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Why aren't we trusting one another? An autoethnography about third space leadership

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Abstract

The emergence of blended professionals in higher education who encompass roles such as academic, teaching-focused, learning design, academic development, and professional staff has led to a growing presence of third spaces where traditional boundaries between roles are blurred. These spaces require novel approaches to collaboration, leadership, and role management. This article explores the author's self-study reflections via autoethnography as a now senior leader, looking back on their experiences as an early career third space academic at an Australian university. Employing a retrospective autoethnography, the study delves into the challenges and opportunities of managing a diverse team of third space professionals for the first time. The author's lived experience highlights strategies for building trust, clarifying roles, and improving communication among blended professionals operating in third spaces. Key findings identify some of the critical leadership requirements needed in third spaces, including trust-building, understanding of roles, resource and time management, effective communication, and recognition of individual and collective contributions. This study provides valuable insights into navigating third space leadership and offers guidance to enhance team dynamics in these increasingly prevalent roles.

Keywords: third spaces; teaching-focused academics; academic developers; higher education leadership; autoethnography.

Introduction

This article is intended for higher education leaders, academic developers, and professionals involved in third spaces, aiming to deepen their understanding of leadership

in blended professional contexts. The study examines the author's reflections as a senior leader looking back on their early career as a third space academic at an Australian university. By undertaking a retrospective autoethnography, the research focuses on an early career academic's teacher-focused viewpoint during their transition into a third space leadership role. The purpose of this study is to explore how early experiences in third spaces can inform better support and advocacy for teams working within blended professional environments.

The findings reveal the challenges and strategies involved in trust-building, clarifying roles, managing resources, and fostering effective communication among third space professionals. In theory, the results highlight the importance of developing leadership requirements specific to third spaces, such as understanding the dynamics of blended roles and the necessity of creating cohesive and collaborative team environments. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for leaders on how to build trust and enhance team effectiveness in third space settings. The key benefit for readers is gaining a nuanced understanding of the approaches needed to support third space professionals effectively.

It is important to note that this research underscores that more work is needed to explore diverse early career perspectives in third spaces to fully capture the complexities of these roles and refine support strategies. Thus, this autoethnography aims to address a gap in the current literature, which often overlooks early career viewpoints while emphasising the potential value of self-study retrospective reflection and trust-building as a cornerstone for successful third space leadership.

The rise of third spaces: blended professionals

The autoethnography presented in this article captures the author's experiences as an early career academic stepping into a third space leadership role for the first time at an Australian university. Now a senior leader, the author reflects on these early experiences to explore leadership effectiveness in third spaces, concluding with recommendations to guide future practice.

To help contextualise the study, the term 'third space blended professional' is described as individuals with mixed backgrounds and roles that blur the lines between academic and professional domains (Whitchurch, 2008). These blended professionals navigate emergent territories that combine elements of teaching, research, and professional activities, leading to new professional identities and collaborative dynamics.

Third spaces are important because blended professionals are needed to help meet team workloads efficiently, address complex managerial demands, fulfil internal and external quality requirements, and streamline administrative tasks (Maguire, 2002; Larsen et al., 2020). The massification of higher education (Gleeson, 2001; Colley et al., 2003) and the shift towards remote working accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. delta wave) has also increased the reliance on third space teamwork (Livingston and Ling, 2022; Hart et al., 2023). Additionally, technological advancements in curriculum design and delivery contribute to the emergence of blended professionals, aligning the roles with institutional, student, and industry demands, such as providing quality work-integrated learning to large student cohort numbers across disciplines.

Despite the advantages of third space roles, significant challenges exist, particularly the lack of trust between academic and professional staff, which leads to misunderstandings and hampers collaborative efforts (White et al., 2021). As noted by several scholars, trust is crucial for fostering innovative risk-taking, openness, and progress. Leaders in third spaces, therefore, must be supported to invest time in building trust among team members, promoting mutual trustworthiness across diverse roles and expertise areas (Spitzner and Meixner, 2021; Magno et al., 2022). Trust-building enables open and honest conversations, supporting institutional innovation in teaching methods (Simon and Pleschová, 2021).

Building trust, however, requires not only time but skills and deliberate effort, particularly in third spaces where team members often lack choice over their collaborators. By intentionally fostering trust, third space leaders can encourage team members to share their challenges and uncertainties without fear of judgement (Simon and Pleschová, 2021). Ultimately, enhancing trust within third space teams minimises distrust, which can otherwise lead to avoidance of interactions and a lack of connectedness (Worthington and Hodgson, 2005; Roxå and Mårtensson, 2009).

Cultivating trust in third spaces involves recognising the individual and collective work of blended professionals, supporting their career development, and legitimising their contributions (Maguire, 2002; Colley et al., 2003; Larsen et al., 2020; Simon and Pleschová, 2021; Livingston and Ling, 2022). Given the increasing reliance on technology, limited resources, and continued massification of higher education, understanding the dynamics of distrustful relationships in third spaces is more crucial than ever.

To assist with this call to action, this paper focuses on identifying some key leadership approaches necessary to foster successful third space environments, thereby advancing learning and teaching in higher education. This is achieved by the author reflecting on their previous third space leadership experience. The findings demonstrate the importance of continual reflection to support and advocate for third space teams (Stocks and Trevitt, 2016; Simon and Pleschová, 2021). In conclusion, the research addresses a critical gap in existing literature, which often neglects early career perspectives, and underscores the potential value of trust-building in third spaces.

Third space leadership

To broaden the understanding around what a third space is and is not, and what diverse types of responsibility constitutes third space leadership, it is important to consider what a first and second space is. Barton et al. (2014) explain that first spaces are where individual staff with teaching responsibilities routinely structure and action teaching and learning job requirements throughout the day. For example, designing and delivering content and marking assessment tasks. Whereas learning designers and academic developers, for instance, might support operations that lead to the delivery of a course, such as technological and learning management platform innovations.

Second spaces are where those in leadership roles (i.e. individuals and teams) undertake activities associated with higher stake teaching and learning actions, such as curriculum accreditation requirements and strategic intentions (Barton et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2023). It is, therefore, in the overlap between these two spaces that third spaces can emerge (Wilson et al., 2023), resulting in staff challenging the status quo, purposely blurring roles and responsibilities as blended professionals.

Consequently, third space roles articulated in this study are viewed in addition and separate to academics undertaking a required service role, and thus separate from engagement requirements as part of performance. Thereby, the philosophy, practice, and impact of third space operations and the work that is undertaken within these spaces resides in a new discourse as well as being an expanding field of practice and research (March et al., 2022; Hains-Wesson and Rahman, 2023; McKay and Robson, 2023).

However, due to its relative newness as a field of practice and research, it has minimal mention around which leadership skills are utmost as well as the appropriate support mechanisms most needed for blended professionals' career trajectory pathways, especially for early career staff members. Consequently, third space members' roles and activities do not belong to clear parameters and structures that are commonly applied to tenure and non-tenure academic positions. Instead, the sharing of teaching and learning processes, responsibilities, and outcomes, including accolades, while purposely blurring roles and creating boundaryless entities, continues to occur (Hart et al., 2023) with modest support mechanisms in career development.

On a closer review of the literature, there appears to be less mention of third space members' lived encounters (Whitchurch and Gordon, 2010a; 2010b; Whitchurch et al. 2009), and in the domain of third space leaders' experiences (Conway and Dobson, 2003; Whitchurch, 2008; Graham, 2012a; 2012b; Veles and Carter, 2016; Smith et al., 2021). There is also no one proven leadership approach (Whitchurch, 2008; 2009a; 2009b; Whitchurch and Gordon, 2010a; 2010b). Rather, the literature highlights administration staffs' experiences of third space to increase self-efficacy and to use case studies to help eliminate binary separation and role distinction between professional and academic roles (Colley et al., 2003; Whitchurch, 2012; Veles and Carter, 2016; Veles et al., 2019; Livingston and Ling, 2022). Further, the argument around the necessity of diverse skills sets and qualifications is made (Veles and Carter, 2016; Smith et al., 2021) as well as a lack of formal acknowledgement for such roles (Whitchurch, 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2012; Conway, 2013; Smith et al., 2021).

Finally, there is less notable research on the serial distrust and academic avoidance of such spaces (McKay and Robson, 2023). Without further study in this area, blended professionals will continue to be viewed as less equal to other university roles (Wilson et al., 2023), and staff will continue to avoid such spaces. With this in mind, the following

research question was posed to help steer the study, which is: *what are some of the third space leadership approaches most required to effectively support third space members to build trust and trustworthiness?*

In the following section, the author presents the methodology and methods before articulating their observations as an early career academic leader working in a third space for the first time. This is achieved through a retrospective autoethnographic account, which includes narrating the experience in the first person.

Methodology

A theoretical-based reflective practice framework was chosen to embrace both practical experience with the linking of theories to help understand the phenomenon under scrutiny. It is a tested framework that has been used to evaluate educational principles and standards, which can assist to elicit implications for future practice (Harvey et al., 2016). Further, to purposely interconnect both the practice of action and to understand its implications, Bain et al. (1999) five phased approach is preferred. By introducing a well-tested theoretical-inspired 5Rs framework, the key lived experiences, observations, thoughts, and feelings are used to help understand more deeply the decisions an academic might make, and why, when leading third spaces for the first time.

For instance, using such a reflective framework enables the author to focus on personal understandings and those of their colleagues, including emotional incidents, interactions, and experiences that occur during the lived experience period. Lastly, by routinely documenting reactions to each incident that occurred, eliciting personal emotional and intellectual meanings to the events and as the author recalled them, the theorising of experience moves from reflection to consider both positive and negative aspects to influence future practice (Pithouse-Morgan, 2022).

Methods

Retrospective autoethnography is a proven and progressive method that assists to expose professional culture and practice through self-reflection (Herrmann, 2017; Wilkinson,

2020). It can be viewed as a type of qualitative self-study that contributes to self-reflective research (Enferad et al., 2022). Thereby, the autoethnography presented in this study purposely centres on the 'I' story about the author's third space experiences, incorporating self-reflection to understand and improve third space leadership awareness through the lens of trust and trustworthiness. To achieve this, data were collected from self-reflective journal entries as well as observational notes based on talking and leading others when undertaking third space work. The monthly self-reflective journal entries occurred over a 12-month period. The entries were between 1,000 and 2,000 words each, with each journal entry being systematically framed by answering the 5Rs prompts (Bain et al., 1999) which were: (i) report: what the situation was; (ii) response: what the emotional response to the situation was; (iii) reasoning: what was the understanding of the incident; (iv) relate: how the incident related to other situations; and (v) reconstruct: how will future practice be improved.

The third space context – the I narrative

My first experience of leading a third space was when I was an early career academic teacher-focused staff member who was fulfilling a teaching, research, and service allocation at an Australian-based university. This type of role is typical in Australian universities and is often defined in the literature as a teaching-focused academic (TFA) within the academic development (AD) community (Huber, 2005). A key outcome of the role was to foster learning with, from, and between academic teachers, researchers, and TFAs and ADs within an Australian university context (Godbold et al., 2022). Therefore, it is through this lens that I share my story, the lessons learnt, and the key third space leadership approaches I discover to help create and maintain trust.

However, prior to leading the third space team to facilitate the university-wide leadership request, I did not favour occupying a borderless role with an unrestricted approach to my career pathway nor fully understood the opportunity I inherited. Instead, I favoured a well-defined leadership role and to follow a proven academic pathway as a TFA, which included teaching, research, and service allocations, because that was what I had observed and noted as being the status quo.

In terms of the third space task, I was invited to co-develop a university-wide, large scale, paid placement programme across disciplines and from scratch, where administrators, academics, academic teacher-focused staff, learning designers, and developers worked together as blended professionals. We worked together to co-create and co-deliver a yearlong placement programme as part of a professional undergraduate degree, occurring in students' second year of study.

The third space work was long term, and it was not a one-off project, resulting in recruitment and team management requirements. The tasks included content design, co-creation of assessments, team-delivery, and evaluation for four separate units of study to meet diverse disciplinary cohort needs. Further, the third space responsibilities included programme and process construction, assessment design, delivery and evaluation, industry partnership arrangements, governance, and policy adherence.

Results

Report: what was the situation?

I was invited to lead a university-wide leadership endorsed third space team to co-implement an interdisciplinary, compulsory, paid placement degree programme from scratch. This included creating a safe, trusting, and creative space to bring ideas, thoughts, and opinions together, collectively, while taking managed risks via inclusive practices to meet set milestones. A challenging task to achieve, and quickly, especially considering the higher education sector has moved towards the notion of trust as being 'increasingly replaced by the monitoring of performance… which are not conducive to risk-taking' (Stocks and Trevitt, 2016, p.219).

To effectively oversee the design, development, delivery, and evaluation of the new placement programme, I therefore needed to be cognitively aware of the need to 'establish both credibility and trust' with my fellow third space dwellers (Stocks and Trevitt, 2016, p.219). I hastily realised that building trust and maintaining it required time and effort, which I did not always have due to competing work deadlines for research, teaching, and service obligations. Further, the third space participants ranged from early to mid-career blended professionals who also had competing work deadlines and work-life balance challenges.

For instance, I endeavoured to get to know each member of the team personally and professionally by asking questions and being authentically curious. As suggested by scholars, when team members trust each other, they are more likely to communicate openly and collaborate effectively. Creating such trusting environments reflects a commitment to others' values and sense of self-worth (Martins and Baptista Nunes, 2016). Despite these efforts, I was not always successful.

I believe this was due to not formally being trained to lead a third space team prior to my experience. Consequently, I resorted to previous project success where I organised team members to meet regularly, using in-person and/or online meetings to distribute tasks and jointly with members. However, as the literature suggests, issues often arise due to diverse values, opinions, and methods (James, 2014):

> Our meetings are interesting places for robust discussions that sometimes get quite heated. I tend to take on a lot of the curriculum design work as others just don't volunteer. Is this because others are just not interested or lack the skills? Organising workload collectively is very stressful too and it can take a lot of our meeting time up without much progress. I'm always feeling rushed to meet deadlines (Reflective Journal Entry, example #1).

My reflection here is marked by a sense of frustration and disappointment, stemming from an initial perception that my colleagues were not as engaged or initiative-taking in curriculum design and workload distribution as I was. This emotional response is also influenced by the high-pressure environment and tight deadlines I faced, which exacerbate my feelings of isolation and being overburdened by the project's goals. The robust discussions in our meetings, while heated, indicated a space where ideas were vigorously debated, suggesting that my colleagues were not as disinterested as I first thought. Rather, they had different approaches and priorities to the work needing to be undertaken. The stress of organising workload collectively, although time-consuming, reflects an attempt at democratic decision-making, even if it was not always efficient. In hindsight, my colleagues' reluctance to volunteer for tasks may not have been due to a lack of interest but rather a need for clear direction or a more equitable distribution of responsibilities, which is noted as a key element for third space success (Conway, 2013).

Response: what my emotional response to the situation was?

I felt confident working in a third space, but I had a sense of discomfort in asking questions and nudging the conversation into uncomfortable terrain. Subsequently, I felt isolated and alien in my thinking compared to other participants. This is known in the literature as the need 'to re-define their professionalism in terms of their underlying commitments and purposes', and to do this with others (Nixon et al., 2001, p.227). Despite my confident–discomfort, I endeavoured to create a trusting environment by enquiring how we might ensure consistency throughout the assessment tasks via co-curriculum design practice and as a blended professional team. Due to minimal engagement to share the assessment design load, it was at this time that I began to set aside some time during our regular meetings to purposely create a team-based environment that included the sharing of challenges and opportunities, increasing trust between members (Dainty and Kakabadse, 1992).

Thus, my discomfort was stemming from several personal work concerns, such as a lack of confidence to have difficult conversations while endeavouring to manage competing workload commitments, including the nudging of third space team members to achieve what was necessary and within a short time. I, therefore, needed to turn around my pre-conceived assumptions, which was influenced by a lack of understanding towards members' personal and/or professional concerns and time constraints.

This insight is an interesting one, because the literature states that those who observe third spaces often view blended professionals as expressing an elevated level of respect and collegiality towards each other's intellectual and professional contributions (Kuo, 2009). Whereas Clark (1986) and others (Jones et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2014; Livingston and Ling, 2022) note that different commitments and function-value will often come to the surface with diverse space entities fostering separate and distinct cultures, which can also negatively impact relationships:

> Don't they know, if I don't research, I don't get promoted. It takes time to do research and to do it well. I must collaborate with others too, and present findings at conferences and to peers, collect data, hire research assistants and the list goes on. As soon as I speak about needing to juggle different commitments, their eyes glaze over, and I've lost the will to live (Reflective Journal Entry, example #2).

This reflective journal entry encapsulates the tension between the demands of an academic's research expectations and the perceived lack of understanding from non-

academic colleagues. This frustration was then expressed through my perceptions of team members' lack of understanding, which may not have been true. The mention of presenting findings, collecting data, and managing my research assistants further highlights the multifaceted nature of academic research, which is often underestimated in third spaces. Whereas the emotional response to colleagues' apparent indifference appears palpable. The phrase 'their eyes glaze over' conveys a sense of dismissal or disinterest from colleagues when discussing the need to balance various commitments. This apparent lack of empathy and/or support contributed to my feeling of isolation and suggests that others' reactions to my distress was uncaring, which is further captured in the dramatic expression: 'I've lost the will to live'.

This type of hyperbole underscores my frustration, which impacted how I worked with others in the third space. Finally, this journal entry underlines the importance of empathy, communication, and mutual understanding when navigating the complex landscape of third space work. Third spaces are places and spaces that require a formal process to successfully advocate trust and recognition of members' diverse struggles (Whitchurch, 2023) that are also time sensitive.

Reasoning: what my understanding of the incident was?

Due to the project's tight deadline and other competing obligations, we had minimal time to reflect on practice, share stories, and listen to one another – about fears, concerns, or ideas to improve the process. By not providing a trusting space to discuss, share, and learn from one another, and outside traditional organisational structures (Veles and Carter, 2016), it became difficult to voice diverse opinions and viewpoints. In turn, it discouraged a spirit of cooperation and collaboration (Kuo, 2009).

For instance, I felt that my research and teaching obligations were not being prioritised in terms of the third space team's availability to meet deadlines, or how my skills could be best utilised. I, therefore, incorrectly presumed that the third space participants were not interested in my research responsibilities, advancement priorities, or obligations. On the other hand, I was not aware of team members' responsibilities or their concerns around the university's reputation, assuming '…most academic staff examine issues from a disciplinary or departmental view and, therefore, pay less attention to the university's diverse directions' (Kuo, 2009, p.48):

> They [third space members] seem quite surprised that I can put two sentences together and speak to strategy, the future of higher education, how their input is important in curriculum design and even delivery when conducted via a shared understanding, philosophy, and practice. I can just about hear the gasps - as I'm finally allowed to contribute to systems and administration operations. I just assumed that this was normal speak, apparently not! (Reflective Journal Entry #3).

In this journal entry, I highlight a self-focused approach to the work, a lack of understanding towards team members' fears and stresses to multiple deadlines, which prevented us from completing the project collectively, creating moments of failure and untrustworthiness between members. I then felt vindicated to hide from the situation, hoping it would fix itself. Whereas, instead, I could have chosen to expose strengths and weaknesses through the unravelling of my failure moments, accepting challenges as part of the overall learning journey. Upon further reflection, I could have articulated my preferences on how I best work and to ask the same of my colleagues. Instead, I expected my colleagues to automatically understand my personal stance, philosophy of practice, and competing commitments because we all worked for the same organisation.

Relate: how the incident related to other situations?

The literature has noted that 'where participants' expectations and prior experiences are challenged, a greater level of trust… is needed in order to have the confidence to abandon tried and tested approaches in favour of something new' (Stocks and Trevitt, 2016, p.222). In terms of my lived experiences, the placement programme project needed to meet diverse disciplinary learning with appropriate industry partner supervision at scale. Thus, it became exceptionally difficult to overcome all the operational, learning, relational, and technological challenges amongst the third space team who all came from different disciplinary and expertise lenses:

> …everyone has a lot to say when it comes to the curriculum content that will sit in the learning management system. Interestingly, when it comes to the assessments everyone is a bit quieter. Really? Why so? Maybe because no one wants to own the responsibility for such a difficult thing to balance for students and the university's reputation? (Reflective Journal Entry, example #4).

The above journal entry features a noticeable discrepancy. While discussions about curriculum content are lively, conversations about assessments are markedly subdued. This observation prompts a critical inquiry into the underlying reasons for this behaviour,

suggesting that the reluctance to engage with assessments might be linked to the responsibility and complexity associated with balancing student needs and the university's reputation.

For instance, my speculation about the reasons for the observed behaviour invites a critical analysis of the cultural and institutional factors that can also influence discussions about assessments. Due to the yearlong third space work focusing solely on achieving the project's aims, with little concern to process and intercultural significance, I did not think about how disputes might emerge between the third space team and university staff who were external to the project, i.e. cultural and institutional factors. A similar observation has been noted in the placement research (Vairis et al., 2014).

Interestingly, my reluctance to link third space work with the cultural and institutional factors that can also limit and/or influence change may have impacted my reaction because it was at this time that I began to view third space work as something to be avoided. As other academics have also expressed in the literature, 'relationships between academic and professional staff could be strengthened if each side would endeavour to recognise and support each other's priorities and principles' (Kuo, 2009, p.49).

Reconstruct: how I will improve practice in the future?

My experience leading a third space team for the first time was both positive and negative. Overall, it was more taxing than it needed to be. Most of the conflict that arose was due to tensions between blended professional staff, internal and external influences, and a lack of recognition of our blended roles and responsibilities, including time limitations to build and maintain trust:

> I absolutely hate this work, too many unknowns, no structure, and no guidance, no way to speak to conflict, resolve it…is this work really just teamwork without the team doing it with little to no recognition or career improvement outcomes anyway? (Reflective Journal Entry, example #5).

Despite the above journal quote seeming quite negative towards third space work, I came to understand the importance of formally recognising the challenges that future third space leaders have, including myself. I have come to learn that third space leaders need to advocate for and provide tailored, comprehensive support to themselves and team

members, fostering meaningful connections and authentic exchanges to purposely build and maintain trust continually and actively.

Further, through trial and error, I came to understand that my role extended beyond merely coordinating the team and to meet project milestones. It was crucial to intentionally cultivate participants' trust in themselves and each other, thereby establishing mutual trustworthiness (Kharouf et al., 2015). However, time constraints posed a significant challenge, hindering the successful development of trust among team members.

Finally, I came to the position that trust of third space workers and their careers must be intentionally developed over time, necessitating significant training and dedication (Jones et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2014; Stocks and Trevitt, 2016). For when early-career leaders of third space teams lack recognition, support, and advocacy for their leadership roles, the demands and responsibilities can also exacerbate distrust amongst team members.

Discussion

Through a third space experience as an early career leader, I discovered that I needed to be more involved in creating and building trust, as well as trustworthiness as part of the day-to-day operations, processes, and outcomes. In my case, not all issues within the third space occurrences were resolved. However, by undertaking deep reflection, I was able to consider what improvements to advance future practice as a third space leader and fellow blended professional. For instance, spending more time and effort to create and build trust amongst members, celebrating positive impact moments, and acknowledging diverse failure incidents.

Early to mid-career third space leaders require urgent and bespoke systems, processes, and human resource opportunities, such as tailored professional development to upskill quickly. This in turn, will ensure that leaders of third spaces are better prepared to include anonymous feedback about leadership skills, communication styles, and inclusivity – while acknowledging the uniqueness of blended professionals' individual and collective roles within third spaces. Thus, the following key recommendations are in line with the findings from this study, which are:

1. Trust-building: actively create, foster, and maintain trust and trustworthiness amongst third space team members, including member-to-member, member-to-leader, and leader-to-members.
2. Understanding of roles: recognise the unique individual and collective roles of blended professionals within third spaces.
3. Resource management: use bespoke systems, processes, and human resource opportunities that are tailored towards third space teams and leaders of third spaces.
4. Communication: effectively communicate with team members, including leaders of third spaces being open to receiving anonymous feedback and to act upon it.
5. Recognition: celebrate positive impacts and acknowledge diverse incidents of failure to improve future practice.
6. Time: continually advocate for and instigate time to develop and maintain trust, including the continual support of blended professionals' career trajectories and recognition.

Conclusion

The results of the study aid to elicit a set of key leadership requirements most needed to enhance trust and trustworthiness amongst blended professionals who operate within third spaces, as well as important leadership pursuits. However, the list is not exhaustive. It will be imperative that future research builds upon the results presented here, including diverse contexts, methodologies, and methods.

A major limitation of the study is that writing about personal experience in self-study research can present distorted viewpoints. Despite this limitation, a reflective account through a tested theoretical framework that has relevancy to educational researchers when working with others in third spaces has been presented.

Overall, the findings from the study shed light on some key leadership requirements for third spaces in one Australian-based higher education context. However, until third space policy and its governing structures are comprehensively developed to recognise third

spaces, as well as its unique members' roles and leadership requirements (Livingston and Ling, 2022), academic staff will continue to serially avoid them.

Third spaces go beyond traditional team approaches where effective communication and collaboration is always needed. They require continual building and maintaining of trust between members' roles, responsibilities, and career support trajectories at an individual and collective level, and across diverse portfolios. Otherwise, the impact can negatively influence innovation in teaching and learning systemically.

Finally, without deeply understanding the key elements needed to purposely build and maintain trust in third space teams, which is framed through the upskilling and training of early career third space leaders, the attractiveness and success of third spaces will remain elusive.

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