university setting? What kind of work relationships are in your opinion compassionate relationships? (With colleagues? With managers? With students?) Do you as an academic benefit from compassion? If yes, how? Do you as an academic feel that compassion could be problematic? If yes, how?
4. Can you think of any examples of compassion you have come across as an academic?	Have you, as an academic, experienced compassion? Have you witnessed compassion experienced by somebody else? Do you feel academics, due to the nature of their roles are expected to be compassion givers? Have you come across any examples of academics as compassion receivers?

5. In 2018, compassion was introduced as one of UCLan's aspirational values. Would you say it has changed your experience as an academic in terms of how you behave or how others around you behave?	What are your thoughts about compassion as an organisational value? Have you noticed any evidence of compassion as an organisational value at UCLan since then? If yes, what is the evidence? (positive change? negative?) What does compassion at UCLan feel / look like? Whose responsibility is it to promote compassion? Do you feel you are expected to do something you were not expected to do before, or to stop doing something you were doing before? Do you feel that you are now in the position to expect others (colleagues, managers) to communicate/act/behave in a certain way? Have you noticed any changes in your relationships with colleagues/managers/students? Have you noticed any changes in how your colleagues/managers treat you?
6. In UCLan appraisal form, section 3, Feedback on Performance ('how' it was achieved), lists all 5 values including Compassion, and asks to provide examples of how you demonstrate these values. How do you feel about being asked to give examples of demonstrating compassion in the context of appraisal?	Do you feel comfortable/uncomfortable/awkward? Why? Do you feel this is appropriate? Why?/Why not? Do you find it easy to provide these examples? Do you find it easy to share these examples with your appraiser/line manager? Why?/Why not? Why do you think we are requested to give examples of demonstrating compassion? What is UCLan trying to achieve? Has it been achieved? Do you think this encourages staff/academics to be more compassionate? Do you take it seriously? Do you think your appraiser takes it seriously? What do you think is the effect of this request?

7. There have been concerns that recent developments in the UK higher education associated with marketisation negatively impacted UK universities, academics' experience and role, and some academics/researchers call for more compassionate universities. What kind of university do you think is a more compassionate university?	What do you think are the features of a compassionate university? Do you think organising events, such as Acts of Kindness, providing funding for Kindness Champion Awards for students and staff (Uclan in October 2018) are associated with a more compassionate university? Do you think free well-being workshops for students on stress management, managing anxiety and depression, confidence building, healthy relationships and a good night's sleep are associated with a more compassionate university? Do you think staff development training, such as workshops on compassion, suicide prevention and stress management training are associated with a more compassionate university? Do you think it is possible for UK universities as commercial organisations to be compassionate? If yes, how? If no, why not?
8. If you feel UK universities could become more compassionate, what do you think needs to happen?	Is there something academics could do to ensure universities are more compassionate? Is there something managers could do to ensure universities are more compassionate? Do you think specific compassion related policies/regulations/practices could be introduced to ensure compassion is present in a university? If yes, should these compassion related policies/regulations/practices be formally registered and added to staff's roles and responsibilities?
9. So is there anything that I haven't covered by my questions that you would like	

	to share with me in terms of your experiences of compassion as an academic in a university context? Is there anything that you would like to add?	

Appendix iv

Interview 6

IAQ1: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself as an academic? How long have you been working as an academic?

P6: I've been working as an academic for 28 years. 24 years at Xxxx, firstly, as a lecturer in Xxxxxxx, then senior lecturer in Xxxxxx and since 2004 as a principal lecturer of Xxxxxxx Xxxxxxxxx. And now I look after the Xxxxxxxxx Xxxxxxxx, the academic lead for Xxxxxxxx Xxxxxxxxx, which is a really interesting role because of the diversity of the of the different subjects represented.

IAQ2: As I mentioned in our email exchange I'm interested in academics' perceptions of compassion. What kind of meaning do they attach to the concept of compassion? And then I would also like to identify some kind of, you know, actions, behavior, practices that are associated with compassion, to see if it could be suggested that there are ways of implementing it in a University context. OK, so again, thank you very much for participating. So the first question then for me would be: if you were asked about the meaning of compassion in general, what would you say? What does compassion mean to you?

P6: I think for me compassion is about empathy. It's about understanding the situation of other people, and I think in our organization where we have so many different teams, I think compassion is a guiding principle to ensure that those teams operate and function as well as they possibly can. So empathy, understanding and a sense of inclusion as well actually for me, would be the three guiding principles for compassion.

IAQ2a: And is it something that you feel people could learn, to be compassionate, or is it something that we are born with? Is it a trait or is it a skill that could be developed?

P6: It's a really interesting one. I guess it is linked to personality. I suppose there is the school of thinking that says that everything can be learned, everything can be taught. But I think compassion, for me anyway, it's organic. It needs to come from the individual. Because otherwise it risks being a false compassion and I think compassion needs to be genuine for it to be meaningful. So I think it could be taught, but perhaps a better way of putting it is that this organic principle of compassion can be harnessed by an organization so it's there in the individual, but it just needs a conduit. It needs a vehicle to actually communicate that compassion to others.

IAQ3/4: Thank you very much for that. So moving on to the University context. So when you said it's empathy and, you know, how you express yourself and how you treat others. So is that how it's expressed? Is it the language that we use? Is it the actions? Is it the behavior and the feelings that we express somehow? How do we express compassion?

P6: I think perhaps a crucial component for me is listening. Because I have lots of conversations with colleagues, and I think the ability to listen to concerns, to fears, particularly in the current climate, I think, is really important because compassion is based on the ability to understand, and that in turn is based on a listening ethos. So I think listening for me is the foundation for compassion.

IAQ3a: Do you think we as academics benefit from compassion?

P6: I think we do because I'd like to think that this is a two-way street. If I am compassionate to you, I'd like to think that you would be compassionate to me, and so it goes on throughout the whole University. Xxxx value of compassion was an opportunity for the institution to get behind this value. And compassion is a positive idea. So I think that if we all buy into this idea and share, which is what compassion is also all about, then I think it would make people perhaps a little bit more understanding of one another, rather than perhaps imposing views on our colleagues. So listening and perhaps entertaining the possibility of looking at something from a different perspective, even if that perspective is not one we share, it just opens up our minds a little bit to seeing the world differently. And I think as a modern linguist, that's really important.

IAQ3b: Do you think it could be problematic? You mentioned that you know it has to be genuine, natural. Could it be a little bit problematic because it's quite sensitive, isn't it?

P6: It is. I think I used the phrase earlier “a false compassion” which is like giving lip service to this idea of caring.

But sometimes actions speak louder than words, and I think for a compassionate organization to be truly compassionate, words aren't good enough. I think it needs to be driven by evidence, driven by action. Otherwise it just becomes a nice, cozy, soft, warm emotion rather than something that could potentially change organizations for the better.

IAQ4: Can you think of any examples of compassion that you have come across, maybe yourself as a compassion receiver, or a compassion giver? Maybe somebody else in the University setting?

P6: I think teamwork for me is really key here because there have been countless examples where some of my immediate colleagues have helped me out, perhaps providing some teaching cover when I'm not able to teach myself for whatever reason, and then that is reciprocated. So having really good colleagues to draw on, I think is a good example of being compassionate to one another in our work environment.

IAQ4a: Do you think that because of the nature of our role as academics, there's almost like an expectation that we should be compassionate.

P6: I think perhaps increasingly in recent years, if we think about the student experience, for instance, and the student voice.

Now we've always been compassionate listening to students, but these pieces of terminology, such as the student voice have recently come to the fore in ways that even, say, 5 or 10 years ago wasn't the case. And I think that in turn, just encourage academic members of the staff to be more compassionate to listen, perhaps more to students than perhaps was the case as I say 5 or 10 years ago.

IAQ5: In 2018 it was introduced as one of our aspirational values at Xxxxx. Would you say that it has changed your experience as an academic in terms of how you behave yourself? Or maybe how others around you behave?

P6: I'd like to think that I was a compassionate person before the Xxxxx value came along.

Because although I do subscribe to the Xxxxx values, I do remember when they were first brought here. It's rather like motherhood and apple pie. Well, everybody loves these things, which I do understand. Whether or not it's changed me - I suppose that's for others to determine, but I would like to think that I've always been able to listen to my colleagues when they come to talk to me.

Because that's something I enjoy doing. I like the communicative side of the job. I'm trying to problem-solve and find people solutions to problems.

I've been doing a lot of mentoring work as well, which also brings in the principle of compassion.

So although I'd like to think as I say, I was compassionate before the value appeared in 2018, it's perhaps just brought it into a sharper focus for me and has provided that extra impetus when I'm having conversations with colleagues appraisals, for instance, and workflow discussions.

So when a person is saying, 'Oh, I'm doing all of this teaching', I think, 'Look at it from that person's point of view rather than from my point of view, as the academic lead'. Yeah, I've certainly been putting that sort of thing into practice in recent times.

IAQ5a: So it's already a positive thing then, isn't it?

P6: I think so and sometimes we don't use the word compassion because people are naturally able to have these sorts of conversations where understanding, mutual respect are our guiding principles, but to have something like a UCLan value to give extra weight and impetus to those natural conversations is a good thing.

IAQ6: You mentioned appraisals, and I also noticed that in UCLan's appraisal form in Section 3, which is feedback on performance, those five values are listed and we as appraisees are asked to provide examples of how we demonstrate these values. How do you feel about it? So as an appraiser how do you feel about asking to give examples of demonstrating compassion in the context of appraisal?

P6: I think as an appraiser it's really important that I ask that question because if we think about it, the University is a sum of its different parts. And if we're going to have

compassion as a guiding principle throughout the whole institution, we do need to gather evidence at the local school level, at the local subject level, at the local course level how compassion manifests itself in the local environment.

And I also think it's quite cathartic because the appraisal is a confidential event and modesty should have no place in an appraisal, so from the appraisee's perspective, it's really heartening and very, very reassuring to hear of different examples that are actually discussed during the appraisal situation in terms of compassion.

And I have to say a lot of it for me is linked with another of the Xxxxx values, which is teamwork and respect. They're all very much interlinked, and it's very, very interesting where in an appraisal people are saying, well, yes, I'm compassionate to my students and compassionate to my team members and it's all reciprocated as well. It means that the environment is a much more positive environment to work in, I think.

IAQ6a: What do you think Xxxx is trying to achieve by asking to provide examples of demonstrating compassion?

P6: I guess they're trying, as it were, to humanize business outfits because in higher education today it's very, very easy just to fall back on those 1980s business principles, you know, the ruthlessness of business. And I think the business is only as strong and as good as the people who work within it. And nowhere is that truer than here at the University. So I think by having compassion as a guiding principle, it does provide this desire to try to make the University more inclusive, more humane rather than just a business focused institution.

I would say though that Xxxx values, although they are still there, they have been airbrushed out of the institution and I find that unfortunate. One management team of the University comes in -they introduce the values, including compassion. Another University management comes in - they don't exactly abandon the values, but they don't proactively promote them. And I think that's quite telling in terms of managerial styles, if you like. But I think the compassionate approach is perhaps the one that can lead to greater productivity in the long run because we feel valued, we feel motivated, because our line managers understand, they listen rather than just expect things to be done, come what may.

IAQ6b: When you were appraising academics, did they find it easy to provide examples of being compassionate?

P6: Not always. But as I was saying earlier, I think one of the issues is that people feel almost timid, shy to admit that they have been compassionate to others. That might tell us something about human nature, I don't know. So it wasn't so much that they found it difficult to come up with examples. They found it more challenging to admit to this very positive notion of compassion.

IAQ7: My next question relates to the context of higher education in the UK. Recent developments that are associated with marketization and consumerism are often

highlighted and many academics and researchers express their concerns about the negative effects of these developments on academics' roles and their experience. So they call for more compassionate universities. In this context of universities as commercial organizations, do you feel that it is possible for universities to be compassionate?

P6: I'd like to think that it's possible for universities to be compassionate because I just go back to that point I was referring to earlier - that the workforce needs to feel valued, respected, for it to function well. And the drive towards marketization in higher education does risk upsetting that a little bit. So if we had compassion at the heart of the ethos of higher education, it would mean that the workforce is more motivated, more productive rather than having to meet deadlines, which is as far removed from compassion as perhaps can be imagined. So I think an understanding approach… I know times are difficult, times are very challenging at the moment. But compassion has been in human nature since human beings were invented as it were, and I think that the principle of compassion should find its rightful place in terms of determining the ethos of an institution like Xxxxx.

IAQ7a: I'm particularly interested in seeing how compassion could work at the institutional level. And that's exactly where there is a conflict between these very target driven commercial organizations run like businesses and compassion. How can we feel that we are respected? Feel that we are listened to? Feel that we are valued?

P6: I think perhaps providing opportunities from that senior management level to listen to what is going on on the ground. So a form of consultation if you like, I think is really important because if the University management is perceived as very remote, very distant, there will be no empathy, no understanding either between people on the ground and the management, and the other way round as well. So I think there should perhaps be opportunities for the University management to have more opportunities to hear what is actually going on in terms of schools, their concerns. And that would then be the gateway to perhaps reestablishing the Xxxxx value of compassion which is there, but it's in dormant mode it seems at the moment, and that's quite depressing. But it's also dangerous as well because people who work very hard sometimes just need to push back a little bit and say, "Hang on a minute. Please listen to me, things aren't going as well as I want them to go". So a listening ear I think is really important and that can only really happen if the management provide those vehicles, those conduits for that listening exercise to happen.

IAQ7b: When compassion was first introduced in 2018, we had events such as Acts of Kindness, funding for Kindness Champion Awards for students and staff. Do you think these kind of events are associated with a more compassionate University?

P6: I think they're fantastic events. And it just means the world to the recipient to actually be nominated for one of these accolades. And it has a trickle effect so that a particular person, you know, dispensing the act of kindness is actually feeling good themselves, but they are also responsible for making the recipient feel good about themselves as well. So I think it doesn't take very much to make a lot of things happen when we come to talk about compassion.

IAQ7c: Do you think provision such as free well-being workshops for students, stress management, managing anxiety training or workshops, confidence building is associated with compassion towards students?

P6: I think they are because it's taking the approach: we understand the challenges that say the student body is facing. And here is our contribution to try to make things a little bit better. And then from the staffing perspective, I mean over the past two years, there's been those winter star awards coming on stream and that's a very feel-good thing to do.

And when in our school we were voted by students as school of the year, that made people feel very, very valued.

Because the students this time were being compassionate to the staff, and I think that sent some really positive waves across the whole school.

So I think there are a number of these initiatives that you can do and do very well in the spirit of compassion.

IAQ7d: Do you think events for staff, such as workshops on compassion, then we had invitations to suicide prevention and stress management training. Do you think these events are associated with becoming a more compassionate University?

P6: I think yes, they are, because all of these are all about understanding the various challenges that go on in life and students sometimes have collective challenges, but sometimes they are very individual challenges.

So I think all of those things you've just listed would fall under the umbrella of compassion because it's understanding the perspective of the other person - in this case, the student.

IAQ8: How do you think universities can become more compassionate in the climate of marketization, targets, financial targets, cuts in funding, or targets to increase profits. So how do you balance these? On the one hand, academics are told their time and my effort are valued. But when workloads are growing, especially now, with teaching online everything takes much, much longer but is not reflected in the workload. So how do you balance this?

P6: It's a tricky one. I mean in terms of workload discussions, they are precisely that - they're discussions, they're negotiations. So as a school, what we've tried to do in order to demonstrate compassion in this instance, is again to listen, and then to make amendments. Just as an example, wherever possible, there's been headroom left on workloads just to sort of take into consideration the fact that this year, because of the transition between face-to-face and online requires more preparation time. That headroom could be 100 - 150 hours and is perfectly acceptable, whereas perhaps in the past there was a requirement to hit the 1581 hours as a full-time member of staff. So I think that's just a movement on the part of the school to try to understand the

very, very real challenges that academic members of staff are facing. But also that the workload model is you know it, it's a University device, but it's a starting point for discussions. So if a colleague, for instance, is delivering a new module, we could look at a 1.5 uplift for preparation time to reflect the fact that this is a new module that the colleague is delivering for the first time. That's compassion in practice as well, I would suggest.

IAQ8a: Is there anything maybe, is there something that we, academics, could do to ensure that universities are more compassionate in addition to what we are already doing?

P6: What I think in our school - because we're nice people - we are quite compassionate as individuals and I think that that matters so much. But perhaps, and it's difficult at the moment because of the COVID-19, but to actually have opportunities to socialize with colleagues; so we don't just see one another as work colleagues, but you know, we spend a lot of time with our various team members.

And just getting to know our colleagues, we've got lots of new members of staff joining us and we need to get them into the family of academic members of staff as well.

So I think for me, it's organic. I think it needs to start from ourselves and this sort of ethos of wanting to genuinely support and help one another and then hopefully that can be fed up the food chain by a line manager and so on. To try to provide a counterforce to this marketisation of higher education, because targets erode compassion. They erode good faith so quickly. So I think for me it starts with us. If you like, we have the power to start something here and to reignite the value of compassion, which as I said, sadly has disappeared from posters around campus. It is still on job descriptions, however, which is good to hear so that new members of staff joining the University know what the UCLan values are, and compassion is a key one there.

IAQ8b: So maybe we could remind the senior management about those values when decisions are made?

P6: Absolutely. I think we should all be doing that because the Xxxxx values are still here. The current management don't seem that keen on promoting these values, which again is back to us. We have that responsibility to all employees of the University to make sure that these values are promoted institution-wide.

IAQ8c: Do you think maybe some specific compassion related policies or practices could be introduced to make universities more compassionate?

P6: I think we've already got some of those. I mean, for instance, there is compassionate leave, and that's really, really important special leave.

And I think line managers are human beings as well, and they know that life happens and I think to have that open and honest conversation with line managers is really important. And that's something that at Xxxxx we do really well.

And then on workload again, we have a set number of hours for what's called contingency, sometimes used for cover. So that if a member of staff is sick, he or she isn't expected to make up that time when they return to full health because we can fill in for our colleagues. So there are little pockets of examples that we can highlight where as an institution, compassion is part of the embroidery of the University.

IAQ9: I have asked all my questions that I've planned to ask. Thank you very much for answering them. Is there anything that I haven't covered by the questions and you would like to add? Or to share with me in terms of your experiences of compassion?

P6: I mean what I would say, Irina, I think it's really timely that your doctoral research focuses on compassion at a time where we all need compassion, because of external circumstances. Sometimes we have no control over those external circumstances, but we can actually model our response and far from moving towards this as I was saying only this ruthless 1980s type business environment, where compassion wasn't really an issue at all, I do think in order to survive in the longer term, we do need to look after the workforce. And compassion is the vehicle or one of the vehicles to enable that to happen, so I think. Thank you for shining a light on this really important topic.

IA: Thank you, thank you very much. That's been very, very useful. So much interesting information. That's absolutely wonderful. Thank you so much, Xxxxx! I'm going to switch off all my recording devices now.