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From academic communities to managed organisations: The implications for academic careers in UK and German universities

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Abstract

   This paper examines the implications for academic careers of the apparent global trend towards marketisation and managerialism in higher education with reference to the UK and Germany. It discusses how university employers might exercise greater control over their employees, privileging research and international publication, and fragmenting the traditional unity of the academic role. The effect is to challenge the values of academic communities, subject individuals to greater uncertainty, competition and insecurity, and influence the shape and direction of academic careers. The paper notes how today's academic careers could be understood in terms of Kanter's three forms of career as well as the boundaryless and protean career. However, it argues that these approaches do not address the key issue in both the UK and German cases: the changed locus and exercise of power within the employment relationship. It concludes that, to understand how careers are changing, this power relationship and the context of career in general have to be taken into account.
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1. Introduction

The purpose of the university is the production and dissemination of knowledge, and to this end its workers carry out teaching, research, and administration. The archetypal academic role comprises all three of these activities (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 1998). Traditionally, universities have been collegial communities that have enjoyed professional autonomy, their members having the freedom to set their own priorities and goals according to criteria set by their disciplines, rather than by the institutional needs of their employing organisations. The scholarly ideal expressed a thirst for knowledge and love of learning uncontaminated by material considerations. Indeed, academia has given more symbolic than material rewards to its members. Their advancement, particularly to the higher ranks, has been due less to their contribution to their employing organisation than to their academic discipline within a reputational system judged by peer review (Whitley, 1986). Although previously elite institutions serving an elite class, universities grew in size and number with the democratisation of education, and as public sector organisations, have been organised bureaucratically. Within their hierarchical organisation, the dominant academic career model has been a linear progression from postgraduate studentship to lectureship and, for the few, to a professorial chair. Even so, academic careers should be characterised, in Kanter's (1989) terms, not as "bureaucratic" where career opportunities and rewards are closely tied to organisational rank, but as "professional" in that advancement takes place in reputational terms as academics increase their knowledge, skill, and reputation within a wider community of peers. In a professional career, individuals may keep the same title and the same nominal job over a long period of time (Kanter, 1989, p. 510), even though, in the case of academics, they have progressed to being recognised as a world authority in their field.

As the industrial gives way to the informational society (Castells, 1996), the demand for the products of universities is greatly increasing, and bringing about the massification of higher education (Kogan, El-Khawas, & Moses, 1994). The university is no longer expected to fashion a cultured elite, but to fuel the engines of economic competitiveness and survival. Universities therefore have to make a strategic change in direction and to do so necessarily have to re-configure their labour-force to new ends. Hence government policies have dictated that the shift from elite to mass-based systems of higher education be achieved through greater productivity without a significant increase in funding. In Britain, this has been carried out through the stimulation of competition amongst institutional providers in regulated or quasi-markets (Dominelli & Hoogvelt, 1996) , and the introduction of managerialist forms of control of, and in, universities. These include the use of performance indicators to judge quality and determine funding (Townley, 1997), and the growing standardisation and bureaucratisation of academic work (Parker & Jary, 1995). We are witnessing, according to Willmott (1995), the commodification of academic knowledge production which is increasingly judged in terms of its exchange value, represented in research funding and position in university league tables, rather than in terms of its intrinsic value as an original contribution to knowledge. We are also seeing, it is argued, the "McDonaldization" of its dissemination (Parker & Jary, 1995;

Ritzer, 1998, 2000), where delivery is increasingly judged in terms of efficiency, value for money, and ability to attract large numbers of fee-paying students, who are being duly re-constituted as customers. The result, it is said, is the potential de-professionalisation of academic work and the proletarianisation of the academic worker (Dearlove, 1997; Halsey, 1992). These changes are well-advanced and documented in the case of Britain, Australia, Canada, and the United States (Miller, 1995; Smyth, 1995). In Germany, similar measures are being contemplated, as we will show.

This paper discusses some of the effects of marketisation (Miller, 1995) and managerialism (Clarke & Newman, 1997) upon two very different national systems of higher education, in the UK and Germany, and asks what these institutional changes might mean for academic careers. First it will examine the impact of these changes in the UK as experienced by academics themselves. It will then identify the changes that are anticipated in Germany, taking business administration as a case in point. Their impact on academic identity and relationships with colleagues, the nature of tasks performed, on selection, promotion, and mobility within and between universities, and on the possibilities for success and failure will be discussed in the light of recent theorising about career. Although Pfeffer (1989) recognised the political nature of career, we do not find in more recent work any recognition of the key issue that emerges from our examination of the context of academic careers: the exercise and locus of power in the employment relationship. In other words, although careers can be partly understood in terms of individual aspirations and achievements, and organisational structures and practices, they can only be fully understood when these are interpreted in the context of the power relationship between employer and employee.

2. The UK experience

The UK system of higher education is not homogeneous and there have been significant differences in history and culture between types of institution and discipline. In 1992 the binary line between the universities and polytechnics was abolished and the latter incorporated as "new" universities. The "old" universities with their well-established academic research cultures have approximated more to the ideal professional type than the new which, as polytechnics, had been considered to be primarily teaching institutions whose mission was to deliver vocationally relevant knowledge to the real world. Polytechnic careers might have begun in business or professional practice, with progression being achieved through the ranks of a bureaucratic hierarchy on the basis of teaching and administration rather than in terms of academic research. Nevertheless, it has been shown that whatever the historic differences in career opportunity, identity, and status, most academics in the post-1992 unified system of higher education share values and attitudes which can be described as both professional and collegial in culture and style (Fulton, 1996; Henkel, 2000; MacFarlane, 1997).

As long ago as 1985, a report produced by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the old university employers association, concluded that, in order

to increase efficiency, universities should move away from collegiate forms of control and adopt management structures more like those in the private sector (Jarratt, 1985). As a result, university administrators (management) now make decisions that were once the responsibility of the academic, either individually or as a member of the collegium (Halsey, 1992). Middle managers (academic deans) are given targets in terms of student numbers, research output and external funding and their performance judged accordingly. Epitomising this new managerial regime is the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which stands in stark contrast to the traditional, collegiate, self-referring system of peer review. The first RAE was carried out in 1986, in the old universities only, in the context of heavy cuts in public expenditure and the funding councils belief that the quality of research in UK universities could not be sustained without targeting public monies available for research. To that time, in the old universities, public funding for research had been built into the unit of resource on the assumption that all academics were engaged in some sort of research as part of their job (Halsey, 1992). The RAE's aim was to distribute research funds to academic departments according to the degree of excellence in their field. There have since been four such exercises, in 1989, 1992, 1996 and 2001, when universities have submitted their research output to panels of subject specialists for assessment of its quality in national and international terms on a five point scale. The higher they score, the greater the level of funding. In 1992, the old universities were joined by the polytechnics which, as new universities, now competed with the old for finite research funds.

These developments are transforming UK universities from academic communities to managed organisations. To identify the impact of this transformation on academics' careers we draw first upon the results of an empirical study designed to explore the perceived impact of the RAE on university recruitment and selection. The research was carried out in 1997 and has been reported in full elsewhere (Harley, 2002).

2.1. The perceived impact of the RAE

An open-ended questionnaire was sent to some two thousand academics in sociology, psychology, marketing, and finance and accounting. In total, 826 replies were received, 450 from traditional social sciences and 376 from business-related disciplines. Four hundred and thirty-seven respondents worked in the old university sector, 364 in the new. Three hundred and forty three respondents worked in a Business School, the majority of whom were in the new rather than old universities.

Over three-quarters of the respondents in both the old and the new universities believed that in recent years there had been changes in recruitment and selection in both their discipline and in their departments. Both of these, they believed, were concentrating on those criteria that were assumed to achieve a high rating in the RAE. They thought that research and publication were now being privileged over other aspects of an academic's role. There were no significant differences between the old and the new universities or between disciplines in the degree to which change in these areas was perceived. The majority of respondents were not happy with the direction of change. When asked how they felt about the changes taking place in

their discipline, 52% of those who responded felt that they were *unequivocally bad*, 28% felt that they were *good or predominantly good*, and 15% felt that they were *both good and bad*. The remainder did not really know. Whilst the extent of outright hostility was remarkably similar between the different disciplines, there were more respondents in the traditionally academic social sciences who were ambivalent about the RAE than in the business-related disciplines, where they tended to be more polarised in their feelings. This pattern of response can be explained in terms of the historic differences in individual career paths between the traditionally academic social sciences and the more vocationally oriented business related disciplines which in many ways mirror those between the old, pre-1992, universities and the former polytechnics described above. In the traditional social sciences, where the majority of staff in both the old and the new universities already shared a research culture, the increased opportunities to engage in research weighed against the perceived damage to the collegiate ideal to render a significant number of staff genuinely and deeply ambivalent towards the exercise. On the other hand, staff in the business-related disciplines divided more clearly into those in a position to take advantage of new opportunities to establish their academic status and others, who as former practitioners, had neither the skills nor the inclination to do so (Harley, 2000). It was this group whose career prospects were most threatened by the RAE and whose jobs were most at risk.

In fact, the overwhelming majority of reasons given by those who approved of the RAE revolved around the positive impact they felt it had had on research and publication in their discipline, activities central to traditional academic identity and the ones whereby reputations are established in the academic community at large. Furthermore, this pattern of response was repeated in the reasons respondents gave for approving of the RAE's impact on the work of their department, though here there was a difference in emphasis between the old and the new universities. Far more academics in the new universities mentioned increased research per se as a positive feature of the RAE's impact on departmental work than in the old where contractual obligations have always required that research be done.

> The RAE has focused attention on research and created a strong pressure to publish. For all its undoubted faults, the RAE has had a positive effect on the working lives of researchers in the new universities.
>
> (Industrial Relations, new university)

> (I feel) very positively. My first higher education post was in a polytechnic where research was neglected and regarded with suspicion. Without the RAE this would still be the case. The methodology [of the RAE] can be criticised in detail, but it has increased the influence and career prospects of research active staff in ways which would not have otherwise occurred.
>
> (Accounting, old university)

In the old universities, it was the encouragement to target research and publish it in high status refereed journals, rather than increased opportunities to do it at all, which was seen to be particularly valuable.

It was *the degree of emphasis* now placed on research, together with the felt constraints on the *type* of research activity and publication undertaken, that gave cause for the greatest concern amongst those respondents who were not happy. What was perceived by those in favour as increased opportunity to secure academic status and identity, was defined by those against as increased pressure to perform to inappropriate criteria. This hostility was verbalised in terms of interference in the academic's traditional freedom to set their own research agenda, to produce the knowledge which they considered important, and to disseminate it in the way that they saw fit. There were similar concerns about the RAE's effect on the quality of research being produced as well as its divisive impact upon the collegiate ideal. Last but not least, there was concern about its negative impact on the status of teaching, especially, but not exclusively, in the new universities (Harley, 2002).

These differences can be seen particularly in the business-related disciplines. For example, the emphasis on research and publications in high-status international journals was thought to lead to the undervaluing of the professional/vocational knowledge of former practitioners in both the old and the new universities which was very much resented by some.

> Quality professionals will not be employable [by universities] because of the lack of publication no matter how knowledgeable and experienced they are. I have 15 commercial/professional years' experience and an FCA. 5 years ago I was encouraged to join the academic world. This would no longer be the case today.
>
> (Accountant, old university)

The divisions between academics and practitioners in business-related subjects generated by the RAE were often expressed in terms of a division between those who did research and those who taught. This division was not confined to business-related subjects, however, but found expression throughout. The need to produce research in the new universities had in many cases resulted in a conscious management strategy to divide academics into research active and non-active, with the latter given more teaching. Many claimed that an emphasis on research under conditions of resource constraint was bound to have a negative impact on teaching and teaching staff:

> No incentive, recognition or reward for good teaching.
>
> (Accountant, new university)

> A division between colleagues—those undertaking research and those whose strengths are in teaching—the latter now feel inferior and threatened.
>
> (Law, new university)

The devaluation of teaching led to bad feelings on the part of those who did not research and created inevitable tensions between teaching and research-led staff:

> In a post '92 university with a teaching mission, it has created a "them and us" division among staff. Some do little teaching but publish. The others do the teaching for the publishers.
>
> (Operations Management, new university)

> I was not considered research active... to be so labelled is demoralising, especially when you are already battling with more teaching.

> (Sociologist, new university).

There were many others who were research active but who saw the division between academic high-flyers and teaching drones as having a negative impact on the traditional academic role in a community of scholars valued equally for the production *and* dissemination of knowledge.

Where there was no formal division of labour between research active and non-active staff, which was generally the case in the established academic disciplines in the old universities, the stress involved in maintaining the unity of teaching and research intrinsic to a traditional academic role could be enormous. This generally fell on the shoulders of younger members of staff, often on temporary and part-time contracts, whose careers had yet to be established:

> Relatively junior members of staff tend to have higher teaching loads because they are not seen as research stars.

> (Psychologist, old university)

Established researchers felt they were being forced to cut corners in the quest for publication within the RAE accounting period, neglecting either their teaching, their students, or the quality of their research to produce a quick-fix, ''salami-sliced'' product in which they felt less pride. This disaffection was compounded by what has become a transfer market in research stars. These new-style academics (Parker & Jary, 1995) , it was felt, were willing and able to sell themselves to the highest bidder in exchange for what were perceived to be accelerated promotions, inflated salaries and favourable working conditions, with deleterious effects on other members of staff and the university as a whole:

> Recruitment of high-flyers has left us skint. No resources to underpin future research.

> (Marketing, old university)

Yet despite these high levels of dissatisfaction, there was a great deal of conformity to perceived RAE demands. When asked whether the RAE had influenced their own work in any way, over half of the respondents said that it had. Taking both types of institutions together, just over half of the respondents who had changed the direction of their own work to fit in with perceived RAE demands believed that RAE-led change was bad. This figure reaches 70% when those who were ambivalent about the RAE are taken into account.

Much of the RAE's power to control derives from the acceptance on the part of academics themselves that individual and collective opportunities depend upon their department achieving a good rating. The cost of failure in terms of academic career could be considerable for both self and others. Institutional ratings confirm high status within the profession and the funding to attract good staff who would contribute to (even) higher ratings next time round. Low ratings could set up a vicious circle of

decline, leaving staff relegated to second-class citizenship within the profession, trapped in a low-rated research or predominantly teaching-only department devoid of the resources to pursue anything but the most basic of scholarly activities. High ratings therefore could be pursued with a brutality once alien to the academic community but justified in terms of the collective good rather than individual or organisational self-interest.

> Research is not an option for staff. They must deliver. Also individual failure has collective consequences and must be dealt with.
>
> (Accountant, old university)

2.2. Implications for academic careers in the UK

There is thus evidence to suggest that considerable pressure is being put on individual academics to produce more where it is believed it will count most for funding purposes. This has led to the privileging of research and publication (largely in high status, international academic journals) over other aspects of the academic role and the rewarding of well-placed individuals for doing it. Such changes, we suggest, have implications for the academic's career. They have a positive side. For some, there is increased encouragement and reward for carrying out research. There are opportunities, particularly in the new universities and vocationally oriented disciplines, to engage in the research traditionally thought to be the defining characteristic of a true academic career; and, for those who succeed, the opportunity for mobility between universities, old and new. On the other hand, the measurement of research productivity in terms of performance indicators linked to funding has given the employing organisation much more interest in and control over academic work than has hitherto been the case, at all levels of the academic hierarchy. At the same time, the fate of individuals has become more closely tied to the interests of the institution that employs them. Universities are engaging in human resource strategies designed to enhance institutional rankings rather than provide the opportunities that all academics need to increase the knowledge and skills, and hence reputation, upon which their careers are based. Hence, and particularly for those less privileged by the system, these changes have created insecurity of employment, career blockages, increased competition between colleagues (for rewards, resources, and advancement), thus straining collegial relationships, and creating the possibility of failure that is publicly visible. The changes also impact on the academic's sense of identity: undermining the traditional experience of autonomy; constraining discretion; fragmenting the time-honoured unity of the academic role; and introducing new distinctions between colleagues in terms of pay, status, and job specification.

3. The case of German universities

In Germany, deregulation, privatisation, and a reform of the public sector are nowadays widely perceived as necessary for national competitiveness in an increasingly

global economy. The question is whether universities produce appropriate value for the state funding they receive. For example, there is talk about professors who do not give sufficient attention to their teaching or time to their students. It is widely agreed that the current system of higher education cannot survive much longer and that it has to adapt to growing national as well as international competition (Müller-Böling, 2000). In line with debates in other countries, terms such as competition, efficiency, and quality dominate the discussion. (Hanft, 2000; Laske, Scheytt, Meister-Scheytt, & Scharmer, 2000). It is suggested that the introduction of strong management structures, modern management techniques, performance related pay, the abolition of lifetime employment, and the evaluation of teaching and research would make universities competitive and efficient organisations.

Such a "marketisation" of higher education is supported by an all-party coalition of politicians, but opposed by most full professors. According to many academics, there is already enough competition and evaluation in the system (Berg, 2000), and the negative consequences of research evaluation in the UK are often taken as a case in point (Ahrens, 2000). Furthermore, it is suggested that the measures designed to transform German universities will destroy their system of self-governance, undermine the freedom of academic research and teaching, and eventually make academia much less attractive for young researchers (Berg, 2000).

3.1. The academic hierarchy

In contrast to the departmental organisation in universities elsewhere (for example, in the UK), where responsibilities and power are distributed between different post-holders, in Germany they are concentrated in one person, the chair-holder or full professor, who leads a small department, which consists of assistants and a secretary. The chair usually has the sole responsibility for teaching and research in a particular field. The doctrines of freedom in teaching and research, which in Germany are explicitly guaranteed by the constitution, help to maximise the individual discretion of the chair over how they perform their job and carry out research and teaching. Management is absent and there is almost complete autonomy from external, non-collegiate influence; financial certainty and complete job security are guaranteed by the tenure system. Altogether, German professors still work within a reputationally based work organisation (Whitley, 1986) which is controlled from within its own ranks (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2002).

The organisation of academic work in Germany encourages the unity of teaching, research, and administration that has constituted the traditional academic role, and research output has not so far had the same pivotal importance as in the UK system. Not only are administration and participation in self-governmental bodies highly time consuming but, more importantly, professors have direct responsibility for teaching and supervising a large number of students. German professors of business administration, for example, have a heavy workload, and are more involved than their Anglo-Saxon colleagues in administration and teaching. As in the UK, the expansion of student numbers since the early 1970s has been achieved despite a much smaller increase in academic staff. As a result, each full professor of business

administration has on average responsibility for more than 200 students (Brockhoff & Hauschildt, 1993) , and they are expected to introduce their subjects to first and second year students. Unlike the practice of many senior academics in Anglo-Saxon countries, it is normally not possible for them to negotiate a smaller teaching load, exchanging a higher research output and more work with postgraduate students for less teaching and administration.

This system can only function because administration, teaching and research within the chair are hierarchically organised and the work is shared: it relies heavily on the loyal collaboration of junior and senior assistants to the chair. Each professor has usually about two or three junior assistants who are studying for their doctorate, which takes four to five years. Most of these will have previously been student assistants, having administrative tasks like supervising the chair's library or photocopying. It is uncommon for anyone who has graduated from another university to be recruited for this job. For example, on average, it takes about six years to study for a degree in business administration in Germany and, as many students do an initial vocational training in a company before going to university, they are in their mid or late twenties before being employed as a junior assistant. They have administrative duties such as handling the computer equipment and organising the library, and assist the professor in his or her teaching and research. For the rest of their time they work on their doctoral thesis (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2002).

At the level of junior assistant there is little integration in the discipline or profession. As even the collaboration of professors with others outside their hierarchically structured team (Whitley, 1984, p. 62) is very rare, academic collaboration tends to be confined within the chair. Moreover the full professor is not only the supervisor, but also the first and most important examiner of the Ph.D. thesis. There is usually no external examiner. The second examiner is often a professor from the same faculty, who is often not a specialist in this area. Therefore a good relationship with the chair, whose assistant they are, is important for an academic career (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2002).

High dependence on the chair continues with the next career step. As many German professors have just one senior assistant, if any at all, only some junior assistants will be able to pursue an academic career after completing their doctoral thesis. Again recruitment from another university for senior assistant positions is uncommon and sponsored mobility is the norm. In the absence of alternative employment opportunities, promotion depends crucially on the relationship with the chair who in practice decides who gets a vacant position. When they start, senior assistants are normally in their early thirties (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2002).

Like junior assistants, senior assistants perform service and teaching functions for the chair, this time while doing research for their *habilitation*. The *habilitation* is normally an individual monograph, and is a cornerstone of the German academic system. Together with the doctorate, this lengthy qualification process exerts a form of direct social control which aims to achieve a standardisation of skills and induction into shared academic values (Backes-Gellner, 1992; Weber, 1999). Despite the fact that the *habilitation* is examined by a committee of faculty members and has to be in a different area of research from the doctorate, there is again a strong dependence

on the chair. The professor has to put his or her political influence behind the candidate and give a positive reference in order for the process to be successful. However, as other faculty members also play a role, it is advisable for the senior assistant to be active in the various committees of the faculty, and to meet the requirements of the faculty in terms of topics, methodology, and writing style rather than those of a national or international research community. Institutional goals and those of local reputational groups are more important than those of national and international research communities (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2002). The *habilitation* is awarded to assistants who are often in their late thirties and so German scholars spend a large part of their careers in one institution. Despite their formal institutional autonomy, they are thus fundamentally local rather than cosmopolitan (Gouldner, 1957).

After the *habilitation*, a position as a full professor at another university has to be found and it is only at this stage that mobility in the German system is no longer sponsored but becomes at least partly contested. However, in business administration, for example, competition for full professorships has been limited in the past. The growth of the discipline has provided a ready supply of new vacancies and professors have been able to control the number of *habilitations*. Although in theory there has always been the option to accept equivalent qualifications, German universities have usually insisted on the *habilitation*. Combined with the requirement of fluency in the German language, the academic market in German countries has been relatively closed to outsiders (Simon, 1993). Even in professorial recruitment, there is anecdotal evidence for sponsored mobility norms. Faculty politics can play an important role and particularist interests and networks can be more important in the selection process than academic achievement based on publications in recognised journals (Dilger, 2000).

3.2. Proposed changes

In recent years there has been considerable debate about the fact that after finishing the *habilitation* it is difficult to start a non-academic career and that research independence is attained only at a late age. To tackle this problem, the government is introducing junior professors. Albeit not full professors, junior faculty in these positions will get a mini-chair and some independence in regard to administration, teaching, and research. At the same time the government has decided to abolish the *habilitation*. These developments are likely to reduce the power of the chairs (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2002). As the academic establishment within any one institution will be less able to control jobs, this could significantly weaken the degree to which sponsored mobility could continue to define the German academic career.

At the same time, current change initiatives on the part of the German state and comparable developments in Austria and Switzerland are attempting to challenge the position of full professors from another angle. Systematic evaluations of teaching and research are intended to open chairs to outside scrutiny and eventually aim to link pay and budgets to performance. This will put more pressure on German academics to publish in international journals that, according to Kieser (1998), will

become the central measure of academic achievement for them. Academic reputation in the international community has to date been less important than that in the local or German academic establishment. For example, Engwall's (1998) analysis of authors in fifteen key management journals shows that German authors are less well represented than Dutch, French or Scandinavian authors. Two of the three major German business administration journals still only publish articles in the German language. Although there are some areas, such as organisation studies and operational research, where German management academics are more integrated in international networks, they are largely absent from international conferences. Recently, however, business administration academics have become more critical about their discipline's lack of international orientation and it has been suggested that young scholars in particular have to become more internationally competitive (Homburg, 1998; Kieser, 1998, p. 215; Meffert, 1998, pp. 719–720).

3.3. Implications for academic careers in Germany

The current changes will alter the traditional rules of the game. For example, they could mean that the unity of teaching, research, and administration would only be maintained with considerable effort on the part of individuals. As the *habilitation* will no longer be an essential requirement for appointment to a chair; the power of the chair to sponsor individual academic careers will be greatly reduced and professors made more accountable to the organisations which employ them. Such changes could be expected to impact on the nature, shape, and direction of careers. On the positive side, they would create greater opportunities for advancement within the university, and mobility between universities, both locally and internationally. If career blockages should occur, they would come at such an age as to make a change of direction possible. By strengthening the demand for internationally recognised research, they would enrich the identity of the academic as both producer and disseminator of academic knowledge. However, by widening the traditional boundaries of academics' roles, reducing the chair's sponsorship of young academics, and increasing competition for university posts, they would introduce greater uncertainty, work pressure, and stress into what would become an essentially more standard employment relationship.

4. Theories of career to interpret the UK and German cases

As the twentieth century ended, considerable discussion took place about whether, how and why careers were changing (Arnold & Jackson, 1997; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Collin & Young, 2000; Hall & Associates, 1996; Peiperl, Arthur, Goffee, & Morris, 2000). The increasing diversity of and fragmentation in careers contribute to what Arnold and Jackson (1997) see as the new career, one form of which is the boundaryless career. However, the careers of UK academics, especially in the old universities, could be said to have already been primarily boundaryless. This is how Arthur and Rousseau (1996) describe careers when, inter alia, they

are validated from outside the present employer, sustained by external networks or information, or when their traditional, and especially hierarchical, organisational boundaries break down. Fulton (1996) , for example, has described UK academics as the ultimate cosmopolitan rather than local (Gouldner, 1957). In so far as they are now experiencing greater control by their employers and are more closely tied to them by mutual interests, then many academics' careers could become less boundaryless, not more. The changes seem to be going in the opposite direction in German universities, where careers traditionally have been bounded, not by the employer, but by the mini-cosmology of the chair (Berger & Heintel, 1998). If that breaks down under the proposed reforms then careers could become less bounded, not more.

According to Arnold and Jackson (1997, p. 429), "perhaps the most significant aspect of the new career is the recognition of the subjective career: ...the sense that individuals make of their careers, their personal histories, and the skills, attitudes and beliefs that they have acquired." People have a subjective career whether they have an elite career or just a job. While this constitutes the lived experience of their career, it has been largely disregarded in mainstream career theory (Collin, 1997). One of its representations is to be found in the notion of the protean career (Hall, 1976; Hall & Mirvis, 1996). This captures not only the boundarylessness and the flexibility of career, but also how individuals shape and re-shape it to meet the needs of their changing self: "whereas in the past the contract was with the organization, in the protean career the contract is with the self" (Hall & Mirvis, 1996, p. 20). This may seem like a helpful way of conceptualising how academics will respond to the new opportunities, uncertainties, and insecurities challenging their traditional identity. However, references to the notion of the protean career, of a career unique to the individual, a sort of career fingerprint (Hall & Mirvis, 1996, p. 21), do not adequately reflect the feeling tone apparent in many of the responses to the British questionnaire, which emphasise new pressures imposed by the employer rather than personal opportunities afforded by the RAE. One way of interpreting this feeling tone might be in terms of Rousseau's (1990) argument that the psychological contract between employer and employee has changed and this interpretation might also be applied to universities in Germany if the anticipated changes come into force. Whereas the implicit contract with the university employer had once been relational, based on mutuality and trust, it may now become transactional, with specific skills exchanged for specific rewards.

One of the major criticisms that has been made of traditional career theory is that it focuses on the individual and neglects the context of both individual and career (Collin, 1997). Unlike the traditional interpretation of career in terms of individual autonomy and mastery, both cases illustrate that it is constructed through relationships, mutual influence, and interdependence (Hall & Associates, 1996). In Germany, the careers of junior academics have been closely bound up with those of their professors. In the UK, academics' individual reputation and the ability to progress increasingly depend upon the RAE rating received by their departments, and this depends on the collective achievements of their colleagues. The two cases illustrate the value of contextualising career in order to identify both the external influences

upon individuals' careers (Collin & Young, 2000) and the social and cultural meanings with which individuals construct and interpret their experiences (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996).

Kanter's (1989) macro-organisational perspective offers a useful framework which both contextualises careers and allows for a comparison of the changing nature of careers of UK and German academics. She suggests that there are three principal career forms: the ''bureaucratic,'' the ''professional,'' and the ''entrepreneurial.'' It has already been suggested that traditional academic careers in the UK should be regarded as professional rather than bureaucratic. However, the result of the changes that have been discussed is that, in many cases, a move towards more entrepreneurial forms of career is taking place as departments compete for their share of resources and academics are made responsible for growing their territory. The story in Germany is again somewhat different. The changes that are taking place would seem likely to be making academic careers more professional than hitherto.

5. Conclusion

Recent discussions of the new career offer some helpful interpretations of what may be happening to academic careers in the UK and Germany. However, they do not address what appears to be the key issue that emerges from the examination of the changes in UK and German universities. This is the locus and exercise of power in the employment relationship. It is by attending to the context of career that this becomes apparent. In Germany, the effective locus of power in academic communities has rested in the role of the chair. The professor has been able to influence academic careers by being the source of all power, whether position, resource, expert, negative, or personal (French & Raven, 1960). If the proposed changes take place, professors themselves would become more accountable for their own outputs and performance, they would be challenged from outside by international competitors, and from inside as their mini-cosmology is infiltrated by junior professors. In curtailing the power of the professors, the universities would create the space within which to exert their power as employers over their employees. In other words, the locus of power would become more firmly embedded in the employment relationship. The UK data indicates that this has already happened in universities there. Unless the exercise of power is explicitly recognised, career theory cannot fully comprehend issues of career choice, advancement, mobility, aspiration, achievement, satisfaction, success, and failure.

The significance of context is also shown in the comparison between both the existing UK and German systems and the changes to them. The differences between the two systems of higher education that have been identified in this paper indicate that although the trend towards marketisation may indeed be international, its impact will vary because there are many different systems of higher education, and disciplines operate differently within them (Becher, 1989). This leads to the conclusion that it is not meaningful to conceptualise academic careers generically, or suppose that they may all be changing in similar ways, nor to look for parallels between what

is happening to academic careers and to the new career that is being postulated in other domains. In addition, the significance of the subjective career must also be recognised, but not allowed to deflect attention from the power relationship in the objective career. Further research is needed into the conditions under which careers develop and change which takes both objective context and subjective experience into account.

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